

# The Presbyterian Banner

June 2020



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## ***WINTER IS HERE***

*Contents:* Editorial : Ravi Zacharias' quotes : Psalm 12 – Help LORD! : An Outline of Church History AD c30-2010 : Search Work : PCEA News from Congregations : Our Calling to France (Malcolm and Muriel Ball)



## FROM THE EDITOR

**I CONFESS I'm not particularly familiar with Ravi Zacharias, the Indian-born Canadian-American apologist for Christianity. After he died on 19 May age 74 I've listened to some of his addresses which are clear, logical and powerful. Here are some of his sayings which give the flavour of the man.**

"Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, He came to make dead people alive."

"God often reinforces our faith after we trust Him, not before."

"Without God, you take man to be God, your body to be a soul, and time to be eternity."

"We are commanded by God to love our fellow human being no matter how much we disagree with them."

"An argument may remove doubt, but only the Holy Spirit can convict of truth."

"We all want Canaan without going through the wilderness."

"Television has been the single greatest shaper of emptiness."

"Justice is the handmaiden of truth, and when truth dies, justice is buried with it."

"I am totally convinced the Christian faith is the most coherent worldview around."

"Success is more difficult to handle than failure."

"The purpose of prayer and of God's call in your life isn't to make you number one in the world's eyes but to make Him number one in your life."

"Evil is a violation of purpose, the purpose of your creator and mine."

"Jesus said, 'Greater things of these you shall do...'

Become a peace builder, a bridge builder, not a destroyer, and the way you do that is through friendships and relationships, and through authentic character."

"Beginning well is a momentary thing; finishing well is a lifelong thing."

"In churches, we live with the danger of one-way verbal traffic."

"It was not the volume of sin that sent Christ to the cross; it was the fact of sin."

"There is no greater discovery than seeing God as the author of your destiny."

"Many Christians have so busied themselves with programs and activities that they no longer know how to be silent and meditate on God's word or recognize the mysteries that are in the Person of Christ."

"A man rejects God neither because of intellectual demands nor because of the scarcity of evidence. A man rejects God because of a moral resistance that refuses to admit his need for God."

"My goal is to satisfy the hunger and longing for those who are seeking the truth."

"We have a right to believe whatever we want, but not everything we believe is right."

"Love is hard work. It is the hardest work I know of, work from which you are never entitled to take a vacation."

"If you believe in subjective morality, why do you lock your doors at night?"

"Redemption is prior to righteousness. You cannot be righteous until you are first redeemed."

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## PSALM 12

# 'Help Lord!'

Rev. George Ball, PCEA, Taree

'WHAT'S THIS WORLD COMING TO?' You've said it - or you've heard it said. We've seen such a rapid decline in morals, in speech, in beliefs, and in behaviour in our generation that we despair. We worry for our children and grandchildren who face a much more hostile world than the world we grew up in. It's a world summed up in verse 8, '**On every side the wicked prowl, and vileness is exalted among the children of men**'. It's a world where evil is paraded as good and good as evil; where vice is regarded a virtue. It's a world that revels in shame and depravity. It's a world that no longer knows how to blush. Think of the brazenness of the participants in the Mardi Gras. It's impossible to watch TV for an evening without being confronted by bad language, blasphemy, 'adult themes', violence, and sleaze.

It's all very discouraging and distressing. So it should be. Righteous Lot was greatly distressed and tormented by the sensual conduct of the wicked in Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8). It's a time to weep and mourn. Though this a psalm of lament – a complaint - it's not without hope.

### 1. David's Complaint (1-5).

**The godly are fast disappearing (1).** David felt (as Elijah did years later) that he was the only one left. There may be a measure of hyperbole in David's words - as there was with Elijah – but that's how it seemed. There was a real dearth of godliness. Perhaps they were dying out and not being replaced. Perhaps they once professed the faith, but now there is no evidence in their lives. The psalm may therefore fit into the period of Saul's persecution of David, or Absalom's attempted coup d'état. The net result is the decline of the influence of men and women of real character and worth. The salt and light had gone. That's a big loss.

**Words are cheap and cunning (2-4).** David laments the lack of truth and sincerity in speech and communication. He identifies (as Kidner highlights) '*empty talk, smooth talk, double talk, and big talk*'. As we consider these examples, we also see a description of the world we live in.

**Empty Talk:** 'Everyone utters lies to his neighbour' (2a). 'Lies' means, not merely falsehood, but '*empty,*

*meaningless talk*'. Conversation that is marked by trivia. Talk of no value. Drivel. It's the sort of thing that people tweet and text. It's the sort of thing people talk about in the pub and club and backyard. What is it that people generally talk about? The last game, the next game, the latest movie, last night's TV. Listen to talk-back radio. What's being discussed? Topics of no consequence. It's empty talk. There is a great irony in all of this. We place so much emphasis on the importance of early learning so that our children can talk and read and write with confidence. But we don't make the same effort to fill their minds with good things (Phil 4:8).

**Smooth Talk:** '**With flattering lips and a double heart, they speak**' (2b). Flattery is literally '*smooth talk*'. Flattery is telling people what they want to hear. What stokes their ego. It aims to deceive. The man flatters the girl because he wants to satisfy his lust. The politician flatters his audience because he wants their votes. The preacher flatters his congregation because they don't want to hear the truth and he wants to be popular. Isaiah addressed a people who didn't want to hear the truth. They said, '**Do not prophecy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel**' (Isa. 30: 9-11). An obituary once described a preacher as, '*a good preacher though he seldom referred to the Bible!*' That sadly sums up much 'preaching' today. They may be expert communicators and know how to engage an audience - but they use only smooth words.

