

The Presbyterian Banner

October 2019



The Rev. William McIntyre about to constitute the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia 10 October 1846
in the home of William Buyers, 4 Hunter Street, Sydney.

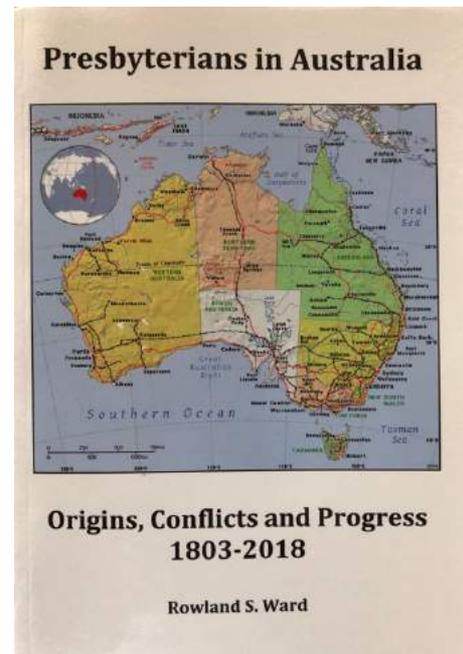
L to R: Rev. Colin Stewart, Mr Samuel Martin, Rev. William McIntyre, Rev. John Tait, Mr Peter Stewart, Mr William Buyers

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FROM THE EDITOR

Thirty years ago I published the first attempt to write a history of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Australia. Entitled *The Bush Still Burns* its 576 pages concentrated on the doctrinal history setting our own small PCEA in the bigger context of the large Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Synod funded the book of which about 1,000 copies were sold and the Synod made a modest profit. It was a bit of a complex book because I included some rather technical detail on pre 1865 history which I wanted to see on the public record and included lists of early Presbyterian ministers. Little did I realise that over the years I would compile with Dr Malcolm Prentis a Biographical Register of over 1,100 ministers who began their Australian service prior to 1901 (we're working on the period to 1977), produce a separate history of the PCEA (currently available for free download at <www.pcea.org.au> and last year write a history of the Presbyterian Church of Australia with the PCEA coming into the story only when it intersects with the larger church. This latest book is now in a second limited printing. While much of the *Bush Still Burns*, carefully revised, is included, there is much new material not only for the last 40 years, but chapters on the fascinating Ferguson heresy case in the 1890s, the Smith of Dunesk Mission to the Outback 1894-1932 and, perhaps most interesting of all to PCEA readers, the revival of Calvinism 1938-198 on pages 298-314.



The book is 377 pages and includes over 70 illustrations, two charts, a comprehensive bibliography and an index chiefly of persons. Including postage within Australia the cost is \$30 and can be secured from the author.

The PCEA was founded on 10th October 1846. The whereabouts of the painting of the scene shown on the front cover is currently unknown. If anyone has information please let me know. RSW

The Presbyterian Banner [ISSN 0729-3542] is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was founded in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as a correct summary of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. There are congregations in Woolloowin (Brisbane), Qld.; Maclean, Grafton, Wauchope, Kindee, Taree, Cardiff, Raymond Terrace, Sydney CBD, Mt Druitt in NSW; Wantirna, Mulgrave, Narre Warren, Carrum Downs, Geelong in Vic.; Ulverstone, Tas.

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Pure Praise

Psalm 8

Rev George Ball, Taree

This psalm is strikingly different from Psalms 3-7. There are no enemies, no suffering, no cries for help, no distress, no struggles and no requests. It's pure praise. Derek Kidner writes, 'This psalm . . . celebrates . . . the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him; all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe'. The opening and closing verses frame the psalm and set the theme, 'O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' Everything in the psalm must be interpreted through this frame. Who is God? He is the LORD (Yahweh) the loving, loyal LORD, who has entered into a covenant with his people. He is 'our Lord' (Adonai) our King – who in Alec Motyer's words is, 'the active executive, managing director, controller and detailed planner of his world, in all its aspects and activities'.

Because He is such a God, David asks with astonishment in verse 4, 'What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him'? Calvin reminds us, 'we can never come to know ourselves unless we have first looked at God'. The key to knowing oneself is not to engage in navel gazing – or to study *Gray's Anatomy* – but we must start with God and His Word to get the true biblical view. That's why the Catechism begins (and not ends) with the question, 'What is the chief end of man'? A: 'To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever'. It then asks, 'What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him? A. The Word of God which consists of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him'. That's how we find our identity and *raison d'être*.

The psalm is a song of praise inspired by the words of Genesis 1-2, especially how it presents man as the pinnacle of the creation week. Everything God made was for man to enjoy. The psalm begins, 'You have set your glory above the heavens'. We know that the mighty God has splashed His majesty and power across the heavens so that everyone is without excuse (Rom. 1: 20). But David says something more. He tells us that the Lord has set His glory *above* the heavens. Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, 'Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you' (1 Kings 8:27). If what we see is glorious – we haven't seen the half of it yet!

As we approach the psalm – like the Teddy Bears picnic – we are in for a big surprise. We'd expect such a great big God to reveal his grace and glory in big things; but

surprisingly he delights to reveal himself in little things, and weak things, and apparently insignificant things.

