

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

JULY 2010

A woman wearing a yellow headscarf and a red patterned garment is holding a book with intricate Arabic calligraphy on its cover. Her eyes are visible through the opening of the headscarf, looking directly at the camera.

Islam's impact

The challenge to the church

MARK DURIE | FLAWED HYPOTHESIS | YOU'RE EXPECTED

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E D I T O R I A L

Whether we realise it or not, one of the world's great religions, Islam, is on the move in Australia.

The 2006 Census says Islam is Australia's third biggest religion with 350,000. But, given the reluctance of many Muslims to identify as such to officials, the real figure is probably half a million, making Islam bigger than Buddhism. It is growing rapidly through higher levels of immigration as well as a higher than average birthrate and successful conversion programs. The spread of Muslim schools is an indication of Islam's strength and its plans to become a dominant cultural force.

Interestingly, Islam's influence on Australian culture is spreading not only through the opening of new schools but also through a concerted push in the area of curriculum development. The Australian Curriculum Studies Association, which is a secular group, has recently published a book about Islam called, *Learning from One Another: Bringing Islamic Perspectives into Australian Schools*. Their aim is to promote positive regard for Muslims and Islam in schools. They want young Australians to develop an appreciation for Muslim history, particularly with respect to Australia. One senses where this may be headed when Osman Karolia, principal of Sydney's Arkana School, claims that Muslims arrived in Australia in the 14/1500s and began engaging with indigenous communities long before white Europeans. As an aside, it is noteworthy that a secular educational association has seen fit to promote a minority religious perspective which is opposed to Western culture and Christianity and wants to see it taught in schools across Australia.

Christians, especially, need to be aware of what is happening on the religious front in Australia. The way that Islam has responded previously to other cultures with different religious worldviews cannot be ignored. The church needs to understand the challenge it faces and find courage to state its convictions, even if it means suffering. We must rediscover the hope of the gospel and the passion of evangelists in earlier ages like Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull in their efforts to lead Muslims to know God's grace. In the Middle East today, especially in Iran and Algeria, many Muslims have found consolation in Christ. We pray for the same in Australia.

Peter Hastie 



Know your place

CLASSICAL ISLAM DEMANDS NON-MUSLIMS CONVERT, SURRENDER – OR DIE.

Dr Mark Durie is a theologian, human rights activist and pastor of an Anglican church, St Mary's Caulfield, in Melbourne. He has published many articles and books on the language and culture of the Acehnese, Christian-Muslim relations and religious freedom. He holds a PhD in linguistics from the Australian National University. He is also a graduate in theology from Ridley College, Melbourne. He has held visiting appointments at the University of Leiden, MIT, UCLA and Stanford, and was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1992. He writes regularly on matters of comparative theology. He has recently published *The Third Choice*, which has been nominated for the best Christian book of 2010. *The Third Choice* provides essential information about the basic beliefs and practices of Islam, the life and role of Mohammed, the history of the doctrine of the "dhimma" and how surrendering to the claims and demands of Islam profoundly affects a society. He spoke recently with Peter Hastie in Melbourne.

Mark, can you tell us how you first became interested in Islam?

This happened during the early 1980s when I was doing a PhD in linguistics at the ANU in Canberra. Part of my doctoral work involved doing a long period of field study living in an Acehnese village. The people of Aceh consider themselves to be very Islamic, so Islam gives them an important sense of their identity in their culture. This is when I first began to



Mark Durie
talks to
Peter Hastie

engage with Islam. Of course, my intentions there were not to study the religion; I was there to study the language. However, in studying the language of Aceh, it was inevitable that I would learn about Islam. After I completed my studies in the early '80s, I worked in the Department of Linguistics at Melbourne University. I really didn't think much about Islam after that until the terrible events of 9/11.

Did you think a lot about Islamic theology during your time in Aceh?

Yes, I did. The whole notion of Islamic jihad has played a big part in Aceh's history. During the Dutch occupation of Aceh, the Acehnese would often kill a Dutch person as an act of holy war. This led me to study how the Acehnese used the verses of the Qur'an that related to the hope of martyrdom and the theology of dying as a martyr. I learnt that Muslims have a duty of resistance if their country is occupied by non-Muslims. They have a personal obligation to fight. When I heard about 9/11, I was not surprised to find that some of the hijackers were carrying the same verses from the Qur'an in their backpacks.

Exactly what did you learn about Islamic jihad in Aceh?

I learnt that the hope of paradise and the desire to die as a martyr was a major

theme in Islamic theology. In the Acehnese language there is a distinction between a verb that describes what you do intentionally and something that is not intentional. So, "to walk" is intentional but "to fall" is not intentional. The word "die" is not intentional, but if you use it intentionally in Acehnese it can mean to die as a martyr. When I was constructing a grammar of the Acehnese language, I referred to the semantics of intentional death, to martyrdom. Signaling intentionality has a significant effect on the meaning of death for the Acehnese. It meant dying for Islam.

As I was reflecting on this after 9/11, I realised that I really needed to engage with Islam. After this, my research led me to study the Qur'an in detail and to read many of the traditions relating to Mohammed, including the classical biography by Ibn Ishaq. I devoted months and months to studying fundamental Islamic teaching about notions of holy war and martyrdom. My training as a researcher led me to the original sources. I discounted second and third hand reports.

The result of my studies was that I realised people in the West would find Islam very hard to understand and accept. I also came to the conclusion that I had a responsibility to explain the true nature of Islam to Christians and the wider community. The world needed to wake up to what was happening.

How does your book, *The Third Choice*, explain what is going on in Islam?

One of the hardest things for people to understand about Islam is that it imagines or envisages a world where Muslims are separate from and superior to non-Muslims. Islam is not based on the reciprocity or equality of all people. It is based on the equality and superiority of Muslims and the inferiority of everyone else. Islamic theology teaches that when you become a Muslim, you become a superior person. If you are living as a non-Muslim under Islamic rule, you are held in an inferior position. When I saw this clearly, I realised that I had a duty to explain to people why some Muslims think that they have a right to dominate the world.

Would it have been possible to have written your book apart from living in a Muslim culture?

My experience in Aceh had a significant impact on me. I saw firsthand what it was like for Christians to live in a majority Muslim environment. The Muslims in Aceh were reasonably tolerant, but churches were burnt from time to time. Nevertheless, it wasn't as extreme a situation as in Pakistan. However, some Christians were killed and Christian teachers in Aceh experienced a lot of discrimination and pressure to convert.

The church experienced difficult relations with the government. For example, church communities found it very hard to build a church. In one city they only let them build a place to worship over the water. They wouldn't let them have any land. In Banda Aceh a church was burned down and then the government refused to give them permission to rebuild. I saw those things firsthand.

As I studied Islam deeper I saw these forms of oppression as the natural and logical result of Islamic theology. The reason I wrote my book was to show how these social outcomes arise from the underlying teachings of Islam. My book does two things: first, it speaks about what it means to surrender to Islam and become a Muslim. I try to explain what a person buys into. I think that needs to be understood. People often have a simplistic view of Islamic conversion. It sounds so easy. Essentially you just need to say that there is no god but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet. However, to understand what that means is a huge project. My great concern is that a lot of people today are converting to Islam and they have no

idea where it will lead them.

The second thing I try to do is to explain what it means to live under Islamic rule if you are not a Muslim. This is a subject that can be very counter-intuitive. If you are coming from a Western secular mindset, then ideas of reciprocity and equality are second nature to you. So the Islamic worldview



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will not make sense. In the book I try to explain from the ground up how Islamic theology developed and then trace those ideas through to how they are influencing us today.

Is your approach to Islam any different from politicians or social commentators? Do you have any additional insights to offer?

There is a widespread view in the secular West today that religion is irrelevant to public life. People do not regard it as a fundamental motivation for human behaviour. I was speaking with a political advisor in Washington D.C. and he said, "Look, basically wars and conflicts are usually over land, money, resources or something like that". He couldn't see that religious ideology was a profound force which shapes world events. This man was a graduate in politics, but he had little understanding of religion. He shared the common view that religion is essentially a personal experience that is irrelevant to public affairs. Many people share this view. They think that religion is simply the product of our awareness of right and wrong, and that we somehow all share the same basic moral ideals.

I often hear people say that we really all believe the same thing and that no religion would ever support violence because it is incompatible with fundamental human values. This mindset is powerfully embedded in the thinking of highly intelligent people who have grown up thinking that religion is a private matter that is not relevant to public life. I have been to security conferences where people will go on and on about security and terrorism but they always stop short of saying that religion is the issue. In my judgment, we have a fundamental illiteracy about religious faith and the power of spiritual ideology in the West today.

One of the difficulties we encounter in trying to understand the relationship



Culture versus Cross-Culture

DR BRUCE WINTER – 1 CORINTHIANS IN A WEEKEND

30 July – 1 August at Ashfield Presbyterian Church

FRIDAY 30 JULY

7:30pm "The Cult of Christian Leadership: the Trojan Horse Within the Church" (1 Corinthians 1-4)

SATURDAY 31 JULY

8:30am "Taming the Beast Within: On Becoming a Christian Gladiator" Men's Breakfast – only 70 places. *Reply to Bill McLaren by 24 July at wm.accounts@reformers.com.au*

3:00pm "The Sex, Love and the Marriage Muddle in a Promiscuous Era" (1 Corinthians 5; 6:9-7:40)

4:30pm "My Right to My Life versus My Productive Lifestyle: How to Join the 30, 60, 100 Club of Jesus" (1 Corinthians 8:1-11)

7:30pm "Chaos in the Christian Church: The Dysfunctional Family of God Begins Again" (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 11-14)

SUNDAY 1 AUGUST · HOW TO ELIMINATE THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF CORINTH'S AND OUR PROBLEMS

9:00/10:15am "The Insurrection of the Body: How to Have a Good Death" (1 Corinthians 15)

6:00pm "The Resolution of Conflict in the Church" (1 Corinthians 16)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

see www.ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au or contact Peter Hastie on 9798 6572

between faith and behaviour is that human beings don't always act according to their ideology. For instance, believers can ignore what is in their religious book; in fact, they can sometimes do the opposite. In my book I use the image of a ship and its compass. Every now and again people look at the compass and direct the ship back on course. This doesn't mean that they will always follow their compass, their religious texts. Nevertheless there are times when peoples' devotion to God grows and they feel the need to institute a spiritual program of renewal. These renewals can have a powerful effect on the social order. Think of the social effects of the Reformation in countries like Holland which have a long history of Bible teaching through catechisms. The Dutch learnt the Ten Commandments from these catechisms. When children were taught "do not lie", this changed culture. It made it easier to do business because the culture has a mindset that makes people trusting and trustworthy.

The basic aim of my book is to challenge people to think about Islam in ways other than secular categories. I get tired of commentators who say that terrorism is due to poverty. How do they explain that the 9/11 bombers were university graduates and came from the more privileged parts of Saudi society? Islamic terrorists are usually not very poor people. The problem is that too many people today have bought into the line of Marxism that religion's only function is to distract you from the political and class struggle that is taking place. If you believe that then you ignore faith and can't understand it.

Why does the heart of your book examine how Muslims treat non-Muslims?

One of the main ideological distinctives of Islam is the dogma of Muslim superiority. Muslims believe that righteous people are superior to others and therefore those who follow Mohammed are superior to everyone else. The Qur'an is full of winners and losers. It is always talking about who the best people are. There is a verse in the Qur'an that says, "You are the best people that have been raised up for Allah, and you instruct and command what is right and you forbid what is wrong." This doctrine of the superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims is hard for people in an egalitarian society to understand, but it is the key to a lot of

the conflict and injustice in the world today.

This doctrine of Muslim superiority has two major pernicious effects. First, it is absolutely soul-destroying for Christians and other non-Muslims who are presently living under Islamic rule. Witness the treatment of the Copts in Egypt. Second, where Muslims are not the dominant religion in a society some of them are nevertheless struggling to make Islam dominant. This inevitably creates conflict and gives rise to jihad as they try to make non-Muslims surrender to the claims of Islam. It is



THERE IS A WIDESPREAD VIEW IN THE SECULAR WEST TODAY THAT RELIGION IS IRRELEVANT TO PUBLIC LIFE. PEOPLE DO NOT REGARD IT AS A FUNDAMENTAL MOTIVATION FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOUR.

this Islamic doctrine of the superiority of Muslims that produces so much conflict and injustice in the world. We ignore it to our peril.

Why do you call your book *The Third Choice*?

I thought a long time about this. A title is important. Essentially, Islam offers people three choices. The first is to convert to Islam, the second is to fight (the sword), and the third is to surrender to Islamic rule. Sometimes it is put in the other order: convert, surrender or fight. Several years ago the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia made a suggestive comment in response to Pope Benedict when the Pope had implied that Islam had been spread by force. The Mufti was saying in effect, "No, Islam was not spread by force because they had another choice."

Frankly, I thought this was an extraordinary statement. Here was one of Islam's most senior clerics saying that Islam's defense against the accusation

that it is spread by force rests on the claim that people have the option to surrender and live under Islamic rule. So I thought that if I called the book *The Third Choice*, people would ask, "Well, what are the first two choices?" The word "choice" is important because from an Islamic perspective the people who surrender have actually chosen that state. In Muslim eyes they have entered into it voluntarily. This raises the whole issue of what we mean by "choice". Is it really a genuine choice, or is it coercion? Is it force or tolerance to give the three choices? I wanted to raise all those questions in the mind of the reader.

Why do non-Muslims have such difficulty understanding "dhimmitude" or surrender to Islam?

It is hard for people today to understand a worldview that is based completely on non-reciprocity. Another problem is that the subject itself is shrouded in denial. Much of the information is presented in misleading ways. In fact, there is a lot of deception about the subject. For example, Colin Chapman's book, *Cross and Crescent*, presents a description of non-Muslim surrender that is quite false. He describes the dhimmi tax that non-Muslims had to pay each year to Muslim authorities as an exemption from military service and from paying the Muslims' alms tax, the *zakat*.

Why would he do that?

Chapman has relied on what others have said, and has apparently not studied the original sources for himself. Another possible reason is that he wants to promote love for Muslims, and he doesn't want to present information that is too confrontational.

Does this explain why he has recently attacked Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, who has been warning Christians against a superficial understanding of Islam?

Yes it does. He is opposed to Dr Sookhdeo's whole approach. Colin Chapman has been a key person in the UK churches to block critical engagement with Islam. He has trained a lot of people along these lines.

