

The Presbyterian Banner

March 2020



--- Approximate border between the Principality of Kiev and the Golden Horde - passage prohibited for Christians.

↔ Land trade routes
 ↔ Maritime trade routes

THE SPREAD OF THE BLACK DEATH IN EUROPE 1346-1353

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FROM THE EDITOR

A new pandemic?

We live in a changing world. Seminal moments indicate the major shift from the Christian consensus in Europe. We may note the legislation decriminalising homosexuality in the 1970s or the same sex marriages issue of more recent days and gender fluidity at present, but in reality we could trace the change further back. The impact of that form of the 'enlightenment' which asserted the reason of man as the measure of all things in the 18th century could be highlighted, but in more popular thought the aftermath of the Great War of 1914-18 could be seen as a watershed with the breakdown in the pew of confidence in the Word of God.

The Great War brought something else – the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 which killed perhaps 50 million people, several times more than the War did. It hit Australia in 1919 and killed about 15,000 people when the population was only a fifth of that today. The toll would have been far higher if Australia had not had strict quarantine measures including compulsory isolation of carriers, wearing of masks, restrictions on movement (we had no national church meeting in 1919) and all the measures we see occurring now in the light of the coronavirus outbreak.

Of course we had over 300,000 cases of influenza in Australia last year and typically there are 3,500 deaths each year. Influenza vaccination for seniors and others at risk groups are freely available but as influenza strains vary so a fresh vaccination is needed each year. The corona virus is of a nature that a vaccine will not be available for some months, perhaps as many as eighteen. While it is not as aggressive as the 1919 epidemic, that is a problem. Symptoms can be very mild and so it is spread very easily without a person realising. The death rate suggested at present is 2 to 3%. If 50% of the Australian population was affected that would mean deaths of 492,000 to 738,000 according to Prof. Raina MacIntyre of the University of New South Wales in the *Age* on 26 Jan 2019. This is all theoretical at this stage but is indicative of the seriousness with which preventive measures must be undertaken.

We have seen worse before. The Black Death (bubonic plague) recurred many times from its initial outbreak in Europe in 1346 which killed at least 30% of the population leading to major social and economic changes. In Wittenberg, plague occurred in the 1520s and Luther refused to leave his post. Similarly, George Wishart in Dundee, Scotland in 1545.

Psalm 91 (look it up and read) really speaks of Jesus Christ as the one who pre-eminently trusted the Father's love and care, was supported in all his trials, and so was not held by death but was raised in the power of an indestructible life to be seated in the place of honour and authority at the Father's right hand. But in him and through him every believer and all the people of God may appropriate this psalm (cf. Luke 10:19).

You've heard the saying, 'Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.' Well then, 'Don't panic; avoid spitting, open coughing and unwashed hands; trust in the Lord and be ready where able to live with restrictions and to volunteer to help others.' #

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Psalm 10

‘Why, O LORD, do You Stand Far Away?’

Rev. George Ball, PCEA Taree

Life was perplexing for David when he wrote this psalm. He cried out, **‘Why O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?’** (1). Though he faced danger and opposition, the most difficult thing for David to handle was the fact that the Lord seemed distant and remote; it seemed He was hiding. David felt forsaken and frustrated. It’s not an uncommon experience for the believer. Job might have asked the same question while he endured his trials. Joseph might have asked it while he was languishing unjustly in prison. The Israelites may have asked it while enduring painful and humiliating slavery in Egypt. Mary and Martha asked this question when their brother Lazarus died. Jesus asked this question on the Cross.

It’s a question we all probably ask at one time or another. Perhaps when we see injustice and wicked things happening in the world? Recently Barnabas Fund showed footage of Islamic State beheading 10 Christian men in NE Nigeria. Soon after that at least 8 Christians in North Cameroon were killed by a 300 strong gang belonging to Boko Haram. We ask, **‘Why O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?’**

But trouble and suffering are not just over the hills and far away. It comes to all of us sooner or later. Perhaps in the form of sickness. Depression. An injury. A bereavement. Marital difficulties. A divorce. Redundancy. Financial stress. Children go astray. We may find ourselves asking the same question as David. *‘Is God really in control?’ ‘Does He care?’ ‘Where are you, God?’ ‘Are you there?’*

1. His Profile of a Wicked World (2-11).

David paints a colourful picture of the wickedness he was encountering. Luther says, **‘There is not a psalm which describes the mind, the manners, the works, the words, the feelings, and the fate of the ungodly with so much propriety, fullness, and light as this Psalm’.**

The wicked man is angry and dangerous. **‘In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor’** (2).

He desires to see the godly crushed and destroyed. He’s like Saul of Tarsus who was **‘breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord’** (Acts 9:1).

He’s a selfish sod (3). He is driven by greed. He has no time or respect for anyone. He treats the Lord with contempt. He only thinks of No. 1. He’s proud of his lifestyle.