**Double Talk:** They speak with a 'double heart' (2b). Lit; 'they speak with a heart and a heart'. They speak with a forked tongue – they say one thing but mean another. It used to be a man's word was his bond, but no longer.

**Big Talk:** They proudly declare, '**With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us**' (4). This is blasphemous speech - that shows utter contempt for God - they claim to be their own lord and master. It sounds like modern godless secularism speaking. '*No one is going to tell me what to do or tell me how I should live my life! It's my life! It's my body! I will do and say what I like*'. This was the language of Eden. Adam and Eve were encouraged to do their own thing. They believed Satan's blasphemous lie, '**in the day you eat, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**'.

Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). He is a clever wordsmith. He is the ultimate deceiver, liar, and source of 'empty talk, smooth talk, double talk, and big talk'. Paul writes, '**The god of this world (i.e. Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from**

seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:4).

David describes the net result of all these words: '**The poor and needy are plundered and groan**' (5a). It's the same today, whether it's the words of deceitful preachers, dishonest rulers, clever salesmen, shoddy tradesmen, or despicable scammers – the resulting misery is the same. Paul confirms, '**There's none righteous, no not one; no one seeks for God . . . Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive**' (Rom. 3: 10 & 13).

This is our world. And this is the world that Jesus entered. He too was surrounded by liars, deceivers, flatterers and hypocrites who, '**lay in wait for Him to catch Him in something He might say**' (Luke 11: 54). We shall never know the sense of isolation, distress and torment it caused Him. Spurgeon once said, '*No one knows, but he who has endured it, the solitude of a soul that has outstripped its fellows in zeal for the Lord of Hosts.*'

## 2. David's Cry (1 and 3).

When things are spiralling downwards in the nation, in the church, in the family, or in your personal life, what can you do? David complained. But he did more. He takes it to the Lord in prayer because He alone can help. He cries, '**Save, O God**' (1 ESV). '**Help Lord**' (NKJ). Just two words. It's not a fancy or complicated prayer. In fact, it's not even grammatically correct. There's no object in the sentence. But that didn't matter. The Lord knew what he meant. It was an urgent, well-aimed, and earnest prayer. It was a confession of weakness. It's a good prayer to pray. Prayers don't have to be long. Sometimes they are just a cry. Sometimes just a sigh. Are you distressed at the moral collapse of our nation – at the decline and weakness of the church - at the loss of the godly? You should be. Spurgeon said, '*The death, departure or decline of godly men should be a trumpet call for more prayer*'. Have you ever prayed - and cried like David – with tears? He says, '**My eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law**' (Ps. 119: 136).

**He also prays that the Lord will exercise justice and cut off all flattering lips (3).** It may seem extreme to us. But it's a serious prayer because the situation was serious. It's a plea to the Lord to do whatever it takes to re-establish His honour. It's a prayer that the Lord will defeat and destroy ungodliness.

## 3. David's Confidence (5-7).

The Lord quickly answered David's prayer (5). He said, '**Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise . . . I will place him in the safety for which he longs**' (5). His judgement may not come as quickly for us, but when it comes it will be no less decisive. The Lord hears and answers prayer. He will bring justice for His people. Jesus assures us, '**I tell**

**you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak**' (Matt. 12: 36).

David had a new appreciation of God's Word. '**The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace seven times**' (6). God's Word is pure - like silver refined again and again so that it contains no dross, no impurities or contamination. His word is perfect and complete and inerrant – without error in all it affirms. '**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and for training in righteousness**' (2 Tim. 3: 16). We can trust the pure word of God – unlike the lying words of the wicked.

Spurgeon sums it up this way: '*So clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord. The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing . . . The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat*'.

John Piper asks in his book 'Coronavirus and Christ', '*How do you know the Bible is the word of God? My short answer is that there is a divine glory that shines through it, which fits perfectly with the God-shaped template in your heart - like sprocket and gear, hand and glove, fish and water, wings and air, the final piece of a jigsaw puzzle*' ().

David had a newfound confidence in the security of God's people. '**You O Lord will keep them; You will guard us from this generation forever**' (7). Dark as the days will be, the Lord Jesus prayed for His people, '**I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one**' (Jn. 17: 15). Paul assures us, '**In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us**' (Rom. 8:37). Spurgeon vividly describes the security of the Christian in nautical terms: '*We may slip and fall on deck – but we will never fall over the rails and be lost*'.

David seems to come to a jarring and disappointing end. '**On every side the wicked prowls, as vileness is exalted among the children of man**' (8). It seems nothing has changed in the world. But David has changed. As a result of his prayer he has renewed hope and confidence in the Lord's rule, and justice, and word, and care. He will trust the Lord in this wicked world. So can we. Jesus said to His disciples, '**I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble; but take heart I have overcome the world**' (Jn. 16:33). #

*Rev. George Ball was inducted to the Manning River charge on 9 May 2008 having previously served Narre Warren PCEA.*

## AN OUTLINE OF CHURCH HISTORY

### AD c.30 TO 2020

Rev. Dr Rowland S. Ward

#### BEGINNINGS AD c.30-325 From the Resurrection to the First Creed of Nicaea

The Book of Acts aims to show the spread of the Christian Church from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 1:8), which occurred in the space of 30 years. By the end of the first century there were churches in Palestine, in what we now call Turkey, and in Italy, Greece and Egypt. The second century saw further growth and also movement into North Africa, Gaul (France) and later Spain and Britain.