Some years ago I met with a group of church leaders in the UK and considered the possibility of doing a conference there. When I spoke to them they shared two perspectives with me. One was, "Yes, there are some bad things in Islam

but ordinary Christians don't need to know about it because it will only arouse fear and dislike of Muslims". The other was, "If we are critical of Islam and they attack us, it will be our fault." These leaders had been schooled to believe that ignorance and silence are better for good relations. They somehow felt as though they must be guilty of the complaints that Muslims could make against them.

Colin Chapman has been a mover and shaker in a movement which has muzzled the UK church. The reality of dhimmitude is distressing. Of course, if you are trying to promote positive regard for Muslims and for Islam, material on dhimmitude will be regarded as negative. Chapman's approach is to censor it. He was too uncritical in accepting the revisionist narrative.

There are other reasons why people have not been completely forthright about the nature of dhimmitude. In the 19th century some people used the mythology that Islam was a benevolent religion as a stick with which to beat the church and to oppose the influence of Christendom in Europe.

People need to understand the reality of the dhimma pact: "you have three choices – convert, fight to the death, or surrender". It is true that you do have the third choice of surrender, but the conditions of the surrender were fixed by Islamic law. Included in it was the payment of an annual tax which, from the point of view of Muslim theologians, was the purchase of your blood. If you surrender to Islam and pay the tax you are effectively buying back your life for another year. The jizya or dhimmi tax is traditionally paid to local Muslim authorities. It is a protection tax. It has some parallels to the protection money that people pay to the mafia to secure their safety. If you don't pay the tax or don't obey all the rules of a system which binds you to a condition of submission and inferiority, then your life can be taken.

Is the dhimmi tax paid in all Islamic countries?

No, it is not official practice anywhere, though there are some who want to bring it back. But the dhimmi laws remain. The way things work in Egypt, for example, is that there is no jizya tax, but there are laws and regulations which come from the dhimmi pact. For example, if a church tries to extend its buildings without permission, then that is illegal. Basically

this is because it would be a breach of the pact. Sometimes people have been killed because a local Christian church has done renovations. Another pact violation is illicit sexual relations. For example, if a Muslim girl is rumoured to have had a relationship with a non-Muslim boy, this is a pact violation, and can trigger retribution against the community. Several Christians were killed in Nag Hammadi earlier this year because of a rumour of such a relationship.

People just don't seem to understand that a dhimmi has to keep all the rules of dhimmitude; otherwise you lose your right to life. So non-Muslims live under this constant threat. I explain it all in



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detail in my book. I went through dozens of Islamic commentaries to be absolutely sure that what I was describing wasn't just cherry-picking Islamic texts to make Islam seem worse than it is. I focused on the core teaching of the commentaries down through the centuries.

In my book I use a story to try and explain the dhimmi tax. Imagine if the Normans, when they conquered England in 1066, forced all the Anglo-Saxons who surrendered to pay a tax and undergo a ritual similar to being stabbed in the heart. Then every year on every village green the Anglo-Saxons underwent this ritual to remind them of their defeat and their need to buy back their life for another year. Imagine that this has been going on since 1066. Do you know, it would need to go on for another 300 years before we reach the situation that applied in Morocco up until the 20th century, where the Jews

had to buy back their blood every year for thirteen centuries? This ritual is well documented, and was witnessed repeatedly by visitors to Morocco. Every year Jewish men were lined up in the public square and were required to pay the tax. They were struck on the head as a sign that their head was forfeit if they broke any of the conditions of the dhimma. Now the radical Islamists want this sort of thing brought back.

When Muslim scholars speak to us about how tolerant Islam is, we don't realise that Islamic tolerance meant allowing people to live for another year. Most people in the West find this very difficult to understand. Their usual response to this information is, "Please don't trouble me with these facts unless you can give me a solution". My response is, "You need to know the truth first and only then can you arrive at a solution. You will never find a solution if you don't recognise the facts". We have become very comfortable and lazy in the West; we don't want to know about problems we can't solve.

Some commentators in the West, such as Bernard Lewis, suggest that surrender to Islam isn't as bad as it seems. Is Lewis painting a fair picture?

No, he isn't. Lewis said that the Muslim attitude to non-Muslims is basically that of the dominator to the conquered. He also said that this relationship had no theological basis. He was completely wrong about this. It is a total puzzle to me why such a brilliant scholar could have gotten something so wrong. I suspect that it has to do with a romantic view about the Islamic past. It may also have something to do with his desire not to paint Christianity in too positive a light. Perhaps in the back of his mind he was making a comparison with the treatment of Jews in medieval Christian Europe.

Is Lewis a Muslim?

No, he is a Jew. In a sense he defends Islam while criticising it at the same time. He faced a pressure which I am familiar with as a former academic. If you are a scholar and you are too critical of Islam, then doors will close for you. I know what it is like to be an academic, needing access to libraries and fieldwork in another culture. These doors will close if you are too critical of Islam. If I applied to do field work in Aceh today, I wouldn't get permission and I wouldn't expect to

either, because of my writings on Islam. It is difficult for scholars to maintain their freedom to do research while also being critical of Islam.

In some ways Bernard Lewis is in the position of a dhimmi himself because when he criticises Islam, he praises it at the same time. He glosses over important facts about the dhimmi system which he did not explore or even report in his book, *The Jews of Islam*. I find this disturbing. He doesn't seem to have really studied the Qur'an thoroughly or the life of Mohammed from a theological point of view. He used the bits he needed. My impression is that he has not gone through the primary source documents systematically. He underestimated the importance of theology. His writings on this subject have misled many.

What happens in a society where people continually give way to the demands of Muslims? Is peaceful coexistence a possibility?

If people accept the idea that Muslims are superior and non-Muslims are inferior, they will constantly privilege Islam over against other religions and ideologies. This will result in the Islamisation of knowledge and transform our understanding of history. Slowly but surely our identity will be conformed to an Islamic view.

Do you see us going in this direction in Australia society?

Yes, people in Australia are capitulating to Islamic demands in certain areas. This trend is even more pronounced in the UK and USA. A recent media report said that prisoners are converting to Islam in British jails because they enjoy better conditions as Muslims. The TV show *South Park* recently decided not to run a show that mocked Mohammed. However, it is happy to run shows that mock Jesus. This sends out a powerful message that criticising Islam is a "no go" area. Nowadays we see references in newspapers to "the Prophet Mohammed". Do you see similar references to "Jesus the Messiah"?

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association, which is a secular group, has recently published a book about Islam in the school curriculum. The association was working with a group from Melbourne University. Their aim is to promote positive regard for Muslims, and for Islam, in schools. They call this

"an appreciation for Muslim history". If young Australians are taught to look at history through Islamic eyes, one of the problems we are going to face in the future is that the rising generation will have an Islamic view of history and of the past. They may have a strong sense of guilt for the crusades, but there will be no mention of the horrors of Islamic conquest. The dhimmi system will be referred to in reasonable-sounding terms and children will be told that it was good for non-Muslims to live under Islamic rule.

The whole project will work to soften up the Australian community for an ideological takeover. It is called *Learning from One Another: Bringing Islamic*



THE JIZYA TAX IS A PROTECTION TAX. IT HAS SOME PARALLELS TO THE PROTECTION MONEY THAT PEOPLE PAY TO THE MAFIA TO SECURE THEIR SAFETY.

Perspectives into Australian Schools. What I find astounding is that ACSA is a secular group, yet, it is promoting a religious perspective which it wants to see in all schools across Australia. I am not aware that there is any secular group promoting Christianity. In this sense, Islam is being privileged in our schools.

How far advanced are we in Australia towards accepting Islam?

I think there is more resistance here in Australia to Islamisation than in many other countries. For instance, in the US leaders seem to be more open to an Islamic world view. After the Fort Hood massacre last year, there was an obvious inability in the media to analyse or expose the motivation of Major Hasan, who committed the murders. This is intriguing, especially in view of the fact that Major Hasan gave a seminar to military leaders the year before explaining why a Muslim could feel a need to kill fellow soldiers in certain situations. Many in the media refused to

engage with that. Even President Obama made the statement, "We cannot fully know what leads a man to do such a thing".

In fact we can know and we do know. The truth is it was very clear why Major Hasan murdered 13 other military personnel. In his PowerPoint presentation he gave a slide-by-slide, point-for-point, detailed explanation from the Qur'an of why such killings can happen.

Fortunately, in Australia journalists have been more open to acknowledge the theological component in the thinking of people who have attempted these kinds of violent acts. We have also had senior politicians who have been forthright about these matters. I feel more hopeful about Australia than the USA or Europe.

Nevertheless, recently we have had Simon Crean, a Labor Minister, calling on the government to support Sharia finance, which is a form of Islamisation. Also, Australian universities are setting up centres funded from the Middle East. With funding comes influence. Even the Australian Catholic University has set up a chair of Islamic studies funded by the Turkish community. There is not enough independence among Australian academics who work in Islamic studies.

Is there any special significance in the present race to develop nuclear weapons in Muslim countries like Iran and Pakistan? Is it possible that nuclear weapons may be used as a means to advance Islam worldwide?

Let me speak theologically. The Qur'an says that Muslims should amass every means of force they can to advance jihad. According to this logic, pious Muslims should see it as their responsibility to be as well armed as possible. This is what the Qur'an teaches. Of course, not every Muslim thinks like that, but it is part of Islamic theology. The Qur'an says to "make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war to strike terror into the (hearts of the) Enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides, whom you may not know". This is saying that Muslims have to possess the means of power. The Iranian leadership surely sees itself as following the compass of the Qur'an.

Middle Eastern cultures venerate the strong man and symbols of power. It is certainly a sign of power to possess these kinds of weapons. What will happen

when Iran acquires a nuclear bomb is that it will gain a lot of prestige and leverage. Iran may not dare to use it, but it will undoubtedly become more aggressive in other ways. I imagine the Iranians will step up their program of taking over Lebanon and they will certainly extend their influence in Iraq through the Shiite militias. The behaviour of North Korea towards South Korea gives us some idea of how the situation will play out. The North Koreans were apparently responsible for sinking a South Korean ship recently. They only did that because they possess nuclear weapons. This makes others afraid of them, and so they experiment with throwing their weight around. It is destabilising. The same thing is likely to happen in the Middle East if Iran gets the bomb.

Is the god of Islam the same God that we discover in the Judeo-Christian tradition?

Islam says that it is the same God. Islam says that Abraham was Muslim. In fact, the Qur'an refers to the religion of Abraham as Islam. When Muslims speak about Abrahamic faith this can entail that Jews and Christians have lost their way. They believe that if we come back to the religion of Abraham we will embrace Islam. However, Allah of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible are quite different. They have very different personalities, different plans for the world, and they have different concepts of right and wrong.

They also teach a very different Jesus. According to Muhammad, the Jesus of Islam is going to destroy all religions except for Islam when he returns. Indeed, the Jesus of the Qur'an was a prophet who commended violence and will one day impose Islam with the sword. Islam demands that its view is the correct one, but the New Testament reveals an entirely different Jesus.

When prominent Christians like Rick Warren use the Muslim name for Jesus, Isa, they want to show that they are tolerant. They think they are finding common ground, but to speak of Jesus in this way is to accept the claim that Islam shares the same fundamentals as Christianity. This is untrue. We should not give the Christian gospel a Muslim face just for the sake of sounding friendly and welcoming.

Do Muslims have a plan to make Australia Islamic?

There are some Muslim groups which plan to convert Australia, and other countries too. For example the Muslim Brotherhood developed a strategic plan, in writing, to establish Islam in the United States. Part of their plan was based on deception.

Is it all right for Muslims to engage in deception?

There are various aspects to this. There are a number of specific areas where Mohammed approved of



THERE IS MORE RESISTANCE
HERE IN AUSTRALIA TO
ISLAMISATION THAN IN
MANY OTHER COUNTRIES.
IN THE US LEADERS SEEM
TO BE MORE OPEN TO AN
ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW.

deception, and so certain actions became legitimate in Islam. For example, it is legitimate to deceive in order to establish good marital relations. Also, if you are reconciling people who are in conflict it is all right to lie. Indeed this is not really regarded as lying at all.

If a Muslim man is having a relationship with another woman, is it permissible for him to lie to his wife about it?

That would be adultery, so that would be wrong anyway. A better example is that Mohammed was sleeping with his concubine and not telling his other wives. He did not tell the truth about this, but it was okay because he did it to maintain marital harmony. Another example is that if you marry a second wife, it is not obligatory to tell your first wife.

Are there other areas where Muslims might feel free to deceive?

Deception plays a role in the Islamic view of warfare. Mohammed famously said "War is deceit". If some Muslims had a plan to take over Australia as a

result of their jihad worldview, then it could be permissible for them to engage in deception to establish Islam.

They could also engage in deception where they find they are in a minority position, and feel unsafe as a result. This is called *taqiyya*. The Muslim scholar, Ibn Kathir, has a famous comment on this, where he says, "We smile in the face of some people although our hearts curse them".


Are there any Muslims who are actually converting to Christianity today?

Yes, absolutely, more than ever before. There are many Muslims all over the Middle East who are not happy with Islam. Many have become very discontented when they see radical Islam in practice. There are many thousands of Iranians who don't like Islam and would be really glad to leave it. This partly explains why Christianity is growing so rapidly in Iran. In Algeria tens of thousands of people left Islam and became Christians after they had seen radical Islam in action in their own country.

Are there any particular approaches to Muslims that are helpful to them in understanding the gospel?

One approach is to go to Islam's own religious texts and look at what Mohammed did and said and ask the question, "Is this reasonable? Does it commend itself to the human conscience?" Father Zachariah Botross is an evangelist from the Middle East who is having great success among Muslims using this technique. He appeals to the human conscience, which has a God-given awareness of truth and justice and he poses these sorts of questions. I think it is right to look at the foundations of Islam in the light of the human conscience. We need to ask the question, "Is it right to dominate others?"

The information revolution and the sharing of information about Islam over the internet can be enormously liberating. The average Muslim needs to know exactly what Mohammed taught and how he lived, because many of them don't.

But above all, we must love Muslims and care for them as people. We need to get to know them and befriend them, and tell them about Jesus. But this must be without surrendering to the values of non-reciprocity and the demand of obligatory respect for Islam. 

