

the presbyterian

June 2015

*...streams came up from the earth
and watered
the whole surface of the ground.
Genesis 2:6*

banner

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Editorial

I remember when growing up in New Zealand, where there are two main islands – the North and South Islands – there was often a comment made about Australia that it was the 'West Island.' Although folk knew Australia was a continent in its own right, it was also seen as another island in the Pacific.

This came home to me when we were blessed to be hosted by the Mt Druitt PCEA congregation in western Sydney for Synod 2015. Seeing the Tongan families there, who make up a large part of their congregation, we realised even more how much this land is a part of the Pacific. And how much didn't they bring their islands to us!

One of the longest serving ministers in our denomination made the comment how encouraging it is that our denomination is becoming more reflective of the different races making up our nation. The Free Church of Scotland Moderator visiting with us noted this also, and, while acknowledging the lessening of a Scottish Presbyterian connection, yet warmly encouraged us to keep in close fellowship with them (and he's an Australian!).

Please note that the Moderator's address and devotions at Synod will be published over the next four months. We are thankful to be able to do this and grateful for how our brother led the proceedings at Synod.

Naturally this issue is very much involved with Synod. We pray that it brings to you a sense of what happened and what it was like there as it was happening. We thank the Lord for his guidance and pray his blessing on the decisions that were made.

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.
Psalm 133*

Cover Photo Credit: Alex Steel

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Synod 2015, 5 May — Moderator's Address

Haggai 1

Brothers in Christ, why are we here? Why are you here? What do you hope to accomplish over the next couple of days? What are your priorities for this synod meeting?

Are your priorities God's priorities, or are they your own? Are you even able to tell the difference between what you are inclined to have as your priorities, and what God would have your priorities for this meeting to be?

The book of Haggai can help us out a great deal in all of this. When it comes to our understanding of what it is that we should be focusing on this week, what it is that we should be trying to achieve, he has much to teach us.

Now that might sound strange for some. After all, Haggai doesn't seem to have a lot to say. His is a rather short book, second shortest book in the Old Testament. Oh, he's mentioned a couple of times elsewhere in the Bible, in Ezra, but he's not exactly what you would call a major biblical figure.

You know, we only have four of his messages, all spoken during a four month period around the year 520 before Christ. A four month ministry, not exactly long-term.

Of course, it's quite possible that He served as a prophet longer than that, and scholars have debated that question. It doesn't take much to get scholars arguing, does it?

But be that as it may, the fact remains that the Lord saw fit to include in His Word only these four messages proclaimed in a relatively short period of time.

So here we have this minor prophet, ministering near the end of the Babylonian exile, about 66 years after the temple was destroyed and the monarchy came to an end in Judah. Prophesying a long time ago in a land far, far away. What could he have to say to us at this synod meeting here in

Australia in 2015? And how could his priorities possibly have anything in common with our priorities?

Quite a bit, actually. This should be clear when we read and consider Haggai chapter 1.

Now, we read in the book of Ezra about how God worked in the heart of Cyrus, King of Persia, so that he allowed the Jewish people to return home from exile, return-



ing to the land of Israel in order to rebuild the temple.

Unfortunately, when they tried to get started on this task, they discovered that not everyone was as supportive of this endeavour as Cyrus was. There were folks already living in the land who weren't thrilled about this project. These enemies were the ancestors of the Samaritans we read about in the New Testament. They didn't want the temple restored.

This opposition, along with other difficulties, caused work on the temple to stop. And it stayed stopped, for over sixteen years.

The people had started the work so enthusiastically. But in the face of stiff opposition, they gave

up.

Well, along came Haggai. Where he came from, we don't really know. Who he was, we don't really know. There's lots of speculation, of course. Scholars love to speculate. But we don't find any of this information authoritatively recorded in the Bible.

But what we do know is that Haggai confronted the people. He proclaimed to them the word of the Lord, calling the people to action. And the basic thrust of his message was simple: "Get back to work on the temple, right now!"

But now, consider how he went about getting this message across. We read in verse 2 of Haggai 1 – "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.'"

The time had not yet come, the people said. Excuses, excuses. "We can't rebuild the temple at this point. The political situation isn't quite right yet. We still don't really have the resources we need yet."

Bad timing. And that wasn't their only excuse. Verse 4 - "*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?*" They were too busy taking care of their own homes to take care of the Lord's house. They had their own financial affairs to get in order. 'First let's take care of these more personal matters, then maybe we'll be able to get around to working on the temple.'

Brothers and sisters, what the people of Israel demonstrated here was both selfishness and a lack of faith. Selfishness, being more concerned that they lived in nice homes than they were about making sure that the temple was

Jim Klazinga

in good shape.

Our text refers to 'paneled houses'. The word translated 'paneled' can have in it the idea of a ceiling. The word also suggests adornment, something fancy. This same word was used in 1 Kings 6:9 – "So he built the temple and finished it, and he paneled the temple with beams and boards of cedar." Lots of fancy cedar. But now in Haggai's day: none of that. All that they managed to really get done before work stopped was the foundation. No fancy walls, no roof, no ceiling. But the people themselves, they were able to have their 'paneled houses'. Selfish.

Consider also their lack of faith. The timing wasn't right. Did they not realize that if they would remain faithful, then the Lord would give them what they stood in need of? Did they not believe that if God really wanted the temple restored, He would remove the obstacles in their way? How can the timing ever be wrong for doing the work of the Lord? If they had had courage and faith, they would not have allowed themselves to get sidetracked from the work they were required to do.

But now, let's be honest, how often do we not do the same sort of thing? How often do we allow our excuses to prevent us from doing the work God requires of us?

Mind you, I should point out, when we talk about doing the work of the Lord, when it comes to what this means for us in 2015, our focus should not necessarily be on buildings. It would be easy to take this passage and apply it in a very simplistic manner, saying that the Lord wants us to do His work by raising money to construct the best church buildings possible. And in fact, this is a common text to preach on when churches are beginning building projects. That's fair enough, as

long as we don't leave it there. If that's all we think this text is about, we fail to do justice to what God is saying to us here.

