

*Clouds and thick darkness surround him;
righteousness and justice are the
foundation of his throne.”*

Psalm 97:2

the presbyterian banner

July 2011

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Editorial

There is a phrase spoken during one of Shakespeare's well-known plays, which subsequently has become commonly used. It is from 'Hamlet' and it is a comment on how corrupt the ruling authorities had become in the nation where that play was set. The phrase goes, 'Something is rotten in the State of Denmark.'

Nowadays this describes a situation when all is not well at the top of the political hierarchy. When a nation gets to such a point you can be sure that the corruption within a country is such that it extends right throughout society.

This phrase is an apt one for where we are now. When more of our political representatives than ever before end their political lives facing charges in a court of law, when even the very magistrates end up in court because of their nasty and violent behaviour towards neighbours and others, and those who should be protecting the weak and innocent are themselves fudging the figures, we know something is not right.

And it keeps getting worse. The lack of true leadership filters through to a growing drug culture, dysfunctional families, stabbings at railway stations, constant bullying at school, and a whole world at war with itself. There is a protest organized to raise concern at the increasing degradation of women in our community and meanwhile the very means of that degradation – movies, computer gaming, pornographic magazines, and the like – is allowed even more freedom!

There is indeed something rotten in the nation of Australia, and throughout the world! It is something, though, which cannot be fixed by a constant series of band-aids applied to the outside of the citizens of this world. What's all that 'education' done for us? There's no amount of new and invasive legislation which will stop this rot. The seemingly endless roll-out of protocols, training, processes, and certification are not helping. And that is simply because none of that gets to the heart of things – in fact the very ones applying all those rules and regulations are themselves severely affected by this corruption. You only need to see the news headlines to have that continually confirmed!

The only real change that can get to the bottom of this moral cesspit is a complete change of heart. It's only when men and women are convicted of the wrong from the inside by God's Word and Spirit that there can be positive change on the outside.

When Shakespeare puts those words in Hamlet's mouth about his nation being 'an unweeded garden' of 'things rank and gross in nature' (Act 1, scene 2), did he have a special foresight into our modern age? Or could it be that because of how biblical his age was he could picture quite clearly that something was very wrong?

Oh, that our world could again have such knowledge! But first must come the gospel. Yes, the good news about Jesus Christ, the only true Saviour and Lord. The very One society reviles against. And yet the very One who while He was here among us clearly exposed the whole tissue of lies that society then had become. He does the same to society today. Nothing goes unnoticed and He is the One who already now reveals that and punishes it. Psalm 2 spells this out quite clearly.

It's only by being humble before the King of kings that there is true peace here below. A peace that might not always necessarily mean an absence of conflict, but it does nip that violence in the bud. It's in serving the Lord of lords from the heart that there comes true blessing!

Cover Photo Credit: Alex Steel, A Palm Tree during a Dust Storm in Sydney

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'Life in Morality Village'

Considering Romans 2:1-16

George Ball

This passage is part of a longer section from 1: 18 – 3: 20, where Paul is demonstrating that ALL (no matter who or what they are) have sinned – and therefore need the gospel. In 1: 18-32 Paul describes the pagan world around him in stark colours. It's a world given over to sexual impurity, sexual perversity and all kinds of sinful depravity. It's a shocking no holds barred description. Some well mannered people think that such a passage is unfit for public reading! Now in chapter 2 the apostle turns the spotlight on a very different audience. It's an audience that we need to take heed of, because it looks an awful lot like many of us! He's addressing, not the riff raff of society, but the good, upright, moral citizens who live in 'Morality Village'. He also changes style. (KJV, NKJV and ESV bring this out more clearly). He's in dialogue with an imaginary critic or heckler. (Paul was well used to that when he preached!) We are to imagine then an ongoing debate with some imaginary heckler (or hecklers) who takes issue with the apostle's guilty charge against all mankind. For the sake of clarity we will provide names for these imaginary characters to help us understand the point that Paul is making. (Any likeness to your name is purely 'accidental'). Let's meet some of the residents of Morality Village . . .

1 - Mary Moralist (1-3)

Meet Mary. Mary is the kind of woman who is genuinely shocked, horrified, disgusted and outraged at the catalogue of sins in chapter 1. She thinks, 'What's this world coming to? It wasn't like this in my day! You didn't have to lock the doors at night. You didn't have to worry about the kids playing outside. They were safe. Sex and homosexual and lesbian were words that were never mentioned. A gay person was someone who was happy'. Mary is a good woman; a wife, mother and very active in the community. She is a faithful member in the church and has taught Sunday School for years. Her favourite part of the Bible is the Sermon on the Mount. She thinks, 'if only we lived by the Sermon on the Mount!' . . . She is a member of the Country Woman's Association and has always voted for the Nationals (she has no time for the Greens because they support

homosexuals and lesbians). From time to time Mary has a letter published in the local newspaper. She's a bit of a moral crusader! Her last letter was a call for readers to write to the TV stations to complain about the bad language and sex scenes. It's people like Mary that Paul has in mind in verse 1 when he writes, 'You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else . . . because you who pass judgement do the same things . . . Do you think you will escape God's judgement?' How could this be possibly true of Mary the moral crusader? Let me quote in reply a passage from Jerry Bridges book *Respectable Sins*. In it he says, 'We appear to be more concerned about the sins of society than we are about the sins of the saints. In fact we often indulge in what I call the 'respectable' or even 'acceptable' sins without any sense of sin. Our gossip or unkind words about a brother or sister in Christ roll easily off our tongues without any awareness of wrongdoing. We harbour hurts over wrongs long past, without any effort to forgive as God has forgiven. We look down our religious noses at 'sinners' in society without any sense of a humble 'there but for the grace of God go I' spirit . . . We are incensed when a major denomination ordains a practising homosexual. Why do we not also mourn over our selfishness, our critical spirit, our impatience and our anger? . . . James says, 'whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point is guilty of all of it' (2: 10) . . . When a person commits murder, he breaks God's law. When a Christian lets corrupting speech come out of his mouth he breaks God's law.' Our so called 'respectable sins' are often dressed up in a smart suit – but underneath we are just as dirty and filthy as the riff raff. If we had a little black box fixed to us which recorded everything we have said in the last week, and if it was played in public would we be proud? God is like the black box. He knows all about us. He is not fooled by external appearances. His judgement is based on truth (2). There is no escaping His judgement (3). The fact of the matter is that Mary Morality's goodness is not good enough. She too is guilty of many of the sins in 1: 29-31

and others besides. Mary is without excuse. She is even condemned by her own standards – 'the golden rule' and the Sermon on the Mount. While she is not guilty of many of the outward flagrant sins; nonetheless by God's standard of judgement she is a guilty sinner. She needs a Saviour.

2 - Sam Satisfied (4-5)

Meet Sam. Sam is very satisfied with life. His motto is, 'Life's good.' He has a nice house, a beautiful wife and two healthy children. He's earning over \$150,000 p.a. as a partner in a business. He has the mortgage paid off and has just bought his first investment property. The children are bright; the oldest is at uni doing medicine and the younger one hopes to do law. Sam's passion is boating and caravanning – and he just loves to get away with the family during the holidays and weekends. He makes time also to do a bit of fishing. Sadly this means he has no time for church. Sam however enjoys life. It's people like Sam that Paul has in mind in verse 4 when he writes, 'Do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you to repentance.' Yes, God has been very kind to Sam. All the talk about judgement and hell that Sam heard when he was in church as a youngster seem light years away. Sam is successful and satisfied; a sign, he believes, that God must be satisfied with him too. He must be doing something right that the 'Man Above' (as he puts it) smiles upon him! 'Life's good!' Sam however has got it all wrong (4)! God's kindness is intended to lead Sam to repentance so that he would give thanks to God and honour Him. The Bible tells us that, 'God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3: 9). Sam however has interpreted God's kindness and patience as a sign of weakness. But Sam is in for a big surprise (5). Sam thought he was storing up a hefty investment portfolio to provide for a long and happy retirement. Instead he is storing up a reservoir of God's wrath! 'Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant

heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when His righteous judgment will be revealed.' (5). Sam - like every other presumptuous person for whom 'Life's Good' is a presumptuous sinner under God's wrath, and who urgently needs a Saviour.

Pete Perfect (7 and 10). (Or is it Charlie Christian?)

Meet Pete. Pete's chief aim in life is to glorify God. He does good – constantly and consistently 24/7. He never lets up or wavers. He always seeks God's honour, and considers that the only thing that matters is the approval of God. His whole search is for glory, honour and immortality. He will be rewarded according to his deeds! His reward will be eternal life, glory, honour, peace, and the immortality he seeks. . . .

There is however only one problem – Pete Perfect doesn't exist. You are not him. I am not him. 'There is none righteous, no not one' (3: 10). The only perfect man is Jesus Christ. Nonetheless the principle still stands – if there was such a person, He would be rewarded according to his works, because judgement will be according to our works. (There is a view that Paul may be here describing – not Pete Perfect but 'Charlie Christian'. When you look at Charlie's life it's obvious the direction he's going. 'The reward of eternal life . . . is promised to those who do not regard their good works as an end in themselves, but see them as marks not of human achievement but of hope in God. Their trust is not in works but in God, the only source of glory, honour and incorruption.')

3 - Sally Selfish (8-9)

Meet Sally. Sally is the complete opposite of Pete. She is utterly self centred, arrogant and proud. She has no time for the Bible ('it's just fairy tales and full of contradictions') or Jesus ('he was just a good man') or the gospel ('who needs that rubbish') or church ('it's full of hypocrites'). She has a perverse pleasure in shocking people by her audacious actions and by her bold colourful speech. What can Sally expect? 'There will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil' (8b-9). She will be judged according to her works. She will get her comeuppance. The judgement will be the same for all. There will be no favouritism. God cannot be bribed, bought or gagged. Sally is under the judgement and wrath of God. She needs a Saviour.

4 - Ivor Ignorant (12-15)

Meet Ivor. Ivor is the only person who lives outside the village. He has lived his whole life in 'the sticks'. (Ivor is like the man who lives in the 'darkest part of Africa'). Ivor has never seen a Bible nor even heard of it. He has never heard the gospel. Never heard of Jesus. Yet look at his life. His actions reveal that he has some sense of law and justice – of right and wrong. He wouldn't dream of stealing from his neighbour. He is a good husband and father. He respects his aging parents. He tries to be honest and true. Though Ivor has never heard of the 10 commandments yet he has some sense of them. How come? . . . It's the way that God has made every human being. It's part of our constitution as people made in the image of God. God stamps His law on every heart. God has made us with a conscience that passes judgement upon our conduct and the conduct of others. Although Ivor has no written code of law, he does have an internal code of law written on his heart.

How will Ivor be judged? Will he be condemned because he does not believe in Jesus? Will he be condemned because he has not heard the gospel? No! It's not his fault that he hasn't heard the gospel. God's judgement however will be fair. Ivor will be judged by the light of nature and by the law of his own conscience. As the apostle says, 'They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ' (15-16). Is Ivor always able to keep the law and respond to the light that he has? No! He often breaks it. He fails his own standards. His own conscience at times condemns him. He is a lawbreaker. Ivor too is under the judgement and wrath of God. He too needs a Saviour.

5 - Barry Bible (12-13)

Meet Barry. Barry, unlike Ivor, reads his Bible regularly and has a good knowledge of it. He can even recite the 66 books of the Bible. Barry attends a church where the Bible is preached clearly and consecutively. He also attends a midweek Bible study. Obviously Barry is very privileged compared to Ivor. How will Barry be judged? The apostle tells us, 'all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the

law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (12-13). Barry will be judged not by his knowledge of the Bible but by his obedience to it. Is Barry able to perform all the duties and requirements that God requires of him in the Bible? No! Actually, knowing what the Bible teaches and not doing it only increases his guilt. This means that Barry is under the judgement and wrath of God. He too needs a Saviour.

We have seen therefore that everyone living in Morality Village i.e. Mary, Sam, Sally, and Barry are ALL declared guilty before God. And Ivor too is guilty! Everyone will face the judgement of God which will be according to truth when He will judge men's secrets (16). Self righteousness; morality; success; knowledge; or education cannot save. No matter how good or bad we are; no matter how much we have succeeded or failed in life; no matter how much or little we know; we are all failures before God, and we all need a Saviour. Living in Morality Village will not save anyone. Like Bunyan's Christian when he discovered that he was living in the City of Destruction was advised by Evangelist to seek to enter the narrow gate. 'For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. But small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'



Burdened Christian flees from home

Life under the Banner

'Filled with Spirits, or Filled with the Spirit? (Part 1)'

Jim Klazinga

Alcohol has often been considered to be a social stimulant. You want to have a party, you have to have lots of booze on hand. Then everyone will have a great time, right? The binge culture is alive and well in our society. But at what cost? Drunk driving destroys families, both for the drunk drivers themselves and their victims. Domestic violence is often stimulated by alcohol. Some who should be spending more money on necessities for their family will instead use what little cash they have to purchase liquor. Alcohol also costs employers quite a bit of money because of time off and lost productivity.

Booze breaks down

And booze is supposed to help people socialize? It would seem that rather than fostering relationships, the excessive use of alcohol more often than not breaks down relationships. Who can deny the wisdom of Proverbs 20:1? 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.' Or Proverbs 23:29-32 - 'Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.' And yet, booze continues to play a very prominent role in our society. In the popular media, drunks have often been portrayed as amusing, even in Walt Disney cartoons. Parties where the booze flows freely are seen as exciting. The drinker is fun to be around, as long as he takes a taxi home and doesn't get behind the wheel.

A quite opposite stimulant

What our society doesn't seem to realize is that there is a social stimulant far more effective than booze. It is far more long lasting, and it comes with none of the nasty side effects. It doesn't lead to hangovers. It is the

best cure for domestic violence. And it is the only way by which we can know true and lasting joy. Ephesians 5:18 says, 'Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.' Being filled with the Spirit is the only way in which we can know real joy. It is the only means toward true and lasting fellowship. Rather than being filled with fermented spirits, we are to be filled with the Spirit of God: the most effective, the most stimulating spirit you will ever find.

Isn't it something how Ephesians 5:18 contrasts these two spirits? On the one hand, you've got the alcoholic spirits (demons might be a better way of putting it). On the other hand, you've got the Spirit of God. The two are opposed to one another. This contrast is typical in Ephesians. Throughout much of this letter, we see how the Christian and the non-



Christian life are completely in conflict with one another. For example, earlier in chapter 5, we read of the contrast between light and darkness. Being a child of the light is the opposite of being a child of the darkness. The child of darkness is filled with malice, bitterness, he holds grudges, he harbors anger in his heart. But the

child of light demonstrates forgiveness, compassion, kindness, just as Christ was forgiving and compassionate toward him. The child of darkness demonstrates immorality, impurity. The child of light demonstrates holiness. The child of darkness is foolish; the child of light shows wisdom.

Drunkenness is part of the life of darkness. In contrast, the sober, Spirit-filled life is the life of light. The one should have nothing to do with the other.

Not prohibition but moderation

Mind you, alcohol is not wicked in and of itself. Some Christians believe that we should have nothing to do with alcohol whatsoever, as if alcohol is inherently evil. But the plain evidence of Scripture does not allow for this sort of thinking. In Psalm 104:25, 'wine to gladden the heart of man' is mentioned as one of the blessings of God's providential care. Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Luke 7:34 implies that he himself drank wine occasionally. And in 1 Timothy 5:23, we read Paul saying to Timothy, 'No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.'

Some might respond saying the references here are to non-alcoholic wine. But the beverage is the same for both wine used positively and wine drunk to excess. Wine is wine: a drink containing alcohol.

Wine and alcohol are not evil in and of themselves. The abusing of alcohol, the over-indulgence in alcohol: that is the problem. Just as meat is not bad in and of itself, but when you over-indulge in it you become gluttonous.

Alcohol is like many other things in life: the fact that it is abused does not mean that we have to get rid of it totally. The fact that computer technology can be used for wicked purposes does not mean that we shouldn't have one in our homes. The fact that cars are used as get-

away vehicles after crimes does not mean we shouldn't learn how to drive. And the fact that alcohol is used for wicked purposes does not mean that we all have to be abstainers.

Mind you, if alcohol abuse is a particularly burdensome sin in your life, then you should have nothing to do with it. If you can't handle alcohol, if it causes you to stumble, if even one drink causes you to go on a binge, then get it out of your life completely. Don't go out to the pub. Don't put yourself in situations where you are going to be tempted to imbibe.

Family and friends of folks who are known to struggle with this sin also need to be helpful here. As we read in Romans 14:21 - 'It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.' While this verse might not have initially been referring to alcoholism, the principle certainly applies. If we know that a particular brother or sister struggles with the sin of drunkenness, then we should not flaunt our freedom to drink in front of them. We should do what we can to help that person in his or her struggle, and if that means curtailing our freedom to drink, then so be it.

A drunkard is a sinner

By the way, referring to drunkenness as a sin brings up another matter. The party-goer who only gets drunk at the occasional weekend party: it's not too hard to see how he is sinning. But how are we to view the alcoholic who can't seem to control his drinking? When he gets plastered at home in secret, is he sinning, or is he ill? It is often stated that alcoholism is a

disease. But this is not the way in which the Bible approaches the whole matter of drunkenness. In 1 Corinthians 5, being a drunkard is listed as one sin among others that would make a brother worthy of discipline. And in chapter 6, drunkards are listed among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast with what many in our society believe, the Bible does not treat the drunkard as a sick person; it treats him as a sinner. Mind you, it may very well be that the physical bodies of some people are predisposed to alcoholism. And it is certainly true that sin in this particular form can be physically difficult to overcome. This sin can have a powerful impact on a person's body, and we should not belittle the fact that addiction is a very real and serious physical problem. Those who genuinely struggle against this devastating sin need our love and support in their struggles as they fight against their addiction. But none of this changes the reality that the abuse of alcohol is still in fact a sin. Abusing alcohol involves making sinful decisions. If we were not fallen creatures, we would not drink to excess. Whether or not we might be labeled as alcoholics, it still has to be said that when we go on a binge, we are sinning.

Being a drunkard is a sin that needs repentance, just like any other sin. But of course, it is also true that there can be forgiveness and healing after this sin, just like other sins. The drunkard can be brought from death to life, through the sacrifice and obedience of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is where the insidiousness of the

'alcoholism as disease' model really becomes clear. When alcoholism is seen merely as a disease, then the abuser becomes a helpless victim. It is imagined that seeing him as such is more compassionate than telling him he is sinning. But in fact, the opposite is true. Only in recognizing the reality of sin and our responsibility for it, only then can we find healing with God's 'cure' for sin. Only in recognizing how drunkenness is one of the effects of being dead in our sins, only then can we come to realize that redemption is found in Jesus Christ, and the sober life is possible for new creatures made alive in him.

In next month's article, we'll look more at the contrast between the alcoholic spirits-filled life and the Holy Spirit-filled life. But for now, let me just say that if you struggle with the sin of alcohol abuse, I would urge you in love to do everything you can to flee from that sin. Recognize it as a sin. Repent of it. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ for your strength.

If the crowd you hang around with is not helping you in this area, you might want to ask yourself whether or not you have the right friends. Instead, seek out help from those around you who are more responsible: from understanding family members, from elders and pastors. In drunkenness and in other forms of darkness, you will never truly be able to escape your pain. But in Jesus Christ, there is hope. There is forgiveness. There is restoration. There is true Spirit-filled joy.

The Past for Today

John Dunmore Lang—Turbulent Scot, Presbyterian Republican

Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang is the most famous Australian Presbyterian of the 19th century and one of the most significant leaders in the colonial period in New South Wales.

Background and Family

Lang was born near Greenock, Inverclyde, Scotland, the eldest son of William Lang and Mary Dunmore. His father was a small landowner and his mother a pious Presbyterian, who dedicated her son to the ministry from an

early age. He grew up in nearby Largs, and was educated at the University of Glasgow, where he excelled, winning many prizes, and graduating as a Master of Arts in 1820. His brother, George, had found employment in New South Wales and Lang decided to join him. He was ordained by the Presbytery of Irvine on 30 September 1822. Arriving in Sydney Cove on 23 May 1823 he became the first Presbyterian minister in the colony of New South Wales. On the way back from the second of his nine voy-

Rowland S. Ward

ages to Britain (1830–31) he married his 18-year old cousin Wilhelmina Mackie at Cape Town. They were married for 47 years. The Langs had ten children. Only three of them survived their father and there were no grand-children.

Lang and the claims of the Church of England

Lang found the Presbyterian Scots to be a small minority, dominated by an Anglican administration and outnumbered



Lang in 1841

bered by the Irish Catholics. There was no Presbyterian church in the colony and he commenced building one before he had applied to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Thomas Brisbane, to provide public funds for it. Governor Brisbane refused. Lang had laid the foundation stone for the *Scots Church* on 1 July 1824 and it was completed with significant debt by William and Andrew Lang. It was opened 16 July 1826 with a Trust Deed that tied it to the Church of Scotland. Lang visited Britain 1824-25, where he successfully lobbied the Secretary for the Colonies, Lord Bathurst, to recognise the legal status of the Church of Scotland to the extent that he was allowed a stipend of £300 per annum. During this visit he was made a Doctor of Divinity by Glasgow University, and recruited Rev John McGarvie for ministry at Portland Head. McGarvie turned out to be a Moderate rather than an Evangelical.

Lang resisted the claim to exclusive State recognition and support by the Church of England involved in the establishment of the Clergy and School Lands Corporation in 1826, which was suspended in 1829 and abolished in 1833. Also in 1826 he claimed the right to perform marriages by virtue of a British Act of 1818 relating to the Diocese of Calcutta which protected Church of Scotland ministers there. This effectively broke the Church of England monopoly, as New South Wales was then part of that Diocese. The *Church Act* of 1836 gave State-aid to the Church of England, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church on the same basis. The Methodists were added in 1839.

Educational endeavours

Lang founded the *Caledonian Academy* in 1826 but it soon folded. Lang made a second visit to Britain in 1830-31 and

recruited several teachers, as well as acquiring a library and equipment for a school he was to call the *Australian College*. It opened at the beginning of 1832 on land adjoining the Scots Church. It had considerable promise which was not realised due to Lang's lack of administrative ability and his failure to achieve more general support. This was largely because of his own flaws of character and ability, particularly financial mismanagement. By 1840 the Academy had only about 30 students and in 1842 the College became simply a day school for boys meeting elsewhere. By 1852, it was no more. Lang dreamed of heading an educational institution of standing. Not surprisingly, he was a supporter of the Presbyterian Theological College, St Andrew's College within the University of Sydney; although he used his political influence to try and change the legislation and hoped in 1872 to be appointed its first Principal.

Lang and journalism

Lang returned from his third visit to Britain (1833-34) with more ministers and teachers as well as a printing press and tradesmen to operate it. He commenced *The Colonist* in January 1835 which he used to promote his schemes and attack those with whom he disagreed. While he was absent in Britain 1839-41, and until it ceased in 1840, Rev William McIntyre, who founded the PCEA in 1846, edited the paper and it reported impartially on matters then agitating the Presbyterian Church. Lang commenced a new paper, *The Colonial Observer*, in October 1841 which ran until 1844. He also conducted *The Press* for a period in 1851.

Lang's theology

Lang was certainly a turbulent Scot but was not quite the fiery fundamentalist who hated all other denominations that some have claimed. Examination of his sermon manuscripts indicate they were orthodox by the standard of the Westminster Confession of Faith as adhered to by the Church of Scotland. He was influenced by Rev Dr Thomas Chalmers and held a form of the premillennial view of the future. He related quite positively to other denominations of evangelical Protestants, particularly Congregationalists, Lutherans and Methodists. He admitted Congregationalists and Baptists to the Synod he operated 1850-64, and in 1856 ordained two Lutherans, regarding the Lutheran questions and Confession, which he used on the

occasion, as the same in substance with those of the British Presbyterians. (Not all Lutherans were happy with this.) His ecclesiastical fights were with exclusivist Anglicans, other Presbyterians and the Catholics.

Attitude to Roman Catholics

The traditional evangelical Protestant belief concerning the predicted Antichrist or Man of Sin in 2 Thessalonians 2 was that the Man of Sin was not an individual as such but a movement of error in history under the guise of friendship to Christ. Lang shared this belief and saw the Man of Sin as illustrated in the Papacy. When the immigration of poor Irish Catholics was running at a massive level he campaigned against Irish migration. His fear was that the colony would be swamped by such persons and that Protestant and British liberties would be lost. In 1841 he published *The Question of Questions! or, Is this Colony to be transformed into a Province of Popedom? A Letter to the Protestant Landholders of New South Wales*, and in 1847 he followed up with, *Popery in Australia and the Southern Hemisphere: and How to Check it Effectually: An Address to Evangelical and Influential Protestants of all Denominations in Great Britain and Ireland*. He strongly opposed Caroline Chisholm's campaign to sponsor the immigration of single Irish Catholic women to Australia. But Dr Barry Bridges is right to state: 'Lang considered opposition to harmful errors of Catholicism part of his duty as a minister but he consistently championed the cause of Irish and Catholic civil liberties and deprecated any incitement to Protestant-Catholic or Anglo-Celtic disturbances.' He visited Archbishop Polding when the Roman Catholic leader was dying in 1877.



Scots Church, Jamison Street, Sydney: built 1826, demolished 1826

The World in the Banner

Sudan: Kharoum Annexes Abyei

The hotly contested province of Abyei (straddling the north-south divide) is supposed to get its own referendum to determine whether it will be part of the South or the North after the Southern secession. Whilst Abyei is inhabited by southern Dinka Ngok, pro-Khartoum Misseriya Arabs drive their cattle through the region annually. Speaking to a rally of mostly Misseriya Arabs in neighbouring Southern Kordofan (North Sudan) on 27 April, President Omar al-Bashir pre-empted any referendum by declaring, 'Abyei is located in North Sudan and will remain in North Sudan.'

On Thursday 19 May, Khartoum accused the Southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of attacking a convoy of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in Dokura north of Abyei town. Though the SPLA denied responsibility, the government responded with force. SPLA troops retreated after being bombed and shelled for several hours and Abyei's remnant 20,000 southern Dinka Ngok residents fled south as SAF tanks and thousands of troops moved in. The MSF hospital in Agok, 40km south of Abyei, had received 42 wounded by early Saturday morning. By Sunday it was being reported that Khartoum had seized and annexed Abyei. Southern Sudanese leaders have accused the north of 'an act of war', something Khartoum denies, saying it was merely removing illegal elements so as to improve security and ensure peace and stability. Abyei, now under the control of Khartoum, has since been heavily looted and torched. War looms. Pray for the Church in Sudan.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 109 | Wed 25 May 2011

State removes 'Inherent Requirements List'

The Presbyterian Church supports the Victorian State Government's decision to safeguard the rights of religious organisations. The Presbyterian Church of Victoria today welcomed the decision of the Victorian Government to restrict the powers of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to the pre 2010 position and to remove the 'inherent requirements test' in the exception for employment in a religious body or school thus restoring the freedom of faith-based organisations to engage staff who uphold the

values of the organisation. Convenor of the Church's Church & Nation Committee, the Rev. David Palmer, said, 'It is to be noted that the changes to the religious exception clauses removes an area of uncertainty introduced by the previous Government last year in its revision of the Equal Opportunity Act. It is worth pointing out that the previous Government's inherent requirements test has not come into force and was introduced without any support from the Victorian Parliament's multi party Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's detailed examination of the Act in 2009.'

'It is particularly pleasing that faith based schools will again be free to meet the expectations of parents in employing staff, whether teachers, gardeners, or receptionists, who adhere to the school's defined 'doctrines, beliefs or principles,' said Mr Palmer. The Presbyterian Church of Victoria calls on the Government to further amend legislation in relation to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to prevent the Commission from allowing antidiscrimination principles where they are in conflict with freedom of conscience, thought and religion to trump freedom of conscience, thought and religion, a basic human right with a long pedigree in international law stretching back to the 1689 British Bill of Rights.

+ *PCV Media Release, May 24, 2011*

Cyclone at Taree!

The Clarence and Richmond Examiner reported on 10 August 1907 (page 13) that on the afternoon of 7 August 1907 the new wooden church for the PCEA in course of construction near the proposed railway was blown down during a severe windstorm, only the porch remaining. The contractor, Mr George Bradley, was putting on the iron and only one side of the roof was covered. Immediate steps were taken to rebuild the structure which was opened without further incident on 15 December 1907. It served the congregation for 70 years until the present brick church was erected. - RSW

China: Update on Shouwang church

Twenty-second May was the seventh consecutive Sunday that members of Beijing's Shouwang Church gathered for worship in the open in Zhongguancun shopping area, only to be arrested by

police. Six of the church's senior leaders remain under house arrest. Since 10 April over 200 members of the Shouwang Church have been arrested; more than 30 have been forced to move after their landlords evicted them under government pressure; others have lost their jobs for refusing to leave the church. In a courageous show of solidarity, 19 leaders of unregistered churches have signed an unprecedented appeal dated 10 May to the National People's Congress, requesting that their right to worship freely be upheld.

(Background: RLPB 103, Wed 13 April 2011 <http://www.ea.org.au> .

More details and updates are on <http://www.chinaaid.org>)

[The initial confrontation on 10 April was caught on film by Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Stephen McDonnell, reporting for Foreign Correspondent. His report, 'True Believers', provides an excellent insight into Christianity in China. The transcript and 26-minute film can be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2011/s3219470.htm>]

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 109 | Wed 25 May 2011

Legends, Myths, Allegations, and Lullabies = Research?

A new parenting programme targeted at Maori tells them they are inherently loving and nurturing caregivers and family violence has arisen only because of European missionaries. The Office of the Children's Commissioner is releasing its 'Maori Parenting Report' on Thursday in a bid to curb violence... Maori children were taught by Europeans that bad behaviour should be punished by physical violence, he said. This steered away from the traditional idea that children were tapu and discipline should be avoided because it tamed the child's spirit... It traced Maori history from the separation of Ranginui the Sky Father and Papatuanuku the Earth Mother through to early European reports of children's relationships with whanau... However, the report has been criticised for painting too rosy a picture of pre-European times. Maori history professor Paul Moon, of Auckland University of Technology, dismissed the idea abuse began after the Europeans came. 'The proposition that missionaries introduced violence, it's

one of those allegations that entered the historical bloodstream and once it's in that bloodstream, it's hard to get out. I would want to see evidence.' He cited the fact that Maori girls were sometimes killed because they were considered less useful than males. 'If children were treated as sacred items, how do you explain female infanticide?' Moon said the report's reliance on oral histories and lullabies also raised doubts over its reliability.

Family First Comment: If we're going to solve the issue of child abuse, we need to tackle the realities of family breakdown, declining marriage rates, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health, and violence in our media - rather than legends, myths, allegations and lullabies. This isn't research. This is romantic theory.

+ *Sunday Star Times*, 29/05/2011

+ *Family First NZ*

I'm terminally ill... and this saccharine portrayal of assisted suicide appalls me

By Geoff Morris

It was revealed that a controversial BBC documentary will depict a man dying at Dignitas clinic in Switzerland. Since the announcement of the documentary, which will be fronted by author Sir Terry Pratchett, the debate has raged over assisted suicide and whether the BBC is right to show the death.

Below Geoff Morris, a terminally ill multiple sclerosis sufferer, explains his uneasiness over the programme.

As a piece of shameless propaganda, Terry Pratchett's film is brilliant. But as an analysis of the truth behind so-called 'assisted suicide', it is grossly misleading and unbalanced.

The programme, which will be screened on BBC2 on Monday, shows best-selling author and Alzheimer's sufferer Sir Terry discussing his campaign to legalise this type of suicide in Britain, and reflecting on the possibility of ending his own life.

In a crucial segment, he accompanies 71-year-old British millionaire Peter Smedley to Switzerland's Dignitas clinic - which has become notorious as a centre for lawfully-sanctioned assisted suicide. As he candidly explains, Mr Smedley has decided he wants to die because he has motor neurone disease. And in an unprecedented move for a terrestrial broadcaster, the film covers the actual moment of his death, the camera capturing Mr Smedley's final cries for water, rasping breaths and involuntary convulsions. Yet, for all its unique explicitness, the film is hardly

honest.

In their eagerness to back the campaign to change the law, Sir Terry and the producers have presented this type of suicide as an enriching, even uplifting choice. So the controversial death scene in the clinic, amid the forests and snow-capped mountains of Switzerland, is suffused with beauty. All that is missing is a choir of heavenly angels.

For me, a disabled man with multiple sclerosis, this approach is profoundly troubling. And particularly regrettable is the role of the BBC. As the nation's public service broadcaster, the Corporation has a duty to give both sides of the argument, not to act as a mouthpiece for a highly partisan cause. What has been inflicted on viewers is a repellent exercise in deceit. So untrue and distorted is Sir Terry's film that it should really be classified as fictional drama rather than documentary.

Sir Terry is shown weeping at Mr Smedley's death, describing him gushingly as 'the bravest man I ever met' and concluding that 'this has been a happy event.' But the film fails to acknowledge any of the serious concerns about assisted suicide. There is no recognition that legalisation could actually encourage abuse and even coercion. And I fear that any such change will mean that disabled people, like me, are even more marginalised in our society, so that a swift exit comes to be seen as a merciful release. The case that Sir Terry presents is riddled with myth-making. He and his supporters like to talk of 'robust safeguards' in the proposed new law to protect the frail, the ill, and the disabled from lethal exploitation. But how could this be achieved in practice? In a climate where assisted suicide is approved by the state, it will become difficult to mount a prosecution against someone who claims to have acted in accordance with the wishes of the deceased (who is no longer around to say otherwise).

Sir Terry wants to see special tribunals established to decide on requests for assisted suicide as another form of safeguard. But this is deeply sinister. Who is going to sit on these panels? Do we really want to give the power of life and death to a bunch of bureaucrats or self-styled experts? Anyway, we already have a perfectly adequate network of tribunals. It is called the judicial system, run by courts and judges.

Some supporters of assisted suicide claim they would only want the law to be used in cases of terminal illness. But this is just another absurdity. How does one define terminal illness? After all,

many people with serious diseases far exceed their projected life expectancy, such as Professor Stephen Hawking, who was told he would not live beyond his twenties when he was diagnosed with motor neurone disease, but is now approaching his seventies, a world-renowned scientist and global celebrity.

Even worse, assisted suicide encourages the belief that only the healthy can lead fulfilling lives, whereas disability and illness can only result in misery. But, as I know from my own life, this is a travesty of the truth.

At the moment my condition means that I'm wheelchair bound and need a carer to help me wash and dress. If I'm on my own, just getting up takes me four hours. I have a lot of problems with fatigue and while I try to stay independent, I know I'm going to need more care as my symptoms worsen. My doctor hasn't given me an exact prognosis, but usually MS patients live 30 years after diagnosis, which would mean I have 15 years left.

Some people would find this depressing, but I try to be pragmatic about it. I've got so much to live for and am determined to see my one-year-old granddaughter reach her 21st birthday.

And despite my MS, my existence has never been richer, surrounded by a loving family and friends. Even in occasional moments of despair, I have never contemplated suicide and know that none of my children would want me to go. Thanks to my campaigning role on disabilities, I am now doing things that I would have never dreamt of before I contracted MS, such as addressing university campuses or writing for newspapers.

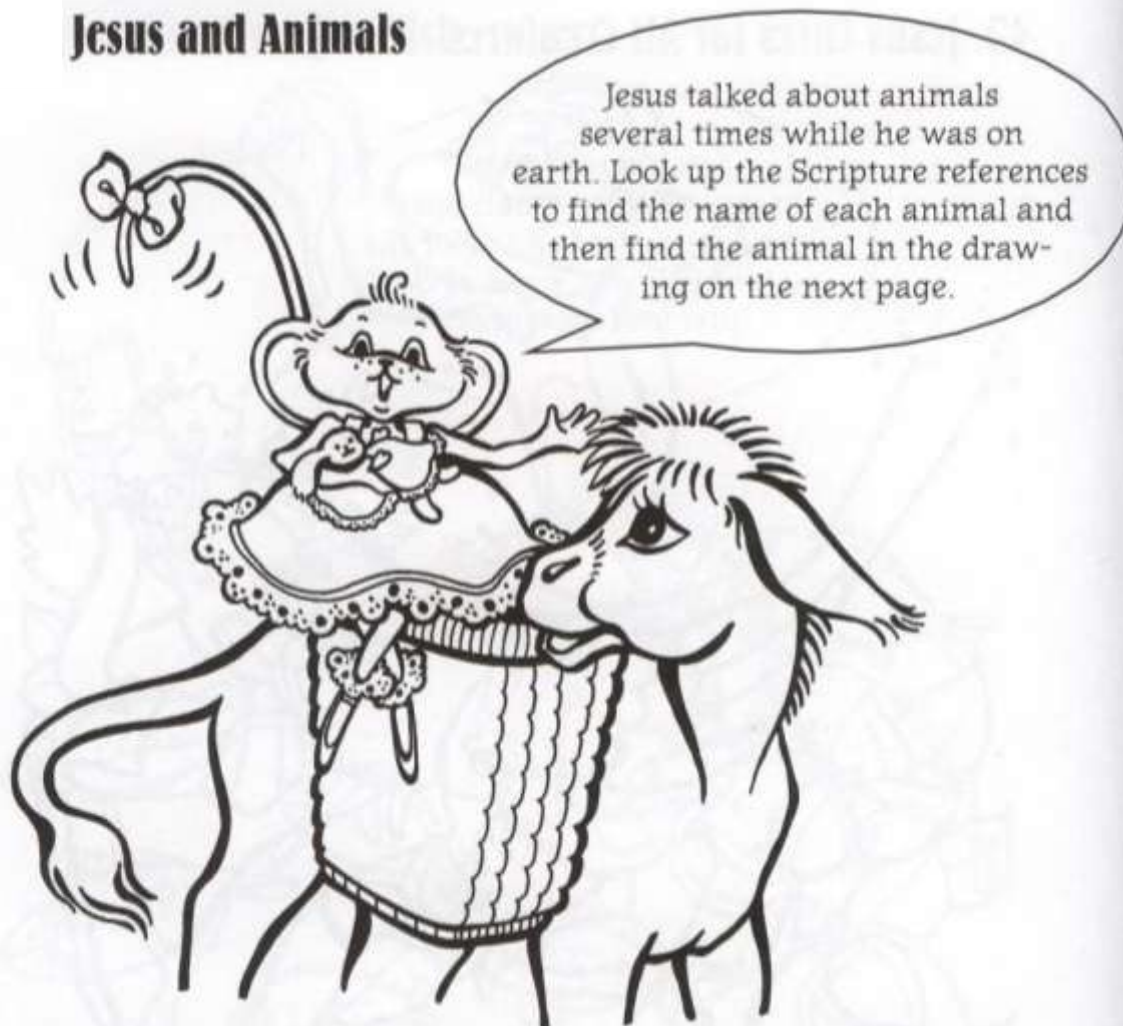
For all the upbeat imagery of his film, Sir Terry's message is a deeply pessimistic one. Assisted suicide would create a climate of fatalism, a loss of hope. It is a sickening world where individual life is devalued and where only the fittest are regarded as contributors to society.

We see some of this eugenicist outlook in the growing fashion for screening unborn babies for any sign of disability, and aborting them if they do not match the modern template for physical perfection. Assisted suicide would translate that approach into the sphere of adulthood.

+ www.dailymail.co.uk/

Children under the Banner

Jesus and Animals



- Matthew 8:20 _____ have holes and _____ of the air have nests.
- Matthew 15:26 It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their _____.
- Luke 11:12 Or if he asks for an egg, will you give him a _____?
- Mark 10:25 It is easier for a _____ to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.
- Matthew 12:40 Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge _____.
- Luke 22:34 Before the _____ crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.
- Matthew 10:16 I am sending you out like _____ among _____. Therefore be as shrewd as _____ and as innocent as _____.

Prescribed Search / Youth Work

JULY 2011

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8)

JUDGES chapter 7:15--25

1. What did Gideon's men do as well as blowing the trumpets?
2. What was the reaction of the host of Midian?

chapter 8

3. What were the punishments of the men of Succoth and the men of Penuel for not helping Gideon? (2 verses)
4. What was Gideon's answer when he was asked to rule over Israel?
5. What became a snare to Gideon and his house?
6. What happened as soon as Gideon was dead? (3 verses)

chapter 9

7. In his parable, to what did Jotham compare Abimelech?
8. How was Abimelech killed?

JUNIOR

JUDGES chapter 7

1. Why were the men with Gideon too many?
2. How many men lapped the water like a dog?
3. In the dream that Gideon overheard, what overturned the tent?
4. What words did the men shout when they blew their trumpets and broke their pitchers?

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
Or email to: iesteel@gmail.com

The Moderator's Address

Church—A Relational Community

This evening I want to address you on an aspect of church life, and the title I want to use to help focus our thoughts is *Church—A Relational Community*. To guide our reflection we will consider three points: Scripture is full of relational language; Scripture-defined relational living is under attack; and lastly, Ways we fail to live as God intends.

1. Scripture is full of relational language

I suggest that the motif of relationship is a very helpful one as we seek to bring church, and our understanding of church, and our being church, into greater conformity to the Word of God. So let me take a moment or two to give an overview of Scripture focusing on this motif of relationship.

We start in eternity with God alone. But God reveals himself as Three-in-One; more, he is a God of love. Now love is a relational word, so who was God relating to before he created this world and all that is in it? He was relating to himself; he was loving himself. The Father loved the Son and the Spirit, the Father lived in relationship with the Son and the Spirit, as similarly did the other members of the Godhead.

God reveals himself to be a relational God, who has always existed in relationship. And when this relational God created men and women in his own image surely one aspect of that was that we were created for relationship. So we are told that God was walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8); coming to relate to those he had made in his image. It is a most astounding picture, Almighty God relating to his creatures, but it is mentioned as if it were such a natural thing to happen—and it was, for God intended just that.

Relating to God was not some unforeseen consequence of creation. Relating to God was not a happy but unplanned result of creation. No. The purpose of God in creation was that those made in his image might live in relationship, and that primarily means that they might relate to God.

But our first parents disobeyed God and as a result were expelled from the garden. More importantly the close fellowship they had enjoyed with their God was broken. It could have been the end of the story, it *would* have been the end of the story had not God intervened. Instead of immediately punishing us for our rebellion as we deserved, God purposed and promised a restoration, a new beginning. It starts right in the midst of judgment, the hint that one is to come, the offspring of the woman (Genesis



3:15b), who will reverse the consequence of man's disobedience and rebellion. And as we move through Scripture God's purpose and plan is revealed with increasing clarity and detail. The relational God graciously enters into covenant relationship with his covenant people; he promises, "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." (Exodus 6:7), and repeats that promise again and again. In the book of Revelation John is given an insight to eternity which he is allowed to share with us. Part of what John sees is "a new heaven and a new earth" and "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (21.1-2). It is a most wonderful description that John

M. Gavin Smith

gives us, with far more detail than we can look at now. But notice what we are told about God relating to his people. John hears a voice speaking, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain," (21.3-4).

God with his people, and his people with their God. More, God dwelling with his people and they living with him. This is God relating to his people, and they to their God, in the closest possible way. It is not just that in eternity there will be no need for tears, but that God himself will be the one who wipes away the tears, such is his closeness to his people, such is the relationship they enjoy with him.

We see this relational emphasis in other, more solemn, ways. The Lord himself speaks these words, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

He is speaking to people who know all about him—they call him Lord. Now this could just be a term of respect, but it is likely that these people were doing far more than being polite. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, 'Lord' was employed consistently as the translation for God's personal name, his covenant name. It was the word the Christians found used of God in their Bible, and accordingly it was very significant that these people came to call Jesus by this title. But it wasn't enough. To these people, even though they acknowledge him in this way, and call him Lord, Jesus

says, 'I never knew you'.

He was speaking to people who had been very active, and active in Jesus' name. They had prophesied in his name, cast out demons in his name, and done many wonders in his name. And yet for all this activity, in spite of all these things they had been doing, Jesus says to them, 'I never knew you'. He doesn't criticise their actions, he doesn't criticise their motives; he says there is no relationship. That was the problem; it was from this that the consequences flowed.

Relating means having a living relationship. And that living relationship needs to be maintained, or it will wither and die. Today, we are no longer in that specially prepared garden in Eden—our forefathers disobeyed God and were thrown out. And we are not yet in that specially prepared new heavens and new earth. So how, today, do we maintain a relationship with God? We do it through the means of grace he has given to us for that purpose.

One final point in this scriptural overview; how can people come into, and live in that relationship with God? Paul writes, 'the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him [that is, the Lord] will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ' (Romans 10:11-13). We come into relationship with God through Jesus, through trusting Jesus, through depending on Jesus and what he has done; he is the only Saviour. As he himself tells us, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6).

We have seen that the Scriptures are full of relational language; once we start looking for it we find it everywhere. What we have looked at is only a small selection from what might have been mentioned.

So in summary, and to risk being accused of stating the obvious, notice that God's redemptive purpose was not merely rescuing us from our slavery to sin, forgiving our many failings, and giving us a new beginning; if we can say that reverently about such a wonderful and costly salvation. He was doing that, but it was simply a means to the far greater end he al-

ways had in mind. God was making possible a restoration of relationship with himself, and through him, with all of God's similarly restored people.

2. Scripture-defined relational living is under attack

Why highlight this now? The answer is that the relational nature of the church is under attack from the unholy trio of what is commonly referred to as 'the world, the flesh and the devil'. It has always been under such attack, but today it is attacked to an extent, and in ways, that may not have been true before. Consider the nature of the attack from these three, reversing the order.

The tactics of Satan.

At some point in history the devil—Satan, the adversary—chose to rebel against his Maker, and since then has

saints, discouragement under the circumstances, and distraction from our purpose. Where these individually, or together, are present then the relational life of a congregation of God's people will be seriously damaged.

Let us never forget that Satan is at war with God and, as those brought into relationship with God, we too are involved in this spiritual war. War is never without certain characteristics and the spiritual war we are engaged in is no different. War is messy, dangerous; there are casualties; there are those who undermine their own side by being traitors to it. If it were not that the Saviour has already won the victory we might easily be tempted to despair; but to do that would be to allow Satan a triumph.

Our ongoing struggle with sin.

God's people are sinners saved by grace. We have been given a new life but the influence of the old continues. One effect of sin in our lives is that we convince ourselves that sin does not have a big influence! For example, when we individually or corporately confess sin do we know what sin we are confessing? If we don't, then how can we repent of that sin, and seek God's grace to mortify it in our lives? Contrary to what we (sinfully) regularly tell ourselves, sin and its influence is no small matter.

The situation is perhaps exacerbated where there is an inadequate theology of salvation. As laid out in Scripture the salvation God has achieved and made available to us is full-orbed; like a brilliant diamond with light reflecting off different faces highlighting the different aspects of this wondrous deliverance. So the rich biblical vocabulary of salvation includes redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.

In our sound-bite world we speak of being *right with God*, and of *justification by faith*; and these are wonderful truths. But salvation involves more than justification, so why do we fail to mention sanctification, far less seek its fruits in our lives?

There is no question that we need to know forgiveness of sin; but we also need to evidence repentance for sin, and labour at mortification of

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

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(Youth & Fellowship Committee)

been working against God and his plans and purposes. Significantly much of his effort goes into destroying relationships; that is what he was doing in the Garden, and that is what he attempts today.

John Benton in his book, "The Big Picture for Small Churches", has a chapter on Satan's tactics against local churches. Several of the tactics Benton mentions target relationships, (being a preacher he manages to get them all beginning with the same letter): Deviation from the truth, division in the body, decadence among the

sin.

The change God works in the lives of his people involves a moving from death to life, from darkness into his wonderful light; and that change is required by all who would live in relation with God and his people. But simply professing that change (without evidencing the reality of it) is not some 'get-out-of-jail' card that we can rely on for the rest of our lives and for eternity. Yet I fear that some in our congregations are doing just that. This tendency to downplay sin and its influence makes us all the more unaware of the ways in which our thinking is distorted, our motives perverted, our actions corrupted; and since sin is against God and his ways it necessarily follows that the influence of sin is destructive of relationships—both with God and with man.

A Puritan catechism asks, "How are [the fruits of sin] manifested?" And answers, "1. By omitting good. 2. By committing evil. 3. By doing good evilly." The comprehensive influence of sin is thus succinctly made clear—it is not just what we do, or fail to do, we may even do good evilly!

The influence of the world around us, the culture we live in.

The third element in the attack we face comes from the world, our cultural environment; but again we have difficulties becoming aware of it. Dr Ravi Zacharias illustrates the difficulty we face. Writing of a time when he and his brother had just arrived in Canada as immigrants from India, he gives his reaction to hearing a missionary speaker from India.

"When he was through, I was quite shaken, wondering if all of his descriptions of the land of my birth were exactly the way I had seen them. ... It took a few years for me to realize what had happened.

"When I made my first trip back to India five years after this event, its sights and sounds caught my attention in a way that had never registered with me before. Yes, there was the nostalgia and the thrill of using the language in which so much of my cultural memory was enshrined. But there was the staggering experience of surprise, even shock. I was reminded of the old Chinese proverb: 'If you want to know what water is, don't ask the fish.' The point is well taken.

When we are immersed in an environment, we do not see it for what it really is."

Dr David Wells has invested a great deal of time and study in describing and critiquing the American context. His detailed writing, merits careful reading. He says, "I believe that in our time, understanding our culture takes on an urgency because this culture is so intrusive, and it is so powerful in its capacity to shape our souls and minds, that if we are not pushing back from an explicitly biblical, Christian point of view—we are going to get swallowed up." And he offers this warning, "A church that is merely mimicking the culture, rather than offering a biblical alternative to it, is on its way to oblivion."

The warning is clear, the danger is real: we need to be aware of what influences us; we need to stand firmly against what is harmful; for to conform to the culture of the world means death. The world wants to mould us to its ways, to conform us to its values, to instil in us its priorities; but the world does not live in relation to God. The Scriptures often speak of that harmful influence of the world, while including in the same breath references to both the conflict with sin and Satan. So Peter writes: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul," (1 Pet 2:11); and later he speaks of, "escap[ing] the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Pet 1:4). John writes, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever". (1 John 2:15–17).

The world has a different agenda entirely from our relational God. To the extent that the world shapes us—and all of us are shaped by the world to some extent—then we are not living as God intends, as God wishes, as God has made possible.

3. Ways we fail to live as God intends

What are the implications of all that we have seen? The first thing to be said, and said loudly and clearly, is that church is about God, and relating to God. The ongoing attacks we face target first this relationship. If we think there is no danger of the church losing its focus on God, its relationship with God, then we simply show how little we know ourselves, and how little we know the Scriptures.

Failure to live in relationship with God.

Just one example (from Exodus 32). God's covenant people were rescued from their slavery in Egypt. God rescued them, and they saw God's mighty working in preparation for their deliverance, and, at the Red Sea, during their deliverance. They knew God's provision for them in the wilderness, and then they came to Mount Sinai.

God meets with them in an awesome display. They are left in no doubt whatever that Almighty God has come down on that mountain—they see it, they hear it, they feel it. More than that, God speaks to them from the mountain and they hear him speak.

Yet, while Moses and Joshua are still meeting with God on the mountain, the people say to Aaron, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." (Exodus 32:1). It was God who had rescued them, it was God who had provided for them, it was God who had met with them, it was God who had spoken to them; but they do not even mention God! The LORD tells Moses what has happened; and then, testing Moses, he instructs him not to intervene, "so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them." But God adds, "Then I will make you into a great nation." (Exodus 32:10). And the world whispered to Moses, "This could work out well for you! Go for it." Sin said, "Sounds good to me!" The Devil added, "What more could you want?"

So does Moses say, "a great nation—the Moseians—I like the sound of that!"? No, he does not. Instead he recognises the relation-

ship he has with his fellow-Israelites and he pleads on their behalf with his relational God. Would we have done that? Is relational living with God and each other what guides our decisions, what sets our priorities? Or do the world, sin and Satan already have our note of surrender?

Why have we come to Synod? To pursue our own agendas? Or have we come to meet with God and his people? Have we come to worship, to bow humbly before God, to listen to what he might say to us, to cry to him in our need? Have we come to encourage others in the Lord, and to be encouraged by them?

Make no mistake, every time our focus is on ourselves—what we think, what we say, what we have done, what we have achieved—we have forgotten God, and the relational living that he has drawn us into, just as surely as Aaron and the Israelites did that day.

Failure to live in relationship with God's people.

We have seen that we live in a double relationship—with God *and* with his people—and just as we can fail in the one, so we can fail in the other. We do that whenever we relate

to God's people in no different way from how we relate to anyone else we come in contact with.

Paul gets to the heart of the matter in writing to the Philippian believers—"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:1-5).

This is relational living as God intends it to be. Our relationship with

God's people stems from our prior relationship with Christ, and it reflects his attitude. And what an attitude it is, as Paul goes on to describe. If we, even in a very limited way, display the attitude of Jesus then how different our relationships with God's people would be compared with how we relate to those others we come in contact with.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what does all this mean for us as elders (and we would not be here at Synod if we were not elders)? We gather for meetings of Deacons' Courts, Sessions, Presbyteries, Synod. And what we do, or are meant to do, on these occasions has its importance. But like all of God's people we are primarily called to relational living—with God and with his people. However, as elders, we have



a further responsibility. Not only are we to make every effort to live in a relational way ourselves, we are to encourage and nurture others in relational living, and model that living for them.

If I were to suggest that we might be more appropriately called 'relational enablers', or 'relational encouragers', then I wouldn't expect that name to stick. But let us be very clear, that *is* what we are to be about, that is our bread and butter work. It is not *all* that we are to do, but it is what we are *principally* and *foundationally* to do. So much so that I venture to suggest that—no matter what else we may be accomplishing—if we are not living, and encouraging, and nurturing, and modelling relational living then we are not functioning as elders. However, there is another aspect of

relational living that applies—we do it as a team, not individualistically. We are all members of teams: Deacon's Court, Session, Presbytery, Synod and the committees of Synod are all teams. Not to mention the congregations to which we each belong. And regardless of which footie code we support we know that team members are meant to be team players, or it doesn't turn out well for the team. Think for a moment of those you share team membership with; are *they* team players? But now ask yourself the more important question, are *you* a team player? You see, we may not be able to change the way others relate, but we can take responsibility for the way we relate. If God has placed us all in teams—and that is what we claim as Presbyterians—then surely that

is how he wants us to work. My mother used to say that if you want a job done properly you need to do it yourself. But the relational God puts us *together*, that we might work *together*, and so model that relational living which he

has always modelled.

Relational living is not some after-thought, not some optional extra; it is the way God has created us to live, and in redemption has re-enabled us to live. It starts with a relationship with God, graciously and lovingly made possible through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ; it then embraces our relationship with God's people. It is God-like living, God-honouring living, God-pleasing living, and it reflects the character of our relational God.

The church, *God's church*, is a relational community, for that is how he has made it to be.

Churches in the Banner

Our Sudanese congregation in Mulgrave, Melbourne

All Nations PCEA, Mulgrave

Knox Congregation had initial contact with Sudanese refugees in 2002 at Glen Huntly, and the work grew from there. We began to sponsor refugees under the Humanitarian programme, advancing interest-free loans for fares facilitated through the International Organisation for Migration. The first family arrived in September 2002 and the arrangement continued for a number of years with over 20 families totalling some 80 individuals being assisted in this way, mostly families from the Bari and Acholi-speaking peoples of south Sudan. In August 2005 the services of Rev Tut Wan Yoa were secured by Knox to further ministry among Sudanese refugees. Mr Yoa is from the



The Sudanese congregation in 2005

Nuer tribe which is largely Presbyterian arising firstly from the work of the United Presbyterian Church of North America a century ago (incidentally, then an exclusive psalm-singing body), and secondly from the revival of the church during the war of recent years. An additional afternoon service in the Nuer language began on the premises of the Christian Reformed Church of Dandenong, cnr Outlook Drive and Gladstone Road, North Dandenong in October 2005. Usually around 200 people attended, including many children. Mr Yoa also had the major responsibility for the small Glen Huntly service, but in 2009

this changed with the Glen Huntly work relocating to Mulgrave on 7 June 2009. It was our hope that a new parish could be formed to reach many of the old and



Rev. Tut Wan Yoa

new settlers in Melbourne's east and south east as well as care for the Sudanese. We gave it the provisional name All Nations Presbyterian Church. A search for premises in Springvale or surrounding areas was fruitless, although a house on a corner block with room for small group meetings was purchased in Springvale in May 2007 with funds from the old Hamilton parish. The search for suitable church premises continued.

On 17 November 2008 we received an unsolicited approach from Bethel Baptist Church of Mulgrave, asking if we would be interested in their property as they were disbanding and had decided not to proceed with a merger with another church. Originally estab-

lished by American missionaries in 1970, Bethel had moved to the Calvinistic position in the 1980s. After inspection and careful consideration we expressed a positive interest. On 22 November, following a unanimous vote at a church meeting, Bethel resolved to offer us their land, building and contents at 91 Tiverton Drive, Mulgrave for \$150,000, a most attractive price. The offer was accepted and contracts signed that day with settlement on 13 February 2009. The Springvale house was sold.

Erected in 1972 and re-roofed and renovated in 1997 during the pastorate of Graeme Lowe, the Mulgrave building had an area of 273m² - a similar size to that at Narre Warren. There was adequate parking as the land includes an electricity easement that cannot be built on but can be used for parking. A wonderful thanksgiving service was held on

1 January 2009. It was necessary to make an addition of 134m² to provide Sunday school class-rooms, and Town Planning permission was received in May 2009. Building commenced toward the end of August and was complete in December 2009. Meanwhile a regular Lord's Day morning service English began 7 June 2009. The car park was upgraded to provide 29 asphalted spaces and professional landscaping while the interior was also upgraded and painted. All up the cost including the original purchase was about \$400,000.

The Sudanese service was moved to Mulgrave 3 January 2010. On 19 December 2010 the first 23 communicant members were received on profession of faith. Currently there are 64 members - 39 women and 25 men. A number of ladies are widows and several have husbands still in Sudan. There is a Ladies' meeting on Wednesdays and a Young Adults group on Fridays as well as the Lord's Day service. On 31 March 2011 All Nations became a separate parish although it still receives extensive financial support from Knox. Over the next few years English will become more common and the services can



Sudanese Ladies singing in the new Mulgrave church

be integrated more fully. Particular prayer needs are for the youth and for commitment in terms of financial support. As well, the nation of South Sudan officially become independent on 9 July. Please pray for peace, stability and honest government.