1. The LORD Reveals his Grace and Glory Through the Lips of Little Children.

'Out of the mouth of babies and infants you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.' How does God silence his enemies and those who seek revenge? Through the mouth of babies and infants (2)! Does that not surprise you? Most of us are fascinated and attracted by a baby. So fearfully and wonderfully made. Only the Lord could make one. Calvin writes, 'infants, while they nurse at their mother's breasts, have tongues so eloquent to preach His glory that there is no need at all for other orators.' (*Institutes*, Book 1. 5. 3).

David was not only speaking literally but metaphorically – as Jesus did when He prayed, 'I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children' (Matt. 11: 25). Who are the little children? Not toddlers. But those who receive the gospel in childlike trust (Matt. 18:3). It's out of their mouths that God has established praise. Paul writes in a similar manner, 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – so that no one may boast before him' (1 Cor. 1: 27-29).

When David penned these words, he may also have been thinking about His own personal experience when he - the youngest in the family - was chosen by Samuel; or when he – just a lad - defeated the giant.

David was also speaking prophetically. Jesus saw this psalm fulfilled in His day (see Matt. 21: 12-16). It was Palm Sunday. The crowds had spread their cloaks in front of Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. This is what people did when kings were crowned (2 Kings 9: 13). He then purged the temple of the moneychangers and healed the blind and the lame. All the people – including the children - cried out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. The chief priests and scribes were angry (because the children had ascribed a messianic title to Jesus) and complained to Jesus, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you not read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise"' (quoting Ps. 8: 2). This was dynamite. By quoting Psalm 8 Jesus was indicating that he is the subject of the Psalm and worthy of such praise from children and infants. He was also suggesting that those who opposed him – the chief priests and scribes – were the enemies of Yahweh.

Dale Ralph Davis writes, 'Praise of God is highly powerful even if – or especially when - it comes from sources we would consider weak. There is a strange wallop in the praises of God's people that silences God's enemies'. Praise packs a powerful punch. It defies and frustrates the enemies of God.

Robert Godfrey writes, 'The chorus of praise that has sounded from Christ's people through the centuries has drowned out the efforts of His enemies to stop His work of redemption'. This should encourage us to say with David,

'I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth' (Ps. 34:1).

2. The LORD Reveals His Grace and Glory Through His Care for Mere Man (3-8).

We imagine David stargazing under the night sky. He describes the heavens as, *'the work of your fingers'*. Clearly a work of precision that didn't require a great sweat. He describes the moon and the stars as that which, *'you have set in place'*. He apparently didn't believe in the big bang or evolution! Davis writes, 'On a clear night David could have seen 2,000-3,000 stars. What if he had a good pair of binoculars? Up to 1000,000! What if David knew that if the Milky Way galaxy were the size of the entire continent of North America, our solar system would fit in a coffee cup, and that the Milky Way is one of perhaps 100 billion such galaxies in the universe? He would probably have been even more staggered than he was – but he had enough to stagger him to be impressed with the massive vastness of his world over against his apparent insignificance'.

As David continued gazing, he began to wonder about life on planet earth. *'What is man (enosh) that you are mindful of him, and the son of man (adam) that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands, you have put all things under his feet'* (4-6). David marvels that the infinite God who made the heavens should care about tiny man. Out of all the creatures the Lord made, man alone was given authority to exercise dominion over all things (even though he wasn't the biggest or the strongest). He was made to rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the air, and every1 creeping thing on the earth.

But (sadly) it didn't last. Instead of exercising dominion over the serpent and crushing its head as he should have done, he allowed himself to be influenced by it and became disobedient to God. Because of his disobedience he was no longer able to fulfil the destiny God had mapped out for him. That's why the writer to the Hebrews says, **'At present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him'** (i.e. man) (Heb. 2:8). That's why we see a great disconnect between Psalm 8 and our experience today. Man has clearly lost dominion. He is now the victim of illness and accident and tragedy.

3. The LORD Reveals His Grace and Glory Through the Lord Jesus Christ (4-8).

This psalm is quoted four times in the New Testament – in Matt. 21:16, 1 Cor. 15: 25-27, Eph. 1: 20-22 and Hebrews 2: 5-9. Each reference agrees that this psalm points us to the perfect man – the Lord Jesus Christ – who spearheads the fulfilment of this psalm. Hebrews 2: 5-9 is the longest quotation (quoting the Greek translation – the Septuagint). After writing, **'At present we do not yet see everything in subjection to him,'** he

tells us, **'But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone'** (Heb. 2:9). When Jesus was on earth, he did what the first Adam failed to do – he exercised dominion. He exercised dominion over demons, over nature, over sickness, and even over death. Unlike the first Adam, he lived a perfect human life in complete obedience to God. But he did more than that. He made it possible for the dignity and dominion described in this psalm to be restored in us. How? By becoming weak – and suffering apparent defeat. He humbled himself and subjected Himself to death on a cross (Phil. 2: 8). The infinite Creator became a man and took upon Himself our sin and rebellion and filthiness and foolishness and paid the redemption price for our sin. But death could not hold him. He exercised dominion over death by His victorious resurrection on the third day. He has ascended to the right hand of God far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and all things are under His feet (Eph. 1: 20-22). He possesses all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28: 18). We who are united to Him are already risen with Him and sit with Him in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2: 5-6). One day when He appears in great glory, we will also reign with Him. Paul says, 'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world' and, 'If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him' (1 Cor. 6: 2 and 2 Tim. 2:12). Are you not surprised? Do you not want to praise Him? *'O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth'!*

QUESTIONS

1. What's the theme of Psalm 8?
2. What is the significance of the two names/titles? (verse 1).
3. God ironically reveals His grace and glory through little things and weak things. Can you think of examples?
4. How did Jesus see the fulfilment of this psalm in Matt. 21: 12-16? See also Mark 9: 9: 33-36 and 1 Cor. 1: 27-29.
5. What lessons should the night sky teach us? (3-4).
6. What was unique about Adam and Eve in the Garden? Cf. Gen. 1: 26-28.
7. What were some of the things 'man' was made to have dominion over?
8. What brought the fall of man and what were some of the consequences?
9. The New Testament sees verses 5-8 fulfilled in Jesus. See 1 Cor. 15: 25-27. Eph. 1: 20-22. And Hebrews 2: 5-9. 9.
10. What is our ultimate Christian hope? See 2 Tim. 2: 10-12.