We have to remember what the temple back then was primarily about. It wasn't first of all about having a nice building to practise their religion in. Rather, its central focus was to point to the presence of God among His people.

And of course, the temple pointed forward to Christ, who himself was God with us, God dwelling among us. He was the temple torn down and rebuilt in three days.

We know also that in our day, living in the New Testament era, the church is the temple. The church is the house of God, his dwelling place. Not the building of the church, but the people of the church.



We are the house of the Lord. And not just those of us who are leaders. Boys and girls, young people, middle aged people, older people, all joined together in true faith, we are God's temple.

So, having said that, when we talk about doing work on the Lord's house, we focus on doing the work we are called to do as those in whom God lives. Such as the important work of gathering together for worship on the Lord's Day. There's also the work of church education, for younger and older members. Or how about the work of service ministry, or fellow-

ship activities, or any of the things we do in showing love to each other? Do we do all we can in these areas? Or are we more concerned about our own personal houses?

And of course, don't forget the work of missions and evangelism. That should be a huge priority. You know, we can be so thankful that this is a major part of our focus at synod, having set aside tomorrow evening specifically as a Missions evening. The one point of our meetings where we especially invite members of the local churches to come and be a part of what we are doing here this week, the Missions evening. That's good. I'm certainly looking forward to listening to brothers Samit and Pradeep from India, and also brother Sekona from the Tongan community here in our host

church, as well as from brother Trevor as he speaks on his work with AIM. I pray that making this a priority here at synod will be reflected on making this work a priority as we go home to our individual congregations.

Now there are so many other examples we can also focus on here, so many applications regarding making the work of the church a priority.

But there's just one more I'd like to bring up at this point, when it comes to what we'll be doing here this week. The work of prayer. Is that a priority for us this week, or is that just something we do at the beginning and end of sessions to make sure it gets recorded in the minutes, so it can be said that we had a proper meeting? Brothers, when it comes to doing the work of the church that we as leaders are called to do, prayer is fundamental.

In 1 Timothy 2:8, shortly before the qualifications for church leaders are listed in 1 Timothy 3,

we read, "I desire then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling." Brothers, may this be our priority this week, and not just for the sake of good order, but for the sake of building up Christ's church and being the building in which he dwells.

But now, shifting focus a bit, we need also to consider what happens when we don't make the work of God our priority. Look at what happened to the people of Israel when they were failing to do work on the temple, failing to do the work of the Lord. Verse 9 of Haggai 1 – "*You* looked for much, but indeed *it came to little*; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. 'Because of My house that *is in ruins*, while every one of you runs to his own house.'" Give thought to your ways. Look at what happens when you neglect work on my house. Why do you think that you are having trouble with your crops, having difficulty putting enough food on the table? Why do you think the money you've earned is disappearing so fast?

God made it clear: He was angry with His people for their lack of effort. He was exercising His judgment, demonstrating His wrath.

So, here the people were, trying to get *their* houses in order, but they couldn't get their houses in order because God was punishing them for not getting *His* house in order.

You know, the word 'ruins' that's used in verse 9 to describe the condition of the temple sounds very similar in Hebrew to the word 'drought' in verse 11. It's a striking play on words, emphasizing how the one is connected to the other. The temple is in ruins, you're going to have drought.

But now, we know that this passage is not saying that every time we go hungry in our day and age, every time we are having financial difficulties, then this automatically means that we are being punished for not doing enough for the Lord

and His church. And when we don't do enough for the Lord, there will be no more rain.

We have to recognize that God was demonstrating Old Testament covenant curses here in the situation that Haggai and the people of his day found themselves. We read in Deuteronomy 28 of the curses the people could expect if they were not faithful to the covenant, curses which included agricultural disasters. So the difficulties they were having with their crops should not have surprised them.

The thing is though, the land had special covenant significance back then. But for us today, those very real, very physical covenant blessings and curses point to deeper spiritual realities. And so we can expect spiritual difficulties when we neglect the work of the Lord.

Are we as a church doing what the Lord calls us to do? We have our share of difficulties. How much of this is tied to focussing on our own houses, and a failure to focus on spiritually building the Lord's house?

Oh, it's not necessarily the case that all our struggles as churches are specifically the result of failures on our part. You don't have to sow weeds to reap weeds; sometimes they just come. But at the same time, when you do sow weeds, you're guaranteed to reap weeds. When you do sow a failure of doing the Lord's work, you will reap struggles as a church. At the very least, our struggles should motivate us to self-examination, asking ourselves what more we can do to put our focus on the right things and make God's priorities our priorities.

Make no mistake about it, when we fail to do what God requires of us, when we refuse to recognize that work on God's house takes precedence, then we can expect God's judgment to be demonstrated in many different forms. We will reap what we sow.

But now, thankfully, we don't need to finish off with just the negative. We read in verses 12 through 14 of Haggai 1 of how the leaders and the people obeyed. Thanks be to God, there was a revival among the people. Thanks be to God, the people recognized the Word of the Lord coming to them through Haggai. Thanks be to God, they responded in faith. And thanks be to God, God promised them: I am with you.

You know, Haggai has been referred to as the most successful of the prophets. The people weren't always responsive to the message of the prophets. But in this case, they were. They were moved to action. They were stirred to service. They worked on God's house. And in Ezra 6, we read about how the work on the temple was completed.

You know why this could happen? Because the Lord stirred up their spirits. He worked in their hearts. On their own, they would have continued to neglect their duties. They would have come up with excuses, over and over again. But the Spirit of God worked a reformation. He brought about blessings for the people. And He gave them the most wonderful message that He could ever give. "I am with you."

"I am with you." There is no greater motivation than the knowledge that our God is with us. He is with us in Jesus Christ. He continues to dwell in us through the work of the Spirit in our hearts. Praise be to Him!