He’s a wishful thinker (4 and 11). He denies God – he’s a practical atheist - yet the irony is he’s obsessed with God! If God really doesn’t exist, why does he think so much about Him? It’s hard to be a consistent atheist. You have to constantly suppress the truth (cf. Romans 1: 18-25). He concedes that if there is a God, his god wouldn’t judge or condemn anyone (11). His god is blind, forgetful and irrelevant. But what is he doing? He’s creating a god of his imagination. He’s creating a straw god to knock down. It’s what many people do. *‘When I think of God, I like to think of Him as a God of love who wouldn’t condemn anyone’.* That’s not only wishful thinking – it’s idolatry – it’s rebellion.

He’s proud (5). He sneers (‘puffs’) at the godly. He looks down his nose at others.

He’s smug and self-confident (6). He’s sure nothing bad will ever happen to him. He will never be sick. He will never get injured. He’s Mr. Indestructible. Life for him is more of the past. He’s like those described by Isaiah, **‘They say, Come, let’s get some wine and have a party. Let’s all get drunk. Then tomorrow we’ll do it again and have an even bigger party’** (Isa. 56: 12). Life for him is one big unending party.

He has a foul-mouth. **‘His mouth is filled with cursing, and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity’** (7). His mouth reveals his heart. Jesus says, **‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’** (Matt. 12: 34). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3: 14 as part of his proof that the whole human race is guilty before God.

He’s a terrorist and murderer (8-10). He lurks like a bandit ready to ambush his victim (8). He crouches like a lion in the thicket waiting to pounce on the poor (9a). He is like a hunter ready to cast his net over the poor (9b). These verses were real to Inspector Robert Buchanan. He, along with his colleague Insp. Harry Breen were ambushed and brutally murdered in South Armagh (N. Ireland) by the IRA on 20/3/89. Robert’s Bible had these, and other similar verses, underlined.

It’s a pretty depressing picture. Though an ancient picture – it’s also a modern picture. It describes our day too – it describes the violence, the godlessness, the antagonism toward the truth, and the foul and blasphemous language. It’s a world where terrorists fly planes into tall buildings. Where suicide bombers detonate bombs in busy

marketplaces. Where terrorists butcher their victims. Where road rage is common. Where it's not safe for a single girl to be walking on her own. Where our children need to be protected from sexual predators. Where it's 'smart' to be an atheist. Where trendy academics and left-wing journalists ridicule the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Where there is no absolute truth. Where we are daily confronted by foul and blasphemous language. Even the children seem to know every 4-lettered word. It's a world where evil seems to have the upper hand

2. His Plea to God (12-15).

How does David respond? He cries, '**Arise, O Lord, O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted**' (12). He pleads that God will act decisively and take the situation in hand.

He reminds the Lord what the wicked man has said in his heart (13). The implication is, '*Lord prove him wrong!*'

He speaks in verse 14 (*as Kidner neatly expresses it*) in faith (14a) and about faith (14b). He says, '**You do see, for You note mischief and vexation, that You may take it into Your hands.**' Do you see what's happening? As he engaged in prayer, he begins to see things in perspective. Faith and assurance gradually returned to David during the exercise of prayer. He began with a wobble: He questioned God. But now he recovers his balance and spiritual stability. He is a God who sees and records the actions of the wicked - despite their proud claims in verses 11 and 13. He commits himself to the Lord, '**to you the helpless commits himself**' (14b).

He prays, '**Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none**' (15). It may seem brutal and vindictive. But it's simply a request that the Lord will act decisively and disable the wicked man so he cannot continue his evil deeds. It's also a prayer that God will judge thoroughly and leave no stone unturned, '**call his wickedness to account till you find none**'.

3. His Peace in God (16-18).

Were his prayers answered? Were his 'why' questions (*in verses 1 and 13*) answered? No more than Job was given answers. Yet nonetheless as a result of engaging in prayer he came to the place of peace and trust and affirmation. He's no longer a waverer but a worshipper. He stakes his convictions: -

'The LORD is king forever and ever' (16). This is where David cast his anchor and we should too. Despite appearances, evil is not victorious. The Lord is sovereign forever. (We should see this verse

through the New Testament lenses: cf. Eph. 1: 20-23). This is where faith stands when we don't understand. When God seems silent and remote it doesn't mean He's inactive.

'O Lord you hear the desire of the afflicted' (17a). He is in reality a God who is near and not far off. David says, '**The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit**' (Ps. 34:18).

'You will strengthen their heart' (17b). *'This is the kind of answer that Paul had to accept, and learnt to value, in 2 Corinthians 12: 8-10'* (Kidner). The Lord didn't remove Paul's thorn but said to him, '**My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me**'. This is what the Lord often chooses to do with us when we are weak and perplexed.

'To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more' (18). David was assured that one day the Lord will bring perfect justice - He will save His people and destroy all wickedness. *'While the day of justice may still be in the future, the promise of encouragement is in the present'* (Keller).

Finally, before we leave this psalm (or indeed any psalm) there is something we should remember. Jesus must have learned it by heart and sung it and made it His own. He knew what it was like to be surrounded by the wicked, lying in ambush waiting to the kill Him (8-9). He knew the pride, and blasphemy, and greed, and violence, and godlessness of the wicked. It seemed God had forgotten and abandoned Him (1). Yet He continued to trust in God's unfailing love.

