

*Summer 20/21 | Presbyterian Church of Victoria*



# FELLOW WORKERS







# FELLOW WORKERS

## CONTENTS

*Editorial: Thinking About the Church* | page 4

*The Kirkbrae Outbreak* | page 6

*A Fresh Start in the Greenfields: Church Plant coming to Donnybrook in 2021* | page 8

*A Health Message for Victoria: Save Lives* | page 10

*A Day of Reckoning* | page 12

*Interview with Moderator, Phil Mercer* | page 16

*Thirty years of parish ministry – A personal reflection* | page 18

*Book Reviews* | page 20

*Exit Student Interviews* | page 26

*Australian Presbyterian World Mission* | page 34

## MINISTRY MOVES

The Presbytery of Geelong has declared that North Geelong and Bannockburn are now separate charges, with **REV DARREN MIDDLETON** continuing as minister of North Geelong charge, and **REV MATTHEW DERON**, former Associate Minister of North Geelong, as Minister of the newly formed Bannockburn charge.

On 13 November 2020, **OLIVER BLYTHE** was licensed and ordained by the Presbytery of Melbourne East at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Surrey Hills, and appointed as Assistant Minister there.

On 15 November 2020, **ANDREW WONG** was licensed at Canterbury Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Melbourne East.

On 4 December 2020, **BRYCE WIEGANDT** was ordained by the Presbytery of Melbourne West for full-time chaplaincy in the Royal Australian Air Force.

On 19 December 2020, The Presbytery of Melbourne North licenced and ordained **MR BEN KELADA** to be the Church Planter at the new Church Plant Charge at Donnybrook.

The Presbytery of North East Victoria appointed **REV BARRY PORTER** to the Broadford Presbyterian Church, commencing on 13 December 2020.

---

### *Fellow Workers*

Quarterly Magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

State News Committee: Stephen McDonald (Convenor), Phil Betts, Jo Craig, Luke Isham & Tony Zimgast.

Designed, sub-edited and distributed by Virtual Church Assist.

Address changes: <https://pcv.org.au/committees/fellow-workers/>

Submissions, 'Ministry Moves' and Letters to the Editor via Virtual Church Assist: [info@virtualchurchassist.com](mailto:info@virtualchurchassist.com)

*Privacy Policy: The information you provide to the State News Committee has been collected and disseminated in conformity with the Privacy Policy of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (which can be found at [pcv.org.au](https://pcv.org.au) or mailed to you on request). If you would like to view or update any of your information held by the church please contact the PCV at 156 Collins St, Melbourne 3000.*



## EDITORIAL: THINKING ABOUT THE CHURCH

2020 was a year of thinking about church. Well, it was for me and I hope it was for you too. And what questions we've had to think about!

What makes church church?

What happens to the church when it can't meet?

Is online church church? And if it is, do we ever need to go back to physical church?

What authority does the State have over the Church, and where does it stop?

As one month slowly merged into another, it became clear that the Victorian Government and bureaucracy doesn't understand the church (as least, not in the same way that Protestant and Evangelical churches do). So, we've been frustrated by trying to work within a framework that's at odds with what we actually are.

We've had to grapple with the challenges of being the church when our main way of being the church wasn't possible. And, as articles in *Fellow Workers* and the responses to them have shown, we've come up with innovative but different answers, even though there's been a common commitment to live by the Word of God. And I wonder if our answers to the question 'What is church?' have influenced that.

### DIFFERENT IDEAS OF CHURCH

If you've spent long browsing at a Christian bookshop (and I reckon I have), you'll have noticed all the books about church. If the ones that have somehow made it back to my place are any indication, a church can be Intentional, Healthy, Deliberate, Visible, Everyday, Total, Deep, Centre, Emergent, Relevant, Transformational, Disappearing, Reappearing, and pretty much any other adjective you can imagine (including Sticky).

No doubt, it's a result of our individualistic outlook, but it's easy to miss a lot of what the Bible says about the Church. Apart from 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and (depending on who you think they're written to) 2 & 3 John, the entirety of the Bible was written to groups of believers, not to individuals alone. And there are all the commands addressed to 'you', which we might recognise more easily as plurals if we used 'y'all' as they do in Southern American English.

That individualism extends to our thinking about whole churches too. It's easy to focus on the local church. Hopefully, that's because we can see and are committed to the churches we go to. But how often do we think of the church beyond the local?

### THE CHURCH BEYOND THE LOCAL

The New Testament does. It uses the word ἐκκλησία (church or assembly) for the local congregation many times (like Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19 and Colossians 4:15).

But it is also used for a group of congregations in one city (as in Acts 2:47, 5:11, 8:1, 11:2, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and Colossians 4:16) and for a group of congregations in multiple regions (Acts 9:31).

But 'church' is even used for all congregations everywhere on earth (1 Corinthians 12:28) and for all Christians everywhere in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:10 and 5:23-32).

So, even though the Christians in Judea, Galilee and Samara (Acts 9:31) did not all cram into John Mark's upper room each Lord's Day, they were still a church.

That has to shape our thinking about the church: Just as there should be no Lone Ranger Christians, there should be no Lone Ranger churches either. We should be connected to one another, responsible to one another, and looking out for the good of one another (1 Corinthians 12:21-26). That's one of the blessings of being Presbyterians. And that's one of the reasons that *Fellow Workers* exists.

### SEMPER REFORMANDA

One thing we must all realise about the church, whether it's our local congregation or the church more broadly, is that we aren't perfect yet (Matthew 13:24-30, 47, Revelation 2-3, also WCF 25:4-5).

Taking up the role of convening the State News Committee, my hope is that *Fellow Workers* will support the church's mission (locally and denominationally) by being an avenue for the mutual building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

How? Yes, by providing news about and to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. Yes, by publishing articles and opinion pieces. But, more than that, by encouraging a sense of self-awareness so that

“WE SHOULD BE  
CONNECTED TO ONE  
ANOTHER, RESPONSIBLE  
TO ONE ANOTHER,  
AND LOOKING OUT  
FOR THE GOOD OF  
ONE ANOTHER”

we think of the church as something bigger than the group of people we meet with day by day and Sunday by Sunday.

So, however else we may describe the church, may this be true of us (if you'll pardon the Latin): *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi Dei* ("The church is reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God." Jodocus van Lodenstein, 1674).

I don't presume to solve every question about the church in this short editorial. But I do hope to encourage you to keep thinking about the church. Keep turning to God's Word to see what it says about the origins and nature and purpose and work and blessings of the church.

*Fellow Workers*, let's keep thinking about the church.

— Stephen McDonald  
Convenor, State News Committee

## THE KIRKBRÆ OUTBREAK

### MATTHEW JAMES

It's never a good thing when you find journalists and news photographers lurking around the front gate of your workplace, especially during a pandemic. But that was a minor problem compared to the horrendous difficulties that were about to unfold as our residents, their families and our staff had to deal with the suffering, isolation and distress caused by the virus.

In common with all viruses that infect us, this one moves quickly and silently through our communities. There is no respect of persons with this virus. It secrets its way in, by hitching a ride within the cells of an unsuspecting carrier. It flies under the radar; silent, invisible, highly infectious and deadly.

In mid-June we were unaware that Kirkbrae was going to be biologically linked with two quarantine hotels situated in the city, some 40 kilometres to the west. Through workplace and community transmission, our local Melbourne version of the virus found its way from the quarantine hotels into the house of one of our staff members. (Apparently, genomic sequencing has identified that most of the COVID-19 cases in Victoria can be linked to the hotel quarantine system).

We all watched the numbers of new cases in Melbourne climb as July came around. In the first week of July numbers of new cases were climbing over 100 per day. With rapidly increasing new cases, the Kirkbrae staff were starting to get nervous about the possibility that it might infect our facility.

On 8 July, an aged care facility called St Basil's in Fawkner had reported one staff member as testing positive. Sadly, it was not until 14 July that the

Commonwealth Department of Health became aware of that case. In line with health department directives, Kirkbrae's infection control measures moved to a higher level on that day. One week later, our staff were informed that one of our staff had tested positive.

It began with one on 20 July. Six days later we had 42 positive cases amongst our residents, and most of the staff were unable to come to work because either they had COVID-19, or were required to isolate at home. It was like watching a bushfire slowly come over the horizon and wondering where the burning embers might fall.

In the last week of July most of our staff were either sick or isolating at home. Kirkbrae was desperately searching for staff to do the personal care work. At the same time, many of the other aged care places in Melbourne were also looking for staff to fill shifts. The government had talked about a 'surge work force' to pick up the slack when the virus hit the state. But the surge work force had disappeared. Aged care workers across Melbourne were either isolating at home, sick in bed, avoiding work because they had compromised health, or working flat out under the most trying conditions imaginable.

It was at this point that the Victorian government came to the rescue. The wonderful and courageous staff of Eastern Health took over the care of residents at Kirkbrae on 28 July. Nurses from the local hospital network came in and began to take care of our residents. The Federal Department of Health sent Mr John Fogarty to take on the CEO role, and Jane Jenkins of Eastern Health assumed responsibility for clinical care. They all did an amazing job.