Let us put aside our excuses. Let us focus on serving Him. May this week be one in which our priorities are God's priorities. Let us pray for reformation in our day and age, and in our church. Let us pray for reformation in our own hearts. Let us continue our work for Him wherever he has called us. We can do so because He has promised that He is with us. Amen.

The Past for Today

Christianity in Scotland (5): The Reformation Parliament & After Rowland S. Ward

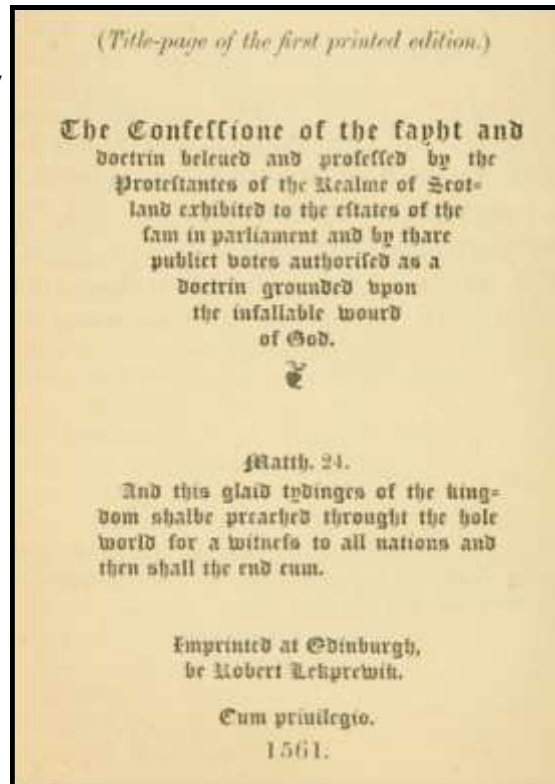
The Scots' Confession

The terms of the Treaty of Edinburgh specifically left religious questions to be submitted to the 'intention and pleasure' of the king and queen. However, this was for the present ignored, as Mary Queen of Scots was never going to approve. On 17 August 1560 a Confession of Faith was adopted, prepared by 'the six Johns': John Knox; John Winram (1492-1582) a former Augustinian prior; John Spottiswoode (1510-85), of the parish of Mid Calder; John Willock (d.1585), a former Dominican friar; John Douglas (1494-1574), provost of St Mary's College in St Andrews; and John Row (c.1525-1580), sometime procurator at the papal court in Rome. A week later the Reformation Parliament abolished the jurisdiction and authority of the bishop of Rome. It declared all acts 'not agreeing with God's word and now contrary to the confession of our faith' passed in the reign of James I and subsequently, to be of no force or effect and forever abolished. The papal sacraments, especially the mass, were proscribed, with penalties as high as death for a third offence.

The Confession was produced in some haste and contains 25 articles. Scripture is regarded as the supreme and final authority and consistent in itself. In place of the church as the infallible interpreter, the Spirit of God is the One who illumines and enlightens in the truth. The atonement of Christ is regarded as sacrificial, penal and substitutive, and the doctrine of unconditional election is upheld. While not a separate topic, justification by faith is maintained

and shown to be a result of a spiritual renewal which also leads to holiness of life. It has been well summarized by Donald Macleod in *The Presbyterian Banner*, September 1976:

The Scots Confession does not elaborate any of its doctrines



Scots Confession—title page of first edition

with the precision and fullness we would like. At some points the arrangement is highly illogical and the movement of thought confusing. Yet it nowhere transgresses the norm of Reformed orthodoxy. Its formulations are emphatic enough to preclude subscription by anyone who is not both an Evangelical and a Calvinist. And it never allows us to forget that truth is in order to holiness.

James Kirk has well described the changes brought by the events of 1560:

The radical and innovative approach adopted by the re-

formed kirk marked a decisive break with the immediate past. In doctrine, the characteristic protestant emphasis on original sin, atonement, unmerited grace, justification by faith alone, predestination and the verbal inspiration of scripture found homely expression in the Confession of 1560 which, with the Book of Discipline, prepared in 1560, rejected transubstantiation, denounced the mass and replaced the seven sacraments of the old church by the two dominical sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Out went Latinity, sacerdotalism, altars and unleavened wavers, auricular confession, the cult of Mary and the saints, the celebration of holy days and feast days, prayers for the dead, belief in purgatory, the sign of the cross, crucifixes, images and elaborate ritual, surplices (or choir dress) and Eucharistic vestments, organs and choristers, the plainsong of great churches and the silence of poor

churches. In came a simple service based on preaching, Bible study, prayers and the metrical psalms sung to popular tunes, and with this, active participation by the people, who, no longer passive spectators, were encouraged to sing God's praise and, seated corporately at tables, to receive both wine and bread at communion. (1)

The population of Scotland in 1560 was around 800,000 and there were over 3,000 in the Roman Catholic clerical establishment. The Reformed church consisted of about



John Knox

1,000 parishes needing about the same number of ministers. Five of the eleven serving bishops conformed to the Reformation, three serving actively in the Reformed ministry. Within a year or so of the Reformation parliament, about 240 men were serving either as ministers or readers in parishes. Of the ministers, most had conformed to the new arrangements, and some had been preaching before the upheaval. The 'readers' were persons appointed 'where no ministers can be had presently'. They were to read the prayers printed in 'the Book of our Common Order', that is, the order of service first published by Knox and others at Geneva in 1556, as well as the Scriptures. The expectation was that the readers might 'grow to greater perfection' and be able to be admitted to the ministry in the regular way. Progressively improved and enlarged, and includ-

ing the entire Psalter in metre, the Book of Common Order was published in 1564 for use throughout the church. Within another ten years most parishes had a minister or reader.