Winds of change

A LONG AND CAREFUL ISLAMIC CAMPAIGN IN EUROPE IS BEARING FRUIT.

Patrick Sookhdeo

On Friday May 20, 2005, a crowd of some 300 Muslims burned a wooden cross outside the American embassy in London. This was part of a protest against the rumoured desecration of a Qur'an by American soldiers in Guantanamo Bay, during which British and American flags were also burned. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this event was that it was not deemed to be newsworthy, receiving little attention in the national press.

The whole scenario is reminiscent of what happens in so many Muslim-majority countries: a rumour of an insult to Islam, a violent and blasphemous anti-Christian reaction, police watching idly, and a complete lack of public interest, let alone outrage. It could have been Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, or Northern Nigeria. But it was the UK.

Europe is undergoing a rapid process of change as Muslims make their presence felt in politics, economics, law, education and the media. While there is a wide range of attitudes among Muslims in Europe, with many who are broadly content with the status quo and just want to live their lives peacefully, others are striving deliberately to drive forward the changes.

As a result of the efforts of the latter, Europe is gradually being transformed into a society in which Islam takes its place, not just as an equal alongside the many other faith communities, but often as the dominant player. This is not purely, or even primarily, a matter of numbers, but is more a matter of control of the structures of society. It is not happening by chance but is the result of a careful and deliberate strategy by certain Muslim leaders.

Though the effects are only now becoming noticeable, the planning was done decades ago. In 1980 the Islamic Council of Europe published a book



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called *Muslim Communities in Non-Muslim States* which clearly explained the Islamic agenda in Europe. When Muslims live as a minority they face theological problems, because classical Islamic teaching always presupposed a context of Islamic dominance; hence the need for guidance on how to live in non-Muslim states.

The instructions given in the book told Muslims to get together and organise themselves with the aim of establishing a viable Muslim community based on Islamic principles. This is the duty of every individual Muslim living within a non-Muslim political entity. They should set up mosques, community centres and Islamic schools. At all costs they must avoid being assimilated by the majority. In order to resist assimilation, they must group themselves geographically, forming areas of high Muslim concentration within the population as a whole. Yet they must also interact with non-Muslims so as to share the message of Islam with them. Every Muslim individual is required to participate in the plan; it is not allowed for anyone simply to live as a "good Muslim" without assisting the overall strategy.

The ultimate goal of this strategy is

that the Muslims should become a majority and the entire nation be governed according to Islam. (M. Ali Kettani "The Problems of Muslim Minorities and their Solutions" in *Muslim Communities in Non-Muslim States* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1980) pp.96-105).

Not all Muslims would support this action plan. The more secularised are happy to become integrated within the majority society. Even among those who agree on the ultimate goal of creating an Islamic state, there are differences about methodology i.e. whether this should be a slow and peaceful transition, or whether it should be hastened by means of political dominance or even – say some – by violence.

Despite the variety of opinion among Muslims, it is not hard to recognise the different stages of the Islamic Council of Europe's strategy being put into practice within today's Europe. Muslims do tend to live in tightly concentrated areas, and show little sign of integrating into wider society. Saudi funding is paying for the erection of large and beautiful mosques, staffed by imams brought over to Europe from the "home countries".

Sweden's third largest city, Malmö, is effectively ruled by violent gangs of Muslims, and some of the Muslim residents of the city still cannot read or write Swedish though they have lived there for 20 years. Denmark has recently seen the Nordgårdsskolen in Aarhus become the first school in the country to have 100% Muslim pupils. Britain's Muslim population (variously estimated at between 1.6 and 3 million) is concentrated in three areas: north-west England, the midlands and London. In some of these areas Muslims are now targeting the remaining Christian presence, arsoning churches, physically attacking church leaders and their property. The aim seems to be to

"cleanse" these areas of non-Muslims.

European Muslims are Islamising many aspects of life that also affect non-Muslims. Spanish Muslims have expressed their desire to "regain" the mosque of Cordoba. This building was originally a church, then turned into a mosque, and then turned back into a place of Christian worship. Halal meat is now routinely served in many British prisons, schools and hospitals, sometimes to Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and the hijab (Islamic headscarf) is worn in British schools. Muslims in the London borough of Tower Hamlets have forced name-changes for districts and local amenities if the existing name sounds too Christian for their liking.

In the UK, where Islam is making its most rapid advance, Islamic law (sharia) is already practised unofficially, with Sharia councils and Sharia courts giving judgments on Muslim family matters. In education, numerous concessions are being made to British Muslims, Islam often being given more prominence and respect than other faiths at state schools. An increasing number of university posts are being funded from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries on condition that a certain line of thinking is promoted.

The ultimate goal of taking control of society, as depicted by the Islamic Council of Europe in 1980, is clearly in the minds of at least some Muslim leaders. A Dutch Imam has stated that Islamic law is superior to other forms of legislation so there is no need to obey other laws. Some Finnish imams preach on the Islamic duty to kill a Muslim who converts to another faith, adding that it is difficult to carry this out in Finland at present because Muslims do not yet "own the state". Furthermore, the freedoms of European society are being exploited by Islamic militants and their supporters to plan terrorist activities around the world. London - or "Londonistan" as it is becoming known - is one of the most important bases for Islamic terrorism worldwide. This has been illustrated by the bombings and attempted bombings in London itself.

Despite all these advances, Muslims still tend to portray themselves as victims in European society, while the majority society in turn struggles to affirm them and to avoid giving any accidental offence.

But this kind of reaction by non-Muslims can be seen as the typical behaviour of dhimmi. In classical Islam,

Christian and Jewish minorities within an Islamic state were called dhimmi. They were free to worship and live out their faith, but had to submit to a raft of discriminatory and humiliating laws. They learned to be subservient, and to consider the dominance of Muslims as normal as the Muslims themselves did.

It is typical of dhimmi not to protest



PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN WERE ONCE CHRISTIAN, AS WAS NORTH AFRICA. THE CHURCH WAS COMPLETELY ERADICATED FROM THESE AREAS BY THE ADVANCE OF ISLAM.

if a Christian cross is burned by an angry crowd, nor even to feel that anything outrageous has occurred. Likewise the Muslim scheme to turn the cathedral of Cordoba back into a mosque has the backing of some Spanish government leaders in the city.

At a political level, European countries are responding in different ways to the challenge of Islam. France is determinedly protecting its secularism, and has banned the hijab in school. The Netherlands have recently swung from one extreme to the other, following the ritualised killing of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh by a young Muslim in November 2004; they are turning against multiculturalism and becoming concerned to control immigration.

The UK seems to be seeking to replicate the segregation and communalism of the British Raj in India, whereby the various religious communities were each given their own laws. This policy would certainly mesh well with some Muslim leaders' own plans for Britain. If Britain is to be subdivided in this way, perhaps geographically as well as legally, it raises the question of how the Church would survive in areas of Islamic rule. What form would Christian ministry be able to

take in these areas?

Muslims are still a minority in numerical terms in Europe, with an estimated 20 million living in the European Union. No country apart from Albania has a Muslim community amounting to more than about 10% of the population. However, demographic studies indicate that Muslim populations are growing far faster than the non-Muslim populations. This is due partly to continued immigration, partly to conversion, but mainly to the larger number of children which Muslim families typically have. The growing Muslim community is a mosaic of different ethnic, linguistic, cultural, sectarian and geographical backgrounds, and characterised by increasing internal tensions particularly over how to relate to the host society.

Some Christians have decried as faithless pessimism those who predict the Islamisation of Europe before the end of the century. But it must be remembered that the region which is now Pakistan and Afghanistan was once Christian, as was North Africa. The church was completely eradicated from these areas by the advance of Islam. It would surely be arrogant to think that this could never happen to the church in Europe.

As individual Christians we must love our Muslim neighbours and forgive any wrongs done to us. But as a community the church must defend herself, as well as the Judaeo-Christian heritage with which Europe is blessed. For this her leaders need great wisdom and courage. ap



Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, a former Muslim, is international director of Barnabas Fund which works with the persecuted church, particularly in Muslim countries.

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Qur'anic Christ

MUSLIMS' OWN WITNESS CAN HELP THEM TO FAITH.

Peter Barnes

One hesitates to begin an essay with a quotation from Samuel Angus, but this one intrigued me: "I have often discovered ... that the two ideal conditions in which to write or to speak are either full knowledge or complete ignorance; half knowledge makes its possessor, according to his character, either too hesitant or too audacious." Armed with half knowledge, and a total inability to read Arabic, I will venture a few thoughts on presenting the gospel to Muslims.

Two things need to be stated at the outset. The first is that Muslims should be treated no differently from other people. We all appreciate friendliness and kindness. It is good to try to respect Muslim and/or Middle Eastern customs. If you are having lunch together, it is no burden for the Christian to eat halal food. A bacon and egg McMuffin is not a good idea. Don't put your Bible – or the Qur'an for that matter – on the floor for that is to show disrespect. It is not capitulation to say that Christianity and Islam have some beliefs in common, and some possible areas of cooperation, for example in opposing the homosexual lobby. We both believe in one God who created the world and who shall judge it.

The second thing is that one cannot simply follow the guidelines in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, all, whether Jew or Gentile, believed that Jesus was crucified. It was the task of Christians to convince them that Jesus is Lord and that He rose from the dead. The Muslim, of course, does not believe that Jesus was crucified. As one can understand, this creates a real barrier.

Because of the Islamic emphasis on the prophets, the issue of prophecy should be a good point of entry. Indeed, this is the challenge of the God of the Bible to other so-called gods (see Isaiah 41:22-23; 44:7). Muslims believe that Jesus is the Messiah but only the Messiah of the Jews. The Christian can show from Psalm 2 that He is the



MUSLIMS SAY THEY BELIEVE THE PROPHETS, AND THEY ARE OFTEN TOLD THAT THERE WERE 124,000 OF THEM. HOWEVER, THERE ARE PRECIOUS FEW PROPHECIES.

Messiah of all the nations of the world. One can also turn to Isaiah 53 to point to the Suffering Servant who came to suffer as the righteous one for the sake of sinners, and then finally to triumph over death itself, and to win the victory. It was, in fact, Isaiah 53 that led Patrick Sookhdeo as a Muslim to become a Christian. After a debate with a sheikh some years back, a number of Muslims came to the Revesby church hall to discuss some matters, and it was noticeable that they were quite taken aback when I read Isaiah 53 to them.

It is worth comparing prophecies in the Bible with prophecies in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Muslims say they believe the prophets, and they are often told that there were 124,000 of them. However, there are precious few prophecies. Islam holds to two kinds of prophecies:

(a) There is Sura 30 in the Qur'an which tells of the defeat of the Persians by the Romans, but it is not obvious what that is referring to. The Romans were always fighting the Persians, and defeated them more often than not. It is a prophecy of sorts, but something that a journalist might say.

(b) There is the prophecy in the

Hadith that Jesus will descend to earth and break crosses, kill pigs, and abolish tribute (Jizya), and the wealth will pour forth to such an extent that no one will accept it. Also, there is the prophecy that Mohammed's uncle, who rejected his nephew's prophetic credentials, would suffer in hell. These are prophecies, but are unverifiable in this life.

It can be profitable too to raise the issue of the character of Jesus and the character of Mohammed. In the Qur'an, Jesus does miracles (3:46; 5:112-113), is joined to the Holy Spirit (2:86), is the Messiah (3:45), was born of a virgin (3:47; 19:20-22), and is the Word of God (3:45; 4:171). Despite this, Jesus is regarded as a lesser prophet than Mohammed. In Islam, Jesus is not in any sense divine. Hell is the fate of those who believe in the Trinity (Surah 5:72, 73), but it is virtually certain that Mohammed had little idea of what Christians meant by the Trinity. In Surah 5:116 Jesus in the judgment denies that He told people to worship Himself and His mother as two gods beside Allah. Surah 6:101 asks "How can He have children when He has no wife?" Like the Knight of the Woeful Countenance, Mohammed manages to tilt at windmills.

It is not wise to begin by attacking the character of Mohammed, but it is helpful to know something about what Islamic sources say about him. Mohammed is said in the Qur'an to be "a good example to follow for him who hopes for Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much" (33:21). Mohammed himself says: "I am only a man like you" (Surah 18:110). It is prophesied that he would die (39:30).

He married something like 13 wives, and kept many concubines (33:50), but he restricted other Muslim men to four wives (Surah 4:3). Mohammed married his favourite wife Aisha when she was six years old, and he consummated the marriage when she was nine years old (Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol.7:64). He married

Zaineb, who had first to be divorced from Mohammed's adopted son (Sura 33:37-38). Hence Mohammed married his own daughter-in-law.

Mohammed seems to have ordered 38 battles, and personally took part in 27. He also gave orders for assassinations and massacres. After the Battle of Trench in 627, trenches were dug and between 600 and 700 men were decapitated. Mohammed himself is told in Surah 47: "So know, O Mohammed, none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your (singular) sin, and also for believing men and believing women" (The Fighting, 47:19). In Surah 80:1-15 Mohammed is rebuked for ignoring a blind man.

Mohammed was a man who knew something of kindness and mercy. He spoke against female infanticide, and used to help his wives at home. But he was a man who sought the forgiveness of his sins, and who did not know whether he would enter Paradise. Mohammed's only sons died in childhood, and ultimately Mohammed himself died in 632. So Mohammed failed to defeat sin and death. He, like all of us, was a man in Adam.

Jesus is in a different category. He lived the life that you and I should have lived. He went about doing good. He is the strongest of men and the gentlest of men. Isaiah prophesied: "Behold, My servant Whom I have chosen, my beloved with Whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not quench, until He brings justice to victory; and in His name the Gentiles will hope" (Isa. 42:1-3; Matt. 12:18-21). The Bible says that He is unique in being without sin (John 8:29, 46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Mosab Hassan Yousef, the author of *Son of Hamas*, records his own experience: "When I read the New Testament, I fell in love with it. I was truly attracted to Jesus." Giving a Muslim a Gospel – especially perhaps the Gospel of Matthew – introduces him or her to the wondrous character of Jesus.

Finally it is good to deal with the Islamic view that one man cannot pay for the sins of others. Yet the Qur'an itself says that Adam's unrighteous act affects us all. The Qur'an says in Surah 2

(The Cow): "Then the Shaitan (Satan) made them slip therefrom (the Paradise), and got them out from that in which they were. We said: 'Get you down, all, with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be a dwelling place for you and an enjoyment for a time'." (2:36; 7:24). So sin and fighting are a result of Adam's sin.