They were blessings from God who have brought us safely through this perilous time.

To lighten the load, around 30 residents were evacuated to St John of God (SJOG) hospital in Berwick. The staff at SJOG were also a great blessing from God to our residents. However, despite the excellent care being provided, the most frail residents became critically ill. By the first week of August we had lost 12 of our lovely residents. By September we had tragically lost 22 residents.

Well, it is now November and most of our staff have returned to work and our residents have started to look healthy again after being confined inside their rooms for many weeks. Since 20 August, Kirkbrae has been free of COVID-19. We give thanks to the Lord who has brought us safely through this dreadful time. However, some of our staff have post viral symptoms that make it difficult to live and work as they did before. The staff are grieving the residents that have died. The empty rooms are an ever-present reminder of those who are no longer with us. Please pray for staff and residents as they slowly recover from the impact of many weeks in isolation. And, please pray for the families grieving lost loved-ones.

*Matthew James is a chaplain at Kirkbrae*

“WE GIVE THANKS  
TO THE LORD  
WHO HAS BROUGHT  
US SAFELY THROUGH  
THIS DREADFUL TIME.”





## A FRESH START IN THE GREENFIELDS: CHURCH PLANT COMING TO DONNYBROOK IN 2021

### **RICHARD WILSON FOR THE CHURCH PLANTING COMMITTEE**

40km north of the CBD is where the latest boom suburb is being built on the edge of the ever-expanding city that is greater Melbourne. In 2018 the population was 200. Now it is over 3000 and in 20 years it is planned that almost 80,000 people will be living in Donnybrook and adjacent Kalkallo. There are plans afoot for schools, shops, a hospital, tertiary education, another railway station, and tens of thousands of houses. In Gods providence we are also starting a new Presbyterian Church as a blessing to the community.

Lots of families are planning new homes and a fresh start in the North. One of those families is Ben and Tanya Kelada with their children as they lead the team planting Fresh Start Presbyterian Church Donnybrook.

The Presbytery of Melbourne North has been praying about this project for a number of years now and the Lord has been kind in raising up Ben and Tanya and a growing number of people who are joining them to build the launch team. We are very excited about what the Lord might do amongst them in the years ahead as they proclaim Christ and disciple the people the Lord brings to them.

They have called the church Fresh Start Presbyterian because we are praying that for many people moving to Donnybrook this will be a Fresh Start spiritually as they are born again and given new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit working in them.

“WE ARE PRAYING  
THAT FOR MANY  
PEOPLE MOVING TO  
DONNYBROOK THIS  
WILL BE A FRESH START  
SPIRITUALLY”



We pray that as the church begins early in the life of the new suburb, they will have the opportunity to see the gospel begin to influence not only individuals but also the culture of the whole suburb as the kingdom of God begins to grow amongst them.

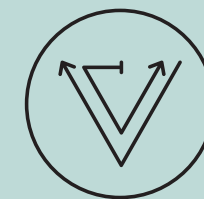
One of the great blessings of ministry in multicultural Melbourne is that world mission comes to our doorstep. Many of the people moving to Donnybrook are beginning life in a new country, coming from the subcontinent, the Arab world and many other places. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Presbyterian Church.

This is just one more step in the strategy of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to reach the city of Melbourne and the state of Victoria with the amazing news that the glorious God who made the uni-

verse has reached down in Christ, at great personal cost, to rescue us for his glory. There are costly sacrifices for all involved, but we believe it is worth it because the Lord himself was willing to make a great sacrifice for us that we might be redeemed. Please pray that the Lord would bless these initiatives for his glory and fame and that many people would be saved in the years to come.

*Richard Wilson is the pastor of Valley Presbyterian Church*

*Remote administrative and  
design services for your church*



VIRTUAL CHURCH ASSIST  
virtualchurchassist.com

# A HEALTH MESSAGE FOR VICTORIA: SAVE LIVES

JESSE WALZ

Our God is the giver of life. In the Garden, he formed the man from dust and breathed into his nostrils so that he became a living being (Gen 2:7). In salvation, he raises those who are spiritually dead to newness of life (Eph 2:5). At the coming of our Lord, “with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thes 4:16), the dead will rise. Our God is the giver of life.

Tragically, we live in a culture that does not value life. The Victorian Government has proclaimed day after day that they care about life. Protecting the lives of the vulnerable is why the state was shut down, why people were prevented from working to provide for their families, why children could not go to school. Their stated aim was admirable. If only it wasn't so completely hypocritical.

Since 2008, our state has allowed the slaughter of the unborn for any reason, at any stage of pregnancy. Moreover, efforts to provide information and counselling, to prevent partial-birth abortion, and even to protect the lives of those children who were born alive after an abortion, all failed. At the time, Daniel Andrews was Minister for Health, and voted for this change in law.

In 2017, Victoria allowed voluntary assisted suicide; euthanasia by another name. In its first year of operation, 124 Victorians were killed, ten times greater than Andrews predicted. These are people who should have been cared for, received sympathy

in their pain, and affirmation that their lives are precious. Greater research needs to be done into pain relief and palliative care, but instead we allow our health-care professionals to once again be the bringers of death rather than the preservers of life.

We live in a topsy-turvy world, where those who desire to protect life are called barbarians by those who want the absolute freedom to take life. The hatred for those who are pro-life is palpable, and the irony seems to be lost on pro-abortion protesters in Poland carrying placards reading ‘You have blood on your hands’.

But let us never stop standing for the lives of the most vulnerable. We will be slandered and vilified. But Jesus said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil falsely on my account” (Matt 5:11). Praise God that the recent General Assembly of the PCV voted unanimously to write and contend for the lives of the vulnerable who are currently dying at the hands of the government. My prayer is that this will be a regular occurrence.

“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter” (Prov 24:11). Let us regularly bring the plight of the vulnerable before our God in prayer and to the government in our letters. Let us inform them that judgement is coming. They will be held accountable for their actions, not only at the next election, but at the coming of our Lord. And who knows, the giver of life may turn the hearts of our politicians like a watercourse, so that life will be protected in our state (Prov 21:1).

*Jesse Walz is the minister at Eaglehawk Presbyterian Church*

“BUT LET US NEVER  
STOP STANDING FOR  
THE LIVES OF THE  
MOST VULNERABLE.”

## EDITORIAL COMMENT:

In a further irony, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announced on 15 November 2020 the launch of a new commemorative certificate that explicitly recognises the life of children lost prior to 20 weeks.

While the certificates have not legal standing, the press release issued by the Premier's office states that they are designed to ‘provide greater recognition for Victorians who have experienced the tragic loss of a child in early pregnancy... in an important step to provide comfort to grieving parents.’

Considering that it was Andrews himself, who as Health Minister introduced the Abortion Law Reform Act 2008, it is hard to imagine a more grim example of what George Orwell called ‘doublethink’: ‘the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.’”

Warm regards,  
Stephen McDonald



# A DAY OF RECKONING: VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PUSHES TO BAN CHRISTIAN PRACTICES WITH THREAT OF 10 YEARS IN PRISON

MURRAY CAMPBELL

The day has come in Victoria where Christians and Churches need to decide whether to obey God or the Government. Such a decision should never be forced onto believers but the current Victorian Government insists that it must be so. There are times when we use hyperbole and exaggerate the significance of words or decisions, but I do not think this is one of those occasions.

The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 has been tabled in the Victorian Parliament. This is the most significant threat to religious freedom in Victoria in living memory. The current Government has been slowly removing religious freedoms for a number of years, but nothing quite like this. Anyone found engaging in ‘change or suppression practices’ may face 10 years imprisonment.

Premier Daniel Andrews,  
“Cruel and bigoted practices that seek to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity will soon be stamped out across Victoria, thanks to new laws introduced to Parliament today.

*The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 will put in place new measures to protect Victorians from the serious damage and trauma caused by conversion practices.*

*The Bill denounces such practices as deceptive and harmful, reinforces that the ideology behind these practices is flawed and wrong.*

*The laws empower the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to consider and respond to reports of change or suppression practices from any person, as well as launch investigations where there is evidence of serious or systemic change or suppression practices.”*

The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill may have wide-reaching ramifications for thousands of religious groups in Victoria, for 100,000s of Victorians, and for the entire State as it turns its back on religious freedom in favour for State-controlled religion.

**Now that the Bill is available to read, what does it mean for Christians and for churches?**

The Bill is long and complex. There are important details that need to be addressed which I or others will do so later on. I want to comment here on some of the larger issues.

I want to begin by stressing that if the Government’s intention is to protect vulnerable people from extreme practices that were once employed by a few and marginal religious groups, there is a warrant for conversation.

When the Guardian reported,  
“Religious groups have sought to distance themselves from the older practices of electro-shock treatment, aversion therapy or other extreme methods, while arguing that religious counselling encouraging people to change their sexuality or gender identity should not be banned if a person consented to the treatment.”