The Cross is the classic example of that time when it seemed God was far off and doing nothing, yet in reality He was never more active working out His saving purposes. Because of Jesus sufferings and death and resurrection He defeated all His and our enemies and has been highly exalted Him. (cf. Philippians 2: 6-11). As a result, He is now King forever (16). He is now our Great High Priest who hears our prayers and will strengthen our hearts (17).

And He is the Judge who will break the arm of the wicked and bring justice and save His people.

We can therefore trust Him at all times - even when He seems far away. #

From Skye, Scotland to Sylvania, New South Wales Mary Hamilton (née Campbell)

John Audet, Narre Warren PCEA member

I'm not sure when I first saw the photo accompanying this article. It must have been decades ago. It is burned on the memory, right down to the detail of the man kneeling in the foreground.

The photo is of Sutherland House at Sylvania, in Sydney's south. Sylvania was the suburb of my childhood, and though the building was long gone by that time, the mansion with its 39 bedrooms, extensive grounds, private beach and half mile of water frontage on Georges River had become part of local lore.

What I've only recently learned is that a story can be told, linking the mansion to a member of St. George's congregation, who had probably sat under the ministry of Rev. William McIntyre at Maitland, and who had travelled with McIntyre from Skye on board the "Midlothian" in 1837 as a result of the efforts of Rev. John Dunmore Lang. I've listed those historical links in reverse chronological order, but to tell the story we have to turn them around and start at the beginning.



Sutherland House, Sylvania

Rev. John Dunmore Lang arrived in New South Wales in 1823 and was the state's first Presbyterian minister. In 1836/7, on the fourth of his nine return trips to Britain, he sought to recruit additional Presbyterian ministers and settlers for the colony. He succeeded in attracting nearly 300 highland Scots, many of them from the Isle of Skye, who sailed from that island in August 1837 on board the "Midlothian". They were accompanied by a ministerial recruit, Rev. William McIntyre, who later became the leading figure in the formation of the PCEA. They arrived in Sydney in December of the same year, minus

at least 24 of their number who had died of dysentery or fever.

Among the arrivals was a family named Campbell from the parish of Snizort in Skye. The Campbell family group included the parents, Donald and Mary, both in their 30's, and their young children Robert, Mary (our principal subject) and John. A further child had died on the voyage, and three more were born in the years following their arrival. The family initially settled in the Maitland district, with a number of others, as tenant farmers on land owned by Andrew Lang, the brother of the Rev. John Dunmore Lang, but the Campbells soon became farmers in the own right elsewhere in the district. It is said that Donald and his family immediately joined the PCEA upon its formation in 1846, sitting under the ministry of the Rev. William McIntyre in Maitland. Donald retired from farming around 1862 and, with Mary, moved to Sydney. The timing is curiously similar to William McIntyre's own removal to Sydney. Donald died at "Isle of Skye Cottage", Woolahra in 1873. His wife Mary survived until 1890.

Around 1854 their eldest sons, Robert and John, both passengers on the "Midlothian", established themselves as merchants in Sussex Street in Sydney. In this business they prospered. John joined St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church and became an elder there. Robert, however, remained in the PCEA. He had a habit of naming his sons after his Presbyterian heroes. The last three were named Robert Murray M'Cheyne Campbell, Thomas Chalmers Campbell and William McIntyre Campbell. He became a deacon in the St. George's congregation during the ministry of Rev. Macintosh Mackay, and became an elder during the ministry of Rev. William McIntyre. His resignation as elder in 1871 seems to coincide with his election as Mayor of Paddington. In 1876 Robert Campbell left Sydney, became a farmer in the Manning district, and was for some years the president of the Manning Farmers' Association. He returned to Sydney, dying at his son's home in 1901.

It only remains to discuss Mary, the Campbell daughter on the "Midlothian". Mary remained in Maitland long enough to marry James Hamilton there in 1861. James was a teacher of Classics in the High School, Maitland, in which the Rev. William McIntyre acted as principal in addition to his duties as the local PCEA minister. McIntyre had long been interested in education, had taught at a school in Glasgow, and in this connection had gone to the trouble of preparing "An Intellectual Grammar of the English Language" which was published in 1831. Mary and James Hamilton had three children within five years, and at some point moved to Brisbane Street in Sydney. They became members of St. George's PCEA of which William McIntyre had become minister a short time previously. James died in their Brisbane Street home in 1866, aged 49, leaving Mary a widow at 36.

Nothing has been discovered of the early years of Mary's widowhood. No doubt she was busy as the single mother of three young children, giving them what was described in one of their obituaries as "a godly training and example". Around the middle of the 1870's, with the children a little older, she went into business as the operator of a boarding house.

