

Summer 21/22 | Presbyterian Church of Victoria



FELLOW WORKERS

PRINCIPLES
FOR A CHRISTIAN
VIEW OF
DISABILITY



Fellow Workers

Quarterly Magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

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FELLOW WORKERS

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EDITORIAL: SINKING OR SWIMMING?

STEPHEN MCDONALD

It's hard to gauge the health of the church. It's not just hard to perceive the health of a local congregation; it's even harder to tell how a whole denomination is going.

Our own tendencies to see the glass as being half-full or half-empty can contribute to that. Whether it's the church or something else, we can tend to think everything is going swimmingly or constantly have that sinking feeling.

A 2020 VIEW

The introduction of the ARMS data collection system by the Ministry Development Committee led to the greatest level of data provision for statistical returns for many years. But when the MDC released the results, there was some panic in my part of the world. The question was "Is the Presbyterian Church declining?"

Certainly, it is concerning to know that almost half of the congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria are 25 people or smaller. But that doesn't tell the whole story.

A LONGER VIEW

In John Wilson's excellent book *Strength for Today, Bright Hope for Tomorrow: A Statistical Survey of the PCV Since Union (1977-2019)*, we find helpful points to compare the annual statistics with.

- In 2018, there were more than twice as many places for full-time ministry in the PCV than in 1977.
- Since 2012, the attendance at worship state-wide has been growing faster than the population (11% compared to 10%).
- Our membership declined by 41% since the high point in 1981, but actual attendance at worship grew over the same period.

The significant loss of membership since 1977 reflects the fact that at Union, almost half of our members were not regularly attending church on any given Sunday.

Since our membership now matches attendance at worship, it now more closely reflects actual participation in the church's life of worship and ministry, which had been greatly inflated previously.

We can never rely on statistics to tell us the whole story. But these numbers point us to a better story: God's church will never disappear. And it seems that in God's providence, the PCV isn't sunk yet. In fact, there's a lot to be thankful for!

A DEEPER VIEW

The temptation is to just look at the numbers. But the health of the church is always about more than that.

The Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us of the Biblical teaching at this point: “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to his will.” (WCF 25.5).

The first question is not ‘How are the numbers?’ but ‘How faithful is the church?’

Then we realise that there’s always a mix of believers and unbelievers (Matthew 13:24-30, 47). Also we hear the sobering reminder that both local congregations and whole denominations are in danger of turning away from the truth and abandoning the Lord Jesus (Romans 11:18-22, Revelation 2:9, 3:9, 18:2).

We should be thankful to God for the amazing transformation the Presbyterian Church across Australia has experienced as it has embraced the Gospel with deeper commitment and passion.

We may not be sunk, but we cannot just stop. We need to keep swimming, and the cultural tide keeps pulling in dangerous directions.

But we can keep going because of the promises Jesus has made: He is in charge (Matthew 28:16-20). His work will endure (Matthew 16:18). And His church will never disappear from the earth but will continue worshipping Him (Psalm 72:17, 102:28).

“THE FIRST QUESTION IS NOT ‘HOW ARE THE NUMBERS?’ BUT ‘HOW FAITHFUL IS THE CHURCH?’”

A BIGGER VIEW

That’s God’s bigger purpose. It’s bigger than just numbers, though it certainly includes more people trusting in Jesus. But it also includes His people growing in maturity, obedience, and service (Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 2:41, 47, 5:14, Ephesians 4:11-16, Philippians 1:5-6, 1 Peter 2:2). And it includes people worshipping Him according to His word until He returns on the Last Day.

That’s easy to lose sight of, especially when it’s easier to see the numbers on Sunday. But let’s not lose our heads among the head-counting (2 Timothy 4:5).

Fellow Workers, are we confident that God will complete His work (Philippians 1:6)?

Stephen McDonald is Convener of the State News Committee

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AN ORGANIST FOR NEARLY 70 YEARS!

PHILIP BURNS

After two attempts at holding a service to mark the retirement of Mrs Jean Spicer as organist at Bendigo (St John's) Presbyterian Church (with both of these attempts postponed due to last minute lockdowns), finally it has happened!

On Sunday December 12, 2021 the congregation met to give thanks and praise to our God for almost 70 years of faithful and appreciated service over the years accompanying the praise of God at regular Sunday worship, weddings, funerals, Sunday School anniversaries and other events for both congregation and choir.

The service featured Jean's three favourite hymns, *Immortal Invisible*, *To God Be The Glory* and *The Day Thou Gavest*, speeches of thanks to Jean, the presentation of a special certificate made by Elder Andrew Kerr on behalf of Session, and a gift of flowers presented by Mrs Averil Harris, Secretary of the Board. Rev Philip Burns preached the sermon on Luke 19:11-27, titled, 'God's People Have Got Talent!' (or, 'a call to multiply your minas') and a shared COVID-friendly lunch was held in the hall afterwards as part of the celebrations.

