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Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

may 2003

...IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH



Michael Horton • Edmund Clowney • Charles Colson

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WORSHIP

Powerful praise: Michael Horton 4
Assembled in Zion: Edmund Clowney 10

REFLECTION

Covenant worship: T.P. Moore 12

BIBLE STUDY

Psalms of Ascent: Bruce Christian 13

NEWS

Across Australia 17
Around the World 18

PRAYER

Contemporary worship: Ron Hutchcraft 20

MISSION

Pastoralist care: Barney Zwartz 21
Open-hearted: Martin de Pyle 22

CULTURE WATCH

Life or Something Like It: Phil Campbell 23

LETTERS 24

PRAYER 26

BOOKS

What St Paul Really Said 27
Jesus Christ or Mohammed 27
The Westminster Larger Catechism 27
Forgiving Hitler 27

BACK PAGE

A perilous philosophy: Charles Colson 28

editorial

Carlos Eire, in *War Against the Idols*, reminds us that “the central focus of reformed Protestantism was its interpretation of worship... the Reformation decision consisted not so much in finding a just God, but rather in turning away from idolatry to the true God”.

John Calvin, in *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543), had said, “all our controversies concerning doctrine relate either to the legitimate worship of God, or to the ground of our salvation”. Eire continues, “Calvin defines the place of worship as none of his predecessors had done before... Worship, he says, is *the* central concern of Christians... the whole substance of the Christian faith... one may even argue that it becomes the fundamental defining characteristic of Calvinism”.

Calvin was correct in assigning an absolute priority to worship. He realised that a true knowledge of God leads to pure worship and right living. That worship is the fundamental issue is emphasised by Jesus in his conversation to the Samaritan woman. He told her that above all else, God was seeking true worshippers (John 4:23).

Significantly, this is the crisis point in the Protestant Church. The Reformation consensus concerning the nature of worship has been lost and the Word and sacraments have disappeared as the focal point of ministry. The social sciences and show business have as much, if not more, influence on what takes place in modern church services than the Word and theological tradition. Evangelicals are no longer certain about the precise meaning of the term ‘worship’: is it an activity which embraces all of life, and if so, can it be used legitimately to refer to church services?

This uncertainty and confusion has meant that the Church is no longer unified in its understanding and practice of worship. Indeed, it seems there is no longer an identifiable form of worship among churches in the Presbyterian tradition. Large differences have developed along the traditional/contemporary divide. The full implications of this modern experiment in diversity are yet to be seen.

This issue of *AP* is not designed to spark a new version of “worship wars”, but is an attempt by two prominent Presbyterian theologians to revisit the roots of biblical worship.

Peter Hastie ^{AP}

Powerful praise

What is – and isn't – Godly worship.



The Rev. Dr Michael Horton is an associate professor of historical theology and apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. He is also president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine, and the author of a number of books including *A Better Way* (on worship), *Where in the World is the Church?* (on vocation) and *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace*. J.I. Packer says of the latter: "It is a breathtaking work-out for Protestant laypeople, with a prospect of new health and strength for those who stay the course." Dr Horton is a minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America, and lives with his wife, Lisa, and son, James, in California.

The evangelical world is struggling hard today to understand the meaning of "worship". Why is it so difficult to construct a theology of worship?

I think one of the reasons is due to our



**Michael Horton
talks to
Peter Hastie**

theological perspective and exegetical approach to the Bible. There are differences in our views of worship, at least in part, because people interpret the Scriptures differently and regard some biblical themes as more decisive than others.

But I think that even more determinative for our views of worship is the importance we assign to culture and whether we stand on the contemporary or traditional side of the fence. In my experience, I find that it's people's cultural attitudes that determine their preferences for what passes as worship far more than their theology. As far as the present debate is concerned, theology is not the driving force that it used to be in previous generations. People today aren't debating whether worship is meant to be primarily understood as a covenant renewal ceremony

with an emphasis on God's initiative and grace as opposed to those who opt for a more Arminian view in which we have greater freedom to respond to God as we like. Rather, the issue more commonly appears in this form: do you like keyboards or do you prefer the traditional organ?

The problem today in sorting out a biblical approach to worship is that our personal tastes have been raised to a higher level of significance than ever before. This is largely due to the influence of popular culture. We now have very strong views about what kind of music we like to listen to. However, it's not very common at the moment to find Christians in America who have strong views about their *theological* rationale for worship. One of the reasons I wrote my recent book, *A Better Way*, was to say, "Hey folks, let's back away from the worship wars and let's take a look at the deeper theological foundations for worship in Scripture."

Some Christians think that since

the coming of Jesus all of life should be worship. Are Christians playing tennis together on Sunday morning worshiping like those in church?

When Paul says “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”, he is at least implying that our whole lives are meant to be consecrated to God. We aren’t simply consecrating part of our lives. What we do in Sunday services is connected with what we do at other times as well. But “worship”, in the special sense in which we use it, goes back all the way to the ancient covenant renewal ceremony where God’s people are called by Him to assemble in his presence (Ex. 5:1, 7:16; 24:1-8; Deut. 4:10, 9:10, 10:4). God is the Great King and we are his subjects. We are also His children and He is our Father. We gather as his family simply because our Father has called us to the table.

As I was growing up, I lived in a fairly strict household where we had to be home at 6pm for dinner. The dinner table was sacred in my family. During the day we could be all over the place, but we knew we had to be home at 6pm for dinner.

Interestingly, as established family patterns have broken down in our culture, they have also diminished in the church. The downside of this is that we have begun to think of worship in very egalitarian free-flowing ways. Consequently, we now say, “Well, I can worship God as much on the golf course as I can in a church building.” This is rather like saying: “Well, I can be Mike Horton out with my friends at the mall as much as I can at the dinner table with my family.”

The problem, however, is that God is our Father, and as the head of His family He has called us to assemble around His table. This isn’t a legalistic requirement; it’s for our good. He has called us out of a world of sin and death to be assembled around His table so that we can eat the bounties of His gracious redemption – salvation from sin’s guilt and power – and praise him for His goodness (Hebrews 13:15; I Peter 2:9).

We can count on the fact that, according to His promise and by His Spirit, our covenant-keeping God is going to feed us each Lord’s Day with Christ and all of His benefits through His Word and sacraments. That doesn’t happen on the golf course or in a shopping mall. It doesn’t occur while I sit at home watching a Christian TV program. Nor does it take place at the beach. It happens when the people of God are assembled with His

office-bearers preparing the table He has set and acting in His name.

There is a lot of discussion in Christian circles over the purpose of our regular church meetings on Sundays. Some say we only come together for mutual edification, not worship.

First, I really think we have to deal with the question of honouring the Lord’s Day. It used to be almost universally recognised among Protestants until about a century ago that God had appointed a special day for His people to be assembled before him. That day, the Lord’s Day, was holy.

Protestants also used to believe that the official administration of the means of grace, conducted by ordained office-bearers according to God’s ordinances, was guaranteed by God to be a blessing for His

The phrase “the worship experience” is almost a contradiction of terms.

people. If we learn anything from the Bible about worship, especially through the incident involving Nadab and Abihu (Numbers 3:4), it’s that God orders His worship; we don’t. It is God’s prerogative to determine how He is to be approached. We must be very careful because He is a consuming fire (Isaiah 33:14).

I think it’s also important to remember that the writer to the Hebrews tells us that we haven’t approached Mount Sinai, which burned with God’s holiness and terrified sinners; instead, we have come to Mount Zion. And here, on God’s heavenly hill, we have an unshakable confidence. But we only have that confidence because we come to God in Christ’s name, by His Spirit, and through the means He has appointed. It is not because I or any other Christian, for that matter, have voluntarily decided that we’re going to waltz into God’s presence today. We approach God because He has summoned us as a covenant-Lord to His holy temple. We no longer worship in an earthly sanctuary as the Hebrews once did; instead, we worship in a heavenly sanctuary through the means of grace.

Let me put it as plainly as I can: if we fail to distinguish, on the one hand, between the official assembly of God’s people on the Lord’s Day, receiving the

ministry of word and sacrament conducted by lawfully ordained pastors and elders, and a group of Christians, on the other, who get together at a restaurant to have a meal and talk about how good the Lord has been to them that week, then we basically eliminate the significance of the ministry of the Word and sacrament, public worship, and the appointed government of the church. To call both these activities “worship” in exactly the same sense is to trivialise the idea that God commands us to assemble before him using the means that He has appointed, namely, the Word and sacraments administered by properly appointed office-bearers.

Look at Acts 2:42-47. We are misled if we think that the early Christians were simply getting together for a meal and a social occasion and calling that “worship” and the means of grace. They were meeting together regularly for the official proclamation of the Word and administration of the Lord’s Supper (v42). It also seems that there was some recognizable liturgy because Luke tells us that they came together “for the prayers”. In the Greek you’ll find the definite article. It is “the prayers”, not simply “prayer”, as is suggested by some translations. Even their times of prayer were more established than what we typically think today. Their prayers were an organized sort of thing. Just because they met in houses does not mean that they dispensed with more formal worship activities. They had to meet in houses because they were under threat of persecution. But when they did meet with each other, particularly on the Lord’s Day, they met with God according to His ordinances.

To what extent is corporate worship a barometer of our theology?

Our corporate worship tells us a lot about our understanding of God. In that sense, it’s a very useful barometer of our theology. I think that one of the errors we often fall into, especially among conservative evangelical Christians, is intellectualism. We think that if we can just get our doctrine right, everything else will follow. However, that doesn’t necessarily happen.

There are lots of people, who on paper have all the right doctrines, but their practice bears no resemblance to their beliefs. For instance, there are many people today who would regard themselves as staunchly Reformed in their doctrine. Yet in actual practice, whether in terms of

their worship, family life, or approach to work and vocation, they don't behave the way Reformed Christians have in the past. Having true doctrine doesn't mean that your practice will be consistent. It's not an automatic flow-on.

For instance, we may say we are Reformed, but if God weighs lightly on us in our worship, are we really encountering the God of the Bible? We may claim that we have a Presbyterian heritage, but if our worship services reflect a purely horizontal focus with back-slapping and enjoying being together (and I am not discounting the importance of fellowship), or if they are glib in the way they address God, then we have to start asking some serious questions about whether we really know the true God.

I say this because the uniform experience that people had in God's presence in the pages of Old and New Testaments was one of terror and fear. People were traumatised when they realized that they were sinners in the presence of a holy God. Only after God had announced the Gospel of forgiveness, pardon and cleansing did they begin to relax in His presence. Ask yourself: how many of our worship services reflect this theology today?

People today talk about the worship "experience" rather than the "worship service". Does this reflect a fundamental change in their thinking about our relationship to God?

You know, when you think about the phrase, "the worship experience", it's almost a contradiction of terms because worship is not something that focuses upon ourselves but is an act that is done in relation to someone else. We worship God. To concentrate on our emotional state while we do this completely misses the point.

If a person says: "I go to church for a worship experience", you know that they're not really involved in a God-ward sort of activity. Experience is something that I have or undergo for myself; the emphasis here is not upon what I do for God. Instead, the primary focus is upon the relationship of the sinner with himself; the relationship between God and the sinner is only of minor importance. If emotional experiences are your goal, you'll be constantly asking the question: "Am I having a worship experience?" On the other hand, if your aim is to please God, you'll ask: "Am I worshipping God properly?" Those are two very different things.

Now Christians in the Reformed tradition are often accused of downplaying the believer's experience. In some cases, this may well be a justified criticism. I think we are meant to have a rich experience of God, but this is not something that we are meant to manufacture for ourselves. One of the reasons why we may not be experiencing God in His fullness is that we are going about it in the wrong way.

One of the things that strikes me about the Psalms is the predictable pattern between God's action and our response that we see in the text. In most cases, you can follow a course of movement where the Psalmist says: "Here is what God has done; therefore, this is how we must respond as His people. God delivered us from Egypt; then He drowned Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea; then He brought us up to live in the promised land and dwelt among us as His people. Even though we have sinned greatly against the Lord, He has continued to be faithful. Therefore we will

**Remember
God's protest
in Amos:
"Take away
the noise of
your songs;
take away all
your fake
obedience."**



praise him. He is our Lord and we will exalt him. Because He is our Redeemer we will serve him."

You will also find this pattern in Paul's epistles where He first of all reminds us about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Then He follows this up by saying: "Therefore, in view of God's mercies, present your bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). What is happening in worship today, as is all too common in a lot of preaching, is that there is a complete loss of connection with what God has done in Christ and our response to God's mercy. We simply tell God what we're going to do: "We will praise You; we will serve You; we will do this, that and the other thing." Frankly, God couldn't care less about these claims. It's boasting. Remember God's protest in Amos: "Take away the noise of your songs; take away all your fake obedience; take away all of your I will, I will, I will. Talk about Me,

talk about what I have done for you." We have to get to the point where we recognize that there is only one hero in the Bible: God.

True worship doesn't begin with us praising God. It begins with God giving testimony about His gracious saving acts and what he's done to bring history to its ultimate resolution. If you want to really burn out Christians quickly on hype, tell us that we've got to pray more, praise more, worship harder, and read our Bibles more. Conversely, if you really want to get us excited about the Christian faith and have a deeper experience of God, then please tell us what God has done. Preach Christ to me. Tell me how God has acted in grace towards us in His Son. Show me how God is going to triumph in the end over sin and death.

What is the defining feature of worship that is "Reformed"? When Presbyterian churches radically change their format of corporate worship, are there subtle theological changes too?

Changes in corporate worship could signal a change in theology, but you have to look at what sort of changes they are. For example, people on the more traditional end of things cannot afford to be complacent because they have only introduced a few changes in the way they do things. There's no doubt that in a lot of the Presbyterian Churches that you could visit on any Lord's Day, there seems to be no genuine excitement about being in the presence of God. The services sometimes appear as though they have been thrown together around the sermon. The sermon is the only thing that really matters. The pastor has given hours (this is in the best-case scenario) to preparing his sermon. However, in many cases, he spends little or no time picking the hymns and psalms or giving thought to the theology and practice of worship.