Global Challenges Facing Christianity: “The Health & Wealth” or “Prosperity” Gospel

Rev. Dr J. C. Whytock, Prince Edward Island

This short article is a synopsis of a seminar presented at the recent World Reformed Fellowship General Assembly in Jakarta in August, 2019. It dealt with one challenge currently facing the global Church, namely, the health and wealth or prosperity Gospel. It is a summary case study of this challenge.

Definition

What is the “prosperity gospel”? This teaching views financial wealth and physical well-being as evidence of God’s pleasure with the faith of believers. The Christian life is viewed as a contract between God and His people: if people have enough faith, then God will bless them and bring them prosperity and health. There are variants within this teaching, but basically that is it in a nut shell.

Streams

Though there are several strains or tributaries, a broad evaluation of the movement reveals six separate streams. The *first* emerged out of the old holiness stream and can be traced back to the late 19th century centering upon healing. Not all in this stream have fully embraced the modern phenomena, but there is a historic root here. The *second* stream comes from Mind Power Teaching and is rooted in the teaching of E.W. Kenyon; here evangelical theology mixes with mind power thinking. The *third* stream is rooted in utilitarian and pragmatic thought. We see it manifested in our cultural captivity to consumerism. The *fourth* stream is post-World War Two Pentecostalism; this once marginalized group of Christians began to focus on prosperity, blessing and contractual theology. The movement centred on many healing evangelists. The *fifth* stream is the Word of Faith stream of the 1970s. The sixth stream is from the majority world and is a syncretism of Christianity, African Traditional Religion and/or Asian Shamanism. Variants on all of the above also can be found with a “soft prosperity Gospel” approach – evangelicals who don’t even know they are dabbling with prosperity gospel teachings.

Characteristics

General characteristics have emerged from the prosperity gospel movement: such as, the language of empowerment, a stress upon Christ’s work as healer and liberator from financial bondage, the abundant life, giving and being blessed materially, positive thinking, releasing your potential, pyramidal church governance,

and now soft prosperity. We should also note with thanksgiving that there are some within this movement who are emerging out of such teaching and embracing a more historic evangelical theology and ministerial model.

Scriptures

The scriptures are at the heart of this movement but with a high selectivity. The constant scriptural emphasis is upon the Abrahamic covenant as a means to physical blessing; the prayer of 3 John 2 is a constant and many other scriptures from the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10 to Deuteronomy 30:2-9 and Mark 10:30. The issue here is a mis-use of scripture or, to state it more accurately, a failure to follow the rules of proper interpretation. Further scriptures which need to be studied are Mark 10:17-24 and the rich young ruler, Luke 9:57-60, and the prayer of Proverbs 30:7, to mention just a few examples of how to apply a fuller interpretation to the concept of the blessings of God.

Challenges

The Prosperity Gospel has many challenges for the evangelical and Reformed community and these challenges centre upon the following: a de-emphasis upon the classical understanding of Christ’s atoning work; a materialistic idolatry; and a lack of *sola scriptura* thinking and a replacement with an human authoritarian model; a failure to grasp the principle of the analogy of faith when it comes to interpreting scripture; both cultural and pagan syncretistic challenges; a return to a medieval indulgence type of religious life; a failure to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and His will; and a failure to see that scripture speaks both positively and negatively. A final challenge is also to see this as a global issue and not confine it, as many have, to the USA or Africa.

Response

The key to responding to the false teaching of the prosperity gospel is for the Church to return to rigorous discipleship models of spiritual life and nurture in preaching, bible study, family devotions and personal spiritual formation. Our response must also impact the theological curriculum of theological colleges and seminaries whereby future Christian leaders are trained to identify and respond to this modern false teaching in its various forms whether in Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, or Europe. Like most egregious and unbalanced Christian teachings, this particular false teaching can be found in past ages. Just as our forefathers identified errors or unbalanced teachings before us, so in our contemporary global context, this is one such challenge that many will be required to face today.

A couple of helpful books on this subject are Kate Bowler’s, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (2014) and Costi Hinn, *God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel* (2019).

Rev. Dr Jack Whytock is a minister of the Free Church of Scotland and visiting lecturer and Governor of Dumisani Theological Institute, King William’s Town, South Africa. In August he and his wife Nancy visited many of the PCEA Congregations.

PCEA/PCA Differences

Rowland S. Ward, PCEA Melbourne

We are often asked, ‘What is the difference between the PCEA and the Presbyterian Church of Australia [PCA]?’

Of course the PCA is much larger with a typical Sunday attendance in over 500 centres of some 26,000. Its form of worship is generally somewhat different with praise bands in many churches and perhaps a more contemporary feel. The Psalter has some use but certainly not exclusively. Still that is not the major difference although we make no apology for giving the Word of God the chief place in our simple form of worship. The significant issue is the way office-bearers are required to adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The following article, prompted by a new book from the PCA, is not written with the aim of stirring up ill feeling with brothers and sisters we hold in high regard, but rather to show why our position of constructive separation in organisation is still warranted.