Jean commenced her long stint as organist for St John's after the retirement of the previous organist, sometime after June 1953, aged 16 years of age, having been thrust into the job at the suggestion of her father. During the years of her service, Jean has not only seen seven Ministers come and go (the



8th is still there), but also a number of different organs, the St John's congregation go into Union and then re-form again, buying back its previous building. One of the highlights of Jean's time was playing for the re-opening service at St Johns in the afternoon of October 15, 1985 with about 450 people attending in the church and by video into the hall. She did have a break from the organ during the time of the birth of each of her four children and 'retired' on other occasions, but continued to keep playing as required. But this time, retirement is official, and Jean's husband Ted, will finally be able to have her sit next to him during services at St John's where they have been members for these many years.

The Church family at Bendigo gives great thanks to God for the blessings received through Jean's faithful service and were glad to honour her faithful contribution to the worship of His great Name. Thankyou Jean!

Philip Burns is the minister at Bendigo (St John's) Presbyterian Church

MINISTRY MOVES

The Presbytery of Melbourne North licensed **Mr Brian Leong** to preach the Gospel of Jesus at a service on 10 December, 2021, at Epping Presbyterian Church.

Mr Kalpan Vasa was licensed to preach the Gospel of Jesus by the Presbytery of Flinders at a service on 10 December, 2021, at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Clayton.

After 9 years, **Rev. Gary Wentworth's** ministry at Leongatha Presbyterian Church concluded on Sunday 19 December, 2021.

On Sunday 26 December, 2021, **Rev. Kevin Maxwell** conducted the final worship services of his inducted ministry in the Tatura-Rushworth Parish.

The Presbytery of North West Victoria accepted the resignation of **Rev. Stuart Withers** from Rochester Presbyterian Church, effective from 30 January 2022. He was appointed to Grace Presbyterian Church Wodonga by the Presbytery of North East Victoria, commencing on 31 January 2022.

Mr Robert Koh was licenced by the Presbytery of Maroondah on Wednesday 12 January 2022 at Donvale Presbyterian Church, prior to taking up his exit appointment at Hamilton Presbyterian Church.

A licencing service was held at Canterbury Presbyterian Church on Friday 28 January for **Mr Marcus Campbell** ahead of his exit appointment to Malvern Presbyterian Church.

Rev. Jared Keath was inducted as the minister of the Frankston Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Flinders on 28 January, having previously been the Associate Minister of the same congregation.

Licentiate Xien Yao will be ordained by the Presbytery of Maroondah at Donvale Presbyterian Church on 6 February. He will be the first full time pastor of the Chinese church plant there.

The Presbytery of Melbourne North will ordain and induct **Licentiate Brian Luong** into the role of Associate Minister at Epping Presbyterian Church on Friday 11 February.



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BLIND STATISTICS

STUART WITHERS

There is an old line in a hymn that says, “then, Lord shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe”. It always makes me think. Since first believing in Jesus, by grace through faith, my relationship with God has been secure in Christ. Yes, at my conversion salvation was complete in Christ, yet I was blind to how much I’d been saved from.

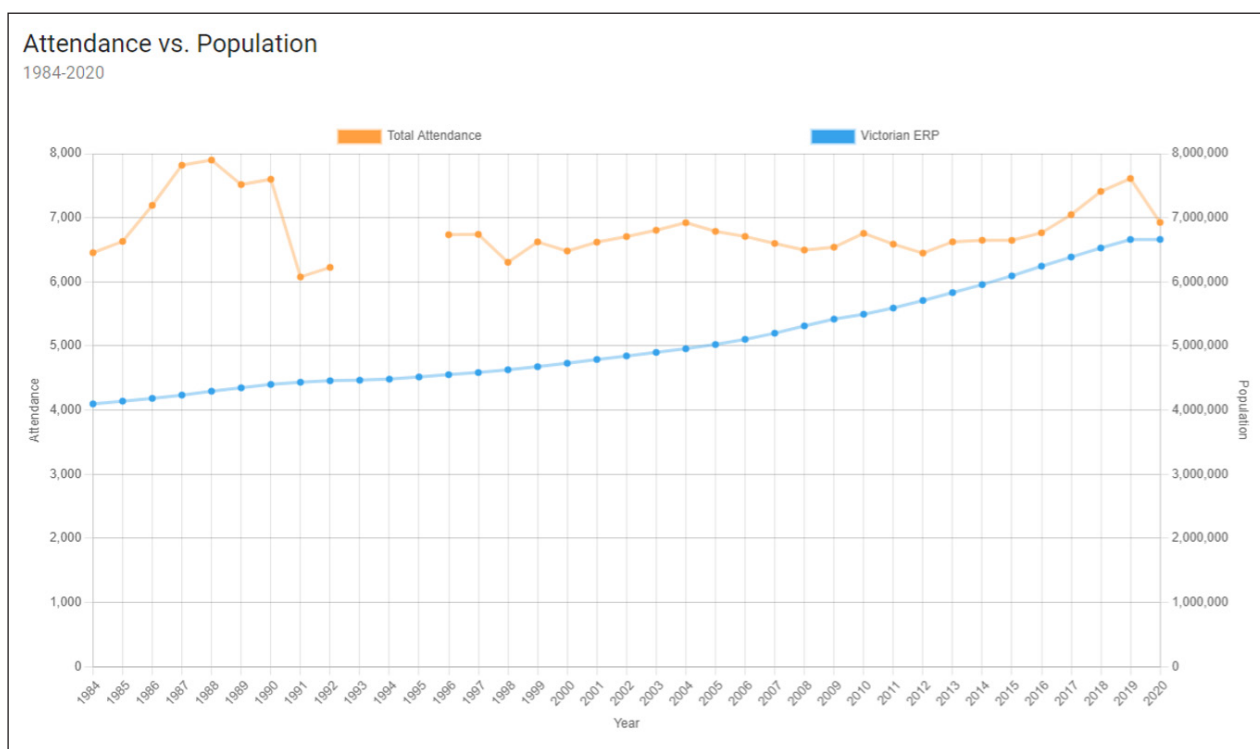
In my few decades as a Christian, I have come to see that spiritual maturity is about greater gospel insight. There is always more to see and realise (Eph 3:14-21). For me, repentance has necessarily gone deeper with Spirit given insight. Wonderfully, of course, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ means every need uncovered has been provided for. God is very kind. And while discovering I’m not yet all that I should be, can be painful, wonderfully, grace frees me from wanting to remain blind. As Tim Keller helpfully puts it, “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