The church was created by the Holy Spirit blessing the Word of God already written in the Old Testament and the Word of God preached by the apostles. Gradually the writings from the apostolic circle which form the Word of God in written form (our New Testament) were circulated - most before AD 70. At first, not all parts of the Church had all the writings. Occasionally there were scruples about one or other of the books near the end of our NT. The Muratorian Fragment (AD 190) shows that the NT as Protestants accept it was regarded as the *canon* (or rule) of faith in the Church of Rome at that date, although there was a scruple over Revelation and a book ascribed to Peter (probably 2 Peter). However, the task of the Church was simply to bring out the evidence from the first witnesses and from the internal character of the books, and express its mind accordingly.

Some books were circulated among Christians which are called Apocrypha ('hidden'). These books were written in Greek after the time of Malachi (c.400 BC), and mainly in the 200 years before Jesus' birth. They were not accepted by the Jews as part of the canon of the OT, and their content shows they are not inspired. One of the best (1 Maccabees) states that there no prophet in Israel. There was useful material in some of them but they were not used to fix any doctrine.

Persecution began with Nero blaming the fire at Rome in AD 64 on the Christians, many of whom were killed by him. Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 158) and Justin of Ephesus and Rome (AD 165) are two of the many martyrs of the second century. Persecution tended to be spasmodic. There were persecutions under Decius (250/251), Valerian (258/260) and a widespread one under Diocletian (303/305). Early Christian writers included Clement of Rome (c.96), Justin the Martyr, Tertullian of Carthage (160-222) - the first major writer in Latin - and Origen of Alexandria (185-254), who died as a result of the Decian persecution. Emperor Constantine issued an edict tolerating Christianity and other religions in AD 313.

The NT shows that tensions and problems always confront the Church. The persecutions led to veneration of martyrs and their relics, as well to a rigorous reaction against those Christians who had recanted during persecution but later repented. Some other issues were the claim to ecstatic prophecy (Montanism) from around AD 180, against which the norm of Scripture was affirmed; the idea of Christian baptism actually effecting regeneration; and belief in the difficulty or impossibility of forgiveness of sin after baptism (which led to baptism being delayed until late in life). The most important issue was the question of the nature of Christ, as a movement led by Arius taught Jesus was not truly God but only a creature. It was the great work of *Athanasius of Alexandria* to lead opposition to this widespread error and to remind the church that her very salvation depended on the Saviour being truly God as well as truly man. Hence the importance of the Creed of Nicaea.

#### RECOGNITION 325-600 From the Creed of Nicaea to Pope Gregory of Rome

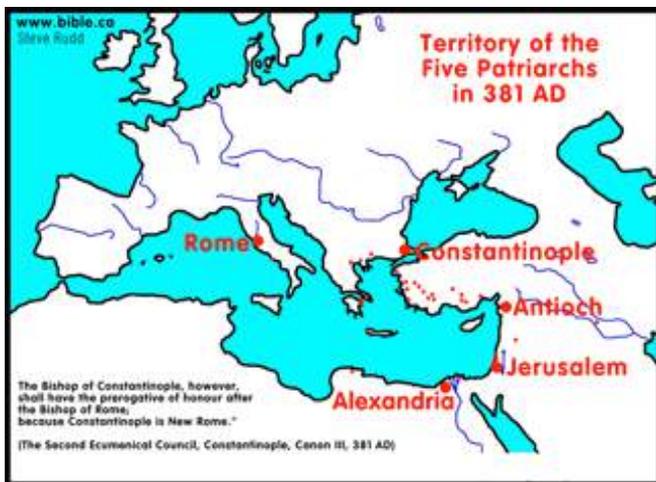
Emperor Constantine died in 337 and the Roman Empire was eventually united under one of his sons, Constantius. Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the only religion of the Empire in AD 380. Pagan sacrifice was generally banned by 400 but the impact of the old paganism was evident in the Church. Pagan gods were replaced by Christian saints, and pagan holy days were Christianised (eg. Christmas). The approval of the Church brought many rather nominal people into it. The idea of separation from the world rather than from the sin of the world contributed to the rise of monasticism.

The vast Empire was divided permanently between East (Greek) and West (Latin) following the death of Theodosius in 395. The sack of Rome by pagans in 410 was a psychological blow. The Bishop of Rome was able to assert his authority in the West as the Empire there broke up later in the 5th century. In the East the patriarch of Constantinople was more directly under the Emperor since the machinery of the Empire was centred there.

The organisation of the Church continued to follow the hierarchical example of the Empire. The New Testament bishop or overseer (simply the elder described in terms of his function rather than his maturity) became a distinct officer who ruled groups of churches, although he was still elected popularly. Bishops of more important centres had more influence, and the bishops of the most ancient Christian centres - Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome - became known as *patriarchs* (in Latin *papa*, hence *popes*). Constantinople was added to the ancient centres because it had become the capital of the empire in the East, a kind of New Rome. The patriarchs clashed somewhat, and Pope Gregory of Rome (590-604) denounced the Patriarch of Constantinople's claim to the title of Universal Patriarch. He thought it was the spirit of Antichrist and the name of blasphemy, but it was eventually used by the Popes.

Some of the Christian leaders of this period were: in *Italy* Ambrose of Milan who promoted monasticism and was one of the earliest hymn-writers; in *Cappadocia* (central Turkey) Basil of Caesarea (330-379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus contributed to trinitarian thought, and Basil stressed monastic life; in *Constantinople* John Chrysostom ('golden mouthed') was a great preacher made bishop against his will in 397. In *North Africa* Augustine (354-430) was made bishop of Hippo in 388, also against his will; his was the greatest mind in the early centuries and is still influential. In *Bethlehem* Jerome produced a new Latin translation of the Hebrew and Greek; in *Alexandria* (Egypt) Cyril was patriarch from 412; in *Ireland* Patrick (c389-461) was a pioneer missionary from Britain.

The early Roman Creed gradually evolved to reach its final form after 500 AD, and is known as *The Apostles' Creed* because it contains a brief summary of certain of their teachings.