Paul F. Cooper & David A. Burke (eds.), *Read in the Light: The 1901 Declaratory Statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia* (Eider Books, <eiderpress@gmail.com> 2019) 300pp \$35

This book from the section of the Presbyterian Church which stayed apart from the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977 seeks to give an account of the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The general position of the authors is that the Declaratory Statement, ‘in the light’ of which the Westminster Confession is to be read, aims to safeguard the orthodox Reformed or Calvinistic faith but to give a measure of liberty on other matters. I was privileged to represent our own PCEA Moderator, the Rev. Robin Tso, at the General Assembly of Australia [GAA] last month, to bring greetings and lead devotions on Thursday morning. Apart from a minority view arguing for the participation of covenant children in the Lord’s Supper from birth, I heard nothing that was not consistent with an orthodox position on the great doctrines of the Christian Faith. It was very different when I was brought up in the church and was the reason I withdrew around 1968 and joined the PCEA. The Church was still giving an uncertain sound when I represented the PCEA in 1982, but continued further on the way of reform in 2001, when I was also present. So one is very thankful for the vast change that has occurred. But what of the book under review?

I: Background to the Basis of 1901

Our own denomination stayed out of unions in the 1850s and 1860s because the Confession of Faith was

compromised on the Church-State issue in order to unite three streams of Presbyterians - Established, Free and United - originating from Scotland. You could believe, as the PCEA believes, in the ideal of a Christian Church in a Christian State with each having their distinctive government without interfering in the lawful rights of the other or being intolerant or persecuting. But you could also believe otherwise, like some of the radical United Presbyterians who thought Church and State had nothing to do with each other – a position leading to the secular state model so common today where even fundamental Christian morality is ignored. It was not the biggest departure in the world but it indicated a pragmatic mood.

The Presbyterian compromise on the Confession widened soon after to questioning of major doctrines. In the 1881 case concerning Charles Strong of the Scots’ Church, Melbourne, radical theological revision was rejected but in the doing so more modest shifts were embraced or tolerated. This particularly impacted Scripture (a view of inspiration which limited it to its saving message so that incidental errors or mistakes on other matters could be allowed) and the atonement (where its objective reality was affirmed over against Strong’s position but its precise nature, whether as a penal substitution or a moral influence, was somewhat open).

The desire to see greater unity among the colonial Presbyterian churches led to Conferences 1879-85, to a Federal Assembly from 1886 and ultimately the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1901 as a federal union of the state-based churches but with certain powers, especially doctrine, ceded to the new body.

II: The Evolution of the Basis of Union

As one reviews the discussions over these 20 years, a draft doctrinal basis in 1884 is important (although disappointingly most of it is omitted from *Read in the Light* useful appendix of documents). The first question to be answered by office-bearers was: ‘Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice?’ This language is in line with the 1711 requirement in the Church of Scotland except that ‘manners’ was used in lieu of ‘practice’. The 1884 draft formula of subscription to the Confession was to the ‘*system of doctrine* contained in the Westminster Confession’ rather than to ‘*the whole doctrine*’, an expression which also dates from the Scottish Church in 1711. Accompanying the formula was (1) a declaratory statement on several matters generally in line with what would be adopted in 1901 with ‘liberty of opinion allowed on points in the Confession not necessary to the integrity of the system of doctrine therein taught’; (2) an explanatory note to assist in understanding the words ‘system of doctrine’ was provided and referred, in order, to the subjects covered by Chapters 1 to 20 of the Confession. ‘System’ subscription was certainly intended to be less restrictive than ‘whole doctrine’ and the brief comments in the explanatory statement on each of the 20 chapters certainly gave scope for wriggle room, but the proposed Basis was generally worded in a conservative way.

Subsequent discussion related to matters such as the training of ministers. However, in 1894/95 a fresh basis was

agreed which stated the supreme standard to be ‘the word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments’ and the subordinate standard was to be the Westminster Confession ‘read in the light’ of a Declaratory Statement. This Statement now included a clause interpreting the meaning of subscription to the whole doctrine as the Reformed system of doctrine in its unity &c. and a clause allowing liberty of opinion in ‘points not essential to the system of doctrine’ taught in the Confession. There was a modest expansion of the clause referred to in 1896, but in 1898 the entire clause interpreting the meaning of subscription was dropped. A declaratory Statement was maintained in 1901 as well as liberty of opinion ‘in matters not essential to the doctrine taught’ in the Confession.

III: Comments

In this section I limit myself to the doctrine of Scripture. The wording about the Scriptures, whether they ‘are’ (Larger Catechism) or ‘contain’ (Shorter Catechism) the word of God are words which can have a fully orthodox meaning. However, there is every reason to believe that the affirmation that they ‘are’ the word of God was taken by some before and after 1884 to allow that there could be errors in Scripture on matters not essential to salvation. NSW Moderator in March 1894, the Rev. George McInnes, delivered an address along these lines proclaiming the death of ‘verbal inspiration’ which sparked considerable controversy. The leading Victorian theologian Dr J. Laurence Rentoul attractively argues at length just this position (*Sydney Telegraph*, 23 April 1894, 5) although avoiding much of the inflammatory language used by McInnes.