Grace emboldens my transparency and allows me to be honest. I hope this has been your experience, but encouraging you personally is not the primary reason I mentioned these things. This brief article is about church statistics and how they might help us discuss healthy church life. And thankfully the same gospel dynamic at work in my life also enables church members and leaders not to be blind to numbers.

Church statistics are one of the ways a denomination can reflect on its life. The annual returns provide a snapshot. Of course, accuracy is important and thankfully since the collection of data has moved online, we are more confident of what is before us. However, it must be said that an over fascination with statistics can create a kind of blindness that forgets the biblical truths that establish healthy churches.

The description of early church ministry by the apostles might be helpfully summarised by 3 P’s; people, proclamation, and prayer. Jesus always unfolds His ongoing mission without the need for a statistical return. Jesus will save all His people, the full number. So, we’d never want an over fascination with statistics to dominate church life. None of the saints undertake ministry to statistical averages but real people (Eph 4:11-12). And yet, a lack of attention to statistics, and “what’s really happening” can leave us blind to critical issues. The life and health of a local church is an unfolding story. The numbers say something, although they can never say everything. So, wisdom is required for clear-sighted discussion.

How do we talk numbers? Rudyard Kipling famously said, “I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew); their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.” It strikes me that Kipling’s friends need befriending! And this sits behind the Ministry Development Committee’s decision to provide PCV Presbyteries with a statistical report on congregations they oversee.



“A LACK OF ATTENTION TO STATISTICS, AND “WHAT’S REALLY HAPPENING” CAN LEAVE US BLIND TO CRITICAL ISSUES”

When the committee was examining the use of statistical data in 2019 it was clear that the numbers were being underutilised. The major reason was manual recording and the double handling needed to generate reports. Since collection has moved online the data is more easily managed. Reporting meaningful numbers is relatively simple. In the sidebar you can see dot point statements for the PCV from 2020. However, standalone facts have limited meaning. Helpfully we can build a chart like the average attendance vs population growth in Victoria seen above. It gives a sense of trajectory, and our six friends help us engage in a discussion.

Analysis shows that in 1987 0.185% of Victorians attended a PCV church while it was 0.104% in 2020. Of course, Covid-19 has had an impact on data in 2020. In relative terms, the PCV attendance v's population growth has seen church attendance decline 38.1% between 1987 and 2019. That said, across the decade 2009-2019 Sunday attendance rose across the PCV by 13.6%. More people are coming to church. And on average Sunday attendance is 136% of communicant membership. In 1996 attendance was 94% of communicant mem-

PCV DATA SNAPSHOT 2020

- There are 5,343 PCV Communicants & 815 adherents.
- Average weekly attendance across the PCV is 6,927.
- 71% of PCV congregations have 50 or fewer members
- The average congregation has 46 members.
- 40 out of 133 congregations do not have any people younger than 10 years of age.
- The average age of congregations with fewer than 50 members is 10-20 years older than congregations with more than 50 members.
- 50 congregations have less than 2 elders
- 44 out of 103 charges reported that their annual giving was less than the Stipend and NCB of \$56,508.
- Nearly 80 of our congregations report greater than 40% of membership attending regular bible studies.

bership. This represents a significant shift in the makeup of Sunday church attendance. Space won't allow a fuller discussion of the possible reasons and implications. Broadly I think it is healthy. My aim is to engage the reader with local church issues and bring this discussion of numbers closer to home.