I must respond and say, not true. We are not distancing ourselves from these older practices because almost no church ever engaged in them. Until a few years ago I didn’t know that such practices once occurred in a few religious groups. Despite the efforts of the Government and various advocacy groups, this is not and was never widespread among Christians in Victoria. In addition, I note the government has carefully avoided telling the public that this the so-called ‘conversion therapy’ originated not with Christian churches but within secular psychology. Decades ago, some well-meaning people unfortunately adopted the ideas and practices from psychology and added a spiritual twist.

If the Government is concerned with banning shock therapy and particular counselling methods, pretty much all Christians would find agreement. For those people who have undergone those kinds of experiences, I pray that they will find healing and come to know the God of all comfort. However, these narrow and debunked practices are not

the parameters of this Bill, nor the goal of this Bill. Both the Premier and the Attorney General have made it clear, Premier Daniel Andrews referred to conversion practice as, “This bigoted quackery”, and “The Bill denounces such practices as deceptive and harmful, reinforces that the ideology behind these practices is flawed and wrong.” Attorney-General Jill Hennessey said, “We’re sending a clear message: no one is ‘broken’ because of their sexuality or gender identity,” and “These views won’t be tolerated in Victoria and neither will these abhorrent practices.”

Let us take note, it is not only the alleged activity that Daniel Andrews and Jill Hennessey want to be eradicated from Victoria, it is “these views”. In other words, to think or have ‘these views’ is something that the Victorian Government wants rooted out.

In other words, the Government is not only targeting those rare, few and extreme practices (that frankly don’t happen anymore), the government is aiming its intention at the beliefs and the thoughts of 100,000s of Victorians. Is it the role of government to police our minds and to decide what theology can and cannot be believed? Since when did God give them jurisdiction over the conscience?

**Churches are left with little protection.**

The Bill contains no explicit protection of the rights of religious people to believe and teach their views. At one point it refers to the Charter of Human Rights but it fails to offer any specific protection to religious people and religious organisations. With a note of irony that can’t be missed, the Bill’s explanatory memo references to “freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief”, in the context of constructing an entire Bill aimed at taking those freedoms away.

The Government’s position is of course hypocritical and disingenuous. For example, while they argue sexual orientation is fixed and that persuading anyone of an alternative is morally wrong, the Bill

“WE SHOULD BE  
CONNECTED TO ONE  
ANOTHER, RESPONSIBLE  
TO ONE ANOTHER,  
AND LOOKING OUT  
FOR THE GOOD OF  
ONE ANOTHER”

offers protections for those who are in the business of transitioning people into a gender other than their birth sex. In another law that the Government pushed through a year ago, on one’s birth certificate you are free to legally change the gender on your birth certificate every 12 months. When it comes to children who are wrestling with gender dysphoria, they are now encouraged and urged to no longer identify with their biological sex but to assume a new gender identity. The government have acted in this manner despite an increasing consensus in the medical fraternity that this kind of counselling and medical intervention is fraught with danger and is unlikely to resolve the issues facing these children.

**What is considered ‘conversion or suppression practice’?**

In terms of the particulars of this Bill. it is important to understand how terms are defined, in particular, what constitutes ‘conversion or suppression practice’.

5 Meaning of change or suppression practice

- (1) In this Act, a change or suppression practice means a practice or conduct directed towards a person, whether with or without the person’s consent—
  - (a) on the basis of the person’s sexual orientation or gender identity; and
  - (b) for the purpose of—
    - (i) changing or suppressing the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person; or
    - (ii) inducing the person to change or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (1), a practice includes, but is not limited to the following—

- (a) providing a psychiatry or psychotherapy consultation, treatment or therapy, or any other similar consultation, treatment or therapy;
- (b) carrying out a religious practice, including but not limited to, a prayer based practice, a deliverance practice or an exorcism;
- (c) giving a person a referral for the purposes of a change or suppression practice being directed towards the person.

Take note of the following details: the Bill will ban consensual practices. If a person invites a pastor or person to pray for them in relation to their sexual orientation or gender identity, the pastor or person can be charged according to the Act.

Section 5.3 provides examples of what constitutes 'practices'. Prayer is banned. For example, if a person asks for prayer that they would live a godly life and refrain from sexual activity that they believe is inconsistent with follow Jesus Christ, the person praying can be charge according to this Act. Section 5.3 specifies that practice is not limited to the examples that are provided. Where does this leave preaching and teaching the Bible's sexual ethic? What of the sermon, the Bible study group, and seminars?

To be clear, Christianity does not teach that a persons gender or sexual orientation will change. Christianity does however teach and urge Christians to live sexually godly lives which include only having sexual relations within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. The Bible contains many exhortations for believers to not engage in sexual activity outside marriage. Will these formal and informal conversations be permitted under this Bill? At the stage, that is far from certain. For teaching abstinence or offering pastoral counselling in line with the Bible's vision of sexuality, and praying with fellow believers that they will be godly in their sexuality, does this fall foul of the Bill?

This ambiguity needs to be clarified in the Bill. If teaching and sermons and study groups are not subject to this Bill, then it needs to be made explicit so that religious organisations are afforded due protection. As it stands, there are details that this Bill does not answer and deliberately (or least it seems a conscious decision) leaves open. What if a church runs a seminar on marriage or raising

children and we explore the bibles teaching on sexuality?

Where the Bill is silent, we may turn to the Bill's explanatory memorandum and to the HCC and HRLC reports which the Government used extensively for shaping their position. The explanatory note states, *"These examples are illustrative only and do not narrow the definition in subclause (1) which is intended to capture a broad range of conduct, including, informal practices, such as conversations with a community leader that encourage change or suppression of sexual orientation or gender identity, and more formal practices, such as behaviour change programs and residential camps."*

In other words, a conversation is deemed an offence. A chat where a Christian encourages another Christian to follow a Christian ethic could become unlawful. The Explanatory memo doesn't hold as much legal weight as the Bill itself. However, I am reliably informed that a Court may refer to the explanatory note.

The Health Complaints Commissioner's Report for the Government, adds this information, *"Conversion therapy/practices reinforced homosexuality as a form of 'brokenness'"* and *"Church teachings that homosexuality is sinful;"*

Notice the attention given to Church teachings (as opposed to other religions who also identify homosexual practices as sinful). In other words, classical Christian teaching about sexuality is deemed to be harmful. According to the HCC, an exposition of Romans ch.1 or 1 Corinthians ch.6 would fall under the umbrella of harm. If a Church organises a marriage enrichment day where the Bible's presentation of marriage is affirmed, this event could fall foul of harm. From weddings to Sunday sermons, from Bible study groups to counselling sessions, in contexts where sex outside of heterosexual marriage is spoken of as sinful or broken, the Health Complaints Commissioner identifies all of the above as harmful and therefore the State can justify limiting religious freedom.

The other report which the Government has underscored is from the Human Rights Law Centre. Under conversion practice they include, *"pastoral care which includes (or claims to include) 'counselling', 'healing', claims about 'curing', 'changing' or 'repairing' a person's sexual orienta-*

*tion or gender identity, or claims about improving a person's mental or physical health, would likely still be classified as a health service, and the above regulations would apply."*

Indeed, the definition is so expansive that it may include sermons, Bible Studies, marriage courses, counselling, and prayer.

The HRLC report also included new forms' of conversion practice, among them is self-control and abstinence. *"Instead, they are beginning to promote activities designed to help same-sex attracted people live chaste and celibate lives, in accordance with the sexual ethics of their religious traditions."*

The HRLC and HCC reports are not part of the Bill, but they do form background and reveal the sorts of practices that are being views. The Government has a responsibility to clarify where the HRLC and HCC understandings of 'practices' can or will influence interpretation of the Act.

#### Concluding remarks for now

Once again, we can all agree that there used to be unhelpful and damaging practices done to fellow Victorians. We oppose them and pray that those individuals who have been harm, may find peace and healing. The Government's Bill, as it stands, goes well beyond those archaic and now debunked practices. This is an attack on normal and deeply held beliefs and practices among Christians all over the world.

I am less shocked by the Government's narrative as I am saddened. Pumping children with hormones and cutting off breasts and penises is not harmful, but Christianity is harmful. Praying for Christians to be godly about sex is harmful. Teaching the Bible's vision for human sexuality and relationships could be defined as harmful.

Without important revisions and corrections, this Bill will make vulnerable 100,000s of Victorian Christians who are persuaded by the Bible's vision for human sexuality. For Christians, this is never about forcing our views on anyone. It is about casting a better vision for the world and human life, and about persuading and loving others as Christ has loved us.

If the Government doesn't intend to prosecute Christians or Churches for praying or teaching or practicing a Christian view of sexuality, then it is incumbent upon them to clarify their goals and to correct this Bill.

I trust that the Victorian Parliament will see commonsense and introduce significant revisions to this anti-religion Bill.

To Churches, faith groups, and denominations, I encourage you to write to your local members of Parliament and express your concerns winsomely and clearly.

*Murray Campbell is the Pastor of Mentone Baptist Church*



MOPS.ORG.AU



## Want to reach young families?

MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) is a ministry for your church that serves mums and creates connections.