At the Federal Assembly in September that year, the Rev. Duncan McEachran of Carlton (Melbourne), a conservative, gave an address as retiring moderator which dealt with the inspiration of Scripture in a modest but orthodox way. Another conservative the Rev. Alex Yule of Parkville read a paper, subsequently published, entitled *‘The Westminster Teaching on Inspiration’* (Melbourne, 1894). He rejects theories which postulate a rationalistic or naturalistic view of Scripture but advances three theories of inspiration that he says may be fairly claimed ‘to be tenable and not merely tolerable under the Westminster Confession’. The first is verbal inspiration of the originals, the orthodox view exemplified by Charles and Alexander Hodge of Princeton. The second is the view that inspiration varies in quality or intensity; Yule thinks this can be held along with complete loyalty to the Confession although he does not particularly like it and he says it lacks explicit support in the Confession. The third view is that the Scriptures are inspired as to their moral and spiritual truth so as to be the rule of faith and life and that this is what the Holy Spirit testifies to the believer. This is the same view advanced by McInnes in his NSW Moderator’s address in 1894 and well described in the Rev. Peter Barnes’ doctoral dissertation, *Living in a Half-way House: The Rise of Liberal Evangelicalism in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales 1865-*

1915. Both Rentoul and Andrew Harper, the leading theologian in NSW, supported Yule’s proposal that his three positions be an acceptable peace platform (*The Presbyterian*, 6 October 1894, 5). Indeed, when Yule died Rentoul acknowledged Yule had agreed with him to take a mediating position so as to reject radical liberalism on the one hand and ‘the minute network of doctrinal propositions’ of the Reformation faith on the other (*The Weekly Messenger*, 17 May 1907, 332).

IV: Some conclusions

a. The evolution of the document that became the Basis of Union of the Presbyterian Church of Australia is instructive. Taken along with the death of older ministers in the 1880s and 1890s and the increased number trained under men like the immensely influential Rentoul and Harper, it is very difficult to hold that the legal position of the PCA commits it to the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Such a position can be held, and happily is now very widespread, but it is not the legally exclusive position.

b. Contrary to one essay in the book reviewed (page 99, footnote 3) it is not necessary to regard the framers of the Declaratory Statement as disingenuous or theologically incompetent if they regarded the DS as consistent with the Confession. The Basis was designed to accommodate different views of Scripture and different views of what was essential to the doctrine of the Confession. Ultimately the legal meaning of the Basis is of higher authority than a majority vote.

c. It is also noteworthy that in 1888 the Church of Scotland changed the question on Scripture addressed to candidates from that in 1711 to the ‘word of God contained in the Scriptures’. For the Church of Scotland this could more clearly accommodate the view of Scripture that had become prevalent in her circles as inspired in religious and moral teaching but not necessarily in matters of lesser importance. In Australia it was easier to justify as it had been used in the earlier unions in Queensland (1863), South Australia (1865) and New South Wales (1865).

d. It was certainly not the intention of the Basis of Union to allow the wide departures from very fundamental doctrines that occurred after 1901, but nor was it intended to clarify and tighten up adherence to the Reformed faith as historically understood, which seems to the assumption of most of the authors, but to modify somewhat as was the case throughout the Presbyterian world of the time.

Apart from the frequent lack of adequate historical context, and an assumption as to the intent of the Basis that is not justified, the standard of the essays by the 13 authors, while varying somewhat, is good overall. As an exposition of one approach to the Basis of Union there is much of interest and value. I would simply say to our brothers: ‘Although there are great legal difficulties, do take steps to eventually eliminate the ambiguities from you Basis so enable subscribers to know exactly where they stand, hinder departures from a consistent Reformed position in the future and thus enable greater unity among Presbyterians in Australia to be realised.’#

The Book of Job 1-28 – Symptoms

Notes of a sermon at Knox PCEA

Rev. Eddie Smith

I have never seen a children's bible story book that includes the book of Job. Maybe it is rated "For mature audiences, with adult themes," at least subconsciously! I guess it is understandable in some ways: After all, children do not normally wrestle with the problem as to why bad things happen in the world, and why bad things happen to good people, and why even good things happen to bad people.

Certainly many adults are acquainted with the book of Job, even people who do not attend church. Down the years – at least in previous generations in particular – there have been some proverbial sayings to do with Job. The saying "As poor as Job" is an allusion to Job being robbed by Satan of everything he possessed. Then perhaps a better known saying is "Job's comforter," referring to any person who means to sympathize with you in your grief but says that you brought it on yourself, and so adds to your sorrow.

Personal impact

Forgive personal references, but briefly I mention first what the book of Job has meant to me over the years, doing this in the hope that you will appreciate the book itself even more. When I became a believer at the age of 17, I had in my possession – as did most Christians at that time – the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. I can say I understood all the Bible in the quaint language of the KJV, except for the book of Job. Then, when the translators of the Good News Bible put out the book of Job in modern English, while I was captivated then by Job as a book in plainer English, Job's sometime shocking language when addressing God took me by surprise, to say the least.

I had memorized in very early days Job's words about knowing his Redeemer lived and that in his flesh he would at last see God, but there was much more to Job than I was taught to believe. I began to pay close attention to what Job's friends were actually accusing him of, but honestly wondering how God's own words to Job in the end helped solve the dilemma of why Job had suffered. Still, an appreciation grew as I saw that God displayed His sovereignty in creation in a way that could humble Job, when his friends failed to convince the poor man as to the reason for his suffering.