I'd like to zero in on two aspects of church life, edification, and evangelism. Yes, statistics can help local church reflect on their ministry and mission. Firstly, as bible believing Christians, we would all agree being people of "the book" is where our edification is found. As you see in the snapshot sidebar, nearly 80 PCV congregations report greater than 40% of their membership attend a regular Bible study. Is that good, middling, or bad? I know there's one congregation in the state that reports 91% in regular bible studies, while others have no groups at all. But what is happening in your patch? What are the local dynamics that limit or encourage participation? Who doesn't come and why? Probing these kinds of questions and speaking with people helps our understanding and response. Are members and leaders equally convinced that mid-week bible study is needed for a church to practice

Ephesians 4:11-16? What could be done to build greater participation?

It is healthy for church families to be places where no one stands alone. Local church leaders might respond by creating a theme for 2022 where attending mid-week bible study groups is "the thing we're doing this year". The theme of course will need a plan. Think through how to better coordinate effective public invitations, the training and development of bible study leaders, what place food might have in gatherings, and the format of what happens when groups meet. To drill down on public invitations for a moment, it's good to recognise the difference between: "Men's group at 7.30pm Tuesday, don't forget" and "Men, there's a great opportunity to be encouraged on Tuesday night. We'll be re-reading today's sermon passage for discussion and eating together from 7.30. It will be so good to see you there." And if someone other than the minister is saying this, it underscores what is considered valuable. Plans that are clear, focused and written down have more chance of happening. How good would it be for you to be involved in creating a 20% lift in bible study attendance at your

church? Put faces and names to the number and then pray and act. Growth and development in church life is like our own discipleship, it is embedded through consistent and deliberate grace-effort (Col 1:29).

What about local mission to the lost? Well, no church family can do mission by numbers alone, but only with people. Yes, we can build an understanding of our community from census data, and it will help. But if you've noticed; not many, if any, from our community are turning up on Sundays. There was a time in Australia when we could wait for the lost to arrive. It was a mission strategy. But given our times, keeping our doors open is unlikely to make many new contacts. However, making friends with those who don't know Jesus, away from Church, is highly effective. Life on life is a great way for a church to undertake evangelism. And Jesus wants all kinds of people saved (1 Tim 2:4). When was the last time you prayed with someone seeking the conversion of another? When was the last time you witnessed someone move from spiritual death to life at your church (Col 1:13)? How do Kipling's six friends help you engage further with your answers?

Statistics are blind to real people stories, but we need not be blind to statistics. Some people might fear that numbers can be made to say anything, but I hope I've shown you that its possible for them to ignite a healthy conversation about ministry and mission. Wonderfully we have every reason for confidence. Jesus is coming. He will save. And the only reason He delays is to build His Church (Matt 16:18). I pray that we would all better grasp how faithful Jesus is, as we ourselves prove more faithful as His servants.

Stuart Withers is the Convenor of the Ministry Development Committee

“STATISTICS ARE
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REACHING VICTORIA THROUGH CHURCH PLANTING

RICHARD WILSON

In 1902 Melbourne was the biggest city in Australia and it became, for a while, the capital city of Australia. It was a time when the churches of Melbourne became focussed on evangelism. They booked the Exhibition building and brought in an evangelist from the US and the protestant churches all came. 10,000 attended meetings in the exhibition building every night of the week for a month and a total of 8600 or 1.7% of the population recorded conversions to Christ. They were remarkable times for the gospel in Australia—but it didn't last.

After the First World War a pandemic hit, and the church went through a long period of struggle until the Second World War. Some feared that as the 20th century progressed the gospel would have little further influence in Australia. But things changed after WWII.

In 1959 Billy Graham came to Melbourne from the USA. On one day 143,000 gathered at the MCG to hear his message. By the end of his time here it is estimated that half of the population of Australia heard him preach. More than 130,000 people, 2% of the Australian population at the time, made a commitment to Christ. Many went into full time ministry. The 20 years following WWII were a highwater mark for the church in Australia.

Melbourne is a very different place today. It's much bigger—with a population of 5 million. We have been blessed with huge numbers of immigrants from all around the world. And Victoria needs Jesus more than ever. If we follow the media, you may conclude that there is little interest in following Jesus today. But that is not true.

When I moved to Melbourne in 2011 to start Valley Presbyterian Church, I began knocking on doors to

see what kind of interest there might be. To be honest I expected a cold response. I knocked on about 2000 doors in our community over the first couple of years. People were much more positive than I expected.

The majority indicated that they thought Christianity was a good thing, but not for them personally. But a significant minority said it was a good thing for them personally and a number of them joined our church. By the fourth year, average weekly attendance at our new church was about 130.

Missiologists are now telling us that the best way to reach a city like Melbourne is not by flying in an international evangelist for a campaign but by planting new churches where the gospel will be proclaimed every week and the church is engaged in mission to the community. That's because a response at an evangelistic event is sometimes not a real conversion but the start of an interest in the good news about Jesus. That's why an ongoing relationship with a local church is so important.