To find out more, email [info@mops.org.au](mailto:info@mops.org.au) to get an info pack

*#thisismotherhood*



## PROFILE:

### INTERVIEW WITH MODERATOR, PHIL MERCER

*You've written elsewhere about growing up in a missionary and ministry family (AP, 2018). How did that prepare you for the ministry?*

I consider myself blessed indeed to have been given believing parents, both of whom had been saved out of unchurched backgrounds, who took seriously their responsibility to train up their children in the way we should go. They taught me the Scriptures from infancy. They surrounded me with faith in the form of daily family devotions, daily scripture memory and countless teachable moments throughout any given day in which the Scriptures were brought to bear upon life as it happened. I grew up knowing that I was loved, that I was continually being prayed for and that the absolute best that my parents wanted for me was that I come to know Jesus personally. Visiting preachers were regular guests in our home and my parents took me to evangelistic meetings so as to expose me to the Gospel at every available opportunity. It was at just such a meeting in the Hobart Town Hall on the 4th August, 1969 that I came to saving faith in Jesus. I was not actively seeking Christ at the time, but unbeknown to me, Christ was seeking after me, and as the message was proclaimed, the Lord opened my heart to respond to the Gospel. It was my parents who presented me with my first Bible, and who disciplined me through my teenage years. Theirs was the power of a consistent godly example. I grew up with a Gospel-focussed, servant-hearted model of ministry ever before me. My parents knew enough about the costs and hardships of ministry to insist upon a strong compulsion and spiritual call to ministry as a necessary basis for going forward. After 35 years of ministry, I remain forever grateful for the heritage of faith gifted to me through my parents.

*You've served in rural, regional, and city churches in New South Wales, Tasmania, and Victoria, both as a solo minister and in team ministry. Are there particular lessons you've gained from that wide experience that could be helpful to ministers or those considering ministry?*

Regardless of the ministry context, the things that we share together in common as God's redeemed people are far greater than the things that distinguish us from one another, or that would threaten to divide us. Regardless of personal background, people from every walk of life need to know that they are loved by the God of heaven, that the Lord Jesus shed His blood to save them, and that God's grace is more than sufficient for every need they will ever face. The Church is the only institution in all the world where true unity among diversity can and should occur, where people of all racial, social, educational, professional and generational backgrounds can come together as equals, as brothers and sisters in Christ, where we stand on level ground at the foot of the cross to share the journey of faith together and to support and encourage one another so as to be a light to the nations as we hold out the hope of the Gospel. Keeping short accounts with one another and maintaining the unity of the Spirit are vital to the wellbeing of any church community. Brotherly love, expressed as mutual care and respect, is paramount.

*What aspects of the PCV's history and heritage are you especially thankful for?*

The thing that I value most about our heritage is our shared commitment to a Gospel-centred, Christ-proclaiming, Word-based, Spirit-led ministry, which is underpinned by our shared confessional basis and the training for ministry provided through our theological college. The practical outworking of all this is that you can travel anywhere in Victoria, and upon visiting a Presbyterian Church, you will almost certainly hear God's Word proclaimed with faithfulness. Another strength is our system of church government. While our name 'Presbyterian' sounds anachronistic, it points to the truth that we are a church that is governed by a plurality of elders. Spiritual leadership is vitally important to the wellbeing of any church, and in our context that is expressed as a shared responsibility, in which lay leaders with recognised gifting, godliness and christian maturity are elected from within the local congregation and are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of that congregation. This ought to be one of our greatest strengths as a denomination, where those with a heart for God's people and the wisdom and maturity to do so, are raised up from within a local congregation and are entrusted to guard, keep watch over, and nurture the life of God's people.

*What do you see as the present and future challenges for the PCV and the reformed and evangelical church in Australia more generally?*

Sometimes local Sessions do not function as a biblical Session ought. It is not uncommon for Sessions to be under-resourced. Elders are not always equipped to exercise a spiritual teaching and shepherding role. Sometimes, the minister becomes the 'paid professional', exercising a solo ministry when the biblical model is one of shared responsibility. There is sometimes a lack of delegation of word-based and deed-based ministry roles among the leadership team. That is borne out not only by observation and experience, but by the statistics, where the number of active elders has steadily declined over decades. For the spiritual health and flourishing of parishes, we need a renewal of leadership at the local level. When a local Session functions as God intended, it is an immense blessing to the church and the community. Spiritual pride is a constant danger, which, in our context, can find expression in 'doctrinal correct-

ness' or head knowledge without heart reality. The biblical model for marriage and family is under sustained attack today. Church needs to be a sanctuary where young people can be taught God's way, find their life's partner, and be supported to build strong marriages and families into the future.

*How did you find the challenge of moderating the General Assembly online?*

I felt wonderfully met in answer to prayer. Moderating via Zoom meant that it was difficult to gauge the tone of the meetings. Relating to fellow commissioners through a computer screen was very different from all being together in one place. The sense I had was that there was a spirit of respect and good-will that meant we rarely got bogged down in procedure and that led to constructive decisions being made.

*What are you looking forward to most about your time as Moderator? Are there any particular areas in which you hope to contribute to the PCV during this time?*

While current COVID restrictions and border closures remain, my year as Moderator will likely be very different to normal, yet I very much look forward to exercising a ministry of encouragement, to promoting the unity and peace of the church, to supporting the expansion of Gospel ministry, and to representing the church in a range of different contexts. Please feel free to contact me about any issue pertaining to the church's life and work, and please pray for faithfulness in the fulfilment of my responsibilities.





## THIRTY YEARS OF PARISH MINISTRY – A PERSONAL REFLECTION

**Richard O'Brien**

January 2021 marked for me a beginning and a conclusion; my retirement and the conclusion of thirty years of parish ministry. Life as a pastor ended earlier than I expected and with circumstances that I would never have imagined, yet as with all things, God's timing is perfect, and his ways are right. As my formal ministry concludes and I address my health issues, I have been encouraged by a number of friends to look back and record God's faithfulness, highlight the lessons learnt, and encourage the church to do what I so often said, to keep investing in people because ministry flows from relationships.

With each of the congregations that Rosemary and I ministered among, the preaching of God's Word, and especially preaching consecutive Christ-centred sermons through Books of the Bible was always the priority. We also strongly believed in spending time with people because it is from these relationships that ministry opportunities flow, not only for the minister who is a pastor-teacher but also for the entire congregation. The worth of the individual and the priesthood of all believers have certainly been two important principles which were reaffirmed by the Reformation and have been important in developing an inclusive style of ministry.

Rosemary and I have had the privilege of ministry in 3 vastly different parishes. From the beginning of 1991, straight out of the Presbyterian Theological College, we went to a church plant at Croydon Hills Presbyterian Church (now known as Croydon Presbyterian Church). Rosemary had previously been a preschool teacher in this estate, so we were both familiar with the area. Over the next nine years this congregation, by God's grace, grew into a vibrant Christian community. The approach we took was quite unremarkable. The commitment was to prayer, systematic expository preaching, discipleship, and pastoral care. God moved by his Spirit in the hearts of his people and applied His word to their hearts so that people came to faith and grew in grace.

In contrast to a church plant, at the end of 1999 we were called to St Paul's Presbyterian Church, Armidale, a NSW country congregation that was soon to celebrate its 150th anniversary. Shortly after we arrived it was revealed the PCNSW was in serious financial difficulties partly brought about by financial losses incurred at the two Presbyterian schools in Armidale. I was asked to become a Trustee for the PCNSW, to help its recovery from this serious financial crisis. At the time Rosemary constantly reminded me that God is sovereign and that He doesn't waste our experience, including my decade in accountancy before entering theological college. God places us in places for reasons that we were not expecting.

By the end of our third year in Armidale the financial crisis was mercifully resolved. I received an invitation from the Rev Douglas Robertson, Senior Minister of The Scots' Church Melbourne, to consider a new role - Minister to the C.B.D. The Lord was about to use experiences from both Croydon Hills and Armidale: starting something new, together with the lessons learnt in Armidale where He had prepared me by meeting and interacting with men and women in business and government. Ever since working as an accountant in the Sydney CBD, I've had a passion for ministry to the business world, but I never expected to be given the privilege of that opportunity.

This was ministry for the next eighteen years; that is a long time to spend in any congregation and especially as an assistant minister. There were several highlights. A major one was the 'Wednesday early morning discipleship group' where we worked our way through some of the spiritual classics such as John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress, A.B. Bruce's The Training of the Twelve, and J.I. Packer's Knowing God. What a joy to be with men as they wrestled with these spiritual classics before heading off to work for the day. The approach used was taken from John Musselman of 'The Jackson Institute' in Atlanta, USA. It is worth reviewing it as he has so much of his material for free on the web. I first met John when he was invited to speak at the PCV Ministers' Family Camp at Halls Gap. I think his studies at that camp were life transforming and I was able to spend a morning with John before he flew back to the USA. In ministry and life sometimes, it is the unexpected providences that can yield the greatest encouragements and spurts to our own growth. And for me, meeting John Musselman was one of these occasions.