First Book of Discipline

Already in April 1560 the Lords of the Congregation had called for a statement on the reformation of religion in Scotland. The first draft of what became known as the First Book of Discipline was made about this time. It covered a wide range including doctrine, national education, poor relief and finance. In January 1561 the final version, by the same six Johns

already mentioned, was adopted by a convention of many of the nobility and the Church as a platform of church organisation and vision for the future. The Book of Discipline did not elaborate a full system of church government although the essence of Presbyterianism was there, with a congregational eldership and a General Assembly. The twice-yearly synods which existed before 1560 continued, at least from 1562, so the basics of conciliar church government were there.

The Book of Discipline insisted on ministers called by God and elected by the people. It also introduced the offices of elder and deacon, subject to annual election. There was to be public worship twice on each Lord's Day (morning and afternoon) and, particularly in major towns, services on other days also. Public catechizing of children was a marked feature of the afternoon service

on the Lord's Day, while marriages took place within the morning service. There was to be a regular weekly meeting of the parish minister and elders of one or more neighbouring congregations, called the 'exercise', for discussion of Scripture. Men with potential for ministry were also to attend and participate. The exercise, which was neither a sermon or a theological lecture, was an opportunity to improve the understanding of Scripture. It was based on 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 and was somewhat similar to meetings held in the Reformed churches in Europe.

Knox and his fellow leaders, having repudiated diocesan episcopacy, were well aware of the need to provide some kind of unity and oversight between parishes in particular regions, and to provide for sound teaching. Given the shortage of qualified ministers, the matter was resolved pragmatically by the appointment of superintendents.

And therefore we have thought it a thing most expedient at [or, for] this time, that from the whole number of godly and learned men, now presently in this realm, be selected ten or twelve (for in so many provinces we have divided the whole), to whom charge and commandment should be given to plant and erect kirks, to set, order and appoint ministers as the former order prescribes...

Despite the aim in the Book of Discipline, only five superintendents were appointed. It has sometimes been claimed, as by Gordon Donaldson, that the superintendent was really a bishop by another name. However the superintendent was elected freely, without the licence from the Crown that was necessary in England, and, whilst paid three or four times

as much as the minister of a fixed parish, received many times less than the typical bishop. The superintendent was a salaried supervisor, a preacher and a watchman who, in carrying out his pastoral and preaching work, was regularly on the move and incurred expense as he did so. From 1562 he had the responsibility to convene regional synods twice a year. The power of excommunication was not reserved to him, but a congregation settled with a minister and elders could excommunicate without reference to the superintendent. Moreover, a superintendent was not only to consult and deliberate with other ministers and elders in dealing with unsatisfactory ministers or readers, but he himself was subject to the censure and correction of the ministers and elders and was subject also to regular scrutiny by the General Assembly.

Given the reluctance of those who had acquired rights to church property to give them up, the intended application of the wealth of the church to the ministry, to education and to poor relief was not settled either. The previous ecclesiastical structure continued and some temporary expedients to provide a measure of financial support to the ministry were adopted in 1562. Only in December 1567, after the forced abdication of Mary Queen of Scots and the succession of her infant son as James VI, was an Act of Parliament passed that formally recognized the church and allocated some of the lesser benefices to the church when they fell vacant.

Mary Queen of Scots

In December 1560 Mary's husband died and she returned to Scotland the following August at the age of 18. She opted to support a moderate Protestant element, led by the Earl of Moray, in line with her ambition to have Elizabeth I, her first cousin once removed, name her as her heir.



Mary, Queen of Scots

In July 1565 Mary married Lord Darnley, her second cousin and the strongest dynastic claimant to Elizabeth's throne. Elizabeth was furious and Moray raised a revolt. It was soon crushed. Mary's marriage with Darnley was unhappy and she refused to grant him the right to succeed her if she died childless. In March 1566 her male secretary was murdered in circumstances which some thought implicated Darnley, while in February 1567 Darnley was murdered in circumstances some thought involved Mary's collusion with the Earl of Bothwell, who divorced his wife and married Mary a few months later. This provoked a further and successful revolt and Mary was forced to abdicate in favour of her infant son, James VI.

So it was that,

against the will of the Crown, Reformation was speedily accomplished on an official level with far more popular support than was the case in England. In following articles we will look at what the Reformation brought, and the struggle between the two kingdoms – the Crown and the Church – that followed.

Footnote:

1—James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) xvi.



The Rev. Dr. Rowland Ward, the writer of this article, as he delivers the retiring Moderator's sermon

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The World in the Banner

Syria: Situation Critical

In September 2014 the US government resumed sending weapons to the 'moderate Syrian opposition' including anti-tank missiles critical in al-Qaeda's conquest of Idlib. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are planning a military alliance to aid the 'moderate Syrian opposition'. They believe the US-Iran nuclear deal will empower Iran and regime-change in Damascus must happen now before the window of opportunity closes. Over Easter al-Qaeda forces shelled Christian districts of Aleppo, killing dozens and wounding many more.

Meanwhile, IS has launched offensives in both Aleppo Province (north) and Damascus (south). A coalition of al-Qaeda and IS fighters now controls Yarmouk, a southern suburb of Damascus just 6km from its CBD. The war is escalating markedly at a time when escaping from Syria is virtually impossible. Please pray for Syria's remnant Christians.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin*
| RLPB 305 | Wed 15 Apr 2015

Who's afraid of Bjorn Lomborg?

Who's afraid of Bjorn Lomborg? Judging by the outsized fuss that followed last week's announcement that Lomborg would set up a research centre at the University of Western Australia, it would appear that many people in academia are.

But why should they be? Is he a climate change denialist, somebody who has made up his mind that humans' impact on climate is not worth worrying about and there's an end to it? No, he's not.

Is he a Lord Monckton-style climate crank, stirring the pot of ignorance? No, he's not that either.

In fact Lomborg has established himself as someone who brings evidence and rational

analysis to a whole range of complex global problems. Not just climate, but also health, development and resource issues.