Localised copying and the perpetuation of distinctive copyists' errors resulted in distinct types of NT manuscripts in different parts of the Church. However, the differences are of minor significance in practical terms. Some of the early centres were early overrun by Islam, while Rome soon used Latin so most surviving manuscripts reflect the form of text used in Greek-speaking Constantinople.

**CHRISTENDOM 600-1300  
From Pope Gregory in Rome to  
Pope Clement in France**

There are seven Church councils commonly regarded as 'ecumenical' (that is, belonging to the inhabited world). The doctrinal conclusions of the last three are not necessarily accepted by Protestants. The churches of the Middle East (Syrian, Egyptian = Coptic and Armenian) did not accept every aspect of doctrine as affirmed by the 4th council and broke away. Various language, philosophical and personality factors entered into this division. By 800 Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were outside the boundaries of the Eastern Empire as a consequence of rapid Islamic invasions which began soon after the death

of Muhammad in 632. which also affected Spain and Portugal. This left Rome and Constantinople as the remaining ancient patriarchates, and they were rivals. The 6th Council excommunicated Pope Honorius (625-638) for heresy. Popes were not then regarded as infallible in teaching any more than they were always moral in life.

Council - number & place	Year	Main issue
1. Nicea	325	Arianism condemned
2. Constantinople	381	Confirmed Nicea [=Nicene Creed]
3. Ephesus	431	Nestorius condemned
4. Chalcedon	451	Christ's two natures
5. Constantinople	553	Diversions from 4 condemned
6. Constantinople	680/1	Monothelites condemned
7. Nicea	754	Veneration of pictures

In 800 the Bishop of Rome crowned Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as Emperor in the West. As the papal grip on the West tightened tensions with the East increased. In 1054 mutual excommunications resulted (lifted over 900 years later in 1965). Conflict occurred in Europe with the rise of nationalism and the growth of towns. Papal relations with the French king were such that the Pope excommunicated the King. In 1305 a Frenchman was elected Pope but prudently stayed in France at Avignon. The East did not have the same focus for disunity. While many of the old areas were lost, the Greek Church expanded into Russia (988) and the Slav lands. These remain largely Eastern Orthodox to this day. The Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic differ largely in this: the East has changed little since the 8th century whereas the West continued to develop its traditions.

In 1095 the Eastern Emperor appealed to the Pope of Rome for help against the Turks who were threatening Constantinople. The request was turned into a Crusade to recover the Holy Land. Jerusalem was captured in 1099. The motives were religious but were not based on a true understanding of Biblical Christianity and were exploited by papal ambition. The crusading movement continued for over 150 years with some seven significant crusades. In the later period the Pope used crusades against European Catholic rulers who had incurred his displeasure.

This period shows increasing corruption in the organised church and lack of a clear grasp of Biblical teaching. There were of course significant thinkers. *John of Damascus* (c.675-749), *Anselm of Canterbury* (1033-1109) and *Thomas Aquinas* (1225-74) immediately come to mind.

**DECAY AND RENEWAL 1300-1690  
From the Avignon Papacy to the Revolution  
Settlement**

The Pope returned to Rome in 1377 and the Papacy continued in its centralising way. It became more interested in raising money in exchange for spiritual favours than in teaching and preaching the pure message of Christ. Inner division resulted in the Great Schism in

1381 with a Pope and cardinals in France and a rival in Rome. Europe was divided in allegiance until 1417 when the Council of Constance forced out rivals and elected Martin V. Meantime, Islamic expansion continued and Constantinople was captured in 1453 causing Christian scholars to flee to the West bringing Bible manuscripts with them.

The corruption and abuses led to many cries for reform, particularly as the *Renaissance* (or Rebirth) of learning and scholarly investigation was under way. The rise of nationalism and the growth of towns and trade were also important.

*John Wycliff* of Oxford (1329-84) translated the Latin version of the Bible into English. *Jan Hus* of Prague (1374-1415) was burned at the stake for urging reform. *Thomas à Kempis* of Zwolle (1380-1471) wrote 'The Imitation of Christ'. *Lorenzo Valla* of Italy (1405-57) showed that certain documents allegedly proving Papal claims over secular rulers were forgeries. He also showed the weaknesses in the Latin translation of the Greek NT (eg. 'do penance' instead of 'repent'). The first book printed in Europe was a Bible (1456). *Girolamo Savonarola* (1452-98), although Catholic in theology, sought reform in Florence but was put to death. *Erasmus* of Rotterdam (1467-1536) was a scholar and humanist and not specially religious. His work in producing a printed edition of the Greek NT in 1516 contributed to reform.

*Martin Luther* (1483-1546), was an Augustinian monk and Professor of Theology in Germany who discovered the truth of God's justification by grace through faith in Christ through his studies of the Bible. He put up 95 propositions for scholarly debate on 31 October 1517. Translated and widely circulated, there was ultimately a crisis of authority - Scripture or the Pope. Luther was excommunicated but an irresistible movement had begun. Luther translated the Bible into ordinary German and kept several printers busy producing his writings. In 1529 the term 'protestant' was coined for those who stood on the authority of the Word of God. Luther stressed salvation through the merit of Christ alone, with good works a fruit of the new relationship not a means of establishing it. He emphasised the priesthood of all believers and rejected the sacrificing priesthood that had developed in the Church after NT times. The Church of Rome convened the Council of Trent (1545-63). It made some practical reforms, but condemned the position of those who followed Scripture alone. It also established as fixed doctrines teachings which had not been previously so defined.