These early morning discipleship groups really confirmed in my mind that spiritual growth in many ways is a slow life-long process especially 'where people are committed to the words and ways of Jesus Christ for the purpose of growth in maturity in Christ and being prepared for a life of service in His kingdom.' There is not much that is 'instant' in ministry. Jesus likened the gospel and the Word of God to a seed which can be nourished and nurtured.

Another highlight was the Thursday Lunchtime Series. This was started for business people and it clearly met a need and provided a means where business people could hear clear Bible teaching, ask questions and have lunch—all within 30 minutes. I was also encouraged by the 5pm engage service together with the Tuesday night City Bible Study (CBS) and the work of the Pastoral Care Committee. As a pastor, one should never weary of the heartfelt desire to nurture, show compassion, care, and the love of Christ to your congregation, and to the world.

There was also a unique ministry established through the City of Melbourne's Collins Street Precinct Group (CSPG). In some measure, we felt we were a part of Jeremiah's exhortation to the exiles of seeking the welfare of the city. The CSPG

sought to provide a sense of neighbourliness in the City. And it provided a context whereby as a congregation we could seek the welfare of the City by being part of the neighbourhood. In this regard, I found the commitment of the retailers in that group to be outstanding. They saw that a healthy city was vital to the welfare of the homeless, businesses and retailers and the life of the City generally. They always included me in their functions. One such example was the day the late Jim Stynes died. That night the Collins Street Precinct was having a function and just before the Lord Mayor spoke, they asked me to pray for the Stynes family and the Melbourne Football Club. A small but not insignificant "chaplaincy" role expressed in a personal way. My involvement in this group has also given me the privilege of being with people in times of grief, providing opportunities to talk about life, death and the city. One such instance was when the traders were shaken by the tragic death of Sisto from Pellingrini's restaurant.

The impact of these ministry opportunities is cumulative after years of a faithful presence in the city by our congregation. People notice what we do and very often people express they are glad for our presence in the CBD. Ministry flows out of relationships. Many expressed their appreciation for the way that Scots had enhanced and refurbished the Assembly Hall building, also the Wednesday Sausage Sizzle, and the AFL Grand Final service. They appreciate us entering into the life of the CBD whether it be in the Comedy, Jazz and White Night festivals, or community groups like the Collins Street Precinct Group. Such involvement cannot be undertaken without a supportive congregation committed to seeking the welfare of the CBD. A sustained long-term effort is essential in order to build healthy relationships with the various stakeholders in the CBD.

Looking back over 30 years of ministry, we can honestly say that the friendships we have formed from each of the congregations has been a highlight and a privilege. We thank God and with the Apostle pray that for all of God's people "that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9-11)

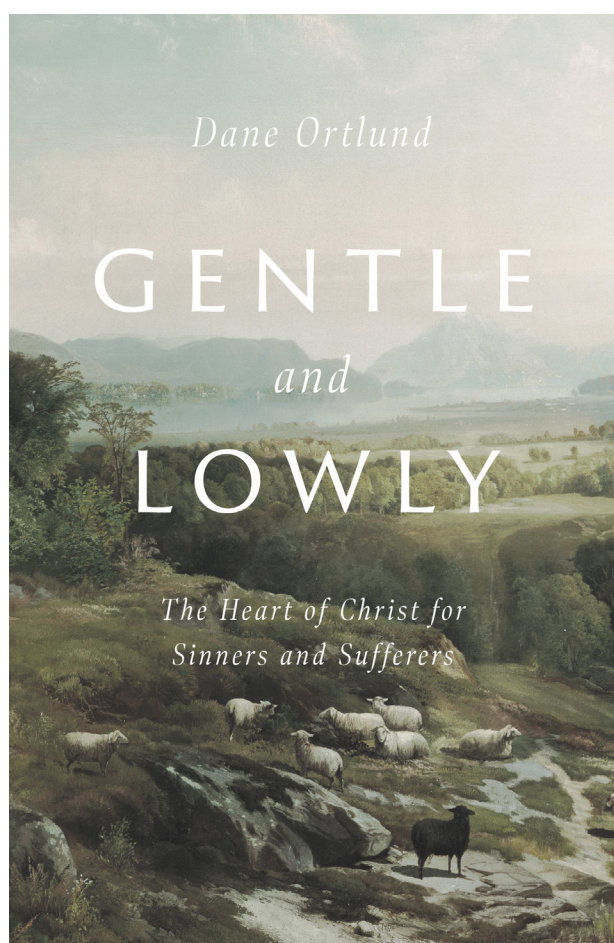




## REVIEW:

## GENTLE AND LOWLY: THE HEART OF CHRIST FOR SINNERS AND SUFFERERS

REVIEWED BY CHRIS BERRY



*Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*  
Crossway (2020)  
ISBN: 9781433566134

Every now and then you stumble across a book that you realize that no one has ever written. For me, this is that book. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* explores the heart of Christ, who he is and how he moves towards broken sinners like you and me. This book presses into grace and how deep it truly goes. The description of the book gives away its intention – the heart of Christ for sinners and sufferers. Every chapter probes grace and asks questions about how Jesus relates to people like us who are wayward, wretched and broken, a perfect topic for isolation when many of us have been confronted with our own sinfulness and lack of growth in the Christian life. It has been thoroughly helpful in my context, with AFES and university students who have been struggling with loneliness, depression and anxiety.

Ortlund explores questions like, what is Jesus' heart like? What does he think of me and my mess? What does he think when I fall again? Ortlund's answer from chapter 1, leaning on Matthew 11:29, is that Jesus is the most approachable and understandable person in the universe. He is gentle and lowly. Ortlund leans into the Puritans and brings out truths in the Bible that we often have overlooked and shows us what's there with particular clarity. There is a reason that this book is now currently sold out at every Australian bookstore.

Each chapter leans into a single verse of Scripture and explores deeply what it means that Jesus is praying for us (chapter 8), able to sympathize with us (chapter 4), our friend (chapter 12), how he deals gently with us (chapter 5) and how he will

never cast us out (chapter 6). In the middle of the book Ortlund pauses to think about the Trinity and how the Father and the Spirit relate to the heart of Jesus. They are one and the same. Impressively, Ortlund manages to centre on some unfamiliar passages from the Old Testament to show the character of God (chapters 15-18). The book finishes by circling back around to think about how merciful Jesus is, how much he loves us and is committed to us (chapters 19-23).

Here is a taste of some of the language in the book and the probing questions that Ortlund asks. There are no hoops to jump through with Jesus. He is not going to lob down a pep talk from on high at you. He cannot bear to hold himself at a distance. Nothing can hold him back. His heart is too bound up with yours. He doesn't simply meet us at our place of need; he lives in our place of need. He never tires of sweeping us into his tender embrace. Through his Spirit, Christ's own heart envelops his people with an embrace nearer and tighter than any physical embrace could ever achieve. Christ does not get flustered and frustrated when we come to him for fresh forgiveness, for renewed pardon, with distress and need and emptiness. That's the whole point. It's what he came to heal. Jesus can no more bring himself to stiff arm you than the loving father of a crying newborn can bring himself to stuff arm his dear child. Jesus' heart is drawn out to you. That's what is most natural to him.

The emotional intelligence is spot on and Ortlund rightly drills down into what grace actually means for those who are naturally orientated to 'Law-ish'

hearts as compared to his 'Lavish' heart (chapter 20). He provides wonderful questions and pushes into what the Christian life should be; felt and lived, not just head knowledge and intellect. Thoroughly reformed, Ortlund is often pausing and asking questions about the attributes of God and how judgment and grace fit together.

How might this benefit my ministry I hear you ask? Great question. Firstly, I think it will help your personal spiritual life. It will deepen your appreciation of the gospel and Jesus' love for you. Secondly, the language Ortlund uses is transferrable, to give a clear vision in your preaching and teaching about how truly gracious our God is. Thirdly, you might want to run a Bible study series on each of the passages to flesh out Jesus' heart with your congregation. Feel free to contact me if you want to use any of the Bible studies I have written.