Then there came the days of suffering some years ago for me. Time and time again I read the book of Job. I am not claiming I suffered with the same intensity as Job did, but thought I could understand why he blurted out before God some of the things he said. Noticing what Job

said, I tried to square it up with the apostle James's claim about Job being *steadfast* in the midst of suffering, trying to see that Job was in many ways patient, with an endurance inspired by hope of vindication, despite the pain he had to withstand.

In those days of trial for me, the difficulties of Elizabethan English were encountered again when I bought a facsimile copy of Calvin's 159 sermons in Job, sermons printed as they appeared in England in 1574. Yet, it is surprising how one can get used to *ye olde English* again. I found Calvin enthralling in his exposition of Job, and my understanding greatly increased.

Contrived history?

The apostle James believed Job was a historical person, so James obviously did not question the historicity of the book of Job. We may be tempted to think the story of Job contrived. For instance, we may be tempted to be sceptical of Job meeting four disasters in one day; that four messengers (all of whom are a sole survivor of one of the disasters) tell Job one after the other what had happened. History? Then we have three friends who help form three cycles of speeches against Job, while Elihu, the young friend, seems to speak three times to Job. Then, there is the ending of the book: We discover Job obtains exactly double of all he initially lost in the way of animals, as well as gaining exactly the number of sons and daughters he lost in the beginning.

Much could be said about such so-called contrivance but, in defence of what is recorded in the book, let us simply say that if God is God, if God "is" according to what He says of Himself in the end of Job, then He is able to bring about both disaster and deliverance in a way that reveals how such things do not occur fortuitously or a case of happenstance – but according to His sovereign will.

On re-reading Job recently, I became quite awe-struck at the power of God in creation and can understand how God alone, unlike Job's three friends (and Elihu too), could reduce Job to the point where at last he is forced to exclaim (Job 42:5-6) –

"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees You;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent (or: and I am comforted) in dust and ashes."

Understanding the book

The well-known poet Tennyson said Job is "the greatest poem of ancient or modern times," but remembering, as James tells us, Job as a man is a real life model of patience with endurance of such kind that should inspire all of us who believe in Christ to possess, no matter what trials or temptations we face.

When we consider Job 1-28, of course, it is difficult to know how to handle such a vast book, and such a vast subject briefly as to why bad things happen if God is supposedly in control. I believe most Australians are agnostic, therefore it is safe to say that most Australians will be found asking: "If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world?" Yet, we are to recall that Job and his friends

were not agnostic. Job's friends were believers who despite solid belief in God thought to reconcile with ease what had happened to Job through the sovereign power and righteousness of God.

The book of Job has Job's friends arguing with Job about the divine and not a doubtful reason for the tragedies that fell on Job. His friends claim Job must have sinned to have incurred such calamity and suffering. Job fights to vindicate himself, finding God is long silent while his friends freely attack him.

In looking at Job himself, I want to suggest two things: in terms of what Job suffered, Job's friends are concerned with what may be regular as *symptoms* the sickness of serious sin; secondly, in terms of what Job suffered, God is concerned more discerningly with the true cause behind Job's complaining and therefore carries out *surgery* of a kind. Job's friends seek to correct him, seeing themselves as doctors of the soul, but how discerning are they?

At the outset of the book we know God was pleased with Job. Job was an upright man, but God allows Satan to inflict suffering on him. Job remains righteous, proving Satan is unjust and wrong in persecuting him. All seems fine at first, with Job initially bearing up quite well with his suffering, even reprimanding his wife for her wicket advice.

His three friends hear about his suffering, and therefore come to comfort him (Job 2:11.) They are amazed at Job's appearance, becoming sympathetically silent for seven sad days at seeing his great suffering. Then, however, the storm breaks out, as it were, once Job begins to speak to them. He arouses his friends' anger when he opens his mouth and expresses his deep regret at having been born (Job 3.) He curses the day of his birth by first exclaiming –

“Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived’.

Let that day be darkness!

May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.

Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.

Let clouds dwell upon it;

let the blackness of the day terrify it.

That night – let thick darkness seize it!

Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;

let it not come into the number of the months.

Behold, let that night be barren;

let no joyful cry enter it.”

Notice that Job's words carry restraint of a kind, though his words are wild. He does not curse God Himself, though he appears to come perilously close to doing so, since he alludes to God bringing Job into the world in error. Job does not even curse himself, but he curses the day he was born. At this point he does not directly question God, yet he complains about being born (Job 3:3-10), longs to die (vv. 11-19), hates life (vv. 20-23), and moans that what he always dreaded has at last come upon him (vv. 24-26).

Note also that Job's first words to his friends are shot through with wishes (*may* this happen, *may* that happen), and then with questions (*why* this, *why* that). Perhaps some of us here have been through the same agony: “I wish this or that had happened,” and “why did this and that happen to me? I wish I was dead.” We are to take comfort to know Job was not struck down with lightning for thinking and saying out loud what he said. God takes up to some measure what Job first said to his friends in order to reduce Job to repentance and final restoration.

In this first outburst Job mentions his birth, day and night, the creature called the Leviathan, doors, stars, the belly and the womb, being bound, being free, being hidden, waking up, rejoicing, fear, exhaustion, as well as a small number of other things that finds him regretting life. God does not forget Job's first words. Keep that in mind.

Now, including Job's first lamentation about living, there are three cycles of lively speeches that pass between Job and his three friends. We already know from the beginning that Job is innocent and is not deserving of the suffering he is undergoing, but his friends are not convinced about this. They are ignorant of the drama that had taken place between God and Satan in heaven, but this ignorance does not excuse or dispense with the foolishness of Job's friends, who are dogmatic in believing that x amount of suffering equals the result of x amount of sin, and therefore Job is suffering so much because he has sinned so much.