Again, another area where there has been a lot of change and innovation in worship has been in the introduction of drama. Personally, I see a number of problems with this novelty. On one hand, you have people who are looking for drama in all the wrong places – the "contemporary approach". Then you have the people who are "anti-drama", the "intellectualist-traditionalists". I think both of these approaches are wrong. The Bible is an unfolding drama; it's the plot of God rescuing His people.

What difference should that make in our worship? Plenty! People should not

be coming to church for a lecture any more than they are coming there for an experience. They are meant to be coming to worship because right there and then God is enacting the drama of redemption that has been in progress since He promised the Gospel to Adam and Eve.

Sinners who have been scripted by the pattern of this passing evil age are being recast and re-scripted, being given new parts to play in a new plot that they could never have imagined. The worship service is that drama where the re-scripting takes place. It is here that the nowhere man, living in his nowhere land, making all of his nowhere plans for nobody, gets re-scripted as Israel, as the people with a future because of God's gracious promises.

Some people say: "As long as the sermon is theologically accurate, what you do in the rest of the service is up to you." Is this right?

That sort of comment smacks to me of gnosticism. People may be surprised when I say that many evangelicals actually have a gnostic approach to worship. But it's true. Their thinking is based on a separation of spirit and form in these matters. The ancient gnostics also had a sharp dualism between the physical and the spiritual realms. This sort of thinking rears its ugly head in worship discussions when people say it doesn't matter how we worship; the forms are irrelevant as long as the substance is there. The type of distinction that gnostics make between form and spirit is not really found in the Bible. God is interested in both form and spirit.

If you were an Israelite living in the theocracy, the idea that forms didn't matter wouldn't have carried much weight. Just think of what happened to Nadab and Abihu. They learned the hard way that forms do matter. Sadly, Aaron forgot this truth when he made the golden calf for Israel's worship. His sin was not a violation of the first commandment. It wasn't that he was putting any other gods before Yahweh. In fact, he calls the celebration "the festival to Yahweh" (Ex. 32:5). Rather, it's a violation of the second commandment, "You shall not make any likeness of God, any images of God." Basically, what God is saying here is: "You will worship me the way I have told you, the way I have revealed myself. You don't come with your own thoughts about worship. I not only reveal who I am; I also reveal how I am to be

approached."

I believe that Calvin had a brilliant insight at the time of the Reformation when he saw that the recovery of the Gospel, the doctrine of salvation and the reformation of worship were all tied up together. He saw them as inseparable because the question of how we approach God, whether pleading our own right-



Voltaire once said, "Get rid of the Sabbath and you get rid of Christianity."

eousness or the righteousness of Christ, is intimately related to how we worship. Do we worship according to our own imagination, according to our own works, according to our own hearts, or do we come to Him through the means that He has provided for us in Christ?

To what extent should we make corporate worship more user-friendly to unchurched outsiders?

I think we ought to be both seeker-friendly and seeker-sensitive. I have no problems with those terms. Too many of our churches are seeker-resilient. I know it's appalling but sometimes we take pride in the fact that we lose people. You've probably heard the joke about the Scottish revival where the minister said, "Yes, it was a great revival. We said goodbye to a lot of people that we've been trying to get rid of for a long time." Occasionally, I see a certain arrogance in Reformed circles that justifies mediocrity by claiming fidelity to doctrine. There are a lot of churches that are failures, not because the minister is sound in his theology, but because, though he uses that as his crutch, he really isn't a shepherd to his people. He isn't really interested in reaching out to the lost.

Now having said that, we must ask the question: is it the purpose of the worship service to evangelise? Yes, I think it is. I don't agree with the popular idea today that there is a dichotomy between evangelistic preaching to the lost and expository teaching to the saved. I believe that preaching is both evangelistic and expository at the same time.

Since the coming of Jesus and the fulfillment of the Jewish Sabbath, should Christians have any notion of sacred time? Has the loss of the notion of the Lord's Day had any effect on the modern church?

Voltaire, the French atheist, once said, "Get rid of the Sabbath and you get rid of Christianity." He had a point. Unfortunately, the observance of the Sabbath degenerated in the West into a sort of cultural day-off to which were attached a lot of legalistic ideas that fell far short of the original intent of the Sabbath. Remember the way the book of Deuteronomy and Hebrews 4 read the Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is not an obligation to do something as much as it's a liberation from having to do something. Hebrews 4, in particular, sees the Sabbath as the everlasting day into which we have entered – the day that Adam forfeited in the fall but into which the Second Adam has carried us by his perfect obedience. He has perfectly fulfilled the work of the six days to bring us into the Sabbath rest. That's good news!

Churches today are replacing organs with guitars, hymnals with overheads and pulpits with stages. How should Reformed Christians evaluate these

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innovations? What does the “regulative principle” mean?

There are a number of big questions here. I’ll take the regulative principle first. God tells us how to worship and that seems rather uncontroversial until you actually start questioning things that are done in the worship service. For instance, there are some who claim they believe in the regulative principle, yet they have drama. I agree with Edmund Clowney that a helpful way to resolve this issue is to bear in mind the important distinction between the elements of worship and their accompanying circumstances. Whether you use an organ or a guitar, or whether you come in collar and tie, is not an element of worship. Whether you have a drama presentation in the service is. Having a drama in the service becomes an element of the worship service. The point of the regulative principle is not to say that you have to wear a tie to church every Sunday and that you have to have an organ.

The regulative principle simply means that you can’t have any elements in the worship service that are not explicitly prescribed by God. Here there is a difference amongst Protestants. The Lutheran/Anglican view has been that whatever is not condemned is allowed. The Reformed view has always been that whatever is not commanded is forbidden. People say, “Well, that’s legalistic.” Actually, it’s not legalistic; it’s liberating. It says: “Look, you can’t impose your

particular preferences on me.” It frees a congregation from the countless aberrations that a pastor could impose on it. It means the young people don’t have to be burdened with a lot of meaningless ritual and the older ones don’t have to feel like they’ve gone to a nightclub on Friday night. There is a real wisdom in God’s

Church music, historically, has never really been either classical or popular.



limitation of His worship to the elements we find prescribed in His Word.

Of course, one of the biggest problems relates to music. Scripture doesn’t tell us to sing *A Mighty Fortress* rather than *Shine Jesus Shine*. So what do we do here? Well, as so often happens, we usually react in one of two ways. We either go for a legalistic or an antinomian solution. We either make a rule or break a rule.

Unfortunately, this has obscured a far better solution, which is the way of prudence. Prudence is a Christian virtue that says all things are lawful, but maybe not all things are good. It would certainly be permissible to have a rock band instead of an

organ, but what is prudent? I think at that point we need to bring in some musicians who know what music actually is and does. After all, we are talking about two different styles of music. I then think those musicians who understand the styles and function of music should sit down with some wise pastors and have a conversation about this.

My own position, having talked to Christian musicians about the different styles, is that there is only one thing that rock music can do. Rock music is very limited in its scale of emotions. It is always aggressive and it usually breaks the bounds, whether the bounds of rhythm or the bounds of order and symmetry. Don’t get me wrong; I like rock. What I am saying is that it’s inappropriate for worship.

But the same can apply to classical music as well. I think it rings a little hollow when those of us who like classical music try to challenge people who like more contemporary styles by saying, “Well, you’re into entertainment worship”. I think we need to be honest with ourselves and admit that we just prefer classical music.

Whether music is classical or contemporary, we need to assess whether it communicates the truth of God’s Word. Most contemporary music does not because it’s so man-centered. But we also need to take into account musical style and ask: “Does the style fit the words?” Think of all the emotional states that are reflected in the Psalms. Can you honestly imagine a contemporary praise chorus expressing the occasional despair of the Psalmist? Every one of the emotions that you find in the Psalms should be able to be expressed in a musical style that is appropriate to its mood. Contemporary soft rock music does not have that range. Nor, incidentally, does classical music. That’s why the church has typically had to produce its own music. It is the folk music of the people of God. Church music, historically, has never really been either classical or popular.

Is sincerity and informality in the worship experience the chief barometer of what constitutes good worship?

The short answer is No. No particular emotion is the chief barometer. The chief barometer is whether the Word is rightly preached and the Sacraments are properly administered. Again, I think the Reformers were right in that. Wherever the Word is rightly preached and the

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Sacraments properly administered, there you find a true church of God. That is the objective standard that all the Reformers agreed on.

My problem is that I don't know what is going on inside people's hearts. We have become so sentimental and individualistic that the test for true worship easily degenerates into the question: "Did you get a spiritual high this morning?" However, the real question is: "Was the Word rightly preached? Were the Sacraments administered correctly?" It's a sobering thought to remember that if worship depends on whether I have had the right emotions today, I will be focused so much on my inner feelings that I won't really have a "worship experience" at all. I won't experience God; I will be experiencing my emotions. I will be grading my own inner feelings.

On the other hand, if the true test of worship is whether the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments properly administered, I can say that even when I don't feel forgiven, I am still pardoned. Even if I didn't experience a sense of deep lostness because of my sins and profound gratitude to God for what he has done to save me, I am objectively lost apart from Christ and I am objectively found because of him too.

Once you make the test objective, here is the paradox. Suddenly, emotion can re-enter the scene. We now have something outside of ourselves – an act or promise of God – to which our emotions can be attached. If you want to get people really excited, don't tell them about what they should think or feel. Just tell me what God has done in Christ to save me. Tell me that in spite of how much I've blown things this week, God is still committed to my salvation. Indeed, He is so committed to it that He won't let me continue in my rebellion.

People often claim that traditional Presbyterian music is dull by comparison with modern music. What criteria should we apply to music?

Perhaps I should start by issuing a caveat and admitting that I am neither a musician nor the son of a musician. I think we really have to listen to trained musicians more than we sometimes do. Having said that, I will nevertheless offer to pontificate beyond my expertise.

I think that when it comes to updating our music, instead of making a conscious effort to sit down and go through all of our hymns and rewrite them for posterity, what we ought to do is realise that cultural

forms evolve. Over time a lot of really bad stuff dies because it deserves to. There's a lot of Bach-style church music that just hasn't made it into the 21st century. It died back in the 1700s. Charles Wesley wrote hundreds of hymns. Yet we only sing about ten of them.

Only a small number of hymns from the last 30 years will make it into the singing life of the church of the present and the future. It has never been the case that the church only sings what has been produced in its own time. It would be arrogant to think that the church of one particular generation had a complete monopoly on the best hymns and music of all time. What happens is that the church collects the best that survives from each generation.

C.S. Lewis makes this point when it comes to reading old books. He says you don't read old books just because they're old; you read a lot of old books because they've survived. It's the survival of the fittest. We have to be very careful, I think, not to be so resistant to change that we miss the opportunity to introduce new praise into our church, and yet at the same time so innovative that we unwisely overestimate the promise of our own generation.



Once you make the test objective, here is the paradox. Suddenly, emotion can re-enter the scene.

What are some of the broad trends of corporate worship that are emerging in Reformed churches, at the moment, that give you the most cause for concern?

I think the biggest concern that I have is the increasing move to market segmentation. I think that we can argue about the ways we should do things, the music we should sing, whether we should have overhead projectors and so forth, and those are important debates. But far more important than all these things is the fact that the church seems to be buying into the notion of market segmentation.

Madison Avenue knows how to sell. Madison Avenue knows that the more it can identify, segment, and isolate specific

niche markets, the more money it can make. The same marketing theory has been applied in the church growth movement. Church growth theorists believe that if you can identify individual markets or target audiences, the greater success you're going to have with attracting people.

Of course, people once bought products on the basis that their mother drove this sort of car; or their mother wore this type of perfume or relied on Westinghouse, or whatever. But no more. Since market segmentation came into vogue, the reverse has started to happen. Marketers now sell cars on the basis that "This is not your father's Oldsmobile." Marketers today have a special message: "You're unique, you're special, you're distinct, you are generation X." I call it generational narcissism. Needless to say, God takes a decidedly different approach.

I think you can see that this question is far more important than whether we are going to have a guitar in our worship. The big question today in Reformed churches is: "Are we going to have two worship services that split up the generations instead of holding the generations together?" Remember, I keep making this point, that the covenant is central to the biblical understanding of worship. Worship is a covenant renewal ceremony. Can you imagine the Book of the Covenant being rediscovered in Nehemiah's day and a couple of really slick folks coming up and saying, "All right, Governor, we want the first service to be a contemporary one for the under-25s. Then we'll have the traditional service for all you older folks who like to have things your way?" Of course not! They were all standing there and they spoke, as the text says, as one man.

I would rather that a church had a guitar than an organ than that a church split up its congregation into young and old. We ought to be preserving the covenantal integrity of the church's worship. I also think that at the end of the day it is a violation of the 5th Commandment. We are not honouring our father and our mother by having our parents and grandparents attend one worship service while we attend another. It is part of our generational narcissism. It reeks of the smug attitude: "Our generation is too important to be smothered by your traditionalism."

AP wishes to thank Daniel and Wayne McManigal for making this interview possible.

Peter Hastie is themes editor of AP.



Assembled in Zion

The Church exists chiefly to worship.

What are the foundational convictions that mark Presbyterian worship? One of the most important is the truth that the church is God's worshipping assembly.

When Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18), he used a term that was quite familiar to the disciples. It is the Greek word *ecclesia*. The word means "assembly". Israel, the Old Testament people of God, was called "the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:3). The term describes God's people as they come together to stand before Him.

Israel's first great assembly was the historic gathering before God at Mount Sinai. God had delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt; but He did more than liberate them: He brought them from serving Pharaoh to serve Him instead. God's demand to Pharaoh was, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness" (Ex. 7:16). To serve God meant that Israel would be his people, in covenant with Him. More specifically it referred to the service of worship, the sacred feast at Sinai to which the Lord called Israel from Egypt (Ex. 5:1).