THE ISLAMIC VIEW IS THAT ONE MAN CANNOT PAY FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS. YET THE QUR'AN ITSELF SAYS THAT ADAM'S UNRIGHTEOUS ACT AFFECTS US ALL.


Also, death came into the world: "He said: 'Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from it you shall be brought out (i.e. resurrected)'." (7:25). This means that Adam has brought sin and death through his being expelled from Paradise, which to the Muslim is not the Garden of Eden on earth, but is located in heaven. In other words, one man has undone us all. What, then, is so

illogical about the claim that one man has restored his people?

Islam sets out its five pillars:

- 1: the confession of Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet;
- 2: prayer five times a day;
- 3: the giving of alms;
- 4: pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj);
- 5: fasting during Ramadan.

Salvation is essentially by merit, and at the end the Muslim hopes that the angel on his right shoulder (mercy) triumphs over the angel on his left shoulder (justice). Salvation is by creed and works (Surah 2:25; 4:57; 29:58). This will open up Paradise which includes 70 beautiful virgins, luscious fruit, wine, and gold (Surahs 37, 56, 74, 83). Islam says if you perform more good deeds than bad deeds, you can hope Allah will be merciful. Ultimately, it says that you save yourself by doing more good than evil. In the explanation of Surah 11:114, "For those things that are good remove those that are evil".

Christ, however, demands perfection (Mt. 5:48), which means that we cannot save ourselves (Lk 18:9-14). We need more than a prophet; we need a Saviour. Try to push your Muslim friend to see that, in the end, we are in Adam or we are in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22). 



Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

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Numbers game

CHRISTIANS WILL OUTNUMBER MUSLIMS INTO THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE.

Charles Colson

In his book *The Clash of Civilisations*, Samuel Huntington predicts that demographics will decide the clash between Christianity and Islam. And, as he puts it, “in the long run... Mohammed wins out.”

In this instance, Huntington is wrong. For the foreseeable future there will be many more Christians than Muslims in the world.

As Penn State professor Philip Jenkins writes in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, predictions like Huntington’s betray an ignorance of the explosive growth of Christianity outside the West.

For instance, in 1900, there were approximately 10 million Christians in Africa. By 2000, there were 360 million. By 2025, conservative estimates see that number rising to 633 million. Those same estimates put the number of Christians in Latin America in 2025 at 640 million and in Asia at 460 million.

According to Jenkins, the percentage of the world’s population that is, at least by name, Christian will be roughly the same in 2050 as it was in 1900. By the middle of this century, there will be 3 billion Christians in the world – one and a half times the number of Muslims. In fact, by 2050 there will be nearly as many Pentecostal Christians in the world as there are Muslims today.

But at that point, only one-fifth of



THIS STORY OF CHRISTIANITY’S EXPLOSIVE GROWTH IS ONE OF THE GREAT UNTOLD STORIES OF OUR TIME – A STORY THAT WESTERN CHRISTIANS NEED TO HEAR.

the world’s Christians will be non-Hispanic whites. The typical Christian will be a woman living in a Nigerian village or in a Brazilian shantytown.

And these changes will be more than demographic. Jenkins points out that those he calls “Southern Christians” – those living in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia – are far more conservative, theologically and morally, than their counterparts in the West.

Thus, as Christianity becomes more southern, it becomes more biblically orthodox. While people like Bishop John Shelby Spong and Templeton Prize winner Arthur Peacock insist that

Christianity must abandon its historic beliefs to survive, it is precisely these historic beliefs that attract our southern brethren.

And that’s why in Spong and Peacock’s own Anglican Communion, African bishops are ordaining missionaries to re-convert the West.

This story of Christianity’s explosive growth is one of the great untold stories of our time – a story that Western Christians need to hear.

It’s a story that repudiates those who say that Christians must compromise their beliefs to remain relevant. The opposite is the case. Biblical orthodoxy is winning converts while churches that have lost their biblical moorings languish.

This shift of Christianity’s “centre of gravity” is also a reminder to Western Christians that we are not the whole show, and we have to start thinking differently about ourselves. We are part of a much larger community: the worldwide church.

Finally, it’s a sign that, no matter how bad things seem at home, God is at work throughout the world. Everywhere it’s proclaimed, the gospel is changing lives and societies. ap



Charles Colson is founder of *Prison Fellowship*. This article is reprinted from *Breakpoint*, June 2010.

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Onward Christian soldiers

20 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES IN MARK 1-5

The march of humanism is in full swing. It may take the form of militant atheism, as in the case of Richard Dawkins and his declared war on seeing God as the Creator of the Universe, or of secular humanism that wants to explain everything without any reference to or need of the supernatural, or of man-inspired religions that refuse to submit to God's clear revelation of Himself and His purposes in the inspired 66 books that constitute the Christian Scriptures.

Today more than ever we need to be clear about who Jesus is, why He came from heaven to earth, what He achieved through His life, death and resurrection, and how all human history is centred on Him and will be consummated in His return as King of kings and Lord of lords. If we are clear on these things we will be convinced of the urgency of proclaiming His gospel as the only hope, and the eternal hope, of lost humanity; if we are not clear on these things we will too readily cave in to the increasing pressure to swallow the lie that it is not only unacceptable but logically impossible for Christianity to claim to be the only true religion or worldview.

If we need some convincing about all this, a good place to start is in the Gospel of Mark. Here we see Jesus presented in all His power as God's Son and Messiah, with all the necessary historical evidence to back up His claim. The most effective way for Christians to resist the march of false "religions" (including humanism and atheism) is to present the evidence for Jesus and His claims, and to live clearly under His Lordship.



Bruce Christian is a former Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

DAY 1

A New Beginning

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:1-8

THE POINT Jesus, God's Son, has come into the world to bring good news. His Kingdom is about a completely different way of looking at things – and John the Baptist will introduce us to it, and to Him.

THE PARTICULARS

- God prepared the way for His Son's coming into the world by getting Malachi and Isaiah to predict it many centuries before it actually happened (2-3; see Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3).
- John the Baptist was the "messenger" or "herald" God set apart and commissioned to introduce Jesus the Christ to the world (4).
- John's mission was to:

- challenge the Jewish nation with his radical lifestyle and message (6; just as Elijah had done 700 years earlier);
- teach about true repentance, forgiveness and baptism (4-5, 8);
- point away from himself to Jesus, the promised Messiah (7-8).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- "Jesus Christ" (1) means "Jesus, the Messiah", the One God had promised all through the Old Testament. What does Mark want us to understand about Jesus and the Gospel He brought?
- How will John's message challenge the way you live today?
- Does your witness point people to you or to Jesus?

DAY 2

God With Us

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:9-13

THE POINT Jesus, God's Son, became part of our broken world in every way; He fully identified Himself with Man at every level.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus was willing to let Himself be baptised by John so that He would become one with us, identifying Himself with us as sinners (but without sinning Himself – cf Hebrews 4:15) (9).
- The Father, through the Holy Spirit's appearing in the form of a dove, showed that Jesus was His beloved, accepted Son (10-11).
- God further demonstrated His willingness to come to us

where we are as sinners through Jesus' being sent by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan for 40 days (12-13).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- If John's baptism was a sign of true repentance from sin, why did Jesus come to John for baptism? (see Matthew 3:13-15).
- Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus did not give in to Satan's temptation (see Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). What does this tell us about Jesus as Man? How does this help us? Is the same help He received from angels available to us?
- Can you see a contrast between the first man, Adam, and God's Son, Jesus? Compare Matthew 4:3-10 with Genesis 3:6; how do Jesus' 3 temptations parallel Satan's approach to Eve?

DAY 3

Repent, Believe, and Follow

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:14-20

THE POINT Jesus takes over from John, proclaiming the New Way of the Kingdom of God, calling ordinary people to follow Him.

THE PARTICULARS

- John the Baptist was put into prison for speaking out against social sins and proclaiming the need for repentance (cf 6:17-18).
- Jesus' statement of His mission was clear and simple (15):
 - time is running out: "the Kingdom of God is near";
 - up until now we've been on the wrong track: "repent";
 - the right way is to trust Him: "believe the good news".

- He chose ordinary people involved in going about their daily tasks and challenged them to leave everything to follow Him.
- He promised to equip them for the Kingdom work of drawing others in to follow Him as well – as "fishers of men".
- Mark emphasises the urgency of the task and the speed of the response of these first disciples to the call of Jesus (17-20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you really come to see how big a step it is to follow Jesus? What have you had to "leave" in order to follow Him?
- How do you think Zebedee and his hired men would have felt when James and John walked off with Jesus? (cf Luke 14:26)

DAY 4

Demons, beware

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:21-28

THE POINT At the very outset of His public ministry Jesus displays absolute authority, above that of the religious teachers, and even over demonic spiritual powers that manifest themselves in people.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' custom was to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath (21).
- His authority as a teacher was easily recognised by the people and contrasted with that of their formal teachers (22, 27-28).
- Although the religious leaders failed to do so, the evil (literally "unclean") spirits recognised Jesus as God's Son, the promised "Holy One" (23-24; see Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 41:14,

- 16, 20).
- The forces of evil are a spiritual reality, with physical proofs and manifestations; but they were subject to, and could be overpowered by, Jesus' word of command (25-26).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you place a high priority on being among the Lord's people on the Lord's Day seeking to be taught by Him from His Word?
- How much was the activity of evil spirits in the Gospels a personal attack on Jesus and a way of proving who He really was? Should we expect things like this to happen today?
- Are you keen to spread the good news of Jesus everywhere?

DAY 5

Work, Pray, Preach

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:29-39

THE POINT Jesus left us a good model for keeping the right balance among the various pressures on our time and other resources as we seek to be faithful stewards, serving God in His world.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus had power to heal physical and spiritual illness (29-34).
- Jesus was full of compassion for all who were in need (41).
- As soon as Simon's mother-in-law was cured she looked for the opportunity to serve others around her who were in need (31).
- Jesus didn't let the pressing needs of others distract Him from spending time alone with His heavenly Father in prayer

(35).

- Jesus kept a balance between His devotional life, His healing ministry, and His preaching; and between preaching God's Kingdom openly and keeping His popularity in check so as not to short-circuit His true Messianic mission involving the cross.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you demonstrate a true "servant heart" in all God's work?
- In your work for God, do you let things that will advance your popularity squeeze out things that will bring you closer to Him and make you more sensitive to His will and others' needs?
- Will you look for opportunities to point others to Jesus today?

DAY 6

Show and (don't) Tell

THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:40-45

THE POINT Jesus' healing ministry was the true fulfilment of Old Testament teaching; therefore it should have proved to the Jewish leaders who He really was, but it impressed the common people instead.

THE PARTICULARS

- The man with leprosy did not doubt Jesus' power to heal (he had true faith) but only Jesus' willingness (he was humble) (40).
- Jesus' power to heal included diseases (like leprosy) that made people "ceremonially" or "religiously" "unclean"; in every way His healing ministry was about reconciling man to God (44).

- Jesus' miracles provided the Jewish leaders with clear evidence of who He really was (44; cf John 14:11; 20:30-31).
- The cured leper was so excited about what Jesus had done for him that he couldn't resist telling everyone he met about it (45)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- When your faith wavers, is it because you doubt God's power or because you aren't sure of His willingness? He understands!
- Have you really seen the true (spiritual) meaning at the heart of Jesus' (physical) healing ministry? (see Isaiah 53:4-5)
- Are you excited about the difference Jesus has made to your life? Enough to want to tell others about Him? Does Jesus' warning about not telling anyone apply to us today? Why not?

DAY 7

More than he bargained for

THE PASSAGE

MARK 2:1-12

THE POINT Spiritual healing is much more important than physical healing. Only Jesus, because He is the eternal Son of God, can provide the cure for Sin's curse under which we are all born.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' central passion was to preach the Good News of God's Kingdom, rather than just to heal the sick (1-2).
- Jesus responded to the men's clear demonstration of faith (3).
- Jesus went straight to the heart of the man's problem: his need for forgiveness of sin, ie of true, spiritual healing within

(5).

- Even on the Jewish leaders' own admission, this act of healing was proof that Jesus was truly God the Son (10).
- In this case, Jesus drew a close connection between the man's physical illness and his spiritual condition and need (9-10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you as prepared to place your faith on the line in the public arena of your daily life as the four friends were?
- Is there always a direct connection between physical illness and spiritual need? (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-9)
- Have you come to recognise the deity of Christ – that He truly was God the Son who miraculously took on human flesh?

DAY 8

Only bad people go to heaven

THE PASSAGE

MARK 2:13-17

THE POINT Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Obviously, if I don't see myself as a sinner I can't know Him as my Saviour, in which case there can be no place for me in heaven. The big mistake the Pharisees made was in thinking they were good enough.

THE PARTICULARS

- Contrary to the accepted religious custom of His day, Jesus mixed comfortably with outcasts and bad people; He eyeballed such people directly and called them to follow Him (13-14).
- Jesus' main role is to save: "Jesus" (Greek) = "Joshua" (Hebrew) = "One Who Saves" – see Matthew 1:21. Therefore,

access to heaven can only be through Him (see John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- With whom would Jesus most likely mix if He came to live in your community today? Would you be comfortable with this? Would they feel welcome in your Church fellowship?
- On what basis did the teachers of the law see themselves as righteous? Did Jesus agree with their assessment? Is it possible for anyone to get to heaven by being good? (see Galatians 2:21). What is it that prevents most people from seeing themselves as sinners in need of a Saviour? Where does it come from?
- Are you going to heaven? Are you sure? Why?

DAY 9

Not a bandaid job

THE PASSAGE

MARK 2:18-22

THE POINT Jesus' way of thinking about the Kingdom of God put Him on a collision course with the Jewish leaders.

Their way of thinking was in desperate need of a radical change; it had gone beyond a "patching up" of their old ways, a whole new start was needed.

THE PARTICULARS

- The shakers and movers of the Jewish religion were mainly concerned about the outward observance of ritual. They failed to recognise Jesus as the Bridegroom/Messiah their Scriptures promised, and therefore that His presence among them should be a reason for rejoicing (see Is. 61:10; 62:5; cf Jer. 33:11).
- Jesus took every opportunity to remind and warn His disci-

ples, and anyone else who would listen, that His mission included suffering and distress on the road to achieving its purpose (20).