Her first establishment, Ardrossan House, stood on Margaret Street. Ironically, it was immediately behind Scots Church, the church ministered to by the now-veteran Rev. John Dunmore Lang, whose efforts had been instrumental in bringing her family to Australia nearly forty years earlier. The writer of Mary's obituary, believed to be the Rev. William McDonald of St. George's Church, said that Ardrossan House was run on Christian principles and that it was popular with Christian ministers and people of all denominations. McDonald, who ministered to the Hamilton congregation in Victoria in the late 1800's, himself stayed there when visiting Sydney, and wrote warmly of its Christian atmosphere. Mary ran this business into the 1890's.



"Ardrossan House", Wynyard Square. Note the original Scots Church immediately behind.

**Private Boarding Establishment
AT MRS. HAMILTON'S
ARDROSSAN HOUSE, MARGARET ST.,
WYNYARD SQUARE.**

An advertisement from "The Protestant Standard" in 1876

Meanwhile, English-born Thomas Holt had built Sutherland House by the water at Sylvania, 20 kilometres south of the city. Holt was the first Colonial Treasurer of New South Wales, a philanthropist, an active member of the Congregational Church and the author of a book called "Christianity, or the Poor Man's Friend". He built Australia's first oyster farm in the waters near Sutherland House. On the debit side, he became partly responsible for the nation's rabbit plague by introducing the animals to the grounds of another of his estates near Marrickville. On his return to England in 1881, he left his son in residence at Sutherland House. In 1894, this son made the property available for lease, and Mary Hamilton moved her operations there.

In 1899 a lengthy article appeared in "The Sydney Stock and Station Journal" which described a visit to Sutherland House and provided, in an incidental way, just a hint of those "Christian principles" of which Rev. William McDonald was later to write. The visit began with one man asking another: "Will you come to Sylvania with us for a bicycle ride?" So it was that one

Saturday morning three couples cycled from the city on their primitive contraptions to the banks of Georges River. After crossing on the punt, they rattled down what was described as "a wide, well-gravelled carriage way" to the mansion.

The house and its grounds were described in detail, and at the end of the day the reader was given a fleeting glimpse of Mary. "When the day was done, at tea, and the "Mistress of the Manse," Mrs. Hamilton, asked God's blessing on the tea, and it was such a sweet and pleasant meal, amongst restful sort of people, that I wished I could be a boarder at Sutherland House".

**THE BEST CHANGE FOR THE
SUMMER.
SUTHERLAND HOUSE, SYLVANIA,
GEORGE'S RIVER.**

Former residence Hon. Thomas Holt, M.L.C. 12 miles from Sydney by rail. Splendid drives, Fishing, Boating.
TERMS MODERATE. Special terms for families.
Communicate with Mrs. HAMILTON, Proprietress.

An 1897 advertisement in "The Sydney Stock and Station Journal"

Though steadfast in her adherence to the PCEA, she gave encouragement to those of other denominations. She allowed a group trying to establish a Congregational Church the use of a cottage until they were able to open a small timber church nearby in 1903. This building still stands on the bend at Sylvania beside the c.1960's replacement in which my mother's funeral service was held over twenty years ago.



A postcard from Sutherland House

There were times of sorrow at Sutherland House. In 1899 Mary's son John, aged 35, was found unconscious on the road to Cronulla, his horse standing nearby. He never regained consciousness and died six days later. Then, in 1905, Mary's 45 year-old son, James, died after several months of illness. An obituary of James which appeared in the Free Church Quarterly stated that he was heard praying on his death-bed that those in the same room might be brought to Christ.

Mary seems to have retired around this time. At least one of her sons had lived at Sutherland House and, now in her mid-70's, she may have been more dependent on their help

than available records indicate. She spent her remaining years living with her daughter, also Mary, her only surviving child. Mary had married Thomas Walton, the head chemist of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) in St. George's church in 1889, and they had made their home in Burwood.

She maintained her connection with the PCEA to the end, though unable to attend St. George's Church by reason of age and distance. The Rev. William McDonald wrote in her obituary, "The writer when shown into her room always found her with the open Bible resting on a table before her, and after a few words, would begin a conversation on the deep things of God which to the hearer was refreshing and encouraging. The night before the call came, she had two lady visitors, one of whom read a passage of Scripture and then Mrs. Hamilton engaged in prayer, giving evidence that she was holding rapturous communion with the God of her salvation".

After 87 years in the colony, 58 years of widowhood, and having outlived 2 of her 3 children, Mary Hamilton died at her daughter's Burwood home in 1924, aged 94. And what of her boarding houses? Ardrossan House was resumed by the State Government in 1912. Along with the neighbouring Scots Church it was demolished in the 1920's to allow road and rail works connected with the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The current Scots Church occupies an adjacent site. The estate around Sutherland House was subdivided into suburban residential blocks in 1908. The mansion itself continued to be used as a guest house for a few years, but was unoccupied when it was destroyed by fire in 1918.