It can't be stressed enough that these are complex problems to which there are no easy or simple answers. And when developing policy to deal with them there are trade-offs that need to be made everywhere.

And Lomborg is very good at drawing attention to the trade-offs. He has argued that climate change is real and poses problems, but is not as urgent a problem to the world as disease, poverty and lack of clean water.

He may or may not be right. Personally I suspect that climate change is the number one problem, but my opinion carries no weight in this debate. And neither, I submit, can the opinion of experts in the field be regarded as definitive when considering climate, and other issues that stem from the rapid human dominance of the earth's ecosystems. It is a situation simply unprecedented in the earth's 4.5-billion-year history, which means the past offers us little help in finding our way through this dilemma. But given the catastrophic consequences of getting it wrong, shouldn't we welcome the Lomborgs who throw the curved balls – the ones who probe current thinking, look for new paradigms, and take an intellectually honest approach to testing current ideas against the evidence. The greatest danger is to assume – as do the extremists on each side, both climate change denialists and embracers – that everything is understood and the right course of course of action is clear.

Some environmentalists who initially opposed Lomborg a decade ago when he first became well-known for his book *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, have reconciled with him. (See a piece in

Cosmos magazine on 21 October 2013.)

Today, Lomborg is not a conventional environmental thinker. But his ability to be contrary is at the heart of his value. If the holes he pokes in standard theories (about development, health, resource use and climate change) can be refuted then conventional thinking is stronger for having withstood the test.

But if he finds holes that leak, then that's also good because he has found weaknesses which need addressing.

The extraordinary thing about the past week's attacks on Lomborg from many academics is that they apparently don't see that all scientific theories, including climate change, need to be exposed to very rigorous attempts to refute them.

Philosopher Karl Popper, who first identified this, said it was the first responsibility of all scientists to test their theories by trying to falsify them. This is the hallmark of good science. Lomborg's antagonists should reflect on whether they are doing science or playing politics.

Of course, the political dimension is unavoidable. Academics who want to build their careers need to play politics. And much of the anger about Lomborg comes from the fact that he is perceived to have won a political battle to get \$4 million from the federal government to fund his new Australian Consensus Centre.

But as Education Minister Christopher Pyne said in defence of the spending, Labor put equally significant amounts of money into university projects it favoured, such as \$7 million for the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney and \$3.5 million for *The Conversation* website.

That's politics, and Lomborg's

new centre is now part of the political game. But if we return for a moment to the pure science: is there any reason to fear Bjorn Lomborg? Afraid not.

+ *Australian Financial Review*, April 26, 2015

Rev. Dr. R.C. Sproul Sr. Has No Paralysis and Is Doing Well after Suffering Stroke

Ligonier Ministries on 21 April 2015 released the following statement regarding the Rev. Dr. R.C. Sproul Sr. who recently suffered a stroke: "Thank you for your continued prayers for Dr. Sproul. The doctors did confirm a stroke occurred but we are thankful to God that there is no paralysis. In fact, he is very alert, feeling well, and resting comfortably. And the hospital staff is enjoying his sense of humor."

The editor shares his joy at this announcement, and asks *Presbyterian Week* readers to continue prayers for Dr. Sproul's full recovery.

+ *Presbyterian Week*, 22 April 2015

Scotland's Politicians Are Blind or Too Cowardly to Address Dangers of Islam

On 8 April 2015 Press and Journal article by Cameron Brooks titled "Free Church Minister Clashes with Politicians over Islam" reports that Free Church of Scotland Moderator-Elect the Rev David Robertson is saying that regarding Scotland's politicians, that addressing concerns over Islam is more important than dealing with the economy, independence and the National Health Service. Robertson says the politicians are "blind or too cowardly," to address the dangers of Islam. Robertson continued, saying: "The subject that dare not speak its name, [which] politicians avoid like the plague, is Islam. The narrative is that Islam is the same as Christianity, that Islamic State and others are just fundamentalists who are not really part of the 'religion of peace', and that Christians have their own Islamic State

equivalents.

"All untrue but the main point is that mainstream Islam does not, and cannot, fit in with the worldview and doctrines of our liberal secularists."

+ *Press and Journal*,
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The Critics of Islam Were Right

For years I was an apologist for Islam, as regrettably, many still remain. I only read books and believed those who painted Islam in a peaceful, glowing light. I made excuses for radical Muslims and lived in a flood of denial that religious teachings could still, in this modern age of drones and clones, motivate a person to commit evil. I criticized the numerous atheists including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Sam Harris, and Bill Maher warning of the dangers inherent in Islamic doctrines, recklessly labelling them Islamophobes.

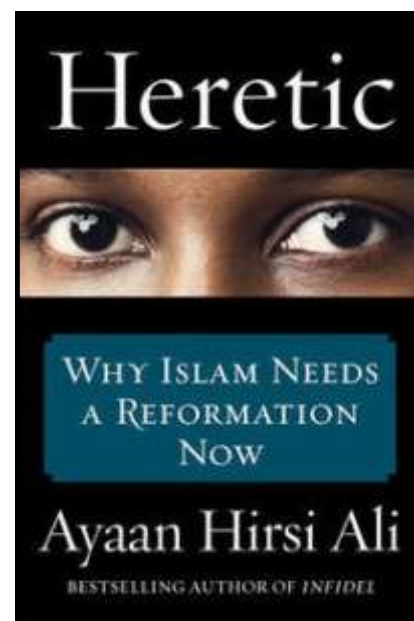
Today I'm writing to say I'm sorry, I apologize, and I ask for your forgiveness. We who have blindly defended Islam and called you Islamophobes are tragically wrong.

My mind first began to change last May when I read an interview by Sam Harris with Ayaan Hirsi Ali in which she addresses the misapplication of the term Islamophobia. This article, along with the seeds atheists planted over the years urging me to do more research, motivated me to delve into the religion. I read the Quran, many Hadith, the biography of Muhammad, the history of Jihad, and Islamic law. This is what I learned: The critics of Islam are right. Islam is intrinsically, alarmingly violent, hateful and oppressive on a scale greater than all other major religions combined. To say that radical Islamists are motivated to commit atrocities and embrace oppression based on religious doctrine is the understatement of the century.