- Any attempt at a merger between Jesus' teaching and Judaism would spell destruction for both. Jesus came to fulfil the true teaching of the OT (see Matthew 5:17) not the perversion of it the Pharisees had set up (21-22; cf Matthew 5:20, 21-22 etc.).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What warning is in this passage for the Church leaders today?
- Jesus' appearance in human form was a unique event. What particular care must we take in applying this passage today?

DAY 10

Use and abuse of the Sabbath

THE PASSAGE

MARK 2:23-3:6

THE POINT God has provided us with one special Day each week for our benefit, not His: the way we use it is to be guided by the teaching and example of Jesus, and not by rigid, man-made rules. In real life, such rules might make us feel more secure about "getting it right", but the legalism it inevitably leads to causes much deeper spiritual problems. We must be careful to avoid both legalism and indifference: Jesus freed us from the burden of law-keeping, but it is possible to be brought into "bondage" to our "freedom".

THE PARTICULARS

- David got the balance right between law and grace (2:25-26).
- Jesus set us an important example by His being among the

Lord's people every "Sabbath"; it is an important habit to get into (3:1).

- In the Gospels, we only have instances of Jesus "breaking" the established Sabbath "rules" (about rest from regular daily toil) to perform acts of mercy or necessity, never for their own sake.
- Jesus nowhere taught that the idea of a day of rest has finished.
- Jesus described Himself as "Son of Man" to emphasise His divine authority on earth over all things, including Sabbath keeping.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is Sunday a burden or a benefit for you? Are you missing out on all the Lord's blessings associated with His "day of rest"?

DAY 11

Vital combat strategy

THE PASSAGE

MARK 3:7-19

THE POINT Jesus' confrontation of the spiritual forces of evil required a well-organised battle-plan; the work He came to do in dealing with death (Satan's coveted "trophy") through His Cross and Resurrection was the focal point and ultimate purpose of all human history, of all Creation (cf Revelation 13:8, 17:8).

THE PARTICULARS

- Important elements in Jesus' strategy to confront evil included:
 - Withdrawal from the crowd in spite of its genuine needs (7);
 - Taking practical steps (using the boat as a "pulpit") to make the best use of all the resources available to Him (8-9);

- Planning the right timing for the final battle (12);
- Prayerfully choosing a small band of people in whom He could invest His time and authority to multiply His resources (13-19).

- Jesus healed many, which was the main reason for His great popularity – but preaching was higher on His agenda (9).
- Unlike the Pharisees, the evil spirits knew who Jesus was (11).
- One of the men Jesus chose was to be His betrayer (19; cf 14:21).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is the Church today serious about the spiritual conflict in which it is involved? How is this reflected in the way we plan and go about our task? Do we invest ourselves in others?

DAY 12

Clear but disturbing logic

THE PASSAGE

MARK 3:20-35

THE POINT Wholehearted commitment to Jesus is clearly the most sensible step we can take, but others won't always see it this way!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' family members were concerned for His sanity because of His single-minded involvement in His mission; the Jewish leaders attributed His strange behaviour to demon-possession (21-22).
- Jesus demonstrated to all those present, by clear, undeniable logic, that He could not possibly be demon-possessed (23-27).
- Jesus predicted His final overthrow of Satan's kingdom (27).

- Jesus warned very strongly against the "unforgivable" sin of referring to the Holy Spirit's ministry as the work of Satan; to adopt such a stance is to indicate a total inability to embrace the Spirit's gracious work of renewal of the heart (28-30).

- Jesus warned that the work of His Kingdom can sometimes be more important than even our family responsibilities (31-35).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you sometimes criticised for being too religious or pious or fanatical about your faith? How do you handle it?
- How can we avoid committing the unforgivable sin?
- How can we balance the Lord's work with family needs?

DAY 13

The "Parable" parable

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:1-12

THE POINT Explaining the Gospel clearly to someone does not guarantee they will understand it. It is not just about giving intellectual assent to certain propositions – there is the need for God's grace to "give" the "secret" (11; see tomorrow's study as well).

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus had a good, simple, practical teaching method that the common, uneducated people found attractive. He used familiar word pictures to explain deeper theological points (1-2).
- Jesus reminds us that we have no excuse for failing to respond to His teaching: God has designed us with ears – let us hear (9)!

- We need the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand spiritual truth; salvation must be by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) since it is about the "dead" being "made alive" (Ephesians 2:1, 5) (11).

- This truth was revealed to Isaiah as he began his ministry so that he wouldn't be discouraged by Israel's hard, unresponsive hearts; we need to be reminded of it too (12; cf Isaiah 6:9-10)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Jesus made the Gospel clear enough for even the least educated person to understand, but many still rejected it. What does this tell us about our true spiritual condition before God apart from His grace? Why is prayer so important a part of evangelism?

DAY 14

One Gospel, many reactions!

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:13-20

THE POINT There is only one Gospel message, the Word of God; but people react to it in many different ways – ranging from total apathy to full acceptance; we should neither be surprised or discouraged!

THE PARTICULARS

- Satan is very actively at work, determined to stop people from hearing God's Word and having a chance to respond to it (15).
- For some (even perhaps regular church-goers!), hearing God's Word has no impact – it is as if they haven't heard it at all (15).
- Some people respond keenly at first but soon lose interest (16f).

- Jesus warns of the danger of compromising with worldly things that eventually destroy our spiritual life altogether (18-19).

- It should encourage us greatly to know that, by God's sovereign grace, the preaching and spreading of His Word can be effective and fruitful, beyond our imagination (20; cf Isaiah 55:10-11).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you really want to see evidence of spiritual growth in your life and the lives of others as you read God's Word each day?
- How does the parable of the sower encourage us to be more enthusiastic and expectant when we spread God's Word, and less discouraged if people fail to understand or respond to it?

DAY 15

Your Kingdom come

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:21-34

THE POINT God wants us to look at things the way He does, with His divine perspective. He has shown us Himself, His ways, and His will in the Bible, and He wants us to listen carefully and obey so we become more like Him. This is how His Kingdom will grow.

THE PARTICULARS

- The light of the Gospel message should be out in the open. We don't belong to a secret society with secret rituals (21-23).
- In Jesus' Kingdom, blessing comes to those who generously use all their God-given resources in the service of others (24-25).
- From very small beginnings God continues to grow His

Kingdom even while we are asleep – we aren't totally indispensable! Our response to Jesus' Great Commission is important (Matt. 28:18-20), yet the Holy Spirit is able to work on people's minds, hearts and lives quite independently of all our efforts (26-32)!

- God's Kingdom is concerned with both growth and the final harvest when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How much of each day do you set aside for getting to know God better and becoming more familiar with His ways and will?
- Are you generous in the use of the resources God has given you responsibility for? Do you long to see God's Kingdom expand?

DAY 16

"Mother Nature" myth exposed

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:35-41

THE POINT Jesus gave further evidence that He is God by demonstrating His control of the weather. He challenges us, therefore, to trust Him to care for us in every situation, no matter how "stormy" it gets!

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus took "time out" for rest. His need for sleep shows He was truly and fully human; His power over the wind and waves proves He is truly and fully God. He is not part-Man-part-God, but 100% Man and 100% God: neither aspect reduces the other.
- The personal God of the Bible, the God of Creation (to whom we all must one day give account), controls the weather. Every

"natural" phenomenon is truly an "act of God" and not just the work of an impersonal "Mother Nature". We can pray for rain!

- Jesus challenges all of us to trust Him for, and in, everything.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- The Bible in many, many places commands us not to be afraid but to trust God. Do you ever think you are "sinning" when you fail to trust God? How can we overcome the sin of fear?
- Do you really recognise Jesus as the truly divine Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, God who became a true man?
- If Jesus is God the Son, what does this show about the validity of other religions? Can any of them be true without Him?

DAY 17

In enemy territory

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:1-13

THE POINT Jesus' recognition by, and power over, unclean spirits was not limited to Israel but extended to Gentile regions too. He could cure fully a demon-possessed, uncontrollably deranged man.

THE PARTICULARS

- A trip across the lake into pagan territory, a life-threatening storm on the way, and an encounter with a deranged man, were all reminders to the disciples of the force of evil in the world. Jesus' power over all these things, and Legion's cry of distress when confronted by Jesus, showed clearly His true divinity.
- "Legion" surrendered before the battle even began! Knowing

who Jesus was, he was beaten from the start (9-10; cf James 4:7).

- The Gerasenes saw the pig as a sacred animal and the lake as a "bottomless abyss"; Jesus' action, therefore, proved to them His divine sovereign power and authority, the God of gods (10-14).
- Satan's intention is always to harm and destroy us (5); by contrast, Jesus' healing is always thorough and complete (15).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is there a need for greater "fear" of God's power in our society (and Church) today? Have we become too "familiar" with God?
- Does this passage encourage you to see your neighbourhood as a fertile mission field rather than a spiritually barren desert?

DAY 18

Go home... and tell...

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:14-20

THE POINT Evidence of Jesus' power at work in the lives of ordinary, frail, needy people has a two-fold effect: it brings some to faith in Him, but causes others to react strongly in opposition to Him. We see both these things happening today as we proclaim the Gospel.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' exorcism caused great excitement across the region (14).
- Many (with vested interests? the pork trade? other religious practitioners? people comfortable with their present lifestyle?) were keen for Jesus to go away and not disturb their peace (17).
- Understandably, the man who had been demon-possessed

felt uncomfortable about staying among the people who had known about his embarrassing past; but this was where he'd be most effective in witnessing to Jesus' power to change lives (18-20).

- Jesus insisted that the healed man's first task was to witness among those who knew him; his "missionary training" consisted only of his personal experience of the Lord's power and mercy.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your life as a Christian cause people discomfort about their own to the extent that they'd rather not have you around?
- Can we spend too much time at teaching conventions yet lack enthusiasm for just telling people what Jesus has done for us?

DAY 19

Interruptions!

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:21-34

THE POINT Jesus turned interruptions into opportunities for extending His work to other areas. The crowd at the lake (including many in need) had to wait while He attended to Jairus. Jairus (with an urgent need) had to wait while He dealt with the sick woman.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' ministry attracted great crowds but Jesus was willing to divert and devote His sole attention to just one or two of them!
- Jairus and the woman were both confident of Jesus' power to meet their need. Jairus was prepared to "go public" with his faith, but the poor woman wanted to remain anonymous.

Jesus accepted them both – there is no "text book" method for faith.

- The woman's faith, and the action inspired by it, achieved her purpose even without a verbal request to Him; He knew she had touched Him in a special way and had been healed; there is a strong link between spiritual forces and their physical effects.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your faith "public" in your daily life? Do you reach out in faith to Jesus in times of need, even if you're a bit shy about it?
- Are you sensitive to "interruptions" to your daily routine that might present opportunities for ministry to others? How can we balance disciplined commitment-keeping with availability?

DAY 20

Never too late

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:35-43

THE POINTS Jesus' power gives a whole new perspective on physical death.

- God sometimes delays in answering our prayers. Our trust in Him must include patience to leave the timing with Him as well.

THE PARTICULARS

- The delay caused by the sick woman seems to bring a sour note to the report that it was now too late for Jairus' daughter (35).
- Jesus challenges us to trust Him in spite of the circumstances rather than because of them (36; cf Jn 20:29; Heb. 11:1).
- With the touch of His hand and a spoken word Jesus has power even to give life to the dead (cf John 11:41-45). To eye-

witnesses (and to us who accept their testimony) the parallel between this and the unique creative spoken word of God is quite clear (41).

- The disbelieving crowd had to wait outside when Jesus raised the girl in response to her father's faith (40; cf Matt. 13:58).
- Jesus was concerned with even the ordinary, practical detail of the girl's need for food; He showed mercy as well as power (43).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Can you keep trusting God even at times when it seems that the opportunity for a particular prayer to be answered has passed?
- Are you trusting Jesus for eternal life? ... for today's dinner?



news

RAE HEADS TOP TEAM

Leading American theologian and ethicist **Scott Rae** is the key speaker in the **Presbyterian Church of Victoria's first Religion in the Public Square Colloquium**, in Melbourne from July 22 to 24. Organised by the **Church and Nation Committee**, topics include business ethics, the future of capitalism, securing freedom of religion in a hostile environment, the case for religion in the public square, understanding vocation, affirming and promoting pro-life policies and sex: the worst and the best.

The high-profile line-up of speakers includes Church and Nation convener **David Palmer**, a former business leader, theological lecturers **Douglas Milne** and **John McClean**, law lecturers **Patrick Parkinson** and **Nicholas Aroney**, federal MP **Kevin Andrews**, business writer **Robert Gottlieb**, Christian activists **Melinda Tankard-Reist** and **Jim Wallace**, and AP convener **Peter Hastie** and writer **Peter Barnes**.

The committee has taken out a bulk booking at the Victoria Hotel for those attending from the other states. For more information, see the flyer at <http://candn.pcvic.org.au/media/ColloquiumFlyer.pdf>.

PRESBYTERIANS HONOURED

Four Presbyterians were honoured with the **Order of Australia** in June's Queen's Birthday awards. They were:

Mr Alexander George Bedwell of Bathurst, NSW, for community service to the region. Mr Bedwell has been on the management committee at **St Stephen's Presbyterian Church**, Bathurst, since 1959.

Mr Ronald Day, of Murrumba Downs, Qld, for community service, particularly through the **Rotary Club of Aspley**. Mr Day has been a member of the **Kedron-Chermside Community Uniting Church** since 1976, and involved in youth and community projects.

The Very Reverend Dr Allan Macdonald Harman, of Wallington, Vic., for service to the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Author, theologian,

educator, administrator, pastor and Air Force chaplain, Dr Harman served as moderator of the PCA from 1994 to 1997, plus moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and twice of the Victorian Presbyterian church. He was principal of the **Presbyterian Theological College** from 1982 to 2001 and held many other distinguished teaching positions. He was a founding director of **St Andrew's Christian College** (1983-2000) and a council member of **Scotch College** (1980-1986).

Mrs Helen Violet Hill of Thornleigh, NSW, for service through the **Presbyterian Women's Association of NSW**. Mrs Hill has also served as secretary of the **Home Mission and Church Extension Standing Committee**, and as representative on **NSW Committees of Australian Church Women** and **World Day of Prayer Australia** since 1995. She is ruling elder at **Beecroft Presbyterian Church**.