OBITUARIES

REV. ROHN PATEMAN (1930-2019) Rev. John Pateman was born in Tutbury in Staffordshire of Brethren parents and converted in his teens. He served in the Merchant Navy after leaving school becoming a ship's engineer and travelling the world. In 1957 he married Jemima Howitt Shannon (1924-2010) of Bellshill near Glasgow (always known as Winnie). For some years John was a salesman in engineering products in east London and active in a small evangelical church. He had come to conviction of the Reformed Faith and for three years was a missionary with the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen in north-west Scotland where he had contact with the Free Church. He studied at the Free Church of Scotland College and was ordained and inducted to East Kilbride Free Church on 3 February 1973. He was called to Hamilton PCEA and inducted there 25 April 1986. A conservative, even-tempered, gracious and honourable man, he gave faithful service in a difficult time in the aftermath of the King James Version dispute (1979). If he was not optimistic about the progress of the Hamilton work and retired in August 1992, he was one whose trust in the Saviour was clear-cut. John and Winnie lived in Geelong for a period after

John retired in 1992 but returned to Hamilton in 1994. They lived independently and John supplied the congregation until July 2001. Winnie did not enjoy good health and she died in Hamilton in 2010, John visiting her each day in the Beeches residential care home for the five years before her death. There were no children. Latterly John lived at the Lutheran Eventide Homes. The Rev. David Schulz, the minister of Hamilton PCV gave pastoral care after the PCEA was wound up early in 2007. John was not able to get out to worship for the last two years or so but appreciated Mr Schulz's visits. Dementia took hold but John lived quietly and died peacefully. He did not want a funeral but the Lutheran chapel was crowded for a service held there as a mark of respect. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

REV. JOHN S. GRAHAM (1939-2019)

John Graham appears to have been the first regular full-time missionary of Christian Witness to Israel [CWI] in Australia. John was born on Lewis and worked as a motor mechanic before preparing for the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland by studies in Aberdeen (MA) and Edinburgh. Ordained by the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis on 17 October 1978 for work with CWI, he arrived in Australia in September 1979 with Katie, his talented wife, and their two daughters, and was an active evangelist among Jewish people in Sydney. He had a seat on Central Presbytery from 1981 to 1994. In November 1988 he became Interim-Moderator of the new PCEA work in Sydney South. There were wonderful times of blessing among Chinese people at the time as I witnessed myself. However, debates John had with a Rabbi in the early 1990s led him to change his position on the law of God as set forth in the Confession of Faith. That meant the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis had to part company with John after allowing a year for him to reflect further. He joined the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales and served at Bondi from 1997, continuing his interest in the Jewish people until he retired on 30 June 2019. John was a missionary at heart, not an administrator. He worked hard when others would have given up. John had cancer for the last decade and passed to the presence of the Lord on 31 October 2019.

Psalm 73:25-26

**For whom have I in heaven but thee?
None else on earth I long to know.
My flesh may faint and weary be;
My heart may fail and heavy grow;
With strength doth God my heart restore;
He is my portion evermore.**

PCEA YOUNG ADULTS CAMP

Friday 10th to Monday 13th April 2020

Easter Long Weekend

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| WHERE | 516 Palmers Channel South Bank Road, Maclean, Northern NSW at the residence of John and Judy Greensill |
| WHEN | Friday 10 th (dinner) to lunch on Monday 13 th April |
| WHO | The camp is restricted to 15 (born 2005) to 30 years (born 1990) |
| SPEAKER | Tim Attwood (Maclean Evangelical Church) |
| COST | Adults: \$100 per person Students: \$60 per person Subsidy or some travel costs available on request |
| ACCOMMODATION | BYO tent, swag, camper trailer or caravan (no grey nomads). Some tents and sleeping bags are available - please let us know exactly what you require |
| ACTIVITIES | Kayaks, swimming, beach, ball games, walks, fishing, Maclean Highland Gathering |

HOW TO GET THERE

XPT train: (from Sydney or Brisbane) stops at Grafton with connecting bus to Maclean (pickup from Grafton can be arranged). **Flying:** Jetstar, Virgin and Rex airlines fly to Coffs Harbour, Ballina and Rex airlines (Grafton). Pickup from Coffs Harbour, Ballina or Grafton can be arranged. Transport from Brisbane or Gold Coast can also be arranged.

WHAT TO BRING

Bible, pen, notebook, togs/swimmers, warm clothes, insect repellent, sleeping bag, pillow
Board games/cards
Usual things: toiletries, torch

MORE INFO

Stewart Carswell: Ph: 0419 765 212; yfc@pcea.org.au

REGISTRATION

Contact: PCEA Youth Camp, 85 Barmore St, Tarragindi, QLD, 4121 or via email to yfc@pcea.org.au

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA SYDNEY, OCTOBER 2019

Report from Rowland Ward

I was warmly received at the GAA and given the opportunity to bring greetings from the PCEA. It was a pleasure to meet up with a son of Bob Gibb. Bob had been a prime influence in the recovery of the Reformed Faith in Tasmania in the late 1950s. Bob went to be with the Lord in 2018 but had the joy of seeing subsequent generations of his family following the Lord. So far as the business of the Assembly was concerned, it was competently led by the Moderator, Rev. Dr Peter Barnes and the Clerk, Rev. Bruce Mellor and their helpers and clearly evidenced adherence to the basics of Reformed teaching. The GAA has limited powers but provided some norms for Safe Church issues for itself and as help to its constituent state churches.