*John Calvin* of Geneva (1509-64) [pictured] was a second generation Reformer, and

probably the greatest mind God had given his Church since Augustine. Seeking a thorough reform according to the written Word of God, the churches which were influenced by him and others of like mind were called *Reformed*. In Britain, where the doctrine of the Church of England became Reformed but its government remained *episcopal* (rule by bishops), *Presbyterian* (rule by elders) was the term used. *John Knox* (c1514-72) was the great reformer of Scotland where the reformation was accepted in 1560.

The Reformation involved many factors but was essentially a great religious awakening. The Reformers did not reject what was valuable in the past, and were generally very well versed in the theological history of the Christian church. Since church and state were so closely allied, heretics were regarded as unfit to remain in society. A strange genius and provocative denier of the Trinity, Michael Servetus, escaped from the Catholics and came to Geneva in 1553 where he was tried and burnt at the stake. Calvin supported this (although he argued for beheading) and was praised by Catholics and Protestant alike.

Generally it was the Protestants who suffered in the religious wars of this period. Reform was crushed in places such as Spain and Poland. In 1555 the Peace of Augsburg gave German rulers the right to decide the faith of their subjects within limits. Calvinists achieved legal rights under the Peace of Westphalia, 1648. In France peace was established by the Edict of Nantes 1598, but this was revoked in 1685 and resulted in many French Reformed (Huguenots) fleeing to England, South Africa or elsewhere. The Dutch knew the cruel oppression of the Spanish but achieved peace in 1648.

*Puritans* were those who stayed in the English church but wished greater reform; *separatists* were those who broke away. Thirty-five of the 102 colonists who sailed to America in 1620 (the Pilgrim Fathers) were separatists. Others regarded water baptism as a sign of the believer's response rather than as the sign of God's covenant, hence the Baptist distinctives arose. The English Civil War lasted from 1642-49. Under Oliver Cromwell as Protector the foundations for civil and religious liberty were laid. The Westminster Assembly met 1643-49 to reform the church in the British Isles according to the written Word of God, but when the monarchy was restored in 1660 dissenters were persecuted and the Reformed character of the English Church supplanted. Nearly 2,000 Puritan ministers were forced out of the episcopal Church of England in 1662 and the Stewart king, Charles II, sought to impose rule by bishops on the presbyterian Church of Scotland. This led to the covenanting struggle in Scotland in which perhaps many hundreds were killed, and many others had to flee the country or were banished. When William and Mary came to the throne in 1688 the period of conflict in the British Isles was brought to a close, other than those who still adhered to the Stewart dynasty.

## **REASON, REVIVAL & REVOLUTION 1690-1990**

### **The Modern World: Isaac Newton to Communism's collapse**

The Reformers' approach to the Biblical text insisted on its grammatical and contextual meaning and rejected the uncontrolled spiritualising and allegorising characteristic for many centuries. This in turn encouraged the examination of the world of nature on its own terms rather than as simply a source of spiritual lessons. However, the earlier religious life of the Reformation period had become somewhat formal and scholastic, and the late 17th century saw the rise of Deism. It thought of God as a distant God who ruled by natural laws and occasionally intervened with a miracle. The 18th century is often referred to as 'the Enlightenment' but in reality there were varieties of 'enlightened' approach from those who used their God-given minds and maintained orthodox Christian belief to those who rejected Divine revelation and made man the measure of all things. The sciences began to make progress but as time went on many considered God was necessary only to explain the gaps in our present knowledge.

A devotional piety arose in Europe about 1675 in reaction to the wars of religion and the decay of vital spirituality. This Moravian movement (as it was called) made a marked contribution to religious life, and influenced the evangelical revival in Britain, which began in 1738. It furthered a weaker and broader attitude to doctrine in favour of felt experience. A populist biblicism that downplayed an educated ministry and reflected a pragmatic approach to church order was furthered. The Methodist movement led by John Wesley separated from the Church of England in 1795 after Wesley's death. Here spiritual experience tended to primacy over doctrine. In France the rationalistic man-centred revolution in 1789-1795 was followed by Napoleon, who was defeated at Waterloo in 1815. The Brethren movement arose about 1830, rejecting the ordained ministry and having great interest in unfulfilled prophecy which had been stimulated by the Napoleonic wars.

In reaction to emotional revivalistic excesses on the American frontier, particularly among Methodists and Baptists, and to sectarianism among established bodies, the Church of Christ/Disciples movement arose in America in the 1820s and spread elsewhere. It held a novel view of the nature of faith and baptism and an interest in a Christianity without formal written creeds – although it had a rather definite unwritten one!

The first formal division in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands occurred in 1834. Although small it was to be part of a revival of Calvinism in that country during the rest of the century. An Anglo-Catholic revival (the Tractarian movement) occurred in the Church of England in the 1830s, while a major division over state interference led to about 40% of the Established Church of Scotland forming the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. There were revolutions in France, Italy and Germany in

1848. The Pope lost the Papal States in 1870, the same year the First Vatican Council, dominated by Italian bishops, proclaimed the Pope's infallibility in matters of faith and morals under certain conditions.

The science of geology was fairly well established by 1800 and was not a major difficulty to Bible believers at that time: belief in an old earth and a relatively recent humanity could co-exist well enough. In English-speaking lands evangelicalism in one form or another enjoyed a resurgence, and dominated most of 19th century Australia, but sometimes it was too allied to middle-class values. However, in the years following Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), the impact of the theory of biological evolution was considerable, particularly from the 1880s. Evolution was frequently regarded as the opposite of creation rather than as a possible method of the divine procedure. Christianity, which had been the friend of science and produced many leading scientists, was increasingly seen as anti-science. The old clear lines of Biblical teaching were blurred through accommodation to changing ideas, and divisions occurred in many denominations. Nevertheless, the modern missionary movement grew steadily right through the 20th century.