Mrs Lorna Jane Rickert of Nobby, Qld, for service to the community of Nobby, and to the Sister Kenny Memorial Fund. Mrs Rickert is a member of **Nobby Presbyterian Church**.

FERGUSON HEADS CELEBRATION

The General Assembly of Australia will celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in Scotland when it meets in Sydney in September. On Tuesday, September 14, the assembly will celebrate what happened in Scotland through John Knox and others in 1560 in Scotland in the best possible way — with worship and preaching of God's Word. The preacher will be noted teacher **Dr Sinclair Ferguson**, a Scot, who was minister of **St George's-Tron Church of Scotland** in the centre of Glasgow, and later professor of systematic theology at **Westminster Theological Seminary**, Philadelphia.

This celebration, aimed not just at members of assembly, will be held in **Scots Church**, Margaret Street, Sydney.

AFGHAN PLEA

Afghan Christians in exile are urging their fellow-Christians around the world to help stop the Afghan government from arresting and executing Afghan Christians. While international media and politicians are silent, within Afghanistan a dramatic anti-Christian



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furore has erupted, in which Afghan media and politicians alike are calling for the death of converts from Islam, in line with Islamic sharia law.

"We do not know how the whole world and especially the Global Church is silent and closing their eyes while thousands of their brothers and sisters (Body of Christ) are in pain, facing life danger and death penalty and are tortured, persecuted and called criminals," wrote a group of Afghan Christians in New Delhi, India on 9 June.

Barnabas Fund

AFGHAN CHURCHES CLOSED

The government of Afghanistan suspended two church-based aid organisations — US-based **Church World Service** (CWS) and **Norwegian Church Aid** (NCA) — on 31 May over allegations of proselytising. Both groups deny the charge, insisting they had adhered to the Islamic State's strict protocols. Leaving Islam (apostasy) is a capital offence under Afghan law and it is illegal to proselytise.

The allegations emerged on 30 May via a privately-run Afghan television station, **Noorin TV**. The station broadcast video footage reportedly showing Afghans being baptised and participating with Westerners in Christian prayer meetings being held in alleged "missionary safe houses" in western Kabul.

Noorin, which named both church groups, admitted it had no evidence they were involved, saying the producer simply selected their names out of the telephone directory because they contained the word "church".

World Evangelical Alliance

PRESBYTERIANS HEAR PM

Sixteen Australian Presbyterian churches were among the hundreds that made their facilities available to view a

webcast of a debate between then **Prime Minister Kevin Rudd** (since replaced by **Julia Gillard**) and **Opposition Leader Tony Abbott** last month.

According to the format, arranged by the **Australian Christian Lobby**, about 25 national church leaders met Mr Abbot at Parliament House, then Mr Rudd at Old Parliament House. This was open question time, where many issues were discussed briefly.

Then about 280 Christians gathered to listen to both men, both of whom gave testimony to their Christian faith and outlined policies in many areas of political interest. Questions were asked about such issues as indigenous welfare, the use of the Lord's Prayer in Parliament, the refugee issue, marriage and the growing tendency towards alternatives, school chaplaincy, sexualisation of society with particular reference to children, climate change, freedom of religion, and issues of concern that the major parties would not "trade away" their stated positions if after the election the government does not hold the balance of power.

CHRISTIAN BOOKS LISTED

The 2010 Australian Christian Book of the Year short list of seven books was announced on June 8.

The list is: *A century of influence: Australian Student Christian Movement 1896-1996* by **Renate Howe** (University of New South Wales Press); *Desolate Beauty* by **Trudy Adams** (Ark House Press); *Hebrews: A New Covenant commentary* by **William Dumbrell** (Redeemer Baptist Press); *Losing my religion: Unbelief in Australia* by **Tom Frame** (University of New South Wales Press); *Montgomery of Tasmania: Henry and Maud Montgomery in Australasia* by **Robert Withycombe** (Acorn Press); *The third choice: Islam, dhimmitude and freedom* by **Mark Durie** (Deror Books);

and *The trellis and the vine: The ministry mind-shift that changes everything* by **Colin Marshall** and **Tony Payne** (Matthias Media)

IRAQI CHRISTIANS AFRAID

The *Assyrian International News Agency* is reporting that Christians in Iraq are expressing fear of renewed violence after 34-year-old **Hani Salim Wadi** was killed last month in Kirkuk.

The incident has sparked an atmosphere of insecurity, *AsiaNews* reported.

Wadi, a Christian businessman, was married with a daughter. He owned a mobile phone store downtown. Eyewitnesses said that he was shot in front of his house in a "targeted killing".

"We Christians are once more targets of attacks," an anonymous source told *AsiaNews*.

Assist

EGYPTIAN PASTOR SHOT

Egyptian lay pastor **Ephraim Shehata** and his wife **Rasha Samir** were ambushed on a desolate street by a group of Islamic gunmen outside the village of Teleda in Upper Egypt in February. The attack was meant to "break the hearts of the Christians" in the area, Samir said.

The attackers shot Shehata twice, once in the stomach through the back, and once in the neck. They shot Samir in the arm. Both survived the attack, but Shehata is still in the midst of a difficult recovery. The shooters have since been arrested and are in jail awaiting trial. A trial cannot begin until Shehata has recovered enough to attend court proceedings.

Despite this trauma, being left with debilitating injuries, more than 85,000 Egyptian pounds (\$A17,650) in medical bills and possible long-term unemployment, Shehata is willing to drop all criminal charges against his attackers — and

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avoid what could be a very embarrassing trial for the nation – if the government will stop blocking Shehata from constructing a church building.

CHRISTIANS FREED

Pakistani police have freed a family of Christian brick kiln workers imprisoned by the kiln's Muslim owner in **Raiwind**, according to a news release from *International Christian Concern*.

Asghar Masih, Rehana Bibi and their three children were allegedly held hostage at a brick kiln by **Muhammad Nawaz**, the Muslim owner. ICC said Asghar escaped and informed Pakistani officials about his family's captivity. The police then raided the brick kiln and freed the victims after arresting Nawaz.

According to ICC, Nawaz allegedly raped Rehana and her eldest daughter repeatedly during the imprisonment. He and others also reportedly tortured and chained the victims to prevent them from escaping.

Assist

IRAN BURNS BIBLES

The *Farsi Christian News Network* is reporting that Iranian Government Security Forces have burned hundreds of Bibles. A spokesperson for the network said: "This action, which has been confirmed by informed sources, was aired on a site belonging to the **Pasdaran** paramilitary organisation, is nothing less than shameful and the persons responsible must be identified and exposed to the whole world."

The report said a news site belonging to a former head of security forces, as part of its "usual anti-Christian propaganda" reported that shipments of so called "Perverted Torah and Gospels" had entered Iran through its Western borders. It said they had been seized and burned.

Assist

PROBLEM GAMBLING

The new president of the **NSW Council of Churches**, the **Rev. Richard Quadrio**, has welcomed the release of the long-awaited **Productivity Commission** report into gambling, and called on federal and state governments to implement all recommendations.

The report indicated that Australia had about 600,000 regular gamblers, of whom about 95,000 were "problem gamblers". The social cost of problem gambling in Australia was estimated at \$4.7 billion a year, and problem gambling directly affected up to 350,000 people each year.

"Every report recommendation that is implemented will help to reduce the intolerable burden of problem gambling in our communities. We want to see action to limit the size and speed of poker machine bets in the short term, and phasing in of additional reforms as soon as possible in consultation with industry and community groups," Quadrio said.

BRAILLE BIBLE

Two hundred years after the story of Welsh girl **Mary Jones'** 40-kilometre walk to buy a Bible inspired the founding of the **Bible Society**, a blind Welsh woman's dream of having a Braille version of the Bible in her own language has come true.

The **Welsh New Testament and Psalms** in Braille was launched at a special service at Trinity University College chapel, Carmarthen, in June. **Rhian Evans**, who has been blind since she was a young woman, read *chwi yw goleuni'r byd* (you are the light of the world) from the **Gospel of Matthew** at the launch. "My dream has come true," she said. "I've always maintained that the Bible should be available for all to read."

Ekklesia

PERSECUTION VIA FACEBOOK

Moroccan Christians say Muslim extremists in the country are aiding and encouraging the government to pursue them by exposing and vilifying them on social networking site **Facebook**.

Facebook user **Gardes Maroc Maroc** has posted 32 image collages featuring dozens of Christian converts, calling them "hyena evangelists" or "wolves in lamb's skins" who are trying to "shake the faith of Muslims" on the Arabic-language site. The online images depict Christian converts and their families from across the country and include details about their roles and activities in churches, their personal addresses and anecdotal stories attempting to malign them.

Since March, the Moroccan government has expelled more than 100 foreign Christians for alleged "proselytising." Since the deportations started in early March, it seems that authorities, extremists and society as a whole have colluded against them, local Christians said. Dozens of Christians have been called to police stations for interrogation. Many of them have been threatened and verbally abused.

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agenda

REFORMED GROUPS UNITE

The formation of the **World Communion of Reformed Churches** "is a source of inspiration for all of us who see the call to unity, to mission and to promote justice as one, undivided call", says **World Council of Churches General Secretary, the Rev. Dr Olav Tveit**.

Tveit was greeting 380 delegates representing 227 Reformed churches from all over the world at the uniting meeting of the **World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)** and the **Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC)** in **Grand Rapids, Michigan, United States**, last month.

Many years in the making, the new World Communion has 227 member churches representing 80 million Christians in 108 countries.

The WCC General Secretary is particularly hopeful that the new body will provide a pathway into ecumenical conversation for many evangelicals who have kept a distance from the traditional conciliar churches movement.

"I'm thrilled to say that the vote by

both of the organisations was unanimous," said **Peter Borgdorff**, president of the REC. "We are intended to be more like a family than a structure."

"What you see here today is the commitment of Reformed churches to be together globally," said **Clifton Kirkpatrick**, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) at a press conference.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches draws on distinctive but complementary traditions, the founding organisations say. While both share the Reformed commitment to biblical tradition, REC is known for its emphasis on spiritual development and faithfulness to church confessions while WARC is known for its stances on issues such as racial and gender justice, environmental protection and a just and equitable world economic order.

The mandate of the new group will be to focus on issues of church unity and social programmes. The staff will be based in Geneva, Switzerland at the **Ecumenical Centre** which also houses the World Council of Churches, with which the WCRC will be in a relationship of cooperation.

ULTRASOUND JESUS

By Dan Wooding

The "Ultrasound Jesus" – a poster

which shows a scan of a child in the womb with a halo above its head with the slogan, "He's on his way: Christmas starts with Christ" – has provoked a storm of protests from secularists and praise from many Christian leaders and the pro-life lobby in the UK. According to Karen McVeigh, writing in the *Guardian* newspaper in London, "The campaign, which aims to reach 40 million people, shows a scan of a foetus with a halo above its head. It will feature on billboards over Christmas and reads: 'He's on his way: Christmas starts with Christ.'"

Drawn up by the charity **www.Churchads.net**, the "Ultrasound Jesus" campaign is backed by a number of Christian organisations including the **Church of England**, the **Baptist Union**, the **United Reformed Church** and the **Methodist** churches.

The McVeigh story says that the **National Secular Society (NSS)** has criticised the ad, saying it gives the impression that it is politically motivated.

"It is an incredible piece of naivety on their part," said **Terry Sanderson**, director of the NSS. "If they are hoping to stop the secular drift away from Christmas as a Christian festival, they risk doing the opposite. It gives the impression that it was politically motivated, that they are trying to put across some sort of subliminal message. The image is too specifically associated with pro-lifers to be seen in a benign context. They should go back to angels and cribs."

However, says the McVeigh story, **John Smeaton**, of the **Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child**, welcomed the campaign as a "wonderful help in changing people's minds in the abortion issue".

HYMNS HELP SUFFERING

He was the **Bernie Taupin** of his time, the lyricist for popular hymns such as *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* and *Oh for a Thousand Tongues* yet a significant part of **Charles Wesley's** back catalogue dealt with pain and suffering and after years of popular appeal, dropped out of favour in the 19th century.



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An Australian historian – **Dr Joanna Cruickshank** of Melbourne’s **Deakin University** – has tracked the reasons why these hymns of suffering were given the silent treatment and how they helped early men and women make sense of the physical, emotional and spiritual pains they experienced.

Her work, published as a new book *Pain, Passion and Faith: Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley in Early Methodism* has led her to conclude that society’s silence about suffering is not healthy.

“Charles Wesley wrote more than 6000 hymns,” she said.

“There were hymns women could sing or recite during childbirth; his wife suffered from smallpox so there were hymns written to comfort smallpox sufferers; he wrote hymns about being executed; there were hymns to help ease suffering.

“While some of the subject matter would be viewed as unpleasant today, you have to see these hymns within the context of the time.

“There was no pain relief. Wesley’s hymns said ‘yes there is suffering, it is a constant integral part of life that we endure because the world is a horrible place’. His hymns pushed that view, but also out of that suffering comes good.”

Dr Cruickshank said the hymns resonated with people at the time because they were something that people who were illiterate could learn. “They had rhythm, but they also rhymed; they spoke of theological things but they also spoke of behaviours and experiences that could be modelled,” she said.

Dr Cruickshank said the hymns became less popular as theological teachings embraced a more benevolent God, there was a better understanding of pain and the invention of pain relief. But she believes society lost something by relegating the outpouring on suffering, to silence.

“I think it’s a deeply unhealthy thing that our culture is fixated with happiness and health,” she said.

SCOTS TRY IGOD

In what may be a British first, a **Church of Scotland** congregation in Bo’ness has screened its Sunday services live on to **iPhones** and **iPads**, so that people can join in wherever they are.

Members of **Bo’ness St Andrew’s Church** have welcomed the “interactive service”, which allows people to follow worship real-time in nursing homes, public transport and in some pretty unexpected locations too – up a mountain, on a train, or even on the beach.

The latter is thought less likely in Scotland, other than for a few days in summer. But as one commentator put it, “You never know... God moves in mysterious ways and places.”

The pioneering “**iGod**” venture, as it has already been branded by some newspapers, was set in digital motion by **the**

Rev. Albert Bogle and congregation member **Neil MacLennan**, who have been webcasting the services for several years.

Mr MacLennan said: “We tried the technology, and I was able to sit in my car on the Royal Mile in **Edinburgh** and watch the morning service live.”

“Essentially you could watch the service anywhere which had a 3G network,” he said.