We are not absolutely certain if Job actually spoke first each time and his friends replied in turn, or whether each of Job's speeches were always a response to what his friends just said. I tend to think Job spoke first and his friends would reply each time. There are definite literary connections to suggest the men were responding each time on the heels of what Job first said to each man.

Symptoms

As I mentioned before, Job's friends were concerned with symptoms. Whenever there is sickness, as we know, evidence is sought in order to locate its cause. A doctor may ask you about or observe for himself any symptoms that are apparent. Yet symptoms may not be altogether enough for a diagnosis. Dizziness or fatigue, for instance, may not explain the true cause of your suffering. Such symptoms as dizziness and fatigue may cover many things. Headaches may be due to eyestrain, but not necessarily so.

We can say that Job's friends thought they saw in Job's suffering a syndrome – a set of symptoms that clearly pointed to his dilemma. Job's sin was clear: one symptom was the four tragedies that occurred all at once. Another symptom was the excruciating disease of his skin, the two kinds of miseries that beset Job were in themselves because of sin, said his three friends. Therefore, they attack him mercilessly, particularly when Job appears too stubborn to heed their reproof and advice.

Still, our author leans in favour to a degree of what Job has to say in defence of his feelings. Job's words occupy about twice as much space as they do for his friends in the book of Job, for we already know Job is underserving of the suffering he incurs, because we know the end from the beginning, as it were. Our author is far more interested in

what Job has to say in the midst of his trials. We are meant to see how patient he is, not only in enduring the tragedy of losing his possessions and his loved ones, and bearing up under his physical pain, but in weathering the attacks on him by his friends.

Yes, in addition note another symptom - the outrageous words Job was uttering when answering his friends. Here are just some outrageous things in the cycle of his speeches –

- “Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfil my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that He would let loose His hand and cut me off!”
- (He says to God): “Leave me alone.”
- “(God) has torn me in His wrath and hated me...”
- “(God) has set me up as His target....”
- “Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me?”

My Redeemer lives

Yet, it is when he begs his friends to have mercy on him that, contrary to all expectation, Job breaks out with these words (Job 19:23) –

“Oh that my words were written!

Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

Oh that with an iron pen or lead they were engraved in the rock forever!

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

My heart faints within me!”

It is not the first time in his rejoinders to his friends that he expresses hope. Although for the most part his answers to his friends are shot through with despair and hopelessness, still, hope had surfaced now and then, but no brighter hope was there than the conviction his Redeemer, his Justifier, would eventually stand upon the earth when Job would see the longed-for face of God himself.

In the midst of his agony, yes, in spite of anything shocking he had said to God or about God, Job had a solid hope that he would eventually be vindicated. He says: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth.” And ever since Christ first came to earth Christians have shared this same solid hope Job possessed. And no doubt these beautiful words of the desire to see God and be vindicated have helped many Christians to endure great pain and agony in this life.

Yet, does the book of Job end at Job 19:23-27? Obviously, Job’s hope was viewed with suspicion and scepticism by his three friends, and they were eager to drag the debate on after this to prove that Job should have had no such hope as he expressed. Still, that alone does not explain why the book of Job does not end on such a joyful expectation as Job expressed.

Indeed, is Job himself just content with this hope of Job 19, that is, with this hope only? As for his friends –

yes, they rave on freely to show that Job to their mind is not fully and finally vindicated. Of course, many of God’s children since Job have been vilified without being visibly vindicated as Job finally was, but Job’s full vindication to shame his friends was to be a special case: It serves as a prototype of what will be for all of God’s children, when Christ returns just as James the apostle intimates. He longed for open vindication.

Then too, was God Himself content just with Job having a hope of the Redeemer to come? Was there anything else Job had to know, had to learn? Any surgery to be done by God? Notice that the hope Job expressed concerning His Redeemer is not mentioned again in the whole book. Not as if it therefore solved everything to possess such a hope that it need not be repeated, but because comfort for Job must rest on even more solid ground.

Job becomes calmer in knowing he has a Redeemer, but he remains agitated by his friends’ assertion that all is cut and dry when it comes to justice in this world. Job says it is not always that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished. Bad men may prosper. His friends cannot entirely convince him that he is wrong, and therefore they personally attack him further. They no longer indirectly attack him; they accuse him of definite acts of wickedness. They spell out so-called specific sins. While he still insists on his integrity before God, Job taunts his friends at the same time. He then concedes that punishment may openly overtake the godless. (In this he more or less agrees with his friends). Well, who was right? There appeared to be an impasse: neither party seems convincing.

Chapter 28 and true wisdom

There are outstanding biblical scholars who hold that Job 28, at the point where Job and his friends have reached an impasse (Job’s three friends are not heard of anymore after Job 28), we have a wonderful reflection on the subject of wisdom, probably not belonging to the lips of Job himself but being the tranquil words of the author of the book. The tranquil reflection on wisdom is in contrast with the previous heated debate between Job and his three friends. It is a calm reflection that marks a watershed in the book. It engages we readers to contemplate calmly the mystery behind the governing of the world by God. Job 28 serves to snap the tension that has existed, and prepares us for what God will eventually say to Job.