An interesting issue was the approval of 'The New Dunesk' – the purchase of a rural property to provide training help for Christians travelling in the outback so that they may more effectively spread the Gospel. The name comes from the 'old' Smith of Dunesk Mission which served the outback of South Australia 1894-32. As I'd written about this and my grandfather was one of the missionaries (1916-18) I was asked to give the background and pray for this new work of the Presbyterian Inland Mission which is in process of realisation with the purchase in January 2020 of a rural property at 6550 Newell Hwy, Ardlethan, NSW.

There were several other reports of interest to us. (1) there was a report (3 pages) on *Eschatology and the Millennium in the WCF* which regarded dispensational millennialism as out of bounds, but considered that, while the return of Christ and the Last Judgment immediately follow each other in the Confession and thus disagree with the 'historical premillennial' position, the PCA Declaratory Statement's liberty of opinion clause makes it an acceptable position. (2) The report *Concerning Paedocommunion* was a thorough piece of work (21+ pages) covering the admission of children to the Lord's Supper, an issue impacting other churches too, such as the CRCA. A survey had showed that children were very commonly admitted in NSW and Queensland but very rarely in Victoria reflecting the more conservative position in the latter state. There may be questions of definition since the real issue is not age but a faith that discerns. The report concentrated on the necessity of faith position of the Confession and carried the day after significant debate. Still, there was serious argument against led by Mark Powell, a capable Sydney minister who argued, using Scripture, that children should participate from birth. Ultimately, perhaps a third of the Assembly opposed the recommendations of the report, hardly, one would think, something covered by the liberty of opinion clause. How the future will unfold is unclear.

Still, the GAA was a positive experience. Lots of issues no doubt but encouragements too. #

The Book of Daniel

Rowland Ward, PCEA Melbourne

The book of Daniel originated with the Hebrew prophet Daniel. He is the key figure throughout and so the manuscript belongs to about 536 BC. Some critics have wanted to place it around 160 BC because of their hesitancy about or even rejection of predictive prophecy. They think the events described in reference to the Greek empire are too precise to have been written beforehand. On the other hand, we know from the best of the Jewish books of the 2nd century BC that there was no true prophet among the Jews then (1 Maccabees 14), and the form of the Hebrew and Aramaic language of the book is certainly much earlier than the 2nd century.

The simple structure of the book should be noted. It is written in Hebrew except 2:4-7:28 which is written in Aramaic, the common language of those days, apparently because this section has special relevance to the nations. Chapters 1 to 6 are narrative in the 3rd person; chapters 7-12 are visions in the 1st person. However, note that the two parts are tied together both by the content and by the overlapping of Aramaic.

Ch 1: Daniel aged about 14 arrives in Babylon 605 BC
This chapter shows the loyalty of Daniel and his three friends to God despite all the pressures to conform. Don't let the world squeeze *you* into its mould!

Ch 2: The Dream of the Image 602 BC
Four world empires which despite their varied forms are all of a piece, and are overthrown by a stone cut out without hands.

Gold: New Babylonian (605-539 BC)
Silver: Medo-Persian (539-331 BC)
Brass/bronze: Greek (331-168 BC)
Iron & clay: Roman and successors

Ch 3: The Golden Image
It looks like Nebuchadnezzar doesn't want to reckon with a silver empire after his. His golden kingdom alone matters: he makes himself to be God (3:15), and indeed he was king by God's decree. Yet God's decree is no insurance for those who do not live responsibly toward the sovereign God. On the other hand, those who trust the living God know that, whatever happens, God makes everything work for their ultimate good. Who is that fourth person in the furnace?

Ch 4: The King's Madness
Nebuchadnezzar was a man who couldn't make up his mind. He died in 562 BC and prior to this suffered a period of madness [technical name: boanthropy] as

described in this chapter so that he behaved like a beast without fully forgetting who he was.

Ch 5: Belshazzar's Feast 539 BC

Strictly Nabonidus was king but other historical records tell us that he assigned royal functions to his son Belshazzar and lived in Arabia for 10 years. Thus Belshazzar promised Daniel the 3rd highest position in the kingdom if he could explain the writing on the wall (5:16).

Ch 6: Daniel in the Lion's Den 537 BC

The precise identity of Darius the Mede (5:31) is still disputed; it could be the throne name for King Cyrus or the name of his personal representative in Babylon. The Persian empire, unlike the Babylonian, was a constitutional monarchy, hence the king was bound by the decree.

Ch 7 The Vision of the Four Beasts c 548

Note that the time of this chapter is earlier than chapters 5 and 6. Daniel has been in exile about 60 years but the future is not going to improve in the way he was thinking. There would be a long period of human empires followed by the Messianic kingdom which would not give special prominence to Israel and would involve trials and persecutions. This seems the explanation for Daniel's troubled spirit (7:15). The parallels with the four metals in the image (chapter 2) are obvious:

Gold – Winged Lion – New Babylonian 605-539 BC
Silver – Bear – Medo/Persian 539-331 BC
Brass – Winged Leopard – Greek 331-168 BC
Iron & clay – Indescribable – Rome and successors

Note that "the little horn" rises from the 4th kingdom and persecutes for "a time, times and half a time".