The assembly of Israel at Mount Sinai was not a town meeting in the desert. It did not take place because the tribal chiefs had decided that it was time to get the refugees organised. On the contrary, it was God who summoned the people to appear before Him (Deut. 4:10). God came down on Sinai and Israel stood at the foot of the mountain, trembling before the Lord. This was the climax of the Exodus deliverance. God said, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19:4). No wonder this event was later referred to as "the day of the assembly" (Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). Sinai became the throne of God; assembled around Him were all the holy ones of heaven; gathered at His feet were His saints, the holy ones of earth (Deut. 33:3).

Yet for all the wonder of that scene at Sinai it did not represent the grand finale of God's dealings with his people. God led his people on from Mount Sinai



**Edmund
Clowney**

to the land that He had promised to give them. God said that He would choose a place there for His name: a place where His house would be built, where He would dwell in the midst of his people. At Sinai God gave to Moses the pattern for the tabernacle, a portable sanctuary for God's presence in the midst of a people on the march. At Mount Zion in the land of Canaan God would give the pattern for the temple, His fixed residence in the midst of the settled nation.

*When we
worship God
we draw near
in spirit to the
heavenly Zion.*



The assembly at Sinai was the gathering at which God entered into covenant with His people (see Ex. 19:16-25; 24:1-8). There were later assemblies for covenanting with God. After Israel entered the land Joshua led them in covenant assembly. Throughout the history of Israel there were similar assemblies for covenant renewal, often after long periods of apostasy. After the exile, under Ezra and Nehemiah, there was an assembly of the returned captives. This became a model for the later synagogue assemblies. In all these gatherings the word of God was spoken or read.

In addition to the gatherings for covenant renewal there were assemblies at the feasts of Israel. Three times a year the people of Israel were to appear before the Lord on Mount Zion, bringing their offerings and worship. The feasts were the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of

Tabernacles (Lev. 23). These gatherings before the Lord were not incidental to Israel's life or worship. The assembly at Sinai brought Israel into existence as a nation. Before that time the descendants of Jacob were only a rabble of rescued slaves with a mixture of other refugees. At Sinai they were all incorporated into the Lord's assembly.

So, too, the later assemblies for covenant renewal dramatised what Israel was called to be: the people of God who stood before Him, those on earth who could enter the assembly of the Lord of the heavenly hosts. The feasts taught the same lesson – the people of God could enter His courts, appear before His face and together praise His name. When the prophets of the Old Testament look forward to God's final salvation they too see an assembly, a gathering of the people of God to a great feast in God's holy mountain, a feast to which the heathen nations are also called (Is. 2:2-4; 56:6-8).

The writer of Hebrews points us back to the scene at Sinai (12:18-29). He tells us that we have not come to Mount Sinai with its fire, darkness, tempest and trumpet (12:18,19). Instead we have come to the mountain that was the goal of the desert pilgrimage – to Mount Zion. The Zion to which we come, however, is not the earthly city where Herod's temple stood. No, we are come to the Zion above, to the assembly of God in heaven itself. There are gathered all the holy ones, the thousands upon thousands of the saints and angels. The picture of Sinai and of Zion is now fulfilled in the reality of the heavenly assembly.

What made the difference? The work of Jesus Christ. We come to the heavenly Zion because Jesus is there. We no longer sprinkle blood on an earthly altar as priests did in the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus has sprinkled the throne of God with His own blood. He has entered into heaven for us on the basis of His finished atonement on the cross.

As our heavenly high priest Jesus ministers in the true and heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:11, 24). The worship of the heav-

enly temple is the adoration of the angels and the saints together (Heb. 12:22, 23). This is the last great feast of glory, the festival assembly of all God's holy ones. That celebration has already begun as the spirits of just men made perfect join with the holy angels in praising the Lord. Notice that the Scripture does not say merely that we shall one day enter that festival assembly. We are now come to it: when we worship God we draw near in spirit to the heavenly Zion (v22). The contrast in Hebrews is not between the elaborate ordinances of Old Testament and no corporate worship at all. Rather, it is between the types and shadows of an imperfect worship and the full reality of worship through Jesus Christ. Our praises blend with the praise of the angels and the hallelujahs of those who have gone on before.

The church is the assembly, not primarily because we meet together in assemblies here on earth, but because we have the awesome privilege of gathering with the saints and angels with Christ in glory. Because Jesus our priest is there, we come to Him. God calls His saints to His festival of praise. That feast has already begun in heaven, and to that feast we have now come.

The author of Hebrews warns us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb.10:25). As we meet in heaven, so we are to gather on earth. Consider what that means. Our gathering together is not incidental – the church is the assembly of the people of God. Moreover, as we gather we stand in the presence of the Lord. We are in the company of the angels and of all believers. We gather with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; with David, Elijah and Isaiah; with Peter, James and John. Above all we come where Jesus our Saviour is.

Because the church is the assembly of heaven gathered already on earth, worship is the first responsibility of the church. Paul describes the church as those “who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place” (1 Cor. 1:2). Peter writes that we are a people for God's own possession that we “may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

God who called Israel to assemble at Sinai and to gather for the feasts of worship at Jerusalem now calls us to His festival assembly in heaven. We sing our songs of pilgrimage as we enter the courts of Zion. In worship we can hear with the

ear of faith the answering “Amen” of the choirs of angels. Jesus Himself is the heavenly choirmaster as, in the midst of the brethren, he sings the Father's praise (Heb. 2:12).

“Man's chief end” (according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism) “is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever” (Q. 1). While we must do everything in the name of Jesus and to the glory of God, our highest joy is to lift up the name of Jesus directly. To be the church of God in this world we must be a worshipping assembly. To worship God together strengthens our faith, renews our love and refreshes our hearts. To worship God also bears witness to the nations.

In the psalms and in the prophets the worship of God in Mount Zion includes a call to the nations to turn from their rebellion and join with us in praising the only Savior of the world. “Sing to the Lord ... declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples” (Ps. 96:2,3). The call to all peoples to praise the Lord is part of the worship of Israel.

The prophets picture the nations streaming to Mount Zion to worship the Lord: God's house will become a house of

prayer for all people (Is. 2:2-4; 56:6-8; 66:18-21). The hymn, “How Great Thou Art” is beautifully adapted to the evangelism of praise. When a community finds that a church is genuinely meeting to praise God there will be those who will be drawn to say, “God is among you indeed!” (1 Cor. 14:25, Is. 45:14).

Therefore to worship God as a member of His assembly is like tasting of heaven. It is to be in the Spirit where Christ is and where we shall one day be. By faith we enter heaven in our worship and stand before the Lord, but He also comes to us in our worship. Jesus promised that where two or three were gathered in His name, there he would be in the midst (Mt. 18:20). The church gathers before the Lord and around the Lord and he addresses His word to us. All this is made actual by the presence of the Holy Spirit in whom Christ comes to us and we come to Him. The Spirit unites us to the Father and the Son. The church is an assembly expressing the unity of the Spirit in the joy of worship.

Dr Edmund Clowney taught practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and was president for 16 years. Dr Clowney is widely known for his ministry as a writer, conference speaker and consultant to the church at large. This article is an edited compilation of two articles that he has written in Living In Christ's Church, Great Commission Publications, 1986 and Worship: Act and Adoration, edited by D.A. Carson 1993.

The church is the assembly, not because we meet on earth, but because we gather with the saints and angels with Christ in glory.

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Covenant worship

Honour God from the heart, and reap the rewards.

What is God looking for in worship? He makes his desires plain in a wonderful psalm of Asaph – Psalm 50.

First, He is looking to see that the prescribed forms for worship are all properly in use (v8).

There is a logic to worship, and this logic includes the use of prescribed forms in a reasonable arrangement, such that our coming before the Lord honours Him properly and allows us to fulfill all that this work requires of us. I have sat through too many services of worship in which this or that prescribed element of worship is omitted, inserted at an illogical place, or given less prominence than it deserves. Some churches today omit any confession of sin. In others the prayers are shorter than we might expect, or too narrowly focused. Some churches take the offering after the sermon, as though, having heard what God has to say to us, we will now decide how much that word was worth!

Second, we need to keep in mind that worship is primarily a matter of our pleasing God, and not the other way around.

That God can be pleased with the worship we offer Him is clear from Psalm 50:23, where we are told that we can, indeed, honour the Lord, and to such a degree that He is willing to unfold more of the riches of His salvation to us. Think of it! Puny creatures such as we can actually honour the God of heaven and earth! Astonishing! Yet, wondrously true!

This is what we should be striving for in our worship. Yet how many of God's covenant people actually do this? Is it not more often the norm that people come to the service of worship for what they hope to get out of it? The sooner we get it in our minds that worship is not primarily for us, but for God, the greater is the likelihood both that we will actually honour God with our worship and that we ourselves will be richly blessed as a result.

Third, we need to see that worship is primarily a matter of the heart.

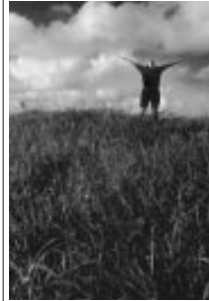
In verses 14 and 15 this "inward" aspect of worship is made clear. "Sacrifice thank-offerings to me..." Here we learn that worship requires a heart of gratitude. God calls

T.P. Moore

such thanksgiving a "sacrifice". It should cost us something – thoughtfulness, time, spoken words, renewed commitments, even the denial of our feelings (if we do not feel thankful). Indeed, the Scriptures call us to give thanks in everything and at all times (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:18).

The ideal seems to be that we devote ourselves constantly to giving thanks to God, day in and day out, in all our activities, for all our concerns, in every situation

***Think of it!
Puny creatures
such as we
can actually
honour the
God of heaven
and earth!***



and circumstance into which the Lord brings us. After we have spent a week in such continuous thanksgiving, we then come together with the rest of God's people and rehearse our thanks and praise before Him together.

Again, God can see that our hearts are fully committed to him when He is our first line of appeal in times of trouble (Ps. 50:15). How do we typically react to trials or disappointments? Many people start by either complaining or casting about for some quick fix. Their hearts are wired to look to their own resources. God says our hearts will be right when we turn first to Him.

During our worship, God is looking to see if we trust Him. If we do not give Him the tithe that He requires because we fear we might not have enough money to meet our needs, how can He see that our hearts are fully trusting in Him? To Him it will appear that we are trusting more in money. If we do not concentrate during the sermon, asking God to make His

Word clear and to show us how to apply it to our own lives, how will God see that we actually trust His Word?

Fourth, the inward aspect of worship is seen in how we are to respond to God's covenant care of us.


God intends that we should "honour" Him (v. 15 NASB). The Hebrew verb here has the sense of "being heavy" or "weighty". It is the same root from which the words "glory" and "glorify" come.

We honour God when we make His presence heavy or weighty to everyone around us. We honour God by the manner of our lives, by the words we speak, and by the interests and passions we pursue. Honouring God must begin in the heart, or it will be merely superficial, whatever form we try to give it.

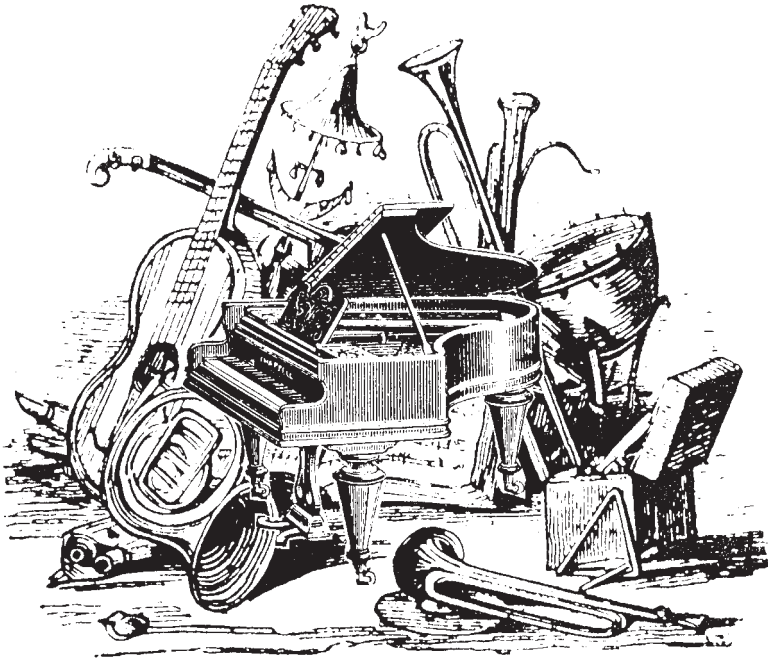
Fifth, the final element of covenant worship is that it seeks the salvation of God (v. 23). "He who sacrifices thank-offerings honours Me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."

God wants to bestow his salvation on his people. Worship is the primary arena in which we may drink more deeply of it and learn to appreciate more fully its final outworking in glory. This means that worship among the members of the covenant community must therefore be decidedly Christocentric and Trinitarian. Jesus Christ must be the focus. Worship should rehearse all aspects of His saving work – His incarnation, obedience, sacrifice, death and resurrection, session and intercession, and return. Worship should invoke and draw on the power of God's Spirit to make that salvation real.

God desires for us to know more of His salvation. When we worship Him according to His forms, in a manner designed above all to please and honour Him, and out of hearts filled with gratitude to and trust in Him, we can be sure that He will open up the riches of His grace in ever more glorious ways to the community of which we are a part.

This is an edited excerpt from I Will Be Your God – How God's Covenant Enriches Our Lives by T.M. Moore (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002) 

Songs of praise



*20 daily Bible studies
from Psalms 120-138.*

Psalms 120-134 are known in the Hebrew Psalter as the 15 Songs of Ascent (or ‘Goings-Up’, or ‘Degrees’). I have found it striking how they connect Israel with the Church. The immediate context is Israel at worship, the chosen people of God collectively responding in a visible and public way to the LORD’s attributes and dealings with them. But it is impossible to read them without seeing the wider context of the Church, God’s Elect in every age, responding in exactly the same way.