Church Planting is both harder and easier than you might expect. It is harder because:

It is hard to find public buildings that we can meet in. When I started school halls were being built by the federal government—few public schools will now welcome a church plant.

It is hard because Australians, while still sympathetic to Christianity are much less likely to be going to church than a decade ago, and over the pandemic even many regulars have dropped out.

It is hard because, many Christians would rather travel the world than invest their life in seeing a new church be planted and grow to influence their

community. It is hard because many feel that the Bible's teaching on gender does not make sense.

It is tempting in these circumstances to try and change the message. But when we change the message, we are no longer planting a Christian church. It is merely a religious club. We must always preach Christ crucified and risen.

But it is also easier to plant churches than you might think. It is easier because the message of Jesus remains very attractive.

The mood in society has changed in recent years, especially since the marriage vote. Orthodox Christianity is no longer seen to be the mainstream belief of society. But that means it is no longer attached to power. And ironically that is a good thing.

There is power in weakness. We have known that since the Lord himself was crucified. As God, Jesus had all the power of the universe. But he came humbly, died sacrificially, paid for our sins, and showed us the way of humility and service.

Our goal is not to recapture power, but to love and serve our neighbours, and introduce them to the servant king who lay down his life for his people. And when we live like that in our community it is incredibly attractive.

It is easier than we think, because as the Holy Spirit works in people's hearts, through the preaching of his Word, he is the one who brings people from death to life, not us.

Melbourne is a big city in a rapidly growing state. We have identified 17 places across the state where we should plant churches. Some of these are in regional cities and rural towns. But most of the growth in Victoria will be in Metropolitan Melbourne with expectations of 9 million people by 2050. So we have plans to plant churches in the growth corridors to the North, West and South East of Melbourne.

These outer suburbs of Melbourne were once rural areas with a little village and a church in the middle that was built for maybe 50-60 people. But now we have 70-100,000 people moving into places like Donnybrook and Beverage, Clyde and Rockbank.

“IT IS EASIER
BECAUSE THE
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Some of those little village churches we sold decades ago. Others were allowed to become derelict, and we need to rebuild. In still other areas we have no history of gospel ministry and we need to start from scratch

But we also need to plant churches in the established suburbs. The so-called Brown fields. Sometimes that will happen after one of our established churches declines and we will close it for a year or two before we plant a new church in an old building. We expect to plant a lot more churches like this in the years ahead.

We need people to join us in this work. We need people to pray for the work. We need people to come and join the core teams for these plants and invest themselves into the work for at least a decade or more. We need people to lead those church plants.

We can look back at what the Lord has done in this city over the years—And we can feel like that won't happen again. But why not?

Like the apostles of long ago we need courage and conviction. Church planting in Rome was much harder than anything we are facing today. So we need to say our prayers to our gracious Father. And we need to put our shoulder to the wheel

The Lord can do extraordinary things through his people. As we boldly engage in the mission he has given us.

Richard Wilson is the PCV Church Planter Evangelist and gave this talk at the Advance Church Planting Conference in November 2021.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PAST MODERATOR

Thank you for the opportunity to serve Christ and His church as Moderator for the last 12 months. It has been a joy and a delight to do so, despite the challenges of COVID and extended lockdowns.

I am most grateful for the support of my wife Lavena, and our family, the Session and congregation of Trinity Camberwell, my chaplains Graham Nicholson and John Huynh, and the officers of the assembly, who have done such a fine job in navigating our way as a church through this extraordinarily disrupted period of our history.

The role of moderator entails leadership, encouragement, and representation, and I have sought to bring all these to the role by God's grace.

I. LEAD

Three Zoom assemblies presented their own challenges. Relating to one another through a computer screen is a poor substitute for meeting in person. Thank you for the patience, care, and respect shown by each commissioner that enabled our meetings to proceed efficiently and effectively.

The challenge of seeking to advocate with government for churches to reopen on fair and equal terms with other sectors of the community, as well as seeking to engage with government concerning the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act has proved difficult. The pronounced secular stance of the Andrews Labor government has rendered it almost entirely tone deaf to the voice and needs of the Christian community with respect to both issues of concern. I believe it to be true that we as a church have never had to operate in an atmosphere more hostile to faith and godliness in all of our history to date. It is

vitaly important that we press on nevertheless, that we not grow weary in well doing, and that we not be ashamed of or a shame to Christ and the Gospel.