It is a beautiful piece of writing, divorced of the heat of argument. Job 28 graphically describes the skill men and Gina Rinehart have in mining for the riches found in the earth, and that man cannot find wisdom in themselves, that God alone is the possessor of wisdom. Our author says – “Surely (Job 28:2) there is a mine for silver, and a place of gold that they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore.” He speaks about miners hanging in the air, miners swinging into the darkest recesses underground. He tells of men probing considerable depths to mine previous metal and stones, only they cannot find wisdom. It is in depths beyond them. “(Wisdom) is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air,” says our author. Only God knows the place of wisdom. Only He has searched it out. And what is wisdom?

It is said for us to know (Job 28:28): “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”

Therefore, the providence of God is not carried along by such a simple explanation as Job’s friends would have him believe. God’s wisdom is not always that obvious. It is enveloped in the deepest mystery. This does not mean there is wild confusion, but simply that we cannot understand all that God does and allow. God understands things we do not – but that there is no chaos is evident by the design we see in the world.

The ultimate truth is that we do not know all there is to know concerning God’s wisdom but we can know how we ought to conduct ourselves despite what confusion there may seem to be – “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”

We need to be careful we are not taken in by symptoms, by signs that appear to indicate the Lord is against us...

Job was to commit himself to refraining from evil, as are we all to do. Job could not tell what was the end of things, but he was wise if he feared the Lord and turned away from evil. We need to be careful we are not taken in by symptoms, by signs that appear to indicate the Lord is against us, even hates, us, when misfortune comes our way. Symptoms of a kind can lead to a false diagnosis. Everything is not as cut and dry as we may think in our despondency.

If we believe in God, even if we are severely tested, we can take comfort in knowing Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, is one day coming back to earth again. And we are also to take comfort now from knowing God is wise, wise beyond our knowledge and wise for our good even in this present life.

We are to be patient as Job was. Yes, we may even shoot our mouth off in adversity as Job did, and harbour evil thoughts about God but, if we are true believers in Christ and long for the redemption that is to come, hope is bound to break through like a burst of sunlight even in adversity. God may catch up with us for regrettable things we said or thought, just as it would be in Job’s case, and yet in whatever way the Lord deals with us it will be for our advantage and our own good.

May we know, may we learn that wisdom lies with God alone. God tells us “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”#

The author’s autobiography is Edmond Smith, The Silver Poplar and tells his story from neglected beginnings in a children’s home to a life of hope.

Israel - a New Government?

Baruch Maoz on Facebook

Elections in Israel are for political parties, not persons. Israel's President -- a non-executive position -- accords the person who represents the party most likely to form a parliamentary majority (61/120). Following the March and September elections, no party achieved that goal. The only resolution to the impasse is a Broad Unity Government, consisting at least of the two major parties: Blue and White, led by former Chair of Staff Benjamin (Benny) Gantz (33 seats) and the Likud, led by the incumbent Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu (32 seats).

Mr. Netanyahu has 3 grievous charges hanging over his head, for which he may well be indicted following his hearing before the State Attorney General, scheduled for October 2-3. In terms of policy, the Likud tends to be more nationalistic, more lenient toward the demands of the religious orthodox parties and by far more supportive of continued Jewish settlement of the West Bank. Blue and White, on the other hand, insists on civil liberties, freedom from religious coercion and believes that the conflict with the Palestinians must be resolved - for Israel's good - by way of a territorial compromise.

Mr. Netanyahu, the consummate politician, is calling for a unity Government with Blue and White on condition that he is the Prime Minister, and his platform forms the basis of the Government-to-be's policies. Blue and White declines the leadership of one who is likely to be indicted for serious crimes, insists that no Prime Minister can competently lead the country while defending his innocence in the Court, and refuses to forgo a loosening of the grip the orthodox parties have on society and on the Government, nor efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the Palestinians. Having failed in his efforts to bring the two parties together, President Rivlin mandated Mr. Netanyahu to form a Government. He, in turn, informed the president that, should he see no likelihood of success, he will return the mandate well before the stipulated 28 days the law accords him. His hope is to put Blue and White in the unpopular position of refusing to form a unity Government, paving the way for his party's gains should elections be held once again.

Should Mr. Netanyahu return the mandate to the President, Mr. Gantz will then be asked to try his hand. If he accepts, he will have 21 days, with no extension possible. If he fails, the President must inform the Knesset (our parliament) of the fact, following which the Knesset will be called upon to mandate one of its members to form a Government. Should that person fail, the only remaining option is yet another round of elections.

In the meantime, some time in December of this year, the Attorney General will announce his final decision, whether to indict Mr. Netanyahu, and on what charges.

One party, Yisrael Beiteynu, led by Avigdor Liberman (8 seats) holds the key to this potential impasse. Should he join with either Mr. Netanyahu or Mr. Gantz, he and the smaller parties on respective sides of the politics divide will have enough parliamentary support to form a Government. So far, Mr. Liberman's position has been that his party will only join a unity Government, led by either of the two contestants. You know how the saying goes: where there are 2 Jews, there are at least 3 opinions.

Christian Witness to Israel (Australia)

It is announced that Mark and Rahel Landrum, an experienced missionary couple, will shortly begin working with CWI in Sydney. It is also hoped to secure a visa for Eugene Tsai to work with them.

NEWS FROM KNOX



New Knox Members

**Sarah and Ben Hur with their son Caleb, 11 August 2019
Alexander Visser with his grandfather Rowland Ward, 8 September 2019**



Rev Dr Jack and Nancy Whytock at the Knox Missions Afternoon, 17 August 2019