An optimistic theology of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man (Modernism) was common by the 20th century. Some evangelicals reacted by continuing to emphasise the great facts of historic Christianity, such as the virgin birth, deity of Christ, and his atoning death, real resurrection and second coming, but neglected the full-orbed Biblical world-view. Some, particularly in the USA, who held a rather literalistic approach to aspects of Biblical interpretation, were called Fundamentalists, and often seemed pre-occupied with prophetic speculations and pessimistic about the future of the gospel in the world.

Atheistic communism became influential and gained sway over millions, but soon demonstrated its bankruptcy. It could only maintain its power by force. In the aftermath of the First World War liberal theology offered little hope. Karl Barth's voice sounded like the old orthodoxy and brought about a return to some of the truths of Scripture although in a philosophical framework which left ambiguity and uncertainty. After the Second World War the resettlement of many Europeans to places like North America and Australia contributed to a more varied religious landscape in these countries.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) wrought significant changes on the liturgy and general life of the Roman Church without touching its doctrine. Decline in active following is now very evident in the Roman communion as it was a generation ago in Protestant circles in the developed world. However, evangelicalism has grown rapidly in Africa, South Korea and South America. Despite the expulsion of Western Missionaries in 1949/52, China in the early 21st century had an

estimated 5% or more mainly Protestant Christian population.

The initial optimism associated with technological advances and material prosperity led to a period of permissiveness in the 1960s. But startling new technology went hand in hand with seemingly intractable social and environmental problems. Disenchantment with science and interest in 'new age' spirituality, that is not rooted in God's Word, soon abounded.

The rise of Pentecostalism early in the 20th century had faltered by the 1950s, but experienced a remarkable resurgence from the 1970s as people sought for spiritual answers and a sense and experience of reality in an uncertain world. Many mainline mixed or liberal denominations continued to decline despite efforts at organisational unity (the ecumenical movement) popular in the 1960s and '70s; the acceptance of practicing homosexual clergy only furthered decline. There was also a recovery of Reformed theology in many churches from about 1960, although sometimes with aspects which owe more to other influences.

**INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
Secularism, the challenge of Islam 1990-2020**

Secularism in the West has accelerated since 1990, regular church attendance declining by as much as a third or more 1990-2020 so as to be around 8% in Scotland and Australia, below 5% in England and even less in Scandinavia. Attendance is higher in North America (perhaps 20%) and in countries like Poland and Ireland (40%), but in many cases attendance is a mark of cultural and national identity rather than true belief in Jesus Christ. Only a clear Biblical teaching can cope with the aggressive secularism characteristic of this age.

Islam has experienced a resurgence of influence as independence was obtained by Muslim states during the 20th century, but the dispossession of the Palestinians and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 remains a source of considerable tension. Burgeoning oil revenues in Muslim lands have funded religious works and renewal movements, but Islam remains a religion with many expressions derived more from culture than the Qu'ran, and a great need to adjust to modernity and to provide uplift for its peoples. A minority dream of redressing real or imagined grievances and restoring past glories over against the West - by violence in some cases. Increasing literacy will contribute to dispelling ignorance.

Ultimately the truth of Christ and his word will prevail among the nations through the power of God's Spirit as believers reflect the values of the Kingdom of God. In one aspect the future is dark and uncertain, but ultimately it is as bright as the promise of the One who said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." #

Rowland Ward ministered Melbourne from 1981 until his retirement in 2012. He taught Church History at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne 2016-19, and currently is Research Lecturer supervising several doctoral students.

**SEARCH WORK – JUNE 2020**

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8

**MATTHEW 9:18—38**

1. What did the woman with the issue (flow) of blood say within (to) herself?
2. How did Jesus raise the ruler's daughter to life?
3. How did Jesus cure the blind men?
4. What prayer were the disciples to make to the Lord of the harvest?

**Chapter 12**

5. Who is Lord of the Sabbath? (2 verses)
6. What did Jesus say to the man with the withered hand?
7. A quotation is made from Isaiah 42 as the fulfilment of which of Jesus' practices? (4 verses)
8. What were the two different reactions of the people when the blind and dumb man (mute) was healed? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

**MATTHEW 9**

1. When the multitudes saw Jesus heal the paralytic, how did they react?
2. What did Jesus say to the woman who touched the hem of his garment?
3. How did Jesus raise the ruler's daughter?
4. How did Jesus heal the two blind men?

Answers to be sent to: Mrs Irene Steel, PO Box 942, EPPING NSW 2121 or Email: iesteel@gmail.com

**PSALM 127**  
Except the LORD build the house, those who build it labour in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. [ESV]

**SYNOD WILL MEET ELECTRONICALLY FOR SEVERAL URGENT ITEMS ON 16 JUNE 2020**

## PCEA NEWS

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A request was made to each congregation for news on how the work is going during the Covid19 crisis. Here is what we have received as at 27 May 2020:

### **St George's**

We in St Georges have continued to provide full audio services (not visual) online/telephone since the closedown began. There are three services each week. On the Lord's Day at 10.30am and 6pm and on Wednesday at 7pm. These services are prerecorded from home and sent to our Webmaster John Marshall to be available for people to listen to from our Website [stgeorgespcea.org.au](http://stgeorgespcea.org.au) at the normal service times. These services can be listened to at any time but we do encourage the folks to listen and gather together online at the usual worship times. Those not able to access the website can join us by the telephone link up (02 9055 2066 password12345) but only at the stated worship times. The services last at most one hour and ten minutes. The only difference from our normal gathered worship is that we have reduced the singing from four psalms to three. We understand that an encouraging number are listening in some of whom we don't know. We trust that the services that we and others are providing at this time are saving and sanctifying and we hope to continue to do so in the conviction that the preaching of the word not only holds the individual Christian together but holds the Christians (the Churches) together. – Rev. John McCallum