Mr Bogle said the initiative could open up a whole new world for the housebound: “The technology is so simple that your granny could use it.”

“Although it is feasible for an old folk’s home to set up a projector with a laptop and speakers to watch one of our services online, it’s not very practical to do that every week,” said Mr Bogle. “But with us streaming live onto the iPad everything is available at the click of a button.”

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Flawed hypothesis

HOW THE NEW ATHEISM MIGHT DAMAGE THE CAUSE OF SCIENCE.

Phil Burcham

The April issue of *The Scientist*, an international news magazine for scientists, reported some fascinating findings concerning the family backgrounds of 744 researchers at the top 21 universities in the United States. Conducted by Elaine Ecklund, a sociologist at Rice University in Houston, the *Religion Amongst Academic Scientists (RAAS)* study is one of the most comprehensive investigations of its kind. Challenging conventional wisdom, the study found that 80% of these top scientists were raised in a religious home while 55% grew up in homes where religion was important.

These statistics concur with lessons conveyed by a book that currently sits on my bedside table – *Pharmaceutical Achievers – the Human Face of Pharmaceutical Research* (by Mary E. Bowden and associates, Chemical Heritage Press, Philadelphia, 2003). I bought the book in my never-ending search as a pharmacology lecturer for juicy anecdotes to spice up lectures for today's easily distracted undergraduates. But, in recounting the family histories of the scientists who made the breakthroughs that led to today's most effective medicines, the book shows that a surprising number of them came from Christian homes.

Edward Squibb, who did much to free the US drug industry from the quackery in which it was long entangled, came from a devout Quaker home in Delaware. Robert Williams, the chemist who identified vitamin B₁ deficiency as the cause of the tropical disease beriberi, was raised by missionary parents in India. Karl Link, inventor of the "blood-thinner" warfarin, was the son of a Lutheran pastor. Likewise, the University of Toronto team that discovered how the pancreas regulates blood sugar levels and how this goes awry in diabetes was led by a Scottish Presbyterian minister's son, John



IN RECENT YEARS SEVERAL HISTORIANS HAVE PUBLISHED SURPRISINGLY UPBEAT ACCOUNTS OF THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN THEISM IN MAKING EUROPE SAFE FOR SCIENCE.

MacLeod. His prickly collaborator and co-winner of the Nobel Prize, Frederick Banting, grew up in a Methodist home and prepared for the ministry before discovering his medical talents. Henry Dale, among the most eminent British pharmacologists of the 20th century, was also raised by Methodists. James Black, a prominent British researcher and Nobel laureate who recently died after a stellar career which produced two famous medicines – propranolol and cimetidine – grew up in a Baptist home.

Maybe I'm missing something, but all this seems a tad inconsistent with the commonly voiced New Atheist prejudice that religion is inherently dangerous to science. In the penultimate chapter of his 2006 bestseller, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins is strongly critical of parents who enroll their children in Christian colleges or send them to parish Sunday schools. From his jaundiced viewpoint, such parental actions come close to child abuse and should be outlawed in the interest of fostering a science-literate society.

New Atheist beliefs concerning an alleged antagonism between Christianity and science are direct descendants

of the "Conflict Model" advanced in the 19th century by writers such as Andrew Dickson White with his *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). White was a pioneering American educator who helped establish Cornell University as a research institution free from denominational interference.

But, presumably in the interests of "selling" his secular university to a US populace used to seeing higher education as the domain of the church, White tended to paint the historical relationship between Christianity and science in dark, unsympathetic tones.

To restore balance to this field, in recent years several historians have published surprisingly upbeat accounts of the role of Christian theism in making Europe safe for science. *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture* (OUP, 2006) by a leading Australian historian, Stephen Gaukroger, is a fascinating and objective survey of this complex topic while *The Saviour of Science* (2000, Wm. B. Eerdmans) by the late Benedictine scholar Stanley L. Jaki provides a compelling, theologically-informed take on this issue.

The new scholarship typically highlights the role theistic convictions played in "taming" the wild unpredictability of nature that prevailed prior to Christianity, thereby forging a science-friendly view of the cosmos as ordered and amenable to reason. For more than 1500 years, Western churchgoers regularly recited the opening clause of the Apostles' Creed – "I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth" – helping entrench on a culture-wide basis a sympathetic view of nature as upheld by laws that originated in the will of a rational Creator. For young people who grew up in homes underpinned by such beliefs, such as I did, the decision to pursue a scientific career was as easy as falling off a log.

Other intangible benefits flowing from a Christian upbringing may further explain the surprising findings from the RAAS study. In such homes children are encouraged to make disciplined use of their individual talents by pursuing useful, worthwhile activities. They also receive daily reminders that life is a precious gift to be spent wisely in the service of God and humanity. Growing up in a supportive congregation also provides transgenerational communication and networking skills that come in handy during a scientific career.

Looking back on my own decision to enter science, I now realise that the church environment where I spent my childhood and teenage years was highly influential. Of the handful of elders serving during that time, one was a PhD physicist. The congregation also included several academics; one was a senior lecturer in physical chemistry while another was a computer scientist. Several engineers as well as a senior agricultural chemist were active church members. While the youth group wasn't especially large, I was one of many in my generational cohort who obtained scientific qualifications: three of us completed chemistry majors while three more obtained medical technology degrees, another majored in marine biology while yet another completed a computer science degree. Of course these eight are only the folks that I can still remember. All but one of us came from committed evangelical homes.

The wider point we are making here is not so much that one needs a personal faith to practise science but simply that a Christian upbringing provides a sound launching pad for such a career. Like a space shuttle releasing its booster tank once the fuel is spent, scientists raised in religious homes sometimes discard their faith in adulthood. Nevertheless, the RAAS study suggests that the trajectory of their future destinies is influenced by their early childhood environment. Even for those leaving the church, the values and self-discipline instilled during a Christian upbringing persist beyond childhood and propel many into secular vocations.

If any grain of truth resides in this unfashionable viewpoint, then the concerted assault on Christianity by the New Atheists could actually be harming the scientific enterprise at a time when its future looks a bit wobbly. All over the Western world, tertiary educators are

worried that science and engineering courses are losing their appeal for young people, with maths, physics, information technology and chemistry enrolments taking significant hits. As a recruitment officer at a leading US chemical company put it recently during an interview with *Chemical & Engineering News*, "even though



**BY LETTING ITS PUBLIC FACE
BE DEFINED SOLELY BY AN
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ATHEIST MINORITY,
THE SCIENTIFIC ENTERPRISE
MAY LOSE THE RESPECT OF
THE MAJORITY.**

Generation Y is a big group, when you begin to look at how few of these people actually go into science and engineering, it gets very frightening very quickly".

Since many looming challenges facing humanity involve a strong scientific component – such as pressures on food and water availability due to population growth, environmental degradation, depletion of energy reserves and climate change – surely an "all hands on deck" approach is needed to attract as many gifted people into science as is possible.

This brings me to an important hypothetical question. Imagine that my youth group pals and I were born some 30 years later, and were only now grappling with the question of finding God's will for our vocational lives. In light of the public prominence given nowadays to dogmatic atheist scientists such as Richard Dawkins or Daniel Dennett, would the scientific pathway now be as attractive as it once was?

I don't watch much telly, but it seems that every other time I take a squiz at dear old Aunty lately I am met by the less than inspiring persona of Professor Dawkins. If he isn't being interviewed by Andrew Denton, Kerry O'Brien or Tony Jones then he is wearing natty coloured overalls and dissecting the carcass of an unfortunate giraffe or elephant in some tedious BBC documentary. Actually,

make that mockumentary, for each episode of *Inside Nature's Giants* seems to have been liberally sprinkled with wise-guy professorial remarks about how the anatomy of the poor animal's mitral valve, urinary bladder sphincter or even its little toe proves there can't possibly be a God. One shudders to contemplate the effect this dull as dishwater stuff has on the standing of science among young people.

By letting its public face be defined solely by an ideologically-driven atheist minority, there is a danger that the scientific enterprise would lose the respect of the mainstream majority, and in particular that of its kids. For, to borrow a thought from Oxford mathematician John Lennox, when confronted with the crude binary option of having to choose *either* God *or* science, young people might well conclude that science is best left to greying atheist diehards. That outcome would likely prove disastrous for us all. AP



Professor Phil Burcham is a Perth-based medical researcher and Presbyterian layman.

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JESUS IS PREPARING A PLACE – AND WAITING FOR YOU TO ARRIVE.

Max Lucado

In one of his *Far Side* cartoons, Gary Larson depicts a winged man seated in heaven on a cloud. No one near. Nothing to do. Marooned on his celestial post. The caption witnesses his despair: "Wish I'd brought a magazine."

I can relate. *Eternal* life? Clouds in my midst, a harp on my lap, and time on my hands, unending time. An endless sing-along — a hymn, then a chorus, then still more verses. "Whatever the tortures of hell," declared science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov, "I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse."

You might have similar reservations, quiet yet troubling. Will eternity meet expectations? Jesus gives an assuring response: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:1-2, NLT).

Forget the movies' images of knee-high fog banks and floating spirits. Jesus has gone to "prepare a place". Heaven is tangible: as real as the soil in your garden, as physical as the fruit in



GOD GRANTS GLIMPSES OF THIS FUTURE STATE. HE DESIGNED AN OCLUS IN THIS PANTHEON. THROUGH IT YOU SEE GOLD-DRENCHED SUNSETS. DIAMOND-STUDED NIGHT SKIES.

your orchard. In fact, your garden and fruit might look familiar in heaven.

You probably assume God will destroy this universe and relocate His children. But when God created the heavens and earth, He applauded His work (Gen. 1:31). God never denounced His earth, just man's mistreatment of it. Besides, He's the God of reclamation, not extermination. He restores, recovers, renews.

Expect Him to reclaim every square inch of what's rightfully His (Mt. 19:28).

Although Scripture uses A-bomb terminology to promise earth's destruction: "disappear with a roar ... destroyed by fire ... laid bare ... passed away" (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 21:1), destruction need not mean elimination. Your body provides a prototype. It will return to dust. Yet the one who called Adam out of a dirt pile will reverse your decomposition with resurrection. Amino acids will regenerate. Molecules will reconnect. The mortal body will put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:53).

The same is true about earth. The "whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth" (Rom. 8:22, NASB). Like a mother in labour, nature looks toward her delivery day. You see the birth pangs: floods, volcanoes, earthquakes. But God will cleanse and reconstruct his cosmos. And pristine purity will flow, as Eden promised.

God grants glimpses of this future state. He designed an oculus in this pantheon. Through it you see gold-drenched sunsets. Diamond-studded night skies. Appetisers of heaven.

But none of those compare to God's crowning jewel: the New Jerusalem. Scripture reveals this city's jaw-dropping dimensions: an exact square of 1400 miles (Rev. 21:16). Large enough to contain the land from the Appalachians to the California coast — Canada to Mexico. Tall enough to stack more than 600,000 stories — ample space for billions of people to come and go.

Come and go they will. The gates will never be closed (21:25). For the enemies of God will be banished (21:27). Satan won't lurk in heaven's gardens as he did in the Garden of Eden (22:3). Just think what he's taken from you, even in the last few hours. You worried about a decision, dreaded a conversation, and resented an interruption.

But in heaven, you'll be you at your

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best forever. You catch occasional glimpses of your heavenly self when you change your baby's diaper, forgive your boss's temper, tolerate your spouse's moodiness. Others will be at their prime, too. Now bad moods infect the best of families. Complaints shadow the clearest of days. But in heaven, all gossip excised and jealousy extracted, no one will doubt your word or speak evil behind your back. Christ's completed redemptive work will discontinue all strife.

The resulting dramatic reunions are beautiful to imagine: a soldier embracing the sharpshooter who killed him, a daughter holding the father who abused her, a son encountering the mother who aborted him. And when they meet, forgiveness will flow like a waterfall. God's sin purging will wipe away all tears, all sorrow, all death (21:4).

No sin also means no boredom. You won't be bored in heaven because you won't be the same *you* in heaven. Boredom emerges from soils that heaven disallows. The soil of weariness (your eyes tire), mental limitations (information overload dulls you), tedium (meaningless activity siphons your vigour). But Satan will take these weedy soils to hell, leaving you with a keen mind, endless focus, and God-honouring assignments.

Yes, you'll have assignments in heaven. God gave Adam and Eve garden responsibilities (Gen. 1:26). He mantled the couple with leadership over the earth (v. 26) and placed Adam in the garden "to tend and keep it" (2:15, NKJV). Adam and his descendants will serve God again (Rev. 22:3). And what is service if not responsible activity?

You might serve in the capacity you serve now. Couldn't earthly assignments hint at heavenly ones? You may be a chef on Saturn or a mural designer for the New Jerusalem. God might fill heaven with plants and animals and entrust you with the care and feeding of an Africa or two.

Increase will mark this new world. You might oversee the orbit of a distant planetary system or monitor the expansion of a new species. "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Is 9:7, NKJV). Increased planets? Colors? Music? Seems likely.

And the attributes of God will increasingly stun. His grace and wisdom will progressively astound. God is so rapt with wonders that their viewing requires

an eternity. And this is his invitation: "When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (John 14:3, NLT).

John Todd was very young when he became an orphan. His aunt offered to take him in and sent a servant to get



YOU MIGHT SERVE IN THE CAPACITY YOU SERVE NOW. COULDN'T EARTHLY ASSIGNMENTS HINT AT HEAVENLY ONES?

John. As they set out for her house, the boy's questions unveiled his fears.

"Will I like living with her?"

"You fall into good hands."

"Will she go to bed before we get there?"

"Oh, no! She'll wait up. When we get out of these woods, you'll see her light in


the window."

Sure enough, as they neared the house, John saw the lighted window and his aunt standing in the doorway. When he reached the porch, she kissed him and said, "Welcome home!"

John Todd grew up in his aunt's care and became a pastor. Years later, she sent news of her impending death. Here's his reply:

"My dear aunt,

"Years ago, I left a house of death, not knowing where I was going. The ride was long, but the servant encouraged me. Finally I arrived to a new home and your embrace. I was expected; I felt safe. "Now your turn has come. I'm writing to tell you, Someone's waiting up, your room's all ready, the light's on, the door's open, and you're expected!"

As are you. Jesus is preparing for you a place. A perfect place of perfected people with the perfect Lord. And at the right time he'll come and take you home. 