Ch 8 The Ram and Goat Vision

At 8:1 we switch back to Hebrew because the main message from here on relates to the position of God's people. Note that "the little horn" rises from the 3rd (Greek) kingdom, persecutes God's people and tramples the temple for 2300 days – something over 6 years. There is probably symbolism in the number, but the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes 175-168 undoubtedly are referred to. He desecrated the temple and had a mind to wipe out the Jews. The common verbal expressions in chapters 7 and 8 do not mean what is described in 8 is still future but what occurs in the 3rd (Greek) kingdom provides an illustration of what will happen on a deeper level under the 4th (Roman) kingdom.

Ch 9 The Seventy Sevens Vision 538 BC

It is very important to appreciate the context in which this passage must be understood.

a. it expands on the outline of the future in chapters 7 and 8 but **b.** specifically (9:2) refers to Jeremiah 25:8-14 and 29:10 which speak about the 70 years of exile. 2 Chronicles 36:21 explains that the number of years of exile corresponded to the number of years the land had not enjoyed the sabbath it was due each seven years (Leviticus 25); **c.** the prayer (9:3-19) is the prayer of one who knows the nation has lost the privileges of the covenant – the

temple and sacrificial system, the city of Jerusalem and life in a land flowing with milk and honey because of covenant disobedience. “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers...I will remember my covenant...I will remember the land” (Leviticus 26:40ff).

The passage (9:20-27) tells us that the end of the 70 years of exile will introduce a new period of 70 units of seven. The exile was closed by Cyrus as God’s “Anointed One” (cf. Isaiah 45:1) who allowed the Jews to return. The new period will be climaxed by the true Anointed One who will deal with the sin problem that had caused the exile in the first place. The 70 sevens is a complete and perfect period during which the perfect plan of God will be realised in effective dealing with sin and deliverance from sin’s bondage (v24) through Messiah’s death (v27) which causes God’s covenant to prevail. The end point of the 70 sevens is therefore the eternal sabbath, the goal of history. Notice the 3-fold division:

seven sevens – the city will be rebuilt but no 50th jubilee year follows (Lev 25:8-13) since true liberty will not follow the rebuilding of Jerusalem; this comes only with the Messiah.

sixty-two sevens – an odd or broken period as if to convey the idea that the period from the rebuilding until the coming of Christ (the first time) is uncertain to us, and a period which even with what has gone before is still incomplete.

one seven – the last seven is itself complete, a single seven. Like creation it suggests a new and complete work of God (cf. Gen 1:1ff), but also completes the perfect plan of God (70 sevens). In the middle (not the end) of this seven Jerusalem is destroyed [which it was in AD 70] leaving three and one half to the end of history. This broken period is a symbol of the Christian dispensation – a period of trial and persecution but also a period which ends in triumph. [The same period is expressed as 42 months in Rev 11:2; 13:5 and 1260 days in Rev 11:3; 12:6.]

So Daniel learns that the city will be rebuilt but destroyed in order that God’s covenant may prevail through Messiah’s death so that its full benefits will be realised in the building of the spiritual temple and the establishing of the kingdom which will have no end. The earthly city/temple is not the key – Messiah is.

Ch 10 The Vision of a Man 536 BC

The time: after the overthrow of Babylon by Persia, and at the time (10:4) of the Passover (significantly related to the earlier deliverance from slavery in Egypt).

The key figure: a priest-king ruling in and through history; compare the description of Jesus in Rev 1:12ff.

The subject: the future of God’s people.

Ch 11 The Suffering of God’s People

vv 1-35: developments in the 3rd world kingdom

vv 36-45 more difficult – perhaps generalised description

Ch 12: Climax: Salvation/resurrection/judgment

Where is God in the troubles of Ch 11? But keep the perspective of chapters 10 and 12.

Some points to ponder:

1. The LORD has all authority over nations and individuals.
2. Mere human kingdoms are temporary, but Messiah’s kingdom is eternal.
3. The work of Messiah is the means by which this eternal kingdom comes.
4. God’s chosen ones inherit the kingdom only through tribulation.
5. The present calls for faithfulness to the LORD in a hostile environment.
6. The climax of world history is in God’s hands.

NB: *There are difficult things in the Book of Daniel but don’t let them distract you from what is plain.*

SEARCH WORK

MARCH 2020

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 5 and 6

MATTHEW chapter 5

1. In what ways are the following persons blessed: (a) those who are poor in spirit; (b) those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; (c) the pure in heart? (3 separate verses)
2. Why are those who are persecuted for Christ’s sake to rejoice?
3. Why were the disciples to let their light shine before men?
4. What were the disciples to do if they remembered that their brother had anything against them?
5. Why is it wrong to swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, one’s head etc ? (3 verses)
6. In what way are we like our Father in heaven if we love our enemies? (2 verses)

Chapter 6:1—15

7. Why should we enter into our closets (rooms) when we pray?
8. What is the result if we forgive others? What if we do not forgive others? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

MATTHEW 5

1. Why are they blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness?
2. Why are we to let our light shine before men?
3. Why should we love our enemies and bless them that curse us? (2 verses)

Chapter 6:1-18

4. Where are we to go when we pray?

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BANNER OF TRUTH CONFERENCE, SYDNEY, TUES 18TH TO FRI 21ST FEBRUARY 2020.