The covenants and promises given to Israel were ‘forever’. This ‘forever’ is invested in Jesus the Messiah, the true Israel, and in the Church which he established.

So, in effect, the Songs of Ascent belong to the whole Church, the people of God in the New Testament as well as the Old. They are therefore a great help to us today because we are confused about the collective public worship of God. Os Guinness has suggested that when we come together each Lord’s Day we have forgotten how to ‘rupture the ceiling’. I hope these studies will refresh our memory in this regard.

Bruce Christian

DAY 1 *Strangers on the earth*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 120:1-7**

THE POINT The Psalmist finds himself living among people who have a way of life completely alien to his. This causes him great distress but he knows that God is always ready to answer his cry for help.

THE PARTICULARS

- It is characteristic of the LORD to answer our prayer when we cry out to him for help from a situation of anxiety or distress.
- Violations of the 9th Commandment (misuse of the tongue) can be a cause of great harm and distress (see Exod. 20:16, James 3:6).
- The LORD will not leave such violations unpunished.
- Living as citizens of heaven in the alien environment of a world that is uncomfortable with, and often hostile to, God’s ways can be very distressing and soul-destroying. Meshech (Tartar descendants of Japheth in the far north) and Kedar (Arab descendants of Ishmael in the SE) become the symbol of all godless people.
- Christians are peacemakers living in a world bent on war, unable to understand the way of peace (cf John 15:18-25, 16:33).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is your first, most natural reaction when trouble comes?
- Truth no longer underpins our society; what about your life?

DAY 2 *24/7 protection guaranteed*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 121:1-8**

THE POINT The name ‘the LORD’ reflects the unique covenant relationship God made with his people Israel (the Church); ‘the LORD’ is the one who remains faithful to (keeps) all the promises given to her in his Word; he can be trusted fully in everything (Rom. 8:28).

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD is our only reliable source of help, because he is the one who made everything that is – the whole of the Universe.
- There is no time when the LORD does not have his watchful eye on us to keep us from slipping, both individually and as a Church.
- The LORD is always very close at hand, our ‘right-hand man’.
- The LORD protects us from every conceivable danger: from ‘sun’ (powerful, physical threats) to ‘moon’ (mystical, psychological pressures – cf ‘lunacy’), whether in open daylight or dark night.
- The LORD is able to monitor all our activities during our lifetime to ensure that the very essence of our being is kept safe.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What are some of the ‘hills’ you look to when things fall apart and you need help and protection? Are they always reliable?
- How can this Psalm provide a clearer focus for our worship?

DAY 3 *You are ... God's building*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 122:1-9**

THE POINT Paul reminded the Corinthian Church that they (collectively) were God's 'building' (1 Cor. 3:9). What David wrote in this Psalm about the City of Jerusalem applies to us, the people of God, today. It is God's will for his Church that we meet together to worship him, regularly and publicly (see Heb. 10:25), praising him and praying for the Church's peace, unity and prosperity.

THE PARTICULARS

- Meeting together for public worship should be a real joy for us.
- Belonging in membership with God's people is like being the citizen of a close-knit community in which there is real security.
- God commands us to unite to praise him in worship together (4).
- The Church has a mandate for exercising godly discipline (5).
- God's people are to pray (and so strive!) earnestly and primarily for peace among themselves, thus enhancing a sense of security.
- The people of God benefit from the Church's prosperity.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What priority does public worship have for you each Sunday?
- How are you contributing to the peace and unity of the Church?

DAY 4 *Despised and rejected by men*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 123:1-4**

THE POINT Because his prayer is directed to One who is in heaven (cf the prayer Jesus taught his disciples), the Psalmist's attitude is at once submissive and confident. He might be 'written off' completely by his detractors on earth but that does not matter; what counts is that he walks in a humble relationship with his God.

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD, the covenant making God, our Creator and Redeemer, is at all times worthy of our praise – he is in heaven, we are on earth; he is our master, we are to wait as his obedient servants.
- At the heart of how we relate to God is a recognition of the fact that we are in need of his mercy, and an earnest pleading for it.
- It is part of the lot of God's Church in the world to be on the receiving end of much contempt and ridicule. (This should never astonish or unsettle us because it is how Jesus was treated.)
- The fact that this treatment comes from the proud (complacent) and arrogant should help keep us mindful of and humble before God.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Read 1 Peter 2:18-23; 4:12-14; 5:5-7 and reflect on how Jesus handled the treatment he received, especially at his trial and crucifixion. Why do we find it hard to follow Jesus in this?

DAY 5 *I will build my Church*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 124:1-8**

THE POINT Living as a citizen of heaven, a member of Christ's Church, is an adrenalin-rush experience. 'The world, the flesh and the Devil' are bent on bringing us down by using all the resources at their disposal. Alone we cannot stand against this onslaught, but in the LORD's name our victory is assured (see Romans 8:28-39).

THE PARTICULARS

- Contrary to modern thinking, God does take sides on behalf of his Church. His name, the LORD, signifies that he is committed to certain Covenant promises he has made. In the NT Jesus is the LORD (compare Isaiah 44:6 with Revelation 1:17-18) and all the Covenant promises to Israel become promises to his Church.
- In our spiritual warfare the forces that are against us are much too powerful for us to hold at bay – but the LORD can rescue us.
- Often God's rescue process is last-minute, nail-biting stuff!
- We can trust completely in the LORD's 'name' (his character and essential nature) because he is the Creator of all that exists.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are there times when you feel totally overwhelmed by circumstances? Perhaps you feel like that now. Take time to reflect on the implications of this Psalm. Pray for the persecuted Church.

DAY 6 *The household of faith*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 125:1-5**

THE POINT Trusting in the LORD is an individual commitment of faith, but Scripture talks about God's dealings with his people in the context of the Church. Our protection, blessing and pilgrimage are a collective thing. The Bible does not recognise 'lone Christians'.

THE PARTICULARS

- The Church (Mount Zion) has been established by God forever and nothing can ever destroy it. (That these psalms are referring to the Church and not to the geographical city located 25 km NW of the Dead Sea is clear from history, although Jerusalem did serve as the symbol of the Church throughout OT times.)
- Those who put their trust fully in the LORD are as secure as his Church, surrounded at present and forever by his protecting arms.
- God will not allow his Church to be forced into using ungodly means to defend itself and its rightful inheritance. He will remove all opposition to allow his Church to advance (cf Matt. 16:18).
- The LORD discriminates between those who walk in his ways and those who don't: to the one he does good and grants peace; to the other there is only the prospect of abandonment forever.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What place does the Church have in your/your family's life?

DAY 7 *Restoration, joy ... and toil*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 126:1-6**

THE POINT The Church often has to go through 'wilderness' experiences, times that seem like captivity. Egypt and Babylon were literal examples of this for the OT Church. When God suddenly sends a time of restoration and renewal (revival) in the midst of such dryness it is a source of great joy and blessing to his people. Evangelism and preaching (sowing) are carried out with more enthusiasm as results (reaping) are more obvious, but the sower still toils with a heavy heart, needing the LORD's continued blessing for a harvest. This Psalm captures such a mood in the Church.

THE PARTICULARS

- Spiritual revival among God's people triggers a powerful emotional response involving joy, laughter, amazement, and a recognition that it is the Lord's hand at work in a miraculous way.
- Such a movement of God's Spirit is obvious to all around.
- Even at such times of renewal men's hearts are still hard (like the Negev area SW of the Dead Sea) and need God's attention.
- The LORD's Word will never return to him fruitless (Isaiah 55:11-13). There will always be a harvest to reap with joy.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Use this Psalm as a basis for prayer for spiritual revival today.

DAY 8 *Unless the LORD...*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 127:1-5**

THE POINT We can plan and scheme and build and guard and toil as much as we like but unless the LORD is in it all our efforts are futile and will come to nothing. Moreover, his desire is to bless us abundantly with all we need, including rest and a secure future.

THE PARTICULARS

- Building houses, families, cities, businesses, etc, to satisfy our physical needs without having the LORD intricately involved in the operation is an exercise in futility and will come to nothing. (This Psalm is attributed to Solomon: note what he also says in Eccles. 2:24-26, and how this teaching was largely lost on him!)
- Our defences against war and terrorism are useless if we leave God out of the equation.
- Sleep is a special love-gift from God: we should accept it gladly!
- The family is at the very core of a Christian view of society. We must guard against its continued erosion with passion.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you think this Psalm is saying something important to us today about the pressure our society is putting on us to establish our financial security by working long hours, going without sleep, and delaying having a family? Is man's way successful?

DAY 9 *The fear of the LORD*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 128:1-6**

THE POINT The basis of all God’s blessings is ‘the fear of the LORD’. This is not being frightened of him, but rather holding him in such high regard and with such respect as to make ‘walk(ing) in his ways’ our prime concern and motivation in life. His blessing includes productive and satisfying work, abundant continuation of the family line, and prosperity of the community. Translated into spiritual terms for the Christian today it means seeing many (including our children and grandchildren) effectively disciplined for Christ, and the Church always growing in spiritual maturity.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- Fearing the LORD means walking in his ways as a way of life.
 - The family is a visible expression of God’s blessing on his people. For the unmarried believer or childless couple this visible expression is found in the family of the Church.
 - The blessing of God’s people is always in the context of their life within the worshipping community of the Church (Zion).
 - Long life is a blessing from God; eternal life is a richer blessing!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is there a tendency today to look for, and expect, God’s blessing without the necessary commitment to walking in his ways?

DAY 10 *The Church militant*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 129:1-8**

THE POINT Jesus said, ‘In this world you will have trouble! But take heart! I have overcome the world.’ God’s people have always been in conflict with the world. Sin puts man in direct opposition to his Maker, and only when sin is dealt with at the cross will this situation change. A world at war with God will always be at war with his Church as well. But victory has been won at the cross and the empty tomb – let God’s enemies be without blessing.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- From the very beginning God’s people (Israel, the Church) have always been oppressed by a hostile world (cf Cain and Abel).
 - In spite of this, God’s people have never been overcome.
 - There has been brutal and cruel suffering for the saints but God’s righteous judgement always prevails. Christ’s righteous life was the means by which victory was gained for us at the cross.
 - In the final analysis, the world hates God’s Church, and it will eventually wither and die without his blessing upon it.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- By God’s grace, in our particular circumstances the Church is not persecuted as in other times or places. Could this be due in part to our being too ‘worldly’ in our attitudes and ways?

DAY 11 *Awesome forgiveness*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 130:1-8**

THE POINT Verse 4 is the key to this Psalm. It contrasts the true God with two other more commonly held views. Half the world says: ‘With you there is NO forgiveness, therefore you are feared.’ The other half (including our own society) says: ‘With you there is forgiveness, therefore you are NOT feared.’ The true God is to be feared because of the basis on which he forgives: our redemption (= buying back something that is already yours) at the great cost of the blood of his own beloved Son on a cross!

- THE PARTICULARS**
- The Psalmist is conscious of sin that separates him from a holy God. It’s like being cast into a pit from which there’s no escape.
 - But he knows God is merciful, that he forgives and forgets, that he wipes out our condemning record (cf Ps. 103:12, Col. 2:13-14).
 - The fact that a holy God is prepared to forgive us is awesome, not to be treated lightly but with the response of godly living.
 - In merciful, covenant love, the LORD pays the full price of our redemption himself. The Church consists of those so redeemed.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Spend some time earnestly waiting in awe on God. Reflect on what it means to you to be a forgiven sinner, saved by grace.

DAY 12 *Childlike trust*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 131:1-3**

THE POINT The world today puts so much pressure on us to perform, to be successful, to establish our personal identity with confidence and self-sufficiency. King David had every right to see himself as someone who could be proud of his achievements; but instead he humbled himself before the LORD, expressing his absolute dependence on him for everything, as an infant depends on his mother.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- David recognises his place before the One who is his covenant-making God. The LORD has established him as King over his special chosen people and has given him past and present success and great promises for the eternal future. But David refuses to let this go to his head. He doesn’t claim to be important or clever in himself, but rather humbles himself before the LORD (‘my heart is not proud’) and among men (‘my eyes are not haughty’).
 - There is unparalleled peace of mind and quietness of spirit to be found in just resting like an infant in God’s arms (cf Is. 30:15).
 - God is calling on the Church to entrust everything to him alone.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what ways does your/your Church’s attitude or activity reflect the way the world does things instead of God’s way?

DAY 13 *God among his people*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 132:1-18**

THE POINT The Ark of the Covenant, built by Moses in the wilderness and having its foundation in Mount Sinai, represented the LORD’s presence among his people. After its years of mobility in the desert, and centuries of being pushed from pillar to post after the occupation of Canaan, David’s burning desire was for the Ark to have a permanent resting place in Zion, God’s Holy City. For David the King, coming together to worship the LORD was the most important part of the nation’s life. His dream was to have a permanent Temple, containing the Ark, in Jerusalem. This was consistent with God’s promise that one of his descendants would always be the anointed (Messiah) king over Israel. This Psalm captures this theme and spells out in detail what it means.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- Today is your turn to do the work! The ultimate focus of Psalm 132 is on Christ and his Church, his Body, his Building, his Flock, his Bride. See how many specific references you can identify to Christ, his relationship to the Church, the people of his Church, its purpose, its function, its work, its worship, its future.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How many of these features are evident in the life and worship of your church today? How can you help to improve things?

DAY 14 *Unity among God’s people*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 133:1-3**

THE POINT One of the things that is most obviously lacking in our society today is harmony. The more we make material things our focus the more we allow ourselves to be motivated by greed and selfishness. The more educated and self-sufficient we become the more alienated we become from each other because we are convinced we are right. In contrast to this the LORD longs for there to be true unity among his people, his Church, so that he can bless us.

- THE PARTICULARS**
- It is God who brings us together as brothers and sisters in his Church; we don’t choose each other! The true miracle of his grace at work is when this results in a family in total harmony.
 - The Church portrays ‘a people as differentiated, but also as integrated, as a priest and his robes.’ The anointing oil intended for the head is free to flow to bless the whole body (Kidner).
 - Like the dew, the unity comes as a gift from God’s hand. ‘True unity, like all good gifts, is from above; bestowed rather than contrived, a blessing far more than an achievement’ (Kidner).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Look again at the things you noted yesterday about what the features of the Church should be. How do these promote unity?

DAY 15 *Blessing in belonging*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 134:1-3**

THE POINT This is the last of the 15 Songs of Ascent. They began with the LORD's people, his Church, struggling to survive among godless people (Meshech and Kedar – Ps.120); they finish with the LORD's people worshipping him in Zion. While worship must necessarily involve all the people, there are those whom the LORD calls to lead the worship so that all may receive a blessing from it.

THE PARTICULARS

- 'Praise the LORD' in vss 1 and 2 is literally 'bless the LORD' (as in KJV). But we cannot bless him in the same way he blesses us. We can only bless him by acknowledging gratefully who he is.
- The 'servants of the LORD' who minister ('stand') in the house of the LORD are people especially called and equipped to lead the Church in public worship, bringing blessing from the Creator.
- 'By night' implies that they are rostered to do it day and night.
- Lifting hands in the sanctuary (literally 'holy place' or simply 'holiness'- cf 1 Timothy 2:8) is a physical way of expressing the devotion of our hearts. It conveys meaning in group worship.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we expressive enough in our public worship today? What are some dangers associated with being over demonstrative?

DAY 16 *God desires our worship*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 135:1-7**

THE POINT We have much for which to praise the LORD our God, and he has provided different ways for us to do so: serving among the body of his people (the Church) is one; singing is another; recalling and telling of his great works in the earth and in history is another. These are communal activities. We must belong to a Church.

THE PARTICULARS

- The phrase 'praise the LORD' here in Hebrew is 'Hallelujah'. Praising his name is praising him because of all that he is.
- As in Ps 134 there are those called and equipped to lead worship.
- Worship, especially singing, ought to be a pleasant experience.
- We are chosen by God to be his Church, to belong to him, to be his treasured possession; knowing this should inspire worship.
- The LORD our God is the only true God; he is the great Creator of all that exists; he controls weather patterns to do his will.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- One of the most divisive issues in the Church's worship today is music. It is hard to think of anything less honouring to God than standing with the people he has chosen to be his 'treasured possession' and refusing to sing enthusiastically simply because 'this isn't my style of music'. Young or old, are you guilty?

DAY 17 *A God with runs on the board*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 135:8-21**

THE POINT The whole Church, from top to bottom, has reason to praise the LORD. Although having no physical form, he has demonstrated clearly his compassion and sovereign power over the elements and nations, working out his Plan of Salvation in every part of human history for the benefit of his chosen people, his Church.

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD delivered Israel from Egypt with signs and wonders.
- The LORD established his people's inheritance in Canaan at the expense of life and property of nations under his divine judgment.
- The LORD's name and reputation stand firm in every age and place.
- No matter what hardships and difficulties we have to endure, the LORD comes with compassion and vindicates those who are his.
- A God without physical parts yet who still hears, sees, speaks and acts is better than a man-made god who has them but can't!
- People in every office in his Church should praise him together.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How has Jesus fulfilled, vindicated, and given substance to all of God's promises to the OT Church, Israel?
- God made himself visible in Jesus. How is Jesus unlike idols?

DAY 18 *His love endures forever*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 136:1-26**

THE POINT God's Church is more remembered by the world in human history for its weakness and failures than for its triumphs. But the same history when seen from the perspective of God's saving purposes for his Elect leads us to quite a different conclusion. And then our response is one of worship, praise and gratitude.

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD's love (the Hebrew word covers mercy and kindness as well – a Covenant attribute of God towards Israel, his Church), is not a transient emotion like human love; it endures forever!
- The LORD who rules alone in the spiritual realm is good, and we should therefore be thankful that it is not otherwise.
- The LORD is the Creator and Sustainer of the whole Universe.
- The LORD's meticulous and powerful care for the OT Church (Israel) gives us confidence in his power to care for us today.
- The LORD cares about us in our weakness and can meet our most basic needs. Had he not revealed himself so clearly in Scripture as being all-powerful, yet caring most about the poor, the needy and the vulnerable, human wisdom would not have seen him thus.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your life an expression of gratitude for God's love and mercy?

DAY 19 *Longing for heaven*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 137:1-9**

THE POINT Israel in captivity among their enemies in Babylon, longing for the day when they can return and rebuild Jerusalem, is a picture of the persecuted Church in any age longing for Christ's Return. By God's grace we can sing 'the songs of Zion' now because the Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of heaven, but when the world taunts us to do so while it persecutes us (as is the case in some places) this Psalm reflects the Church's cry, 'How long, Lord?'

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD's people will always live in tension this side of heaven. We are strangers on the earth and the world around us will always try to make fun of our 'songs of Zion'.
- We are sometimes in danger of feeling at home where we should be strangers, of adopting the world's ways, and even of loving the world so much we forget that heaven is our 'highest joy'.
- The way God's people were treated by Babylon when Jerusalem was destroyed aroused in them an intense desire for revenge. Our zeal for God's name should be equally intense, but Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies must temper our reactions.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How can our regular weekly worship meet needs raised here?

DAY 20 *Safe in the Potter's hands*

THE PASSAGE **PSALM 138:1-8**

THE POINT David expresses in this Psalm his firm confidence in the LORD. He has proved himself faithful in the past. He has shown himself to overshadow any rival power or authority in greatness and glory. In spite of his greatness he walks beside and protects the humble and poor. David's response to all this is one of unmitigated praise and worship, and a grateful acknowledgement that the Potter can be trusted fully with the work of his hands.

THE PARTICULARS

- The LORD's love (mercy) and faithfulness, his name and his word, inspire our response of consuming praise and public worship.
- All other powers and authorities must submit to the LORD alone.
- The LORD relates to the lowly but distances himself from the proud. Our behaviour ought to reflect this same attitude.
- 'With your right hand you save me' is looking forward to the One who will come and be our Advocate at God's right hand.
- I can rest assured that nothing can harm me before the LORD has completed all his purposes for me (see Ephesians 2:10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you share David's assessment of who the LORD is and how we should respond? How is this reflected in your worship?



Across Australia

Vale Joseph Macague

Joseph Macague, the session clerk of Rochester (Vic), passed away on 7 April aged 79, following a period of ill-health. He is survived by his wife **Gwen**, and their large family. Until recently he was still working on his farm. He had been part of the Rochester Session for 45 years and had served as session clerk for 39 years.

Farewell Jean Sticpewich

Mrs Jean Sticpewich died suddenly on 24 February, aged 95. She was born in Newcastle NSW but lived in England for 20 years where she married her husband Jim and bore three sons. The Sticpewichs returned to Australia in the early 1950s and became closely associated with the work of the Presbyterian Church in the Lane Cove area of Sydney.

Jean was totally involved in church life: federal and state president of the PWA at various times; PWA market and Dorcas convenor and session member of the Chatswood congregation (St. James and St. Andrew's). Her determination in promoting the church, her strong leadership, her unswerving faith and love for her Lord translated into all she did.

A memorial service at **St Andrew's, Chatswood**, was conducted by **Rev. Jeff Read** and **Rev. James Mullan**, with **Mrs June Angas** delivering the eulogy.

Challenging conference

The **Rev. Andrew Young** of Auckland's **Grace Theological College** in Auckland was guest speaker at the 2003 **ministers' conference** at the **PTC Melbourne**. About 60 theological students, elders, ministers and home missionaries came from all over Victoria. **Rev. Dr. Tony Bird** spoke on James, and **PTC principal Dr Douglas Milne** gave the keynote address on Luke 12. **Dr Milne** gave two challenges: to acknowledge that Islamic moral outrage at Western decadence is not without cause, and to learn from the fast-growing Third World churches.

Gold Coast boom

Palm Beach-Elanora is the newest parish in Queensland. Started as an outreach of **Mudgeraba** by minister **Rev.**

Glen Samuel in September 2001, this work was designed to cater for the needs of the southern Gold Coast. Eighteen months later it has been made a separate Home Mission parish with 3 elders and 50 communicants and adherents. The Gold Coast is the fastest growing area in Australia with a population equal to that of Tasmania. Palm Beach-Elanora is the fifth parish on the Gold Coast, all of which have been established since Church Union. **Rev. Donald Geddes** has been appointed part time minister.

Service for Iraq

On 24 March **Scots Church, Melbourne**, hosted a prayer service for the war in Iraq. Victorian Moderator **Rev. John Wilson** preached from Ps 46. Also taking part were the minister of Scots, **Rev. Douglas Robertson** and visiting Turnbull Trust preacher **Rt Rev. Trevor Morrow** from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Easter camp

Over the Easter weekend people from **Camperdown-Terang** and **Noorat** congregations in western Victoria came together for a church family camp at Nelson. The guest speaker was noted scholar and former Presbyterian Theological College principal **Dr Allan Harman**.

Help for refugees

The Presbytery of Brisbane has collected more than \$14,000 to help relocate the **John Dak Pouk** family from Kenya to Queensland. The family arrived at the end of February. Further support can be given through **Rev. G. Kettmiss**, the presbytery clerk (07 3216 4151).

Long service

Two long-serving members of **Ann Street Presbyterian Church (Qld)** have retired from ministry positions. **Mrs Barbara Harvey** stepped down after 19 years as a Sunday school teacher and **Miss Joan Pigram** after 23 years as church organist. The new organist is **Ms Nevann Hardwick**, head of music at **Clayfield College**.

Orchard next Moderator

The Commission of Assembly in Melbourne at the start of April elected **Rev. Peter Orchard** of **Ashburton** as

Moderator-Designate of the PCV. The church office manager, **Mr George Nichols**, has retired after 10 years of service. The commission was opened with a brief Bible exposition from **Rt. Rev. Trevor Morrow**, who also conveyed the greetings of the General Assembly of the **Presbyterian Church of Ireland**.

Malawi link

Following the return of **Colin M'Bawa** to Malawi after finishing his studies at the PTC, the Commission took up the recommendation of the **APWM (Victoria)** to establish brotherly relationships with the **Synod of Blantyre** of the **Church of Central Africa Presbyterian** in Malawi. The new Theological Resource Centre being established in Blantyre is the initial focus of the relationship. The Victorian Moderator, **Rev. John Wilson**, will travel to Malawi to teach at the inaugural seminar.

Building up Shailer Park

Some 230 people gathered to mark the opening of the new church building of the **Shailer Park/Cornubia** charge in late February. Founded in 1999 under the pastoral leadership of **Don and Lillian Kennedy** by the Home Mission Committee of the PCQ, the new charge has as its focus bringing unchurched people to Christ and equipping them to serve Him.

Appointments

The PCQ Home Missions Committee has appointed **Rev. Laurie Peake** to the **Wandoan (Qld)** charge in an honorary capacity from the beginning of March. **Rev. David Newman** is supplying the **Maryborough (Qld)** charge.

On 7 March the **Presbytery of Melbourne East** inducted **Rev. Graham Nicholson** into **Hawthorn**. **Rev. Phillip Mercer (Camberwell)** preached. **Mr. Nicholson** is currently completing doctoral studies in the thought of Augustine of Hippo.

On 23 March the presbytery inducted **Rev. Dr John Elnatan** into **Burwood Community Church (Vic)**. **Rev. Charles Green**, the chaplain at **PLC**, preached. While the **Burwood** congregation is largely made up of Chinese Christians at the moment, the vision for the future is for outreach to people from all kinds of ethnic backgrounds.

Peter Prendergast and **Bob Speck** were ordained and inducted as elders at

Donvale (Vic) on 6 April 2003. Both have strong associations with the **St. Andrew's Christian College**: Peter is past chairman of the school council and Bob is principal.

During 2002, three Elders were inducted into Office in the Congregation of **John Knox & St Stephen's, Rockhampton Qld**: **Keith Brandt**, formerly an elder in **Mackay, Maurie Ivers**, and **Peter Voltz**.

Distinguished service

Captain Lionel Boxer, a member of **Scots Church, Melbourne**, has been awarded the Golden Jubilee Medal by the Governor-General of Canada for community service in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Eternity, again

A number of years ago Home Missionary **Adrian Kebbe (Templestowe, Vic)** wrote a book entitled *Eternity*. It was recently published in Bangladesh in an inexpensive edition of 15,000 copies. So far more than 2500 responses have been received by local Christians, who are following up those who have expressed interest in the Christian faith with pastoral visits and bibles.

Good news in Tasmania

The **Rokeby** congregation on the eastern shore of Hobart has experienced growth in recent times at both the morning and evening services. The congregation has been enjoying the ministry of **Rev. Neil Mackinlay** who was appointed supply at Rokeby at the start of December 2002. In the north, **Scottsdale**, which has three preaching places, also has received a new supply preacher, **Mr Greg Munro**, from February. Mr Munro trained for ministry work at Moore Theological College in Sydney.

Gluten-free supper

Congregational members who are on a gluten-free or wheat-free diet are unable to take even small portions of ordinary bread provided at communion without having a negative reaction of some kind. To allow them to take part, rice crackers (gluten-free of course) should be made available at communion time. It is estimated that in Australia about one in every 200 to 300 people require a gluten-free diet.



Around the World

Suffering in Iraq

On 31 March **Bartulla**, a Christian village just 12 km from Mosul, was bombed when Coalition planes hit the local Ba'ath Party headquarters. Reports state that 20 Christians were killed and 75 wounded in this tragedy.

Iraq's 700,000 strong Christian community, about half of whom reside in areas under the control of Saddam Hussein's regime, and half in the Kurdish authority areas of the north, have been suffering alongside their Muslim neighbours in the war in Iraq. Until the bombing of Bartulla they had been largely spared the tragic casualties of war suffered by many Iraqi civilians.

Many Christians left Baghdad to return to their ancestral homelands in the north of Iraq until the war was over. The refugees from Baghdad are being housed in churches, schools and people's homes. Some Christians have also fled into Syria.

Alongside the general grief and distress both Muslim and Christian Iraqis are suffering, Christians have the added fear that they could be made the innocent victims of revenge attacks from angry Muslim neighbours who associate them with the 'Christian' West.

The Barnabas Fund

Breakthrough in Peru

A Peruvian evangelistic mission saw 600 people come to Christ in the last six months. **Marino Huatangare**, founder and director of **New Life Evangelistic Mission** in Peru, told Christian Aid that his ministry conducted seven evangelistic crusades in the last six months, drawing an aggregate attendance of more than 6000 people. Of these, 600 made professions of faith, and 250 new believers took the additional step of public baptism.

The ministry began as a radio program in 1985 and so many people responded that the ministry reorganised as a church-planting ministry three years later. Today it numbers 300 congregations gathering more than 20,000 Peruvian believers, including people from the Kañary tribes, others of the Peruvian Andes, and the Aguaruna tribal people along the Amazon River.

Christian Aid

Christian scapegoat

Local Christians and human rights monitors have collected overwhelming evidence indicating that **Rev. Rinaldy Damanik**, a Christian pastor in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, who is currently on trial for the alleged possession of weapons following Muslim-Christian violence, is being framed as a scapegoat for the authorities' own failure to act against Islamic militant extremists Laskar Jihad.

According to the Barnabas Fund, Rev Rinaldy Damanik is a leading and influential figure, a minister in the Church of Central Sulawesi (GKST) who heads the church's **Crisis Centre of Central Sulawesi**, set up to deal with the crisis provoked by Islamic militant attacks on Christians in the province over the past four years.

The Barnabas Fund reports that Rinaldy has played a crucial role supporting Christian refugees and coordinating action to assist those who have been left destitute without food, medicines or shelter by Islamic militant violence. He has been a major voice for peace in the region and is one of the main signatories to the December 2001 Malino reconciliation agreement, which was meant to bring a formal end to the conflict in Sulawesi.

However, Rinaldy has been fiercely critical of the Indonesian authorities, particularly the local police, for failing to take any action against Islamic militant groups like Laskar Jihad, for allowing them to operate with virtual impunity, and even for siding with them in some attacks.

Assist News Service/The Barnabas Fund

Mindanao terrorism

Terrorists apparently have stepped up their attacks on Mindanao Island in southern Philippines. "There is war in Cotabato City, and four explosions in Davao City hit a gas station, the airport, a health center, and the nearby bus terminal," a ministry leader in the region told Christian Aid. "Please pray for peace on our island, and that the terrorists turn to Jesus and get saved."

The report follows a terrorist attack on 4 March in which a bomb left in a backpack in the crowded outdoor waiting shed at Davao City Airport killed at least 21, including three American missionaries, and filling the hospital with about 150 maimed and injured. "Lifeless bodies were tossed through the air like rag dolls. Blood was everywhere," the Christian leader told Christian Aid. Davao is the Philippines'

second-largest city and the largest on Mindanao.

Islamic militants have been fighting for a separate Islamic homeland in southern Philippines since 1972. There are 5 million Muslims in Mindanao and adjacent small islands, though Davao City is mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic).

Christian Aid

At-tract-ive witness

An evangelical ministry in Croatia has found that handing out gospel tracts is an effective gospel witness. The ministry's evangelical sextet was invited to sing two hours a day for three days a week in two of Zagreb's shopping malls during the 24 days leading up to Christmas. While the group sang, other church members handed out a total of 6000 tracts and invitations to special Christmas events.

Then the local two-week Masquerade Festival, a Mardi-Gras-type event, began on February 27. One Saturday members of the evangelical team handed out tracts and witnessed to whoever would listen. "The entire festival is based on witchcraft and is full of drunkenness and sexual immorality," said one of the leaders. "It was our first time witnessing at the festival, so we were not quite sure what would happen."

Surprisingly, the tracts were accepted by almost every one. "After a half hour the centre was filled with people reading Christian tracts!" the leader said. Croatia is about 87 per cent Catholic, according to **Operation World**.

Christian Aid

Preaching banned

The Liberian Government has imposed an immediate ban on street preaching by evangelists and church leaders in the capital, Monrovia. A justice ministry press release cited security reasons for the ban but gave no more details. It only warned of stiff punitive measures against would-be violators of the new order.

The ban comes just a week after rebels of **Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development** (Lurd), who started their insurgency in the north of the county five years ago, came to within 10 kilometres of the capital.

Until the ban, nearly every street corner and public square in Monrovia hosted daytime prayer services, with young evangelists and self-proclaimed spiritual counselors drawing in crowds. So widespread had street evangelism become that people with little or no biblical knowledge were also

getting involved in the preaching.

Since Lurd rebels began attacking townships close to Monrovia, the government has attempted to discourage the mass gathering of people in the capital.

BBC

Second chance

Adventist and Baptist leaders and human rights activists have said they hope any new religion law in Serbia and Montenegro will not be modelled on the controversial old draft law, whose adoption has now come to a halt with the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its replacement by the new country of Serbia and Montenegro. **Goran Miletic** of the **Humanitarian Law Centre** in Belgrade insists that lawmakers must now start again from scratch. "There has to be a completely new draft of the law on religious freedom," he told **Forum 18 News Service**. **Miodrag Zivanovic** of the Adventists complained that although the old law was not adopted, some discriminatory provisions are already being applied.

WEA Religious Liberty

Nepalese jailed

A gospel worker and two local believers have been arrested and jailed on proselytism charges in western Nepal.

The three included a gospel worker, 34, from a church in Pokhara District, his assistant, 26, and a retired soldier, 46, from the Royal Nepal Army. The three were on their way to visit a Christian family in Pyuthan District when they were

stopped by police.

They told police: "We are Christians and are going to meet one of our Christian brothers in the next village, and then we are going to Pokhara to participate in a Christian program." The police checked their bags and found Bibles and other Christian literature, and charged them with "carrying Christian literature, preaching Christianity, and attempting to convert others into Christianity".

In Nepal, any attempt to influence others to change their religion is illegal. An appeal is being made, but if the appeal is lost, the brothers could be incarcerated for three to six years.

Christian Aid

Georgia pledges action

Minority religious leaders and human rights activists remain sceptical that new pledges from political leaders in Georgia to end the long-running religious violence and punish the perpetrators will bring justice to the victims.

Pledges made by **President Eduard Shevardnadze** have been echoed by Security Council secretary **Tedo Japaridze**. "I have no doubt that the perpetrators of this violence will be punished," he told **Forum 18 News Service**. **Levan Ramishvili** of the **Liberty Institute** was highly sceptical. "President Shevardnadze's apology at the ecumenical service was positive, but came too late," he told **Forum 18**. "There is no willingness on the part of the government to end the persecution."

WEA Religious Liberty



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Contemporary worship

Ten ways to pray in times like these.

1. "Lord, do something that will show people Your glory over all the earth."

• "O God ... let Your glory be over all the earth." Psalm 108:5

• "Be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Habakkuk 1:5

This is a moment for God to do something that no diplomat, no world leader, no army could possibly do—so all will know that "the Lord, He is God."

2. "Lord, use these anxious and uncertain times to bring many to Christ."

• "Pray ... that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored." 2 Thessalonians 3:1

• "May God be gracious to us and bless us ... that Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among the nations." Psalm 67:1,2

God can use this fearful time to reach the hearts of many—in Iraq, in Australia, America, across the Middle East, among the young men and women of the military.

**Ron
Hutchcraft**

3. "Lord, guide our leaders to be instruments of Your will on earth."

• "I urge ... that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority." 1 Timothy 2:1,2

A believer's responsibility to "honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17) and to pray for those in authority transcends political labels and issues—it is a spiritual responsibility!

4. "Lord, protect the innocent."

• "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in time of trouble ..." Psalm 40:1

• "A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling." Psalm 68:5

In the violence of war, of oppression, of terrorism, only God can protect the innocent—innocent citizens, innocent victims, innocent combatants.

5. "Lord, use human authorities to bring punishment on evildoers."

• "The governing authorities ... are God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the evildoer." Romans 13:1,4

• "It is God who judges; He brings down one, He exalts another." Psalm 5:7

Ultimately it is God Himself, sometimes using human instruments, who removes those He does not want in authority any longer. "He brings princes to naught." (Isaiah 40:23)

6. "Lord have Your way and Your will in the lives of our enemies."

• "Pray for those who mistreat you." Luke 6:27

Jesus has charged us to represent even our enemies before His Throne of Grace.

7. "Lord make a way for people to live in the dignity and freedom that goes with being made in Your image."

• "Live as free men ..." 1 Peter 2:16

• "Weep and wail, because of the misery that is coming upon you ... you who have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men..." James 5:1,5,6

• "Act justly ... love mercy ... walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

Every person on this planet is "God's workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10), worthy of the dignity and respect a "God's image" person should have.

8. "Lord, help Your people model peace in these troubled times, pointing the people around them to Jesus — at a time when hearts are soft."

• "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm, and secure." Hebrews 6:19

• "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." John 4:35

This uncertain time is a life-saving moment — when those who belong to Jesus have an unusual window to introduce Him to those who don't. But the window may not be open for long.

9. "Lord, use world events to open many doors that have been closed to Your gospel."

• "The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm." Nahum 1:3

• "Pray that God may open a door for our message ..." Colossians 4:3

God's plan is much larger than disarmament, political change, or military victory — He's about getting the Good News of His Son to hearts and places it has never gone!

10. "Lord, bring peace out of all that's happening."

• "That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." 1 Timothy 2:2

God has told us that the result He desires in answer to our prayers for our leaders is a climate where peace and righteousness can flourish.

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pastoralist care

Following Flynn's footsteps, practical care still counts.

On his first day in his new parish, Barry Rossiter couldn't get out of bed until a black snake decided to vacate his living room.

His bed was on the roof of his four-wheel-drive, his living room a tiny tent annexe, and his parish half a million square kilometres of outback South Australia.

Rossiter is the newest patrol padre for the Presbyterian Inland Mission (PIM). The ministry, which provides practical and spiritual care for people in the outback, is the heir of John Flynn's Australian Inland Mission.

Rossiter, who also pastors the Port Augusta Presbyterian Church, has been bitten by centipedes, terrified by dogs and had a much closer encounter than he would like with an eagle (both survived).

He is more likely to find himself helping a farmer fix a fence than preaching a sermon, though he is passionate about "reaching people with the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ".

For the five PIM padres, who held their triennial meeting near Bacchus Marsh outside Melbourne recently, practical care is as pressing as spiritual.

In his 1912 report to the Presbyterian general assembly that founded the Australian Inland Mission, John Flynn



**Barney
Zwartz**

quoted another missionary: "When you set out to commend your Gospel to men who do not particularly want it, there is only one way to go about it – to do something for them that they will be sure to understand."

Terry Sadler, who patrols outback New South Wales, found a farmer putting up fences. "I've got a PhD," he told him. The farmer replied: "So has my son but he just sits in his room reading." Sadler went to his four-wheel-drive and pulled out a post-hole digger. "Here's mine," he said.

A highlight for Barry Rossiter was an Aboriginal funeral on an outback station between Coober Pedy and Port Augusta.

"They couldn't get anybody to do the

funeral service and asked if I knew anyone. I said I did: me. They couldn't even get an undertaker to go out there.

"I assumed it would just be the immediate family, but there were 300 there. I took my father-in-law with me, who wasn't prepared for Aboriginal grief – they really do wail at the graveside. I'm often now stopped by people who say 'Hello, I was at the funeral'."

Rossiter travels with 40 litres of fuel in jerry cans, 60 litres of water, two folding chairs and a folding table, stove, pots and pans, a fridge that runs off a second car battery, Bibles, and a green felt board, which he uses to tell stories to children. "They love it, it gets them away from the school of the air."

Rossiter says the ravages of the drought are obvious. "You don't know when you go back if they'll be there. Some have given up (their properties) and left. Everything they had went into it."

David and Doreen Hart travel Western Australia in a four-wheel-drive mobile home that David designed. "We've got everything you have at home, except it's condensed. We don't have microwave, TV or air-conditioning, but we don't miss them."

They are out nine months a year, covering a beat of 250 stations, broken by a



L to R: Barry Rossiter; Bill & Bronwen Gray; Terry & Judy Sadler; Owen & Sally Oakes; Doreen & David Hart.

Open-hearted

Martin de Pyle

A gift of \$25,000 to buy a camper trailer for the Flynn patrol in South Australia sealed a successful open day for the Presbyterian Inland Mission near Bacchus Marsh on 6 March.

The open day was held to take advantage of the presence of all the PIM patrol padres in Victoria – the first time since Church Union – for the mission’s triennial conference.

The day was informal, interactive and insightful. Activities ranged from damper cooking over an open fire to personal testimonies and anecdotes from each of the patrol teams. Four couples said they were seriously interested in becoming Patrol workers.

The conference launched an appeal to enable another inland patrol, into the Kimberley Pilbara region of Western Australia. About \$160,000 is needed.

Three days later, Scots Church in Melbourne held a thanksgiving service

for the work of the PIM. It coincided with the first evening service given by Rev Trevor Morrow, the Turnbull Trust preacher for Scots’ Church in 2003.

The congregation was drawn from all over the state. PIM superintendent Jack Knapp, Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, spoke of the historical continuity of ministry “beyond the furthest fences”. He recognised that for more than 90 years the Presbyterian Church has been able to take the gospel to those who live in the inland and isolated regions of our country.

He emphasised that all padres offer non-judgmental love and a helping hand with no strings attached. By both word and deed, they bear witness to the love and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin de Pyle, minister of Swan Hill Presbyterian Church, is a member of the PIM committee.



Jack Knapp addressing the crowd on the open day.

In 1912, according to Jack Knapp, PIM’s superintendent and the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Flynn asked the Presbyterian general assembly for volunteers for the outback. Knapp says ordained ministers were conspicuous by their absence. So Bruce Plowman became the first patrol padre, setting out with six camels from Oodnadatta.

Plowman was soon introduced to the inelegancies of bush life. A farmer who shared a steak with him first held it out so the dog could lick off the fly-muck before throwing it straight on the stove.

Knapp says Flynn (1880-1951) was a great visionary, who told the assembly outback people were dying without Christ for lack of medical facilities. His work helped reshape life for people on much of the continent.

Barry Rossiter is awed by the dedication shown by the first padres. Even today, it’s arduous work, but it brings many rewards. David Hart says: “We love the outback. We stay in a million-star hotel every night.” Rossiter shares that thrill: “We fall sleep and wake up in places people would pay huge amounts to see – God’s creation.”

This article first appeared in The Age, for whom Barney Zwartz is religious affairs writer.

ap

couple of trips to Perth to restock. The properties are so big that one has a drive more than 100 kilometres long.

“It’s a tradition of the outback that when the padre calls, regardless of denomination, you’re made welcome.”

Again, practical help dominates. “We spent two days at a station helping a lady paint, and at morning tea, sitting on the paint tins, we had an opportunity to share the Gospel. I’ve climbed a windmill



L to R: Bill Gray / Owen Oakes/ Terry Sadler/ Sally Oakes

to clear the head, and helped at cattle yards, where Doreen cooked for everyone.”

PIM’s ministry has a venerable tradition. Its roots lie in an 1839 bequest, which was used by Port Augusta minister Robert Mitchell to open a new work in the tiny settlement of Beltana, 250 kilometres to the north, in 1894.

John Flynn joined the Beltana work as a brand new minister in 1911. His ambition was to throw “a mantle of safety over the outback”, in pursuit of which he later founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service and relieved the isolation in the settlements and stations by developing the pedal radio.

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DVD Watch

Life or Something Like it

Reviewed by Phil Campbell



Angelina Jolie as Lanie and Tony Shalhoub as Prophet Jack.

Beautiful television reporter Lanie Kerrigan is living life in the fast lane. With perfect bottle-blond hair and sensational gym-toned body, Lanie is engaged to a baseball star, and is heading for a big promotion.

But her perfect world starts to unravel when she interviews eccentric street prophet Jack. Perched on his pedestal in the midst of Seattle's peak hour pedestrians, Jack delivers traffic warnings, weather forecasts and sporting tips in advance. Lanie's news report is predictably cynical – until the Seattle Seahawks win their match 19-13, and there's an un-seasonal hailstorm, exactly as Jack predicted. And there's the rub... Jack's parting words to Lanie were ominous. "Next Thursday you're going to die. I'm sorry."

As the days roll by, Jack notches up more spectacularly successful predictions. And Lanie, predictably, becomes more and more anxious. So what do you do if you've got seven days to live? Time for a radical overhaul of your values and priorities?

According to cameraman Pete (Edward Burns) it's an overhaul that's long overdue. "You carefully construct every moment of your life to project the right image," says Pete. "If I found out I had a week to live and my life had just been a meaningless quest for the approval

of others, I'd be upset too... I'd try to live every moment. I'd see all the people who mean something to me and say all the things I always meant to say."

And Lanie agrees. "My life that seemed so perfect seems like some big greasy sugar donut." Time for some significant changes. First it's fiancé Cal. "What have we really got in common. Are we in love?" Then it's Lanie's upwardly mobile sister. "Does your life have meaning? Because I've been thinking about life and what's meaningful..."

Cue the Rolling Stones song *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*, and you've got all the ingredients of a movie that's going to deal with some real issues. Sadly, both as a movie, and as a source of deep answers, *Life or Something Like It* leaves the viewer hungry for more.

For starters, Lanie's existential angst seems superficial – perhaps outside Angelina Jolie's emotional range? For a gal facing almost certain demise, her efforts at reconciling relationships and pursuing real meaning look shallow and glib. "Maybe I'm trying to be something I'm not" is about as deep as the self-analysis gets.

So does she die on cue? And does anything really change? Let's not spoil the ending – after all, it's a reasonably inoffensive video that may fill an idle Friday evening.

However, in real life – in the face of death or something like it – bigger and better answers are needed in the quest for meaning. Let's start with Jesus, who told a similar story in Luke 12. Angelina Jolie steps into the shoes of the rich man, whose ground is producing a top class crop. "What shall I do?" he thinks to himself... "I have no place to store my crops." And so he plans to build

bigger barns to store his growing pile of grain and goods.


It's a simple plan... take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.

As in the movie, impending mortality puts worldly success in a new perspective. "You fool!" says God. "This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" And Jesus concludes: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

So in her final week on earth, is there any suggestion that street-smart Lanie wants to get rich towards God? Not at all. In fact, the most useful advice you'll walk out with is this: "In your career and your life, you've just got to be yourself." In the face of impending death, I'm not sure how that's going to help.

The fact is, most people these days are living "life or something like it". And movies like this one make a genuine attempt to tap into that place in the heart where ordinary people are grappling with big issues; they're part of a the new breed of "morality tales" that are desperately seeking something substantial to rest on. The problem is, when you ignore the Lord Jesus, there's nothing much left.

Culture Watch editor Phil Campbell is part of the ministry team at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church.

Life Or Something Like It – available on DVD or Video. Starring Angelina Jolie and Edward Burns. M15+ Some sexual references. 



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Letters

Sincere thanks

I, Heather and our family would like to express our deep appreciation for all the expressions of love and concern that we received on the recent death of our daughter Elaine. The cards, letters, phone-calls and gifts were all a source of great comfort and encouragement during our time of great shock and sorrow. Throughout this tragedy God has extended His graciousness and mercy toward us all. Through His constant provision for us, for all the prayers and thoughts from you our brethren, God has been "the strength of our heart and our portion for ever" (Ps. 73:26).

Our tears of sorrow and loss for our daughter were mingled with tears of thanksgiving and gratitude for the blessings given by God, extended to us by our brethren. Words are inadequate, as we express our thanks and gratitude to you all for all you have given us. May God always be a blessing to you and your portion forever.

*John and Heather Rickard,
Numurkah, Vic.*

Request from Iraq

I have received a communication written before the hostilities in Iraq, in which Iraqi church leaders issued this appeal: "We address all who call themselves Christians throughout the world to pray for peace and for the well-being of Iraqi Christians and the many millions of Iraqi people who live under the constant fear of the threatened war. We wish to remind

all Christians of the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, that supplications, prayers intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for Kings and all who are in authority, that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and reverence which is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1. Tim. 2:1-4).

Since then, the Iraqi nation has been plunged into war. There has been massive destruction of property, tragic loss of life and the seemingly unavoidable casualties of war. The Rev. Victor Atallah, General Director of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship, seeks prayer for the safety and well-being of the believers in Iraq.

May I ask you, therefore to continue in fervent prayer for lasting peace, and also consider making a monetary gift to the brethren in Iraq. This can be done through the coordinator of MERF Australia, Rev. Les Percy, Post Office Box 64, Zillmere, Queensland, 4034. "Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

*Rt Rev Jack Knapp,
Moderator-General
Lake Munmorah, NSW*

Challenge for Presbyterians

Jodie Day's review of *Bowling for Columbine* (AP, February) is an offence to all of us who live and work to restore the foundations of our once-Christian civilisation. Jodie called Michael Moore brilliant, a master of the documentary, funny and with an uncanny talent for interviewing. Please!

Jodie admitted, "I'm still not sure how he does it. Over and over in the movie people... (say things)... making them look quite stupid." I agree with Jodie on that point, Americans are usually articulate and well able to communicate their opinions but exposed before Moore's camera, yep, stupid. Until, wait a minute, the creator of the debauched *South Park* TV show is a shining example of lucid oratory and, hello, a heavy metal satanist looks like an intelligent, humane and wise if tragically misunderstood person who could enlighten us all.

The late Francis Schaeffer, in one of his far superior documentaries, demonstrated how this dishonest editing technique can be employed to support either side of a debate.

In the little cartoon Jodie found so succinct we have the worst example of revisionist vandalism that I have ever seen

done to the history of the Christian west.

When the sinners can't tell left from right, we Christians had better learn up from down, because heaven and hell are real and inclined to impinge upon our families and churches. What I want to know is this: are Presbyterians going to sort out the relevant issues? Is there any value in civil liberty or is social order the only thing that matters during the war on terror?

Finding a just and true solution on which to build for the future is going to take the combined wisdom and experience of our spiritual forefathers. It won't be good enough to leave it to the giddy sentiments of pietistic liberalism.

*Arnold Rowntree
Barongarook, Vic*

Spreading the word

I am wondering if we are going to hear some reports of active and effective evangelism during our Assemblies this year. I had been reading about the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida. They started with 17 members and in 20 years grew to 6500. How did they achieve that? Every week some members went out to share the Good News with others. After all isn't that what we were told to do? Mark 16:15: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Paul said in Romans 10:15: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Perhaps we should be encouraging and teaching our members to do just that.

Many years ago I attended a week long L.I.F.E. (Lay Institute For Evangelism) seminar in the Presbyterian Church in Grange, Qld, and have found it very helpful and I believe our dear Lord has drawn many into His kingdom through that program.

*Phillip Storrs
Eumundi, Qld*

Truly confused

In his interview with Peter Hastie (AP, March), Dr Mohler refers to the "limitations" of "scientific method", that "realism" needs to be accepted "on the basis of some kind of non-scientific assumptions". Why does he categorise what is beyond current human understanding as automatically "non-scientific"?

Visiting Melbourne?

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The intellectual values that post-modern philosophical thought promotes are grounded in evidence-based inquiry. The early Christians who produced the New Testament believed the world was flat (a belief that was for a long time seen as a “non-scientific assumption”). Does a human consensus of subjective experience constitute “objective truth”? Was the world really flat two thousand years ago?

This leads us to another “non-scientific assumption”, that the collection of written texts called The Bible, is the “inerrant, infallible, and the objective written word of God”, that the essential “truths” have been safeguarded in the text by the invisible hand of God. What evidence is there of this “truth”, other than its own self-proclaiming? Oh, that’s right, this is a “non-scientific truth”, it transcends the need for evidence. Is this what is called “faith”?

By some strange fluke of coincidence, Christianity positions “man” as the centrepiece of existence. This is the fundamental flaw in this self centred epistemology, it elevates human perception to an “objective” level. It substitutes the requirement of evidence with “assumptions”.

Maybe I’m just trapped in the intellectual values of post-enlightenment “rational” methodology, blinded by prejudices, “human, all too human”, as a certain German philosopher might say ...

*Colin Young
Annandale, NSW*

Haven needed

The Sabian Mandaean Association appreciates your publishing John Clugston’s letter “Persecution in Australia” (AP, February) and the article by Barney Zwartz “Baptism of Fire” (AP, March). We are grateful for the sympathy and support which the innocent persecuted Madaeans (followers of John the Baptist) are receiving from Presbyterians and other Christians.

There are about 18 Mandaean families in detention, mostly women and children. Madaeans have fled in family groups as the severity of Islamist persecution has rendered it too unsafe to leave anyone behind.

As a result of the war in Iraq there has been a dramatic upsurge of Muslim hostility towards those whom Islam characterises as kaffir (“infidels, unbelievers”) and najes (“unclean”). This includes Jews, Christians and Madaeans.

The Pope recently warned of an impending “religious catastrophe” for Christians at the hands of Muslims in the Middle East. Given the sizeable Chaldean Catholic minority in Iraq, the Vatican is well-informed on these matters. As the smallest of the religious minorities and also the one having no external support the Madaeans are also the most vulnerable.

Under these circumstances, the Australian Government needs to be urged to grant protection and release from detention those who are fleeing the terror of Islam.

*Khosrow Chobaili, president
Sabean Mandaean Association, Sydney*

Less relevance, more worship

Can someone please explain exactly what is “contemporary worship”, something that is invading our churches on an alarming scale.

For all the years I can remember I have worshiped in Presbyterian Churches all over the eastern part of Australia and have been comforted by the uniformity of this worship. I thought that worship was worship until our churches began targeting “the young” and we began to have “contemporary worship”. It seemed that we (apparently) were boring the socks off “the young” with the same old message of salvation and God’s Grace and that “worship” needed jazzing up to make this mes-

sage “more relevant”.

Then, as everybody was so busy, we needed to compress all of our Christian activities – worship, fellowship, fun, teaching and anything else, into about an hour each Sunday. Is this “contemporary worship” or is it just another way of pleasing ourselves rather than learning how to please our great God.

For all of our targeting of special groups, the majority of our membership is ageing and our membership numbers are not increasing. This invasion of contemporary worship has alienated many faithful members who look back – perhaps wrongly – to days of reverence and awe in our churches, with the young being brought to church to learn of God’s greatness and love. If our church is going to continue on the path of pleasing ourselves, then we might as well amalgamate with every other modern Protestant church and forget our Reformed heritage.

Do not forget the story of the Prodigal Son who wanted more fun out of life so turned his back on the ordered, predictable life in his father’s house and went off to seek his pleasure in the world. Where did it land him? In the pigsty, hungry and soiled, and only too glad to return to all the love and order in his father’s house. Don’t let us go too far down the track of pleasing ourselves until it is nearly too late to turn back.

*Dorothy Posthuma
Toowoomba, Qld*

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prayer

MAY 2003

- 21 Montrose parish Hobart; (about 35 c&a – communicants and adherents), 10 yf (younger folk- Sunday School and youth) and 3 e (elders); vacant.
- 22 Moree parish, NW NSW, including Boomi, Garah and Poppinguy; with about 135 c&a, 15 yf and 7 e. Les and Shirley Fowler.
- 23 Robert and Leonie Betts APWM/WBT workers from Ashburton and Canterbury congregations, Melbourne, recently returned to Nairobi, Kenya, checking four Bible translations, and soon to relocate to Entebbe, Uganda.
- 24 Revesby parish, southern Sydney; with about 75 c&a, 20 yf and 6 e. Peter and Lynette Barnes.
- 25 Sunraysia (Mildura) home mission station NW Vic.; with about 40 c&a, 7 yf and 2 e where Mark Smith has recently taken over the work.
- 26 Narrandera home mission station, southern NSW; with about 35 c&a, 7 yf and 4 e. Alan and Jenny Horsburgh.
- 27 Alan and Faye Canavan APWM/WBT workers from Warburton, Vic, working on the Bwanabwana translation for northern PNG.
- 28 PWA, PWMU and other organizations catering to the special needs and ministries of women.
- 29 Mt Evelyn parish Melbourne; with about 40 c&a, 15 yf and 5 e. Mark and Linda Crabb.
- 30 Students and staff of the Presbyterian Theological College, Box Hill, Melbourne; Douglas Milne principal.
- 31 Carmel church, The Gap, western Brisbane; with about 70 c&a, 30 yf and 5 e. David and Diana Niven.

JUNE

- 1 Presbytery of Sydney; 23 parishes and

- 2 home mission station with some 3500 communicants and adherents; 2 deaconesses, 1 school and 1 hospital chaplains, 3 theological teachers, 1 minister to the deaf, 1 director of youth training, 5 retired ministers, 11 under jurisdiction and 5 theological candidates; Robert McKean clerk.
- 2 Kiama parish south of Sydney, including Jamberoo, with about 130 c&a, 20 yf and 7 e. Noel and Fleur Creighton.
- 3 The 23 million people of Iraq and effective and just post-war reconstruction; the 350,000 Christians, mainly Roman Catholic and Orthodox.
- 4 Epping-Lalor parish northern Melbourne; with about 45 c&a, 15 yf and 8 e. Tony Parle, recently inducted, and Joyce.
- 5 The newly formed Grace Presbyterian Church, New Zealand, linking evangelical congregations, and the work of Grace Theological College, Andrew Young principal.
- 6 West Wyalong parish, western NSW, including Barmedman, Mahda, Tallimba and Weethalle; with about 145 c&a, 30 yf and 11 e. Lance and Daphne Jackson.
- 7 Graham and Sue Single APWM/WEC workers from Epping, Sydney, serving in Spain in drug rehabilitation ministry.
- 8 The men and women of our police forces and the work among them of Police Chaplains such as Sally Oates (Qld), Adrian Van Ash, Tony Lang, David Robson, Derek Bullen, Angus Ewin (NSW) Dallas Clarnette, Gerald Vanderwert, Chris Siriweera and Peter Owen (Vic).
- 9 Essendon District parish western Melbourne; with about 60 c&a, 30 yf and 4 e. Paul and Gaylene Ridgewell.
- 10 The two vacant home mission stations of Tumut and Tumbarumba, southern NSW; the former with about 75 c&a, 6 yf and 4 e and the latter (including Roewood and Toona) with about 135 c&a, and 4 yf.
- 11 Alex and Sybil Shaw since 1969 APWM / Language Recordings workers from Epping, Sydney with varied roles including training recordists, recording in new languages and distributing recorded Christian messages.
- 12 Presbytery of Western Australia; 5 parishes and 5 home mission stations with about 885 communicants and adherents; 2 missionaries, 1 retired minister, 4 under jurisdiction, 2 theological candidates; James Nocher clerk.
- 13 Monto home mission station, Qld, including Abercorn; with about 70 c&a, 45 yf and 6 e. Elton and Glenda Wiltshire.
- 14 Reformed College of Ministries, Brisbane with 60 students (14 full time, 7 ministerial candidates) with campuses at St Lucia (UQ) and Ann St., and courses at Buderim and Toowoomba. Ian McIver principal.
- 15 Dennis and Glenys Tranter APWM / Australian Indigenous Ministries workers from Frankston, Vic. serving at Borroloola, NT.
- 16 Praise God for 90 years of ministry of the PIM (formerly AIM) and the response to the recent open day at Bacchus Marsh and thanksgiving service in Scots Church Melbourne.
- 17 Sandy Wade-Ferrell APWM / OMF worker from Epping, Sydney who recently returned to her English teaching ministry in East Asia.
- 18 The newly established Ashtonfield special charge near Maitland, NSW; with about 15 c&a. Russell and Liana Vandervelden.
- 19 Peace church Deception Bay, northern Brisbane with about 85 c&a, 40 yf and 6 e. John and Deanne Gilmour.
- 20 Presbytery of Central Queensland; 6 parishes and 1 home mission station totalling 21 congregations with 820 communicants and adherents; 2 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction, 2 theological candidates; Charles Kennedy clerk.

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Books

What Saint Paul Really Said

Tom Wright

Lion: London, 1997.

Reviewed by Paul Morris

Any Bible-believing Christian will be put on their guard by the title of this book – and that’s where they should stay. Any author who claims to have key insights into the mind of the apostle Paul, which the rest of the church has apparently missed over 2000 years, is to be approached with caution.

So why do evangelicals take any notice of him? After all, plenty of liberals write in such a vein and are generally ignored, their writings gathering dust on the shelves of second-hand bookshops. But Tom Wright comes from an evangelical stable, is an interesting writer, intellectually challenging and says many things with which evangelicals concur. The fact that he also expresses ideas which alarm evangelicals is our reason for caution.

His concern in this small volume, a potted version of his thoughts on Paul, is firstly to set Paul in his day so as to better understand his attitude to the Mosaic Law and then to present a doctrine of justification which does not include imputed righteousness.

Second, he argues that the core of the Gospel is the messianic kingship of Jesus, the divine Son of God, over the whole universe, so that Christian profession is defined by the confession “Jesus is Lord” and the experience of believers centres on the resurrection life of Jesus in true worship, true humanness, holiness, love and mission. The cultural mandate for the church is also given strong emphasis, and ecumenism is promoted. All of which is something of a curate’s egg.

The fatal flaws are to understand Paul’s personal history primarily from Jewish background studies rather than his own words about himself, to fail to discern that Paul uses similar words to describe two different things – the fact that God is righteous and that He gives a righteousness to believers, and to assert that the expression ‘God’s righteousness’ is a way of referring to God’s faithfulness.

This book is of value if you want an easy way to get to grips with the thinking

of an influential and prolific writer, but on the basis of the dictum that the doctrine of justification by faith (as understood traditionally) is the mark of a standing or falling church this is a book which effectively encourages you on a downward path. More reliable and equally readable guides to the thought of Paul are available, which are both thought-provoking and heart-warming and will keep readers on the straight and narrow.

Paul Morris is Australian director of Christian Witness to Israel.

Jesus Christ or Mohammed?

F. S. Coplestone

Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Those who face the fact that Jesus Christ and Mohammed were saying very different things are likely to be regarded as intolerant these days. This little book, of just over 150 pages, faces that fact, and provides a helpful summary of the claims of Christ compared to those of Mohammed. The tragedy is that Muslims hear so little of the true Christ. They even believe that Christ prophesied the coming of Mohammed!

Coplestone does hold to the view that Christ was crucified on the Wednesday, not Friday. Of more significance is his Arminianism. He criticises the Islamic view of God’s sovereignty in a way which makes it clear that he himself does not hold to Reformed truth. For all that, this is a work that many Christians and seekers should be glad is in print.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

The Westminster Larger Catechism A Commentary

Johannes G. Vos

Phillipsburg: P+R, 2002

Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

What gifts of grace Dr. Geerhardus Vos and his son Dr. Johannes G. Vos were and are to the Christian Church! How wonderful to have in book form (at long last!) the famous series of studies the ‘younger’ Dr Vos contributed over three years to the

Blue Banner Faith and Life, the magazine of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. There is so much thought-provoking classic Reformed theology in this book it is mind-boggling!

The Larger Catechism “supplements the Shorter Catechism on such topics as the church and the means of grace”. It is very hard to see that any Christian would not get a great deal of serious spiritual help and guidance from this book, let alone the benefits gained from using it for sermon and bible study preparation. It is highly recommended.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of South Yarra Presbyterian Church, Vic.

Forgiving Hitler The Story of Kathy Diosy as told to Kel Richards

Kel Richards

Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2002

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Kitty Kalafoni, later known as Kathy Diosy, is a Hungarian Jewess who managed to survive the Nazi Holocaust. Hers is a terrible story of brutality and barbarity – Hitler was Attila the Hun in a tank. After many narrow escapes from death, Kitty was finally able to make her way to Australia after the war, and more than that, she was led to saving faith in Christ. With Kel Richards’ expert help, Kitty tells the story well, without exaggeration or melodrama. The result is fascinating to read.

I warmly commend the book, but have two main criticisms. First, the later chapters which deal with Kitty’s conversion are short compared to the earlier ones which deal with her escapes. So the book finishes with something of a rush. Second, *Forgiving Hitler* is, in Philip Jensen’s view, “about as obscene a title as one could imagine”. I do not think it is obscene – after all, brutal and idolatrous Manasseh was converted in 2 Chronicles 33 – but it is lacking in reality. Christianly speaking, it is not Kitty’s duty to forgive Hitler. It is her duty not to be consumed with bitterness, and to leave vengeance to God. For Kitty to profess forgiveness for Hitler, when God has not done so, is somewhat presumptuous. Christian forgiveness does not set aside the claims of justice.

But, those two squawks aside, I would hope this book is widely read. It is a most moving work.

A perilous philosophy

Ethics can never be just a numbers game.

In a senate hearing room, Christopher Reeve is testifying in support of embryonic stem-cell research. Sitting in his wheelchair, breathing with a ventilator, the former star of *Superman* films makes a sympathetic figure. And then someone raises an uncomfortable question: Is it ethical to take a life to save a life? Embryonic stem-cell research does, after all, destroy human embryos.

Reeve counters: "I thought it was the job of the government to do the greatest good for the greatest number." Senators and reporters nod in agreement.

Obviously, they didn't get it. If the government really embraced "the greatest good for the greatest number", Reeve himself might be dead. After all, Reeve's therapies, his doctors, his aides, and his motorised wheelchair cost millions – money that could, instead, fund basic medical care for hundreds of poor children.

Of course, Reeve can afford to pay for all of this himself – a fortunate fact should the government take his "greatest good" advice. But he's still asking taxpayers to spend millions on research to treat spinal cord injuries. Given that vastly more Americans need immunisations than a cure for paralysis, wouldn't a "greatest good" policy mean spending scarce research funds on immunisations instead of paralysis research?

I've used this vignette in speeches, and to my shock, I've found that even Christians nod in agreement with Reeve's reasoning – until I explain just where this thinking leads. Have we all unthinkingly become practical utilitarians?

Reeve is echoing the arguments of Australian philosopher Peter Singer who has a chair at Princeton University. Singer is the quintessential moral utilitarian. He believes morality cannot be judged by any transcendent standard. Instead, he suggests we ask whether a particular action will increase the world's sum total of happiness.

For example, Singer believes parents should, instead of spending money on lifesaving surgery for their child, send the money to save a hundred African children



Charles Colson

from starvation; doing so would increase the world's total amount of happiness. Singer scorns traditional teachings about the sanctity of human life, believing that some people – encephalitic babies, for example – are not actually "persons". He argues that parents should be allowed to kill their handicapped newborns (a healthy replacement baby would live a

If the government really embraced "the greatest good for the greatest number", Reeve himself might be dead.

happier life), and favours euthanasia for sick and elderly people who have lost the basic capacity for mental functioning and who create a burden on others.

This is the "greatest good" philosophy that Christopher

Reeve espouses. I wonder if he knows that Singer, on his first day at Princeton, was greeted by protesters from Not Dead Yet, a group of people who – like Reeve – are wheelchair-bound. Unlike Reeve, they understand exactly where Singer's teaching leads: euthanasia for those considered burdens on society.

His philosophy also leads to absurdity. Rejecting the uniqueness of human life, Singer claims that drawing distinctions between humans and animals is "speciesism." So – quite logically – he professes to find nothing morally objectionable about bestiality (sex with animals), a view that shocks even non-Christians. (When my colleague Nigel Cameron pressed him in a recent debate on the question of the animal's consent, it put Singer on the defensive.)

In utilitarianism, we encounter a philosophy dramatically at odds with Christianity. The Scriptures teach that God created humans in his own image, giving each a unique moral character.

Christianity, as Mother Teresa used to say, is anti-statistical. Every human, at every stage in life, has intrinsic, not merely instrumental, worth.

This means it's never right to create and then kill one person to find a cure for another. Of course, we all want to see loved ones relieved of their suffering. But it shows what we're up against when even many Christians fail to grasp the implications of practical utilitarianism.

In one sense, we can be grateful for Peter Singer. He does what Francis Schaeffer urged us to make secularists do – that is, take their reasonable-sounding philosophies and carry them to their logical and often preposterous conclusions. I've discovered that this tactic is the best way to penetrate the postmodern fog. If biblical revelation is true, any proposition that is inconsistent with it can be shown to be irrational.

Life and death issues like stem-cell research won't go away. If we don't make the case against utilitarianism, policies that today make most of us recoil may one day, as our moral sensibilities become anaesthetised, elicit nothing more than a shrug. And then, as the philosophy of "the greatest good for the greatest number" takes hold, the Christopher Reeves of the world will be in peril – and so will the rest of us.

This article is reprinted from Christianity Today, February 2003.

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