Max Lucado is the pastor of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, and a best-selling author of numerous books, including *3:16: The Numbers of Hope* (Thomas Nelson), from which *Christianity Today* adapted this article.



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Glengarry is The Scots College extended stay outdoor education campus located in Kangaroo Valley, New South Wales. The residential program encompasses academic, outdoor, environmental and professional development education. Year 9 students are encouraged to develop self reliance, independence and high levels of self motivation and leadership as they participate in the two term program.

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The Scots College
Sydney Australia



JULY 2010

- 21** Crossroads special (home mission) charge Hobart with about 90 c&a, (communicants and adherents) 10 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and Youth) and 5 e (elders). Dan Shephard.
- 22** Public Affairs Colloquium “Religion in the Public Square” Assembly Hall, Melbourne next three days. Dr Scott Rae, Talbot School of Theology, USA and 24 other leaders. The topics include business ethics, freedom of religion, Christian worldview and sexual/pro-life ethics.
- 23** Inverell charge, northern NSW – 2 congregations including Ashford – with about 235 c&a, 70 yf and 14 e. Peter and Lillian Greiner.
- 24** Manly-Lota home mission station, SE Brisbane with about 60 c&a, 65 yf and 6 e. Des and Jean Gallagher.
- 25** Pray for the Moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Sunraysia (Mildura) home mission station Vic with about 40 c&a, 15 yf and 1 e.
- 26** Leeton-Yanco charge – 2 congregations: Leeton-Yanco and Narrandera – with about 180 c&a, 20 yf and 12 e. Richard and Karen Keith.
- 27** Dalby charge western Qld – 2 congregations including Cecil Plains, with about 240 c&a, 225 yf and 13 e. Roland and Joanne Lowther.
- 28** Pray for the Interim Moderator Jeff Read, preachers and filling of the vacancy in North Sydney charge (including Greenwich) with about 200 c&a, 45 yf and 21 e. Steven Pym assistant.
- 29** Robina charge, Qld Gold Coast, with about 50 c&a, 15 yf and 3 e. Kevin and Beverley Ridley.
- 30** Presbytery of the Hawkesbury – western Sydney – 11 charges and 4 home

mission stations totalling 21 congregations with about 2320 c&a and 830 yf, 9 retired ministers, 5 under jurisdiction, 2 hospital chaplains, 2 deaconesses, 2 workers among koorie people. Mick Quirk clerk.

- 31** Clayfield charge, northside Brisbane, with about 50 c&a, 12 yf and 5 e. Andrew and Simone Richardson.

AUGUST 2010

- 1** Discernment for voters, so that able, honest and godly legislators are returned at forthcoming federal, NSW and Queensland Elections.
- 2** Our Partner Church, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian – Blantyre and Zambia synods.
- 3** Richard and Lisa Cho *MP* workers from Cornerstone church, Concord, Sydney in northern Thailand with OMF International involved in church planting.
- 4** Wyndham (Werribee) home mission station, Vic. with about 40 c&a, 15 yf and 1 e. Shane and Sue Cassidy.
- 5** Ipswich charge, Qld – 2 congregations: Central Church (formerly St Stephens) and Forest Hill with about 235 c&a, 65 yf and 14e. Scott and Rebecca Muir.
- 6** Andrew and Rosemary Williamson *MP* workers from Gosford NSW in Vanuatu involved in providing theological training.
- 7** The work and effectiveness of agencies aiming at widespread realization that refusal to recognize the reality and sovereignty of the Creator, as shown by denial of design in His created world, is at the heart of secularist views of the universe and human morality. (Romans 1:18-22)
- 8** Nathan and Kathy Griffith *MP* workers from Epping, Sydney in Portugal involved in language learning.
- 9** Graham and Irene Haywood *MP* workers from Hurstville, Sydney in Victoria HQ of Wycliffe Bible Translators involved in maintenance, hospitality and administration after

yeas in PNG with Wycliffe Bible Translators/SIL.

- 10** Presbytery of Ballarat, Vic. – 7 charges and 2 home mission stations totaling 18 congregations with about 445 c&a and 75 yf, 1 retired minister, 2 under jurisdiction. John Woodward clerk.
- 11** Graham and Sue Hammond *MP* workers from Croydon Hills, Melbourne in Cairns, Qld, involved in guest house ministry after time in PNG.
- 12** Como charge southern Sydney with about 40 c&a, 7 yf and 2 e. Graham and Therese Stark.
- 13** Thank God for the ministry of Fayek and Samira to Middle Eastern folk and pray for His guidance and blessing for their future.
- 14** Pray for steadfastness for the millions of Christians undergoing severe persecution by followers of other religions and non-religious philosophies (Heb. 13:3).
- 15** Barbara Sayers *MP* worker formerly from Gosford and Cairns and now in Eltham, Melbourne, involved with aboriginal folk since 1957 in Ernabella, SA (nursing) and Aurukun, Qld (translation) and still actively involved with Wycliffe Bible Translators/SIL.
- 16** PIM leadership: Robert Duncanson NT, convener; Stuart Bonnington WA superintendent.
- 17** Colac charge, Vic. with about 85 c&a, 5 yf and 4 e. Marvin and Margaret Hagens.
- 18** Upper Hunter charge west of Newcastle – 2 congregations: Musswellbrook and Scone with about 80 c&a, 8 yf and 6 e. Alan and Jenny Horsburgh.
- 19** Ann Street Brisbane charge with about 185 c&a, 20 yf and 17 e. Archie and Heather McNicol.
- 20** Presbytery of Torrens, Adelaide and northern SA – 4 charges and 3 home mission stations totaling 8 congregations with about 325 c&a and 25 yf, 1 retired minister. Chris ten Broeke clerk.



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books

Why Join a Small Church?

John Benton
Christian Focus Press, 2008
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

John Benton is an English Baptist pastor and managing editor of *Evangelicals Now*, a monthly British Christian newspaper noted for its conservative theological stance, while seeking to relate to the modern world in a way that is faithful to Scripture. This little book (61 pages) is a prophetic call for believers to abandon the “consumerist” mindset which so many have today with regards to church involvement (“it must have a good youth group, it must have great preaching, it must have everything that suits me, etc etc”) and adopt the attitude of being willing to get involved in smaller, struggling causes. This is a depressingly common problem encountered by faithful pastors, to see the very people who need to learn most about Christian service, avoiding it, by going to the big church up the road.

Where would we be if our blessed Lord and Saviour had adopted this attitude? Buy some copies of this book and keep them handy for those who turn up next time seeking a new church to attend. Highly recommended.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot’s Kirk, Fremantle.

God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades

Rodney Stark
Harper One, 2009
Reviewed by Mark Powell

This brilliant book should be required reading for all Christians. For too long the crusades have been viewed as the great moral blemish upon the Christian faith without due consideration for their historical and religious context. The eminent American sociologist from Baylor University, Rodney Stark, provides a balanced, persuasive and much-needed corrective.

Stark demonstrates that the crusades were a response to more than 600 years of

Muslim military aggression and bloody conquest. They were motivated primarily by the desire to provide safe passage for Christian pilgrims traveling to the holy land (many of them were being brutally attacked, tortured and murdered) as well as to free it from Islamic “dhimmitude” and oppression. What’s more, rather than seeing it as a fortuitous occasion for “land and loot” most of the crusaders went at great personal and financial cost, mortgaging their own estates to fund the campaign.

The bibliography alone is worth the price of the book and reflects an impressive breadth of research. Stark does not gloss over the weaknesses and a foible of those involved in the crusades, but at the same time proves that these have been greatly exaggerated.

One of the lasting benefits of this book is the excellent opportunity that it presents for engaging with those who may have dismissed the gospel because of erroneous perspective on this particular event. This is a book that one can use as an apologetic tool to give way.

Mark Powell is a Presbyterian minister.

Anger Management

Richard Baxter
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

This is part of a series called *Pocket Puritans*, which is designed to make the Puritans somewhat more manageable for modern readers. Baxter cared little for style, and never bothered to revise or correct his works, but raced quickly on to

the next one – and ended up writing 168 books! In this little booklet, we have a section on “When anger is sinful”, followed by 16 considerations to hinder sinful anger, followed by six possible objections (or excuses), and 16 practical directions against sinful anger.

Finally, there is a very short biography of Baxter, taken from J. C. Ryle’s *Old Times*. This is a booklet, not a treatise, but anger is a growing problem in modern Western society, and Baxter’s wisdom should prove a help to many. One small comment about the cover – the word “management” appears above the word “anger”, which is a trifle confusing.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

Bible Numbers

Alison Brown
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Many young children love to work with numbers, and this book deals with 12 Bible episodes that will take the reader through numbers one to 12. There are exercises attached to each lesson, and by the end of the book the youngster should know twelve Bible stories and the numbers one to 12. It is all attractively presented, and should prove most useful for those teaching young children.

All books reviewed are available from the **Reformers Bookshop** – Phone: (02) 9569 9857 or visit www.reformers.com.au



Catholicism: East of Eden

Richard Bennett
The Banner of Truth Trust, 2nd Edition
REVIEW BY DR PETER MASTERS OF SPURGEON’S METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE LONDON

By an increasingly well-known former priest with impeccable Catholic educational credentials, this [book] begins with the writer’s testimony, affirms the sole authority of God’s Word, then describes and critiques a range of Catholic doctrines and practices – all in a style that is captivating, courteous, and crystal clear.

Richard Bennett spent over twenty years as a parish priest in Trinidad, and writes from deep experience, providing the most readable survey, supported by first-hand experiences, of any of the currently available critiques of Catholicism. In the chapter, “The Mystic Plague”, the author takes his readers into a Shango (Voodoo) meeting attended by him as a curious priest. We read of gory rituals tolerated by the Catholic Church, which for centuries has absorbed the mystery elements of pagan religions.

The alignment of new evangelicals with Rome is ably reviewed – a crucial chapter that should be read by all evangelical office bearers – but then the whole book is of such immense value it should be regarded as priority reading. It is a blend of sheer intelligence and simple clarity.

Richard Bennett’s websites: www.bereanbeacon.org and also www.helpfor Catholics.org
His MP3s and DVDs are easily accessed at www.sermonaudio.com/go/212

Banning Christianity

SOON EVERYTHING WILL BE TOLERATED EXCEPT CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE.

Peter Jones

While being reassured by the “progressives” that we are moving forward to a new day of utopian human transformation, in fact, all roads are leading backwards — to pre-Constantine pagan Rome. During that period, the Christian faith was outlawed and officially persecuted (see the first four chapters of my book, *Capturing the Pagan Mind*), but in AD 313, the Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of his realm, and from then on, the state rigorously sought to promote the Christian faith and eliminate all vestiges of paganism. The rest, as they say, is (Christian) history — until now.

Now, in “Christian England”, says journalist Melanie Phillips, “terrifying as this may seem, the attempt to stamp out Christianity in Britain appears to be gathering pace”. The wind is blowing in the opposite direction. Rather than protecting and promoting biblical truth, the state now seems hell-bent on criminalising it. Phillips cites the May 1, 2010, case of Dale McAlpine, a Christian open-air evangelist in England who happened to state that homosexuality was a sin according to the Bible. The insensitive chap found himself carted off by the police (one of them “gay”), locked up in a cell for seven hours and charged with using “abusive words and behavior”.

Everything is tolerated except “intolerable” Christian moral standards. The nanny state’s new civil religion of pan-sexual liberation and interfaith polytheism will tell you it is OK to pray to *any god*, but not to *a god* in particular. Inmates at the Ed Young Senior Citizens Center near Savannah, Georgia, can “say” grace with a moment of *silence* but may not audibly thank the One Who created food, now that their meals are provided by money from the federal C(ae)sars.

This civil religion is intolerant of any beliefs but its own. On May 6, 2010, the Rev. Franklin Graham prayed in the

SOONER OR LATER THIS ANTI-BIBLICAL AGENDA, OFTEN MASQUERADING AS “CHRISTIAN”, WILL COME INTO DIRECT CONFLICT WITH THE OPPOSING WORLDVIEW OF SCRIPTURE.

Pentagon parking lot. As honorary chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force, Graham was to have led a prayer for the US military inside the federal building, but at the last minute he was disinvented, apparently on orders of the Commander-in-Chief. For affirming the classic Christian belief that Jesus is the only savior, Graham was out on his ear.

In her article, journalist and théologienne extraordinaire, Kathleen Parker (*Washington Post*) had no problem imposing *her* view of religion, which she considers better than Rev. Graham’s: “(we need to) transcend the notion that only some prayers are the right ones,... (this idea) might get us closer to the enlightenment we seek.”

The police will surely not be inactive on this side of the pond when President Obama’s corresponding pan-sexual agenda is eventually made law. His 2009 proclamation declaring June Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month congratulated the LGBT community for “strengthening the fabric of American society”. The President expressed a patriotic goal: “The (nation’s) promise of equality for all remains unfulfilled” until “the full spectrum of equal rights (is brought) to LGBT Americans.”

The President promised practical measures: “enhancing hate crimes laws, supporting civil unions... outlawing discrimination in the workplace, ensuring adoption rights, and ending the existing ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy in a way that

strengthens our armed forces and our national security.” Note: programmatic anti-creational sexuality will “strengthen” both the nation and the armed forces.

You have been warned! Sooner or later this anti-biblical agenda, often masquerading as “Christian”, will come into direct conflict with the opposing worldview of Scripture. One side can only allow Jesus to be one of many spiritual gurus, while the other sees Him as the only divine Savior; one side promotes pan-sexuality as strengthening the fabric of society (as in pagan Rome), while the other calls it an unnatural perversion that is tearing apart the fabric of normative heterosexual human identity, made in God’s image.

With more and more radicals committed to a “living Constitution” and sexual entitlements now appointed to courts and federal agencies, Bible-honouring Christians may soon be treated as un-American “scofflaws”, their spoken witness outlawed as hate speech.

Ironically, though the President signed this Gay Pride proclamation “in the year of our Lord 2009” (as the old text quaintly puts it), in fact, faith in “our Lord”, the God of Creation and Redemption, is being progressively stamped out and outlawed in the USA as in Britain.

We are *not* going forward. We are going back — to the time of powerful Roman paganism, when the persecuted Christians declared with boldness to a hostile State: “...this Jesus Christ of Nazareth... has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12). ap



Peter Jones is founder and director of TruthXchange, where this article first appeared.