This was held in the lovely setting of Collaroy Centre, Sydney, with 80 residents and about another 20 attending as day visitors. It was good to see several PCEA ministers and an elder there. Some young people attended, especially as day visitors and there was a greater ethnic mix which was encouraging.

Greatly missed this year was Dr Noel Weeks who was not well enough to attend.

The conference opened with Rev Johnnie Li, minister of Maroubra Presbyterian Church, setting the tone in a sermon from 2nd Corinthians 5:14, *The Love of Christ – Motives and Motivation for Christian Living and Ministry*. Other addresses were from Rev Peter Barnes speaking on *Athanasius*, then a later address on *Christianity, Laws and Freedom*, referring to the proposed Religious Discrimination legislation which he did not favour as likely to bring more problems in a society which had already abandoned the Christian world-view.

Rev Graham Nicholson (Hawthorn Presbyterian Church) preached from 1st Corinthians 2:2, *Everything in Christ Crucified* and Jeff Kingswood (minister of Grace Presbyterian Church, Woodstock, Ontario, part of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church) preached from Ezekiel 2:1-3:15 on *Ezekiel's Call*. (His wife Joan was present and is a sister of Nancy Whytock.)

The evening addresses were given by Rev Steven Lawson, a Baptist minister and writer from USA who runs One Passion Ministries. He gave three comprehensive addresses on *The Importance and Benefits of the Doctrines of Grace*.

There was a short Missions segment on Wednesday afternoon, with interviews with two men:

1. Leon Tang, Presbyterian missionary, who works in an Asian country with returnees ie students who have become Christians while here, then go home.

2. Victor Atallah of Middle East Reformed Fellowship, on a visit to Australian churches.

These were interesting and thought provoking, but I was disappointed that missions was cut back from previous years. Both these speakers could have said more and there were at least 3 people present who could have spoken on other missions.

The programme included a new innovation, 2 sessions of 10 minute talks by two speakers followed by discussion and Q & A. The first was *How best to nurture our young people*, with Tom Reeve and Jeff Kingswood the speakers. The second was *How may the standard of our preaching be raised?* with Joel Radford (Drummoyne Baptist Church, Sydney) and Graham Nicholson the speakers. They were good discussions but I was surprised that in the first on no mention was made of the impact of modern technology on young people – the internet, cyber bullying, use of social media etc. The suggestion was raised of a Banner of Truth Youth Conference and I hope this is followed through.

Overall – There are many good things about the conference, including the possibility of a Banner Youth Conference, but overall, it needs to be locally run, with more psalms sung instead of the hymnbook used by The Evangelical Movement of Wales (ie a return to the practice of the early years of the conference when a cappella Psalms were the standard) and a greater emphasis on missions.

I would also like a broader focus on the minister's role, rather than almost exclusively on preaching. For example,

- Helping ministers to develop pastoral skills. Being overwhelmed with complex pastoral situations is more likely to end a man's ministry than lack of preaching skills.

- Encouragement in evangelism.

- Perhaps a session on the minister's own well being. The ministry is a stressful calling and stress changes people, perhaps leading to reclusiveness, or bitterness, or depression, or retreating to the computer. The Banner Conference, being apart from the local church or denominational hierarchy, is ideally placed to give support in this.

Finally – it is a rather expensive few days, especially for those who have to travel a distance. In many ways it is worth it, but does the cost stop people attending? Is there a cheaper way of doing it?

The PCEA folk took the opportunity to visit Dr Helen Ramsay (92), our first lady missionary doctor (1955), at her aged care facility at Killara. - AFW

SNIPPETS

South Sudan

A new unity Government was formed in South Sudan on 22 February 2020 with the same Vice President and President as before civil war broke out in 2013. Perhaps 400,000 in this nation of 12 million have perished and half the population is hungry. A locust plague has spread from Pakistan into East Africa and to Sudan via Uganda to add to the misery.

Nigeria

Murderous extremist attacks against Christians in north and north-east Nigeria by Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and militant Fulani herdsmen have cost hundreds of Christian lives.

Iran

It is estimated 60% of Iran's population of 80 million are not interested in Islam. MERF is finding an encouraging response to its media broadcasts.

Martyrs

The number of persons martyred each year for their Christian Faith is hard to calculate. On a narrow definition, excluding civil war situations, it still amounts to thousands a year, with many, many more ill treated. Pray for these brothers and sisters. Western media seems to pay little attention to persecution of Christians.

Rev Ian Hall and Mrs Jennifer Hall and their children (Christopher, Toby, Clementine, and Sophia) moved into the manse at 22 Frost Street, Carrum Downs (below) on 10/11 February.



New Brisbane Manse at 3 Padua Place, Boondall