### **Hunter**

The Lord's day worship services have been conducted regularly by Rev. Robin Tso. Video stream and telephone services have enabled access by members and friends. These electronic means have enabled interactive Sunday School, mid-week Bible study/prayer, Session and Deacons' Court meetings. Participation rates have been very encouraging. Session and Deacons' Court members are making extra contact with our vulnerable folk to assist as appropriate. - Ian Miller. Session Clerk

### **Mount Druitt**

We give thanks to the Lord that services have continued using the dial-in facility set up by Rev. Robin Tso. Evening services (max. 10 in congregation) recommenced on 17th May, with studies from the prophecy of Habakkuk. Our minister, Rev. Dennis Muldoon, has also conducted weekly services at the Abel Tasman Nursing Home by Z technology, which is also used for the High School Bible study. With parental supervision, Sunday School lessons have continued and we are encouraged that several students have completed the memorisation of Proverbs 3:1-13 during the lockdown. Families and Nursing Homes have been regularly visited by the office bearers, and some of the ladies, mainly by phone.

Prayers would be appreciated for members of the congregation who have suffered financially. Two men

have lost all their regular overtime hours whilst another was out of work for two months (when laid off, he generously used his spare time for the upkeep of the church grounds). No-one has suffered directly from the virus, though one member went into isolation after a colleague tested positive at his workplace. We look forward to all meeting again soon, God willing. – Tom Reeve, Session Clerk

### **Narre Warren**

Obviously, no one was prepared for the news about the pandemic, nor were we prepared for isolation under restrictions of social distance. Despite all these unexpected events, the Narre Warren congregation can testify that God never abandoned them and that He has been richly supplying every spiritual and financial need. Not only that. This situation has also deepened our appreciation for Christian fellowship, and has enriched our practice of intercession and mutual encouragement throughout the week. We also thank God that the restrictions are being relaxed and on Wednesday (May 20) we were able to meet at church for prayer and study the Bible. – Rev. Andres Miranda

### **All Nations, Mulgrave**

The pandemic has hit our scattered congregation rather heavily with school-children at home and parents not always able to adequately help their studies. Many members also have trouble working Zoom for a prayer meeting. However the Facebook livestream in the Nuer language has gone well with South Sudanese in places like Norway and Finland expressing appreciation. We held the first service in the building on May 20 with the legal number allowed present. Please pray for a couple of members who have their and for the work of our minister Rev. Tut Yoa. There are major food shortages in South Sudan at present. – Rowland Ward, Session Clerk

### **Geelong**

The Geelong congregation has remained steadfast and committed to both the Lord and to each other during this time of isolation. While the availability of sermons, meditations, and services online has been a blessing, there is a strong desire to be together again in worship and fellowship. The easing of restrictions, and our small numbers, means that we may be able to resume "private worship" at the church in June. It has been particularly encouraging to see the caring and support for one another being given through regular telephone calls and text messages. As is often the case, these trials have only served to build and strengthen our dependence on God, our desire worship Him together, and our love and support for each other. – Donald Ramsay, Session Clerk

**We hope to receive news from the other congregations for our next issue.**

**Pray for one another!**

## Our Calling to France

An Interview with Malcolm Ball, the brother of PCEA minister George Ball, on Malcolm's career of ministry in Nantes. Malcolm and his wife Muriel served as missionaries in Nantes, France for over 30 years. Note that some names of church contacts have been changed for this article which is reprinted from the *Reformed Presbyterian Witness* [RPCNA] of March/April 2020. **It provides a good illustration of Reformed church-based mission work which surely should be our focus at home and abroad.**

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### HOW DID THE MISSION TO FRANCE BEGIN?

France was recognised as the principal overseas mission field of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland at a special meeting of Synod in autumn 1977. That meeting also happened to be my first as a member of Synod, having been ordained to my first pastoral charge a few weeks before. Some years earlier our missionaries been forced to leave Ethiopia, the previous field, following the communist overthrow of the emperor. When it became apparent that it would be impossible to return there, the church began looking elsewhere.

### HOW DID GOD CALL YOU TO FRANCE?

Although promoting the future work in France had been one of my responsibilities as a member of the mission committee, it was a shock for me to receive the call to go and minister in that field in September 1985. Nevertheless, some two months later I felt led to accept it. Many factors played a role, not least the encouragement of many friends and acquaintances. Chiefly however, it was my own regular Bible reading.

On one particular day that I had set aside for prayer on this matter, the Bible reading plan I was following included Genesis 12 (the call of Abraham) and Exodus 4 (the doubts of Moses regarding future success). Although his destination was quite unknown, Abraham trusted and obeyed. Moses was unsure about the future success of his mission, but God reminded him that in all things He was sovereign and that we are called to walk by faith and rest on the encouragements of the Word of God.

Yet, concerning our children, my wife and I were fearful about leaving the Bible belt that was Northern Ireland for the secular influences of France. Then one day I happened to read this wonderful sentence: The best place to bring up children is in the centre of God's will. Doubts resolved!

### WHEN YOU ARRIVED, WHAT STRUCK YOU MOST ABOUT THE PEOPLE AND THE PLACE?

Our arrival at the airport in Paris happened to be at the same time as a group of Muslims returning from a pilgrimage. We had never seen such a sight before, scores of people in white robes with the women veiled. We spent our first two years in the Paris area. We began in the rather special ambience of a Christian language school, where the teachers taught us both the basics of language and also aspects of French culture. So the introduction was gentle.

Being in such a city exposed us to all the beauty and richness of French culture.