I, like most defenders of Islam, was ignorant, naïve, and in denial. I wrongly assumed all holy books have enough good messages to

offset the bad. I wrongly assumed that, like Jesus, Muhammad promoted peace, love, and non-violence. I wrongly assumed criticism of Islam equates to criticism of all Muslims... While I apologize to those wrongly labeled Islamophobes, my biggest apology is owed to Muslims.

Muslims have needlessly suffered under oppressive Islamic religious and political doctrines as thousands of uninformed smearists like myself rushed to judge and silence critics of Islam. By not acknowledging the Islamic link to radical violence and hate, smearists have unwittingly allowed it to spread. The smearists, denialists, and the naïve have, unknowingly, turned their back on moderate Muslims and a reformed, peaceful Islam. We who have carelessly thrown around the Islamophobe label including Glen Greenwald, Reza Aslan, and Karen Armstrong should lower our heads in shame and guilt. Few things are as morally depraved as attacking someone who criticizes Islam (Ayaan Hirsi Ali) rather than attacking the Islamic apostasy and blasphemy laws teaching Muslims they should kill her. We must now live with the knowledge that we've abandoned and betrayed our principles. Though we claim the mantle of human rights, free



speech and equality, we lack the courage of our convictions when it offends someone. We make the cowardly lion look like Churchill. In reality, those who criticize Islam, especially reform minded Muslims, are the bravest of the brave. They are literally putting their lives at risk by the simple act of criticizing the Quran, Muhammad, and Sharia. It is the critics of Islam who are working steadfastly for equality and human rights for Muslims as apologists wallow in denial... But by no means take my word for it. You owe it to yourself to do your own research and see if you too find a connection between Islamic teachings and Islamic violence and hate. I challenge everyone, especially

smearists, to read the Quran, biographies of Muhammad, the history of Jihad, and the political ideology of Islam.

Perhaps you too will notice the Quran's recurring theme of hating non-believers and the desert like absence of loving and inclusive passages to offset the vile and violent ones. Perhaps you too will notice how Muhammad's violent life mirrors that of members of the Islamic State and that it would be dangerous for any person to follow in Muhammad's footsteps. Perhaps you too will notice how there is no separation of Church and State in Islam and that most Islamic governments place Islamic law above Secular law.

It would be one thing if Islamic doctrines said Muslims should love non-Muslims and love their enemy. It would be one thing if the prophet Muhammad preached non-violence. It would be one thing if Islamic Laws supported equality for women, minorities, freedom of expression, and valued human rights. It would be one thing if the Quran taught the golden rule.

It is because they do the complete opposite that I am now speaking out.

+ Mike Dobbins,
www.christianpost.com

Moderator's Closing Prayer To Devotions

Father in heaven, help us to have a childlike reverence and trust that through Christ you have become our Father.

Father in heaven, help us not to think of your heavenly majesty as something earthly. Enable us to expect everything needed for body and soul from your almighty power.

Help us to pray from the heart to none other than you, the one true God. You have revealed yourself to us in your Word. Help us to ask for everything you have commanded us to ask for.

Lord, we fully recognize our need and misery, and so we humble ourselves in your majestic presence.

Lord, we rest on this unshakable foundation: even though we do not deserve it, you will surely listen to our prayer because of Christ our Lord. That is what you promised us in your Word.

"Hallowed be your name." Help us to truly know you, to honor, glorify, and praise you for all your works and for all that shines forth from them: your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth. Help us to direct all our living— what we think, say, and do— so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised.

"Your kingdom come." Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you. Preserve your church and make it grow. Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your holy Word. Do this until your kingdom fully comes, when you will be all in all.

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Help us and all people to reject our own will and to obey your will without any back talk. Your will alone is good. Help us to carry out the work we are called to, as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.

"Give us this day our daily bread." Do take care of all our physical needs so that we come to know that you are the only source of everything good, and that neither our work and worry nor your gifts can do us any good without your blessing. And so help us to give up our trust in creatures and trust in you alone.