II. ENCOURAGE

As a pastor engaged in preaching and pastoring my own congregation on a weekly basis, one of the great joys of holding office is the freedom that it gives to enter into the life and work of sister congregations and to witness first-hand the kingdom building work that is going on at a grass roots level in other parts of the state. Having done so, I am persuaded that our great strengths as a denomination are: a deep love for Jesus, a strong commitment to the Bible, faithfulness in proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, unity in the truth, a clear confessional basis, and our leadership structure which involves a plurality of leadership locally elected. But we also have significant weaknesses that urgently need to be addressed: small numbers, aging congregations, limited financial resources, a growing number of parishes slipping into unviability and facing closure, sometimes little or no locally elected eldership, and little backup for the pastor. If I were to stress one of these as being in urgent need of attention, it would be the need to revitalise the lay leadership of congregations. As I have observed, those congregations flourishing the most are those that have a strong and active locally elected session to work with and support the minister. By contrast, those congregations that have a weak session needing external assessors appointed to maintain viability are the ones that are struggling the most. It was the pattern of the Apostolic Church that elders were appointed in every town, a factor that led to the growth and maintenance of strong, healthy churches. We also need to maintain

that same benchmark as essential to the health and vitality of local congregations today. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus prioritised training up the Twelve. The raw material He had to work with was not impressive, but the training they received, combined with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, equipped them to be mighty in God's hands. Likewise, I believe ministers must be proactive in prioritising the training up of elders, present and emerging, to share in the task of spiritual leadership of local congregations. None of us should be content with the steady decline in the number of dedicated ordained elders serving across the denomination that we are witnessing at present.

The Moderator's mission trip, in which I planned to visit the top end to encourage missionaries involved in indigenous ministry, needed to be postponed several times, meaning that due to lockdowns and border closures, it has not been possible to make that trip to date.

III. REPRESENT

Of the many ways in which I was able to represent the church throughout the year, one enduring memory will be the joy of giving the message at the Scotch Easter service. In person activities were few and far between, but on that day, the boys gave me a warm welcome, and an attentive hearing. It was a joy to share with them the message of the cross. Having educated three of our daughters at PLC, it

was an honour for me as Moderator to be invited to commission the new principal of PLC, Mrs Cheryl Penberthy. And as a past member of the TEC, it was a joy to make several visits to PTC and to participate in their annual Graduation/Commencement in March.

Looking to the future, both as a pastor, father and grandfather, my concern is for the younger generation growing up in our midst. In the world they are bombarded with a radical gender ideology, secular humanistic values, with a sustained attack on the biblical model for marriage and the family, and a constant undermining of the biblical standard for sexual purity, leaving them vulnerable and confused. We as a church need to be radically counter-cultural and fight for our young ones who are not yet able to fight for themselves. We need to redouble our efforts to ensure that church communities are safe havens where families are equipped, nurtured and strengthened to be beacons of light in a darkening world, and where young people are both taught to love with purity and integrity, and supported to form godly marriages and families of their own that will be a blessing for generations to come.

Rev Philip Mercer was the Moderator of the 2020-21 General Assembly of Victoria.

“IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE PRESS ON NEVERTHELESS, THAT WE NOT GROW WEARY IN WELL DOING”



PRINCIPLES FOR A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DISABILITY

LOUISE GRIFFITHS

In 2008, my husband and I announced to our church family that our son had been diagnosed as profoundly deaf. The news was met by tears, surprise, scepticism, invitations to healing services and in one case, absolute shock that a faithful Christian couple could find themselves coming to terms with the birth of a child with a disability.

Despite the mixed reactions to our son's diagnosis, a biblical perspective on disability enabled us to continue to rely upon God for strength, wisdom and hope as we navigated the coming months and years of life with our beautiful child who was facing an additional challenge due to a disability.

I would like to share with you some principles that we have found helpful in discussing a Biblical perspective of disability with those around us.

PRINCIPLE 1: WE ARE GOD'S IMAGE BEARERS

Every human being has been created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Our worth does not come from what we can do or achieve, we are valuable simply because God created us in His image.

In an era when pressure is placed upon parents to terminate their unborn children if they are perceived to not be able to participate or contribute to society, the recognition of every person's inherent value as an image bearer must be at the forefront of our discussions around the value of every human life.

PRINCIPLE 2: DISABILITY IS NOT A PERSONAL PUNISHMENT

Genesis does not divulge the first instance of someone presenting with a disability. However,

it can be assumed that when Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden and life became marked by suffering and hard work (Genesis 3:16-19), disabilities would also have begun to emerge, either through genetic aberrations or as a result of accident or illness.

In John 9, Jesus addresses the origins of one man's blindness, stating that it was neither the sin of the man nor his parents that caused his disability. In fact, this man's blindness would allow God's kingdom purposes to be displayed.

This leads us to the next principle:

PRINCIPLE 3: THE KINGDOM OF GOD CAN BE PURSUED REGARDLESS OF THE PRESENCE OF A DISABILITY

Moses attempts to excuse himself from God's call due to a speech impediment, yet he faithfully leads Israel for 40 years. In Samson's final hours (Judges 13-16), blinded and physically weak, God gives him superhuman strength to provide the Israelite people victory over their enemies.

These snapshots reveal that not only does God himself acknowledge the presence of, and His control over, disabilities (see Exodus 4), but He also demonstrates that He will see His salvation purposes fulfilled regardless of the abilities of His chosen messenger.