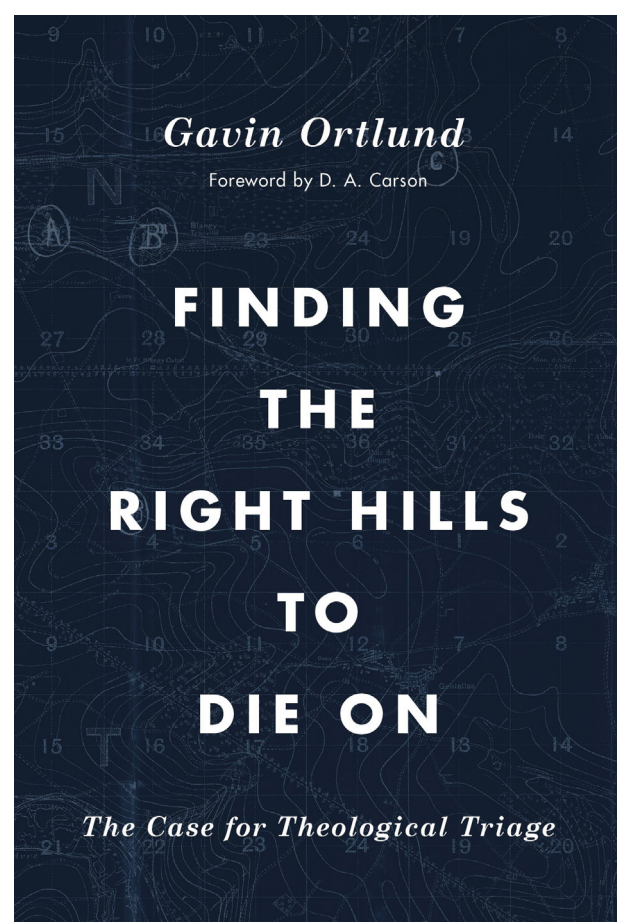
To conclude, I highly recommend this book to you. I believe it will be the book that wins all the Christian awards this year and be the standout book of the decade. I hate a bandwagon, yet I am on this one. Use it in your ministry, to help centre your ministry on the wonderful Saviour we have. I am so thankful for the Puritans, Ortlund's wisdom and the rich theological framework that is presented. But I am most thankful for Jesus very heart—gentle and lowly.

*Chris Berry is an elder at Darebin Presbyterian and also a AFES worker at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne*

**BOOK REVIEW:****‘FINDING THE RIGHT HILLS TO DIE ON’**

THE CASE FOR THEOLOGICAL TRIAGE BY GAVIN ORTLUND

REVIEWED BY DOUGLAS MILNE

*Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*

Gavin Ortlund

Crossway 2020

ISBN 9781433567421

The title of this book is taken from the Korean War, where soldiers had to decide which hills they needed to die for to win the war. The subtitle is taken from medical triage where doctors have to decide which patients to attend to first in an emergency. In other words, this book is about prioritising our theological beliefs and learning to grade them, since not all truths are of equal importance—some are worth dying for, others are not. The author’s stated aim is not to win us over to his way of thinking on particular beliefs, but rather to help us do theological triage better.

The book is in two parts—the first alerting us to the danger of extremes in either overstating the importance of certain doctrines, or of understating the need for biblical orthodoxy. The first leads to unnecessary divisions among Christians, the second, laxity and compromise with secular culture. Most Christians are either too hard or too soft in matters of doctrine.

The author warns against deciding everything on whether it is ‘a gospel issue’ or not. This because the Scriptures contain more than the gospel, some secondary issues are needed to defend the gospel, lesser issues have often shaped church history in exemplary ways, and secondary questions are not unimportant in themselves. “Everything God reveals in Scripture is essential for something, or it wouldn’t be there. ‘Non-essential for salvation’ does not mean of no importance at all”. (p.49)

That Scripture itself grades things becomes clear from, for example, Matthew 10:15, 23:23; 1 Corinthians 1:17, 15:3-5; 1 John 5:16-17. As a result, the author proposes a three- or four-fold grid for sorting out Christian beliefs—to preserve Christian unity on the one hand, and to avoid undesirable and damaging sectarianism on the other. As the author spells this out, first rank doctrines are essential to the gospel, second grade doctrines are urgent for the church, third rank doctrines are important for theology, and fourth grade doctrines are indifferent. This brings readers to the second part of the book.

We might imagine that first rank doctrines are those doctrines that people need to know in order to be saved, but the author includes in his first rank those doctrines that are needed in order to defend those saving truths. As a result he includes, along with the saving teaching about justification by faith alone in Christ alone, the belief in Christ’s virgin birth, because it is needed to validate the truth of Jesus’ person as both God and Man. Perhaps the most essential doctrine of this kind would be a full doctrine of biblical inspiration and authority, since there is strictly no salvation or faith without its infallible witness to God and truth.

The author admits that second order doctrines are the most delicate and difficult to navigate in a spirit of tolerance and charity. This is because these are issues that most Christians feel strongly about, and historical differences over denominations, ministry and church life are justified by them. The three examples the author gives are baptism, spiritual gifts, and women in ministry. He is himself a Baptist, non-cessationist and complementarian,

Regrettably, on baptism the author did not expose the strong underlying theologies—Arminian theology for Baptists and covenant theology for Presbyterians—that generate the respective practices. On spiritual gifts, the author reports on the diversity of views among reformed writers, but also concedes the difficulty for cessationists when continuationists make spiritual gifts essential to conversion, valid worship, and the ‘second blessing’. On complementarianism versus egalitarianism the inroads of secular culture was noted, the author discussing “the complexity

inherent in the hermeneutical task of cultural translation from the first century to today” (p. 121), the tendency of each side to assume the worst of the other, and the danger of over-restrictiveness on the part of complementarians.

For tertiary doctrines, the author selects from the beginning and end of Scripture, the days of creation and the millennium. On the former, the author believes we should give more attention to those aspects of creation teaching that Christians have historically emphasized and “that are distinctive to a broadly Judeo-Christian worldview, such as creation ex nihilo, the historicity of the fall, and the fact that human beings are made in God’s image” (p. 143). On the millennium, the author rightly draws attention to the slight grounds on which some premillennial beliefs are built from (symbolical verses in Revelation 20), along with the historical evidence against it. Nevertheless, the author believes that “we can debate our differences from within the context of Christian unity”, since most premillennial people agree with us on so much else in the word of God.

Throughout the book the author repeats the need for wisdom and humility when attempting theological triage. This is because attitudes are just as decisive as convictions. Readers will not agree with every position taken by the author, but the value of the book is in the way it challenges us about our theological commitments, the importance we place on them, and the spirit we bring to them. The lasting message of the book is that we should aim to become as biblically orthodox in our confession and as lovingly Christlike in our working relationships as possible; to work constantly on both of these, the theological and the personal-attitudinal; and to pray persistently for them both to grow in ourselves and in one another.

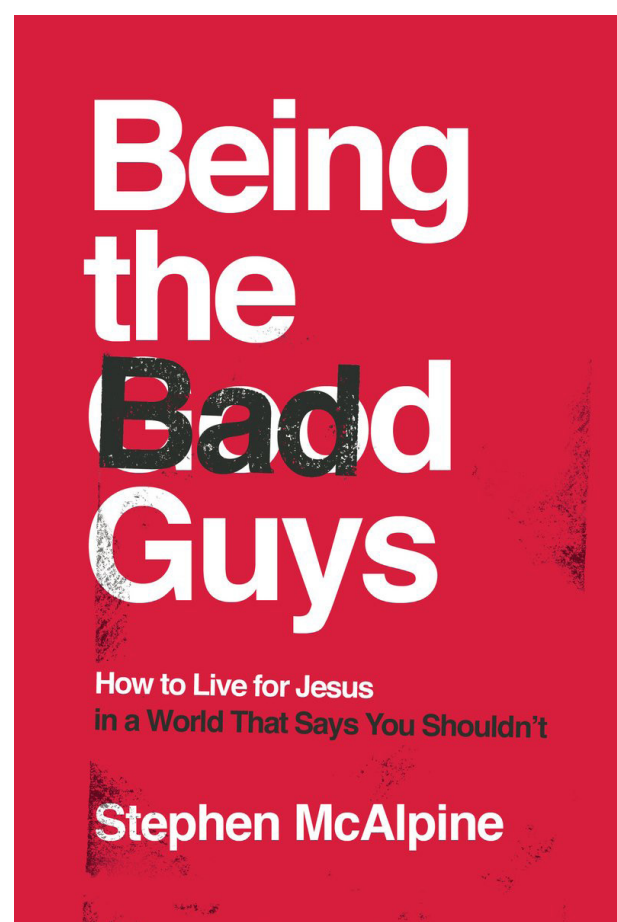
*Douglas Milne is a member of Canterbury Presbyterian Church and former Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College. A review copy of ‘Finding the Right Hills to Die On’ was provided by Reformers Bookshop.*



## BOOK REVIEW:

## ‘BEING THE BAD GUYS’: HOW TO LIVE FOR JESUS IN A WORLD THAT SAYS YOU SHOULDN’T

REVIEWED BY LUKE ISHAM



*Being the Bad Guys: How to Live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't*  
 Stephen McAlpine  
 The Good Book Company 2021  
 ISBN 9781784985981

The “world has changed ... much that once was is lost” says Galadriel at the beginning of the Fellowship of the Ring movie. It was not long ago that the Australian church was grappling with the issue of same-sex marriage and now it’s coming terms with proposed legislation around the transgender issue. One year prior to the same-sex marriage referendum, the 2016 census famously re-arranged the religious choices, making “no-religion” the first option. Churches may still have non-profit status and the Lord’s Prayer is still mouthed in Parliament but Christianity is no longer a mainstream force, politically or culturally. Stephen McAlpine argues in his new book *Being the Bad Guys: How to Live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't* that Australian Christianity hasn’t just being pushed to the margins, but is now perceived negatively. In the post-modern world we assumed Christianity would be one option among many in the Areopagus in Athens, instead we’re becoming a threat to the Artemis trade in Ephesus.

McAlpine focuses on the central flash-point of this change, sexual ethics. The varied sexual appetites of individuals has been turned into a political ideology. Admittedly, people have always had a fraught relationship with sexuality. Now however the previously dominant view of binary male-female gender and monogamous marriages has been overturned. The new sexual ethic is built around a certain type of self-expression. McAlpine observes: “Western culture is obsessed with sexuality because it has declared that our deepest, truest, most authentic self is discovered there.” (90) And ironically secular post-Christian culture picked up the tools of Christianity to seek and promote this change. Ideas like the ‘good life, personal change, collective responsibility, individual autonomy and the rejection

of harm are part of the ruins of Christendom that have been leveraged by secular sexual ethics.

McAlpine’s big idea in *Being the Bad Guys* is to recognise this new stage in the culture wars as an opportunity. An opportunity to be consistent in our behaviour and an opportunity to proclaim the hope and beauty of the Gospel. McAlpine argues we should rise above the argy-bargy of the culture war, otherwise our joy and sorrows become connected to culture war wins or losses. Instead we should says McAlpine harness the energy of being a “creative minority”. (70) Becoming the bad guys was inevitable for Christians says McAlpine. “Jesus ... told his disciples, ‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.’ (John 15:18)” (36)

A despised minority, notes McAlpine should be despised for our connection to Jesus and not our sin. Losing the culture war may be a blessing in disguise if it helps us become consistent servants of Jesus. That is the first opportunity McAlpine surveys. The second is the truth and beauty of a Christian sexual ethic. McAlpine notes the importance of self-denial, repentance and forgiveness. Importantly, McAlpine says our joy as Christians should be based on our view of History. “Our hope is in that day when the resurrected and reigned Jesus returns.” (106) We know how things will turn out, we can put events and people in their correct proportions.

*Being the Bad Guys* finishes with some practical advice for congregations and workers. The secret to our success as a maligned minority will be the simple act of gathering together and proclaiming Jesus. We must says McAlpine continue to “prefer God’s people”

(98). Interestingly the Pandemic has revealed that even digital gathering requires participation to be effective for our discipleship. Then we need to be clear and confident in our proclamation of the goodness of Jesus. “When Jesus and his goodness are proclaimed in our buildings, it will seep out into the rest of our lives.” (102) Workers, says McAlpine need to be alert to the Daniel in Babylon style “gotcha” planned by secular culture. (112) A public choice between your God or the organisation’s Diversity policy is the desired outcome here. However you have tools says McAlpine. Take the opportunity to do a “faithfulness check” (115) on your own sexual ethics and gospel fidelity. And play to your strengths as a Christian. Christianity knows what ideological commitment feels and looks like. And if you’ve been a Christina for a few years you know how get along with others with strongly held ideological commitments. And gather, says McAlpine with like-minded colleagues in your department or field or can help and pray for you navigate the specific issues of obedience in your work place.

*Luke Isham is the pastor of St Kilda and Balaclava Presbyterian Church. A review copy of ‘Being the Bad Guys’ was provided by Reformers Bookshop.*

## EXIT STUDENT INTERVIEW:

BILLY KERNIAWAN

BURWOOD COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*Where did you grow up?*

I was born in Indonesia and grew up in a city called Surabaya.

*What did you do after school?*

After I finished high school, I worked as a manager at my cousin's furniture shop for about two years. After that, I went to one of the Reformed Bible seminaries in Indonesia (South East Asia Bible Seminary) to be trained for ministry.

*Where did your wife grow up and what is her educational and professional background?*

Just like me, my wife was born in Surabaya, Indonesia. She moved to Melbourne in 2005 and studied a Bachelor of Commerce at Deakin University. After graduating from Deakin, she worked at Vodafone for a couple of years, and now she is working at Brighter Smiles Family Dental Care as a receptionist.

*Where have you lived since?*

After I completed my Bachelor of Divinity and did ministry in Indonesia for a year, I moved to Melbourne in 2015 and worked as a second worker at Burwood Community Presbyterian Church.

*At what stage of your life did you become a Christian, and what led you to study for the ministry?*

I became a Christian when I was 18 years old. After that, I became quite active in my youth group. At one point, after seeing my passion and potential, my youth leader challenged me to go to seminary. At first, I was a little bit hesitant. But after I prayed for a couple of years and sought lots of advice, I knew for sure that this was God's calling. In 2009 I went to Bible seminary and completed my Bachelor of Divinity in 2014.

*What are the most helpful things you've gotten from your theological study and ministry experience so far?*

There were a lot of helpful things, such as how to read the Bible in its context and apply it in today's context, how to share the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelievers, and discipleship. But in my opinion, witnessing pastoral hearts from the lecturers at PTC and many godly ministers and learning from their experiences were the most valuable things. They really helped me put all the knowledge into practice.

*How do you feel about your appointment to Burwood Community Presbyterian Church, and how do you plan to approach your role?*  
The Presbytery appointed me to Burwood Community Presbyterian Church, my home church. I'm looking forward to serving in my home church, and I pray that God may use me to be a blessing for this church. I am also looking forward to learning many valuable things under the guidance of Rev. John Elnatan.

*Anything else you'd like people to know?*

I do not have anything else to add. I'm looking forward to beginning my appointment at Burwood Community Presbyterian Church and serving His church.





## EXIT STUDENT INTERVIEW:

### JOHN HUDSON BRIMBANK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*Where did you grow up?*

In North Eastern suburbs of Melbourne: Briar Hill and Montmorency.

*What did you do after school?*

I studied maths and IT at university and then worked in maths (tutoring at RMIT), IT (systems operator), and then scientific programming (combining both). After Bek and I got married, I did a ministry apprenticeship with the RMIT Christian Union and Bundoora Presbyterian, before going to theological college to train for ministry.

*Where did your wife grow up and what is her educational and professional background?*

Bek grew up in Brisbane. She trained as a nurse, and has worked as a nurse in Queensland, NSW and Victoria. She also spent four years serving in ministry with the RMIT Christian Union. She now looks after our four children: Hannah (11), David (9), Abigail (7) and Esther (5), and runs an online business called the *Ministry of Yarn*.

*Where have you lived since?*

We've lived in Preston, Sydney (Parramatta), Sunshine, and now Taylors Hill.

*At what stage of your life did you become a Christian, and what led you to study for the ministry?*

I became a Christian at university, when I was challenged by the way that Christians lived, and by the depth of their discussions. I was converted by sermons on Leviticus, which convicted me to come to God on his terms rather than my own. Many years later, it was reflecting on the importance and eternal impact of the gospel that led Bek and I to pursue ministry.

*What are the most helpful things you've gotten from your theological study and ministry experience so far?*

I've really appreciated learning Hebrew and Greek, because while other subjects tend to give you fish (which are essential for theology and ministry), biblical languages teach you how to fish, and continue to draw out treasures from God's Word. I've also had the privilege of doing lots of one-to-one ministry, which I've found very helpful for understanding people and how to communicate the gospel to them.

*How do you feel about your appointment to Brimbank Presbyterian, and how do you plan to approach your role?*

Bek and I are very excited about it! Having lived in Sunshine, we've seen the need for Bible teaching churches in Melbourne's West. We also very glad to be a part of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria. And we love the people at Brimbank Presbyterian. I plan on simply preaching God's Word, praying for people, and staying as long as we can to have an impact for Christ.

*Anything else you'd like people to know?*

Over 700,000 people live in western Melbourne, but there are only a handful of Bible teaching churches in the area. We'd love you to pray for people in western Melbourne to come to know Jesus and find new life in him.



## EXIT STUDENT INTERVIEW:

XIEN YAO

ASSISTANT PASTOR AT DONVALE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

*Where did you grow up?*

I grew up in Guangdong, one of the southern provinces in China.

*What did you do after school?*

After migrating to Australia with my wife, I completed an IT degree at the Swinburne University of Technology. After graduating, I worked as a software engineer for 17 years.

*Where did your wife grow up and what is her educational and professional background?*

My wife Suzanne grew up in the same hometown as mine. She has a Diploma of Accounting, a Diploma of Library and Information Services, and a Bachelor Degree in Ministry.

*Where have you lived since?*

We have been living in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne since we came to Australia.

*At what stage of your life did you become a Christian, and what led you to study for the ministry?*

Both my wife and I were communists and worked in Chinese government sectors before we came to Australia, we did not have any chance to hear the Gospel at all. We believed that as long as we worked hard and relied on our strength and wisdom, we could achieve a happy life. When a friend of ours tried to invite us to go to church, I turned down the invitation without hesitation and responded to him that only the weak pursue religion. Although I was arrogant, ignorant and rebellious to God, he did not give up on me. He used one incident that happened in my life at that time to see my need to pursue Him. In God's grace, both of us converted to Jesus during a Family Gospel Meeting. Hallelujah!



After our conversion to Christ, we were eager to learn God's word. Not long after, both of us started serving in different roles in church ministry. We felt great joy in serving God, and the more we served Him, the more satisfaction and God's love we experienced. Although God blessed my IT professional career, I began to feel God's call to be a full-time minister both internally and externally in 2013. I was not sure what His timing was exactly, so I waited for His signal while enrolling in a course of Graduate Diploma of Divinity at MST part-time. In His grace, God gave me a clear sign to step forward to follow Him in 2018. When I shared with pastor Felix the decision of putting down my IT career and doing full-time study, he also shared with me his vision from God of setting up a Mandarin congregation in Donvale and was looking for coworkers. I thought that it would be an excellent opportunity to further equip myself for God's ministry, if I could be part of it, and receive theological training at PTC. Thus, I expressed my interest, and here I am.

*What are the most helpful things you've gotten from your theological study and ministry experience so far?*

It is such a great blessing for me to study at PTC. The teachers there are great theologians who not only teach God's word faithfully and provide excellent theological training to students but also provide great pastoral care for them. Therefore, during these years of full-time study and ministry, I have grown a lot in areas of my theological knowledge, spiritual formation, and ministry skills.

My time at college was helpful for sharpening my theology and exegesis skills, and for building life-long ministry friendships/partnerships.

*How do you feel about your appointment to Donvale, and how do you plan to approach your role?*

I feel really excited about my appointment at Donvale. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be part of the Donvale pastoral team. My major responsibility is to lead and develop the Chinese congregation while at the same time sharing the pastoral load with pastor Gerald and Jordan in the English congregation.

I fully embrace what Mark Dever says in his book, *The Deliberate Church*, that it is God's word that builds the church. Therefore, I will continue to place God's word in the centre of what I do. I will plan every activity as a response to the Great Commission, which either falls into the bucket of disciple-training or evangelism.

*Anything else you'd like people to know?*

Growing a church is like growing a plant. It not only requires effort and caring, but it also takes time to grow and produce results. However, I believe that if we faithfully plant the seeds, and water them, God will make them grow and produce fruit in His own time. Let us continue to do God's work faithfully and diligently. I pray that when each of us sees God face to face, we will be called by Him as his good and faithful servants.



## EXIT STUDENT INTERVIEW:

BEN KELADA

CHURCH PLANTER AT FRESH START PRESBYTERIAN, DONNYBROOK

*Where did you grow up?*

I grew up in the northern suburbs of Melbourne (Heidelberg West). My parents were immigrants who met in Melbourne (Dad from Egypt, Mum from the Philippines). I went to high school in Northcote (before it was hipster!).

*What did you do after school?*

After High School I studied Computer Science at La Trobe Uni and have since worked as a computer programmer in various roles. After getting married, we settled in to serve at Bundoora Presbyterian Church, where I also did a METROP apprenticeship.

*Where did your wife grow up and what is her educational and professional background?*

My wife grew up in housing commission flats in Northcote (also the northern suburbs of Melbourne). We met at Northcote High school. She studied Occupational Therapy at La Trobe Uni and has worked on and off as an Occupational Therapist, in between being an at home mum for our 3 children.

*Where have you lived since?*

We have lived in the Northern Suburbs (Reservoir, Bundoora, Lalor) and have been part of Bundoora Presbyterian Church since we got married 18 years ago.

*At what stage of your life did you become a Christian, and what led you to study for the ministry?*

I grew up in the Baptist Church, but drifted away during my teens. Tanya grew up without a Christian background. We met at the end of High School and after graduating we started asking questions about God and began attending a church. God had begun to be a part of our lives, but He challenged both of us to take him seriously with all of our lives. This led to us joining the Christian Union student group at La Trobe University. It was there that we were helped to understand our own sin more fully, understand Jesus' grace to us in the Gospel and challenged to live out our faith while sharing it with others. We received training and encouragement that made us want to pursue full time ministry. This led to both of us doing METRO apprenticeships. Through these apprenticeships and service at Bundoora Presbyterian Church we felt that God had confirmed our gifts and that encouraged us towards pursuing ministry in the Presbyterian Church.

*What are the most helpful things you've gotten from your theological study and ministry experience so far?*

The apprenticeship taught me that ministry was not programs or projects, but about loving people. This set me on course to integrate Bible teaching with community building. I've enjoyed a number of subjects at the PTC - the preaching subjects have been really helpful, the counselling subjects helped integrate the theology we were learning in a counselling context and Church history gave me a greater appreciation for those who have loved the Lord Jesus in the past. I've also loved going in depth into many different books of the Bible.

*How do you feel about your appointment to Fresh Start Presbyterian and how do you plan to approach your role?*

I've been appointed as the church planter for a new church plant—Fresh Start Presbyterian, Donnybrook. Donnybrook is a greenfields suburb in the northern growth corridor of Melbourne. It is exciting to be building a team and starting a new work, but is also somewhat daunting - we are going to need a lot of prayer! We have begun recruiting and God has graciously provided 4 other couples to join us so far. We are hoping to start with at least 10 families. We plan to be a missional community that is centred around God's Word. We want to be a community that loves God, loves His people and loves the community around us. We believe God's Word informs how we do community and how we are to share our lives, share the Gospel and invite people to meet Jesus.

*Anything else you'd like people to know?*

Please pray for us and the team as we prepare to launch next year. It is a big move for us all. Please also pray for the people of Donnybrook that God would be preparing the hearts of many to receive his Gospel. If you know anyone who is moving into the area and would happy to be on board taking the Gospel to Donnybrook please get in touch at: [info@freshstartdonnybrook.com.au](mailto:info@freshstartdonnybrook.com.au)





## REACHING THOSE WHO CAN'T READ

How can people who cannot read or do not yet have the Bible in their mother tongue be reached for Christ?

One solution is provided by Global Recordings Network, which sends recordists across the globe who record people reading the Bible and singing Christian songs in a mother tongue.

Yousif and Vivian, from Clayton Presbyterian Church in Victoria, have served with Global Recordings for several years. Yousif is a trained recordist and has recorded gospel messages, songs and scripture in Africa and central Australia. They had planned to travel to Africa in 2021 to carry out recordings.

Since they couldn't travel overseas, Yousif and Vivian have spent 2020 studying linguistics at the SILA training college in Kangaroo Ground, Victoria. In 2021 instead of heading for remote locations in Africa they will be travelling to Indigenous communities in northern Australia to record audio and audio-visual materials—translated scripture, songs, Bible stories, testimonies—in Indigenous languages, spoken by Indigenous people.

They are now waiting for an invitation to go and will need to increase their support team which has diminished over the course of 2020. Would you be willing to pray for Yousif and Vivian and the people they serve? Can you contribute to this vital ministry?

To find out more please go to:  
[globalrecordings.net/en/yousif](http://globalrecordings.net/en/yousif)

(Yousif and Vivian's surname has been omitted for security reasons).



Photo: Yousif and Vivian

## THE ENEMY BECOMES THE BUILDER

In the late 1970s Timor Leste suffered what was often a cruel occupation by Indonesia. In the south of the island lies the major town of Same ('sar-may'). Many had fled from Same in fear of their lives and for years lived in the mountains, to evade the Indonesian troops. Some starved, others were killed. Some fled from the country. Many were eventually captured.

One of the captured men was a Christian, and when the Indonesian troops searched his meagre belongings they were surprised to find a Bible. The commandant asked the man "We were told that you were all communists. Why do you have a Bible?" The prisoner replied that he was a Christian, not a communist, at which point the commandant shared that he too was a Christian. After that, many of the prisoners were released and commandant set about helping them construct a church building.

Over the years that congregation has grown to become many hundreds of people. It has supported many small groups of Christians meeting throughout the southern part of the island. When the original church building had reached the end of its life, the Same congregation, with government aid, built this beautiful new church building.

Please pray that this building will always be used for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel and that through this congregation's ministry, many in the Manufahi district may come to know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.



Photo: Same Presbyterian Church building

## TALUA: JUST A PILE OF TIMBER?



What do you see in this photo? Perhaps simply a pile of timber. But it's far more. It's the first sign that rebuilding has commenced at Talua Theological Training Institute following the devastation caused by Cyclone Harold in April this year. In a nation such as Vanuatu it can take some time to arrange for such work to take place. The fact that rebuilding has begun is good news!

These repairs will make these buildings safe for the upcoming cyclone season, thus preventing further damage when the next cyclone hits—and it will come!

At the moment the main priority is housing for staff and students. Talua closed a few months ago because of the damage caused by Cyclone Harold and plans to re-open in May 2021.

We, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, have been the primary donor for these essential repairs. Where did the money for this come from? From you, the many generous individual members and congregations who can see the strategic importance of Talua.

Although Cyclone Harold inflicted much damage in northern Vanuatu, APWM has made the rebuilding of Talua a priority. For any church, theological education is an essential part of the church's life as it seeks to train and equip the next generation of pastors and lay leaders. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to help the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu do this work. The Talua Cyclone Recovery Committee has asked APWM to thank you, its supporters, for your generous support in rebuilding the college.