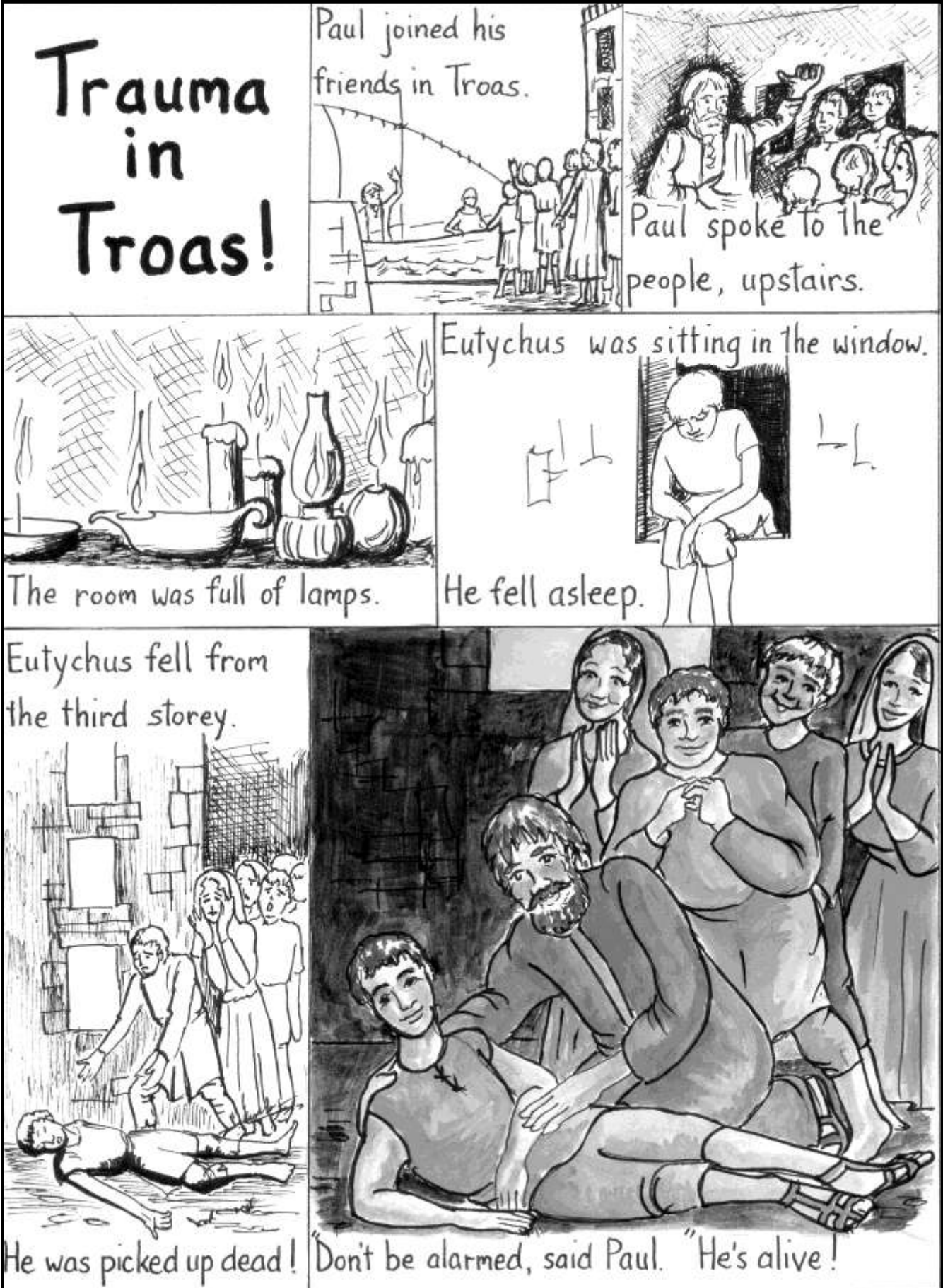
"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Because of Christ's blood, do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are, any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly clings to us. Forgive us just as we are fully determined, as evidence of your grace in us, to forgive our neighbours.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies— the devil, the world, and our own flesh— never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.

"For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever." We have made all these petitions of you because, as our all-powerful king, you are both willing and able to give us all that is good; and because your holy name, and not we ourselves, should receive all the praise, forever.

This shall truly and surely be! It is even more sure that you listen to our prayer than that we really desire what we pray for. "Amen."

Children under the Banner — Acts 20:1-12



Prescribed Search Work

JUNE 2015

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 1 and 7)

ACTS chapter 9:32--43

1(x). What was the reaction of the people when Aeneas was healed, and Dorcas raised from the dead? (2 separate verses)

chapter 10

2. What did the angel of God say to Cornelius concerning his prayers and alms?

3. What was the Lord's answer when Peter said he had never eaten anything common or unclean?

4. Why was Peter to go with the three men, doubting nothing?

5. What was Peter's response when Cornelius fell down at his feet?

6. What were the opening words of Peter's sermon? (2 verses only)

7(x). What had God commanded the apostles to preach to the people, and testify concerning Jesus?

8. What happened when Peter was still preaching, and what was the reaction of the believing Jews? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

JOHN chapter 7:28--53

1. Why could no one lay hands [a hand] on Jesus?

2. What did many of the people who believed on Christ say about him?

3. What did Jesus cry [out] on the last day, the great day of the feast? (2 verses)

4. What was the officers' answer when they came back to the chief priests without Jesus?

**Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com**

Synod in the Banner — 2015



The Synod delegates arrived from various congregations and other churches to a warm 29 deg. day in Sydney. We saw the remains of storm damage in uprooted trees waiting for council to come and dismember, and broken fences here and there. However, the warm welcome of the sun soon disappeared as the next morning slapped us with a 6 deg. chill. Winter had come early, too early for the delegates north of the 31st parallel (south)!

Despite the weather, the welcome of the congregation was always warm and we enjoyed their wonderful hospitality each day. Too much cannot be said of the wonderful feasts we had at each meal, and even “Elevesnes” in between went all the way up to twelve – in intensity and also duration – it was so hard to prise people away from the food to get them back to the business of Synod. We were grateful to those who catered and served. It made a wonderful time so much better.

Synod opened with the customary outgoing and incoming Moderators’ addresses, interspersed with preliminary administration business and Presbytery reports on the work in each congregation. As outgoing Moderator, Rev. Dr Rowland Ward began by taking a fresh perspective on a challenging parable in Luke 16 – The Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man had all the benefits of life and still ignored the need of the beggar, Lazarus, whose help was from God. At the end the beggar had an eternal inheritance and the rich man eternal suffering. One application taken from this sermon: what would we do with the gifts given to us? Use them for the service of the Kingdom and its people or squander them on ourselves?

Rev. Jim Klazinga spoke next as incoming Moderator, beginning his examination of the book of Haggai, which would carry through the morning devotions for the next two days. In this he focused on the work on God’s house, his church in Christ as shadowed in the Temple, carried forth as a priority in our lives, with an assurance of God’s presence with us as we labour. The opening sermon and each devotion were edifying and encouraging as we prayerfully sought to refresh our efforts in the service of the Lord. We went to our beds on Tuesday night tired but spiritually invigorated, fed by the Word.

The deliberations of Synod began in earnest on Wednesday with the Law and Advisory Report



Top left: the front of Mt Druitt church; above: the very artistic table setting; above right: a real cutie!; right: some historical photos unearthed in the preparations for Synod

and the matter of the Barrier Act. Careful consideration of a very long deliverance slowed proceedings somewhat, but the importance of the Barrier Act, and the proper procedure in applying it to decisions affecting the whole denomination, gave everyone pause for thought.