Our arrival in Nantes, our eventual field of labour, was quite different. Church buildings seemed to be everywhere, and all whom we were meeting were Catholics but always non practicing. Being evangelical and not belonging to the main Protestant denomination, we were considered by some as belonging to a sect. While people were outwardly polite, it seemed that we had to initiate conversations.

### WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACED DURING YOUR TENURE?

Mastering French was a top priority. Listening to the radio and reading Christian books to acquire vocabulary became an absolute must. The major challenge was, of course, how to take the gospel into the surrounding community. Children's clubs, friendship with neighbours and parents of our children's classmates, and joining different clubs and associations in order to meet people all had their place.

The chief means in those early days became the regular distribution of gospel leaflets. The written page didn't speak with a distracting accent. Over nearly all our years in France, these leaflets with the title *Réflexions* became our main outreach effort. We would visit those who replied with the book or calendar offered, and in some cases that became the beginning of a relationship.

While many years earlier Clément Marot and Theodore Beza had put all the psalms to meter, the 16th and 20th Centuries had different ideas as to what was a nice tune and appropriate meter. Much effort went into searching for versions of the psalms that we felt happy with.

### HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO SUSTAIN YOUR MINISTRY IN A RELIGIOUSLY COLD CLIMATE?

Thankfully many, all over the world, were praying for us. As a Christian, one is never alone. Jesus has promised His constant presence. When you are on the front line that is a real comfort. He makes Himself known chiefly through his written Word, but also through the writings of other believers. Often those, past and present, who had written solid challenging books were that instrument. I give thanks for many of them.

Thankfully Christian fellowship can be face to face also. For most of our years in France we were part of a team. That was a blessing greater than any words can express. Then in Nantes itself, the contact with many of the other pastors was enriching. While we might have been on different theological wavelengths, there was mutual respect, and, as iron sharpens iron, our regular times together were stimulating. On the national level, indeed international level, I attended what was considered the French equivalent of the Banner of Truth conference. This eventually evolved into the *Colloque biblique francophone*, which, to my great surprise, I later presided for many years. So I had fellowship with like-minded brethren from various corners of the French-speaking world. God is indeed good!

**IN WHAT AREAS DID YOU SEE PROGRESS IN NANTES?**

Encouragements came in all kinds of ways. Over the years evangelicals became accepted as part of the French church scene, and so stigma was no longer attached. Our attendance slowly increased. Seeing those who were quite ignorant of basic doctrines growing in their knowledge of biblical truth was encouraging. Seeing French people who had come to faith assuming responsibilities and themselves being involved in various forms of outreach, was a real blessing. The greatest joy was seeing people come to saving faith.



Rev. Malcolm and Mrs Muriel Ball

Louise, already well on in years when she began to be a regular at the Bible study, had several priests in her family circle. Because of that she never felt able attend our worship service. In her latter years, however, it was clear where her hope was. Her final instructions were that I should be in charge of her funeral.

Maria was already a Christian from a Pentecostal background in Peru who had come to live with her two married daughters in the area. She devoured virtually every book in the church library and became thoroughly Reformed in all her thinking. For her, walking home from church was never about taking the shortest and quickest route but was where she hadn't distributed tracts before. Her witness over the fence at the home of one daughter led to that person coming to faith and church.

Janice, a well-respected, middle-class lady originally from Cameroon, first came through friendship with a compatriot and had been part of a church-going culture. For many years that was how it was. However, in the past few years, she has been coming to the prayer meeting, and her prayers indicate that a real change has taken place in her life. Sometimes we may think that conversion is something that happens to the young, but these and other examples reveal that even when someone is advanced in years the Spirit can be at work to bring that person to a true commitment to the Saviour.

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE?**

Many, many things, not least the importance of taking each individual seriously and listening carefully before

speaking. We are only links in a chain, who are called to sow and water seed. We may not always see the desired fruit, but years later God, who has faithfully watched over it, can cause something to happen in the hearts of people. The great temptation is always to think short term, whereas in all of Scripture the emphasis is upon the long term. A recent example is Camille, a single mum, whose children came to our children's club in the early 1990s. She only began attending church in recent months, because of seed sown in those far-off days.

Another lady, Hanna, of Polish origin, has been attending the Bible study for over 15 years. Sometimes following a comment we might have thought that she was near to the Kingdom but then a later statement raised a doubt.

That someone like myself, not known as a linguist in my youth, could have such a ministry, shows that we can never limit God and how He can use us. Likewise, while the base was Nantes, the mission field was the world. Students from every continent worshiped with us for a time. While language was sometimes a barrier many have returned to their own land strengthened or with a new found understanding of the gospel.

**WHAT FILLS YOUR LIFE NOWADAYS AND WHAT IS THE SITUATION IN NANTES?**

Though I have been a grandfather for many years, it is only in these past few months that I have had to collect the children from school at times and play with them. Also, as many other retired pastors I've been called on quite often to fill vacant pulpits. Whatever benefit I have brought, these visits have helped us to rediscover the wider church in native Ireland.



Some of the names may have been known but the faces have changed. Shortly after leaving France I was approached by a Dutch organisation that conducts outreach activity in several languages through the internet. So I've been translating into French

simple articles on some basic Christian truths. In addition, I've been mentoring about 20 students from various francophone countries who are doing a series of introductory studies on the gospel. All this tends to keep me out of mischief.

While we may have left Nantes, Nantes hasn't left us yet. There is regular contact with several people. The work is in excellent hands, and all are in good spirits. There is a major hurdle on the horizon as planning permission is sought to erect a more spacious meeting place. Nantes, just like every corner of France, is still so needy. Please continue to pray for every aspect of the work. #