Although the news of our son's deafness was hard, I had never shared my faith with so many people as I did the year our son was diagnosed. People wanted to know the source of our peace and hope in such a tumultuous season of life. So I told them about Jesus! Our prayer for our son is that, just like Paul

in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, our son may also be able to use his disability as a launch pad for gospel drive conversations.

PRINCIPLE 4: FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST SHOULD CARE FOR THOSE WHO LIVE WITH A DISABILITY

The laws given to Israel speak of God's care for those who are weak or disabled and His expectation that the Israelites would show mercy and compassion to all people. God pronounces a curse upon anyone who misleads a blind person (Deuteronomy 27:18-19) and the Israelites are not to speak badly of a deaf person (Leviticus 19:14).

Jesus spoke into the Jewish context and further demonstrated care and concern for people living with a disability in AD 30 Israel through his verbal interactions and supernatural acts of healing (Luke 5:12-13, Luke 5:17-26, Luke 7:18-23, John 9:1-12).

Although Paul does not explicitly mention the presence of disabilities in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, he does make reference to the importance of recognising the value of those perceived to be weaker in the body of Christ, reinforcing the message that all people are welcome in the body of Christ.

The way by which we make accommodations and adjustments in our church gatherings to allow people with disabilities to participate and grow spiritually is a testament to how seriously we take God's command to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:31).

“A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON DISABILITY ENABLED
US TO CONTINUE TO
RELY UPON GOD FOR
STRENGTH, WISDOM
AND HOPE”

PRINCIPLE 5: JESUS USES OUR PHYSICAL CONDITION TO POINT TO OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION

In Luke 5:17-26, Jesus tells a man, who is paralysed, that his sins have been forgiven. Then, he proceeds to tell the man that he can get up and walk. Jesus used physical healing to draw attention to his greater power of providing forgiveness for sin.

PRINCIPLE 6: WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO ETERNITY WITH JESUS WHEN WE WILL BE FREE FROM WHATEVER HAS CAUSED US PAIN OR FRUSTRATION

The prophetic texts looked ahead to a time when those who were blind, deaf, mute or lame would be a part of God's remnant people, and residents in God's New Creation (Isaiah 35; Isaiah 42; Zephaniah 3:19-20; Micah 4:6-7). People with disabilities are a valuable part of God's family, now and when Christ returns.

In 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, we are told that when Christ returns, mortal bodies that are weakened by disability will be transformed into immortal, imperishable bodies that reflect the true glory of their Creator. Revelation 21:4 informs the reader that there will be no crying or pain in heaven.

I had never thought much about heaven before my son was born, but now, we reside in the 'now and the not yet'. We enjoy a relationship with our Saviour Jesus in this life and we look forward to the hope of heaven, when our son will live with Jesus without the frustration of his hearing loss. Come, Lord Jesus.

Louise Griffiths attends Croydon Presbyterian Church

MOE PRESBYTERIAN BUILDING PROJECT

RUTH URE

Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church Moe has been praying hard for COVID attendance restrictions to be lifted. We have one more reason than most for wanting this: Our building project, 7 years in the making, has been completed, and we wish to share our joy and thankfulness to God with our community.

In 2014 there had been much concern for the condition of the hall we were using for after-church get-togethers, youth group, social activities, and community groups. And so the project to consider replacing the hall began.

As with any project, funding was a significant concern. Yet God enabled: people within the Moe and Yarram congregations gave; we sold some of our church land; and Presbytery and the Ministry Development Committee supported us. At first there were many ideas as to how to proceed, but eventually, the way to move forward became apparent. Our church heritage overlay caused many building plans to come and go, but, finally, with the assistance of the Church Architect, council permission



was granted. We issued a 'Request for Tender', and our preferred builder indicated he was no longer available. Covid began to break out. And, at the last hour, our preferred builder indicated he could respond due to 'Covid cancellations'. His tender was the lowest priced of the tenders, and his reputation and helpfulness made the choice an easy one.

Before any demolition could start, asbestos had to be removed and roofing material recycled. We, and our community, watched with interest as slowly the site was prepared, and the new hall took shape. Watching the completed roof being raised by two large cranes, on the only calm morning for weeks, was an amazing sight. Some nine-months later, we were granted an occupancy permit.

On Sunday 1 August, the one Sunday between COVID lockdowns, our minister, the Rev. Stephen Deroon, conducted a dedication service for the congregation. As part of the morning service, we followed one another (keeping our COVID-safe distance) along the path from the church to the

hall— it was forecast for rain, but we had a beautiful sunny morning—as we dedicated our hall to the glory of God. After the service we celebrated our first morning tea in our new building.

We continue to wait for the opportunity to hold an official opening; one that affords us sufficient attendance numbers to allow us to invite our community and those involved in the project, to join us in giving praise to the God who can do more than we ask or think; and in expressing our thanks to those involved in the project.

Ruth Ure is a member of the Moe Presbyterian Church Board of Management.



GROW SUSTAIN FLOURISH

SARAH MCDONALD

The purpose of Women's Ministries Victoria is to support and grow women's ministries within local churches. We want to assist women within the Presbyterian Churches of Victoria to grow towards maturity in Christ, and to reach out to the community with the gospel and so strengthen the whole church.

As part of our next phase of ministry, we hope to employ a Women's Ministries Facilitator! She will be dedicated and passionate about encouraging and supporting women within our denomination. We need your partnership and support to do this! With the endorsement of the Victorian Assembly, we are seeking gospel partnership from churches and individuals to commit to supporting this vital ministry both prayerfully and financially.

We have a vision to see women better supported in the ministries they are involved in - both formal and informal. The Women's Ministries Facilitator is your advocate, trainer and encourager. She will provide training and support through events, partnership and resources. Her goal will be to build opportunities for women to use their gifts to nurture, disciple and serve: enabling and partnering with women across the state as they utilise their gifts in the service of the body of Christ.

Our goal is to raise \$36,000 per annum to support a facilitator. We are stepping out in faith, believing that the women of our denomination are valued and God honours them as co-heirs of the gospel.

Investing in women's ministry is a gospel priority. We have made a start with some churches and individuals now supporting the WMF for three years. Others have given a once-off donation. We are immensely thankful for individuals and churches who are already partnering with us.

We are looking for another 100 individuals or groups to pledge \$25 a month, 50 individuals or groups to pledge \$50 a month, or 25 to pledge \$100 a month—or any combination!

We invite and encourage you to become a partner in one of three ways:

GROW: \$25/month over 3 years. Individuals receive one free conference pass per year. Churches receive a 25% discount on up to 4 registrations.

SUSTAIN: \$50/month over 3 years. Individuals receive one free conference pass per year, and one for a friend. Churches receive a 25% discount on up to 8 registrations.

FLOURISH: \$100/month over 3 years. Individuals receive one free conference pass per year, and two for friends. Churches receive a 25% discount on all registrations.



Your commitment to help Grow/Sustain/Flourish women's ministries will enable the employment of a Women's Ministries Facilitator. So, please send an email to accountant@pcv.org.au and Cc wmv@pcv.org.au indicating how you will make your monthly donations.

Please let us know:

- I have made an online partnership registration on the WMV website at <https://www.wmv.org.au/supportwmv>
- I have set up a direct deposit (online or at my bank branch):
Account Name: Presbyterian Church of Victoria
BSB: 083-004
Account: 015016531
Transaction description:
"WMV Grow/Sustain/Flourish"

Or you can ask to be contacted by phone to further discuss becoming a partner with someone from the WMV team. Either email WMV on wmv@pcv.org.au or mail your contact details to:
WMV Presbyterian Church of Victoria,
156 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000.

Becoming a partner isn't just a monthly donation. It's an opportunity to engage with discipleship work locally, build a network across Victoria and to be part of WMV's mission to support and grow women's ministries within the church.

We look forward to partnering in the Gospel with you.

Sarah McDonald is on the Women's Ministries Victoria Committee

THE CHURCH RESPONDS TO THE “CHANGE OR SUPPRESSION (CONVERSION) PRACTICES PROHIBITION ACT”

PHILIP MERCER

The passing of the “Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill” into law represents a significant challenge for the church and its mission to the world. Just how significant remains to be fully seen. But let us be clear: the fundamental premises underpinning the legislation are essentially anti-Christian, namely: i) that no person’s sexuality or gender identity is broken or sinful; ii) that a person’s same sex attraction and gender identity are determined from birth; and iii) that people cannot change. As Bible believing Christians, we would strongly disagree with each one of those premises as being not only contrary to Scripture, but anti-scientific, intellectually dishonest, ideologically humanistic, and morally without foundation. The La Trobe study upon which the legislation is based, takes aim at what it describes as the “accept but not affirm” approach of churches toward people with same sex attraction, based as that is on a Christian view of sexuality. The La Trobe report labels that traditional Christian approach as ‘insidious’. Clearly, one of the aims of this legislation is to impose an “accept and affirm” approach upon churches and society at large, whether we like it or not. In that sense, the passing of this act into law is a direct assault on our religious freedom, in that it now places numerous Christian beliefs and practises on the wrong side of the law. The way that will unfold going forward depends to a significant extent upon how aggressively the Human Rights Commissioner and others in office, wish to weaponize this legislation against the church. We will need to monitor the implementation of this bill over time in order to form such an assessment. However, without wanting in any way to be alarmist, it is reasonable to expect that churches, church institutions, and Christian schools will increasingly become the target of gay rights activists and may become the subject of complaint and prosecution under the criminal offence provisions, or complaint, investigation and possible re-education under the civil response provisions of this act.

What is clear is that we must adapt and change the

way we seek to fulfil the great commission so as to take the passing of this legislation into account, not in any