The Training of Ministry Committee report commended the progress of Mr Duncan Hickey, who has obtained exemplary results in his first year studies. Mr Hickey will be studying for a further three years at Christ College in Sydney, and we hope that everyone will be engaged in prayer for him and

his family as he seeks to serve the Lord in this endeavor. The Committee also sought the help and advice of the Synod regarding establishing a Candidate Placement scheme whereby a student for the ministry would spend some time involved in supplying in a congregation not his own, mentored by the local minister and elders as he builds on experience in preaching and pastoral duties. A non-compulsory Eldership Training Course will also be developed for Synod 2016.

Church and Nation Committee delivered a statement on Funerals and will also send a letter to our Prime Minister on the ongoing issues of homosexual marriage and euthanasia. Both these issues are areas where there is continual lobbying by ungodly minorities to force the government to enact their sinful desires. Continual prayer is needed so that we may live in a peaceful society, and that our governments

would submit to the Governor of all the nations, Christ Jesus. The Media Committee, a sub-committee of Church and Nation, delivered reports on the Banner and the website. Contributions for both media



are always welcome, and actually witness to the vitality of the church. Please contribute to your magazine and website! The Archivist was overjoyed to obtain a rare-as-hen’s-teeth copy of a church paper from South Australia for the church Archive. The Archive is available to all for research and much of it is now

digitized by Mr Robert Hingston, available freely on the website (www.pcea.org.au/index.php/downloads/historicalmagazine-archive).

Youth and Fellowship Committee oversees a vital work in our denomination. The life of the church is enhanced by the Family Camp that is organised biennially by the Committee. The Spiritual life of our young people is nurtured by the Search work, prepared and marked by Mrs Irene Steel. Other prescribed work set by the Committee encourages a knowledge of Scripture and a basic repertoire of Psalm tunes. Mrs Margaret Kinder continues her wonderful ministry of sending birthday cards on behalf of the church to young people. Synod expressed its thanks to both these women. With an eye on the demographics of our church, the Synod spent some time discussing the need for closer ties with and amongst our youth: How can the PCEA encourage our young people to be more active and involved in the

gation). Delegates from the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India, Rev. Samit Mishra and Mr Pradeep Kumar, spoke at our Missions evening later that night.

Rev. Millar spoke of the state of the church in Scotland and our long-standing historical ties with the Free Church, and urged us to maintain them. He also brought a report from his visit to Dumisani, speaking of their needs and the vital Reformed witness that DTI is in that region of South Africa. Rev. Schie spoke of how he had

encouraged by the ongoing development of our relationship with the SPC. While the fruits of a more formal relationship are not yet ripe, he sees a blossoming time of growing together. We were greatly encouraged by the words of all three men on the work that is going on in the wider Kingdom of our Lord, and the desire for brotherly co-operation within it.

The highlight of any Synod is the Missions Night and we heard talks from Rev. Mishra and Mr Kumar of the FPCCI, as well as a fascinating history of the church in Tonga from Mt Druitt Elder, Mr Sekona Latu. Rev. Mishra and Mr Kumar have

since begun a deputation tour of PCEA congregations and some of you may have already met these faithful



Clockwise from above: Some of the local members; Mesdames Bajema, Ward, & Klazinga; Tongan singing; mealtime; our Treasurer—Alex Steel; Moderator—Jim Klazinga; & Clerk—Trevor Leggott; the friendly helpers!



church, and how can the ministers and elders nurture this?

As we were running a bit behind, the Missions Report was held over

until the Thursday, and on Wednesday afternoon we heard the Inter-Church Relations report followed by greetings and speeches by delegates from The Free Church of Scotland (Moderator, Rev. David Millar – the first Moderator of the FCS to speak to our Synod for 19 years), The Christian Reformed Church of Australia (Rev. Geoff Van Schie – who was with us last year at the Synod in Wauchope), and the Southern Presbyterian Church (Rev. Ian Hall, from their Launceston congre-



been touched by the outcome of his previous visit, reconnecting with the PCEA at last year's Synod and finding a desire to build relationships between our respective denominations. He hopes to take a positive message back to their own Synod soon (the CRCA Synod meets every 3 years). Rev. Hall, originally from Belfast, (the Convener of Inter-Church Relations, whom Rev. George Ball introduced as "the only other man not to speak with an accent" at our multicultural Synod) was

men. The Missions report followed on the Thursday morning, as did the dry but necessary business of finance, Superannuation and Trust Corporations. Records were examined and the Synod closed with thanks and prepara-

tions for next year. The Moderator-Elect for 2016 is Rev. D. Kerridge.

We are always thankful for the work of our General Treasurer and Clerk, who keep the Synod ship on an even keel. Thanks also to the organisers of this year's Synod and particular amongst them, Mr Tom Reeve. Thanks to the Sydney West Congregation. We look forward to Synod with you again next year, God-willing.

David Kerridge



Clockwise from top left: Rev. Samit Mishra of the PFCCI speaking; Rev Ian Hall of the Southern Presbyterian Church; Elder Sekona Latu; Rev. David Miller, present Moderator of the FCS; part of the audience on Mission Night; Rev G. van Schie from the CRCA.



Synod Delegates (from left): Rev G. Ball; Elder R. Campbell; Revs G. van Schie (back), R. Tso, P. Smith, I Hall, R. Ward; Elder J. Dekter; Revs T. Yoa, T. Leggott; Elder David Manly; Revs J. Klazinga, A. Miranda; Elder A. Steel; Rev J. MacCallum; Elder R. Lawson; Rev's D. Kerridge (back) S. Bajema, D. Miller; Elders D. McIntosh, T. Reeve, G. Hamilton; Revs S. Mishra, D. Muldoon; Elder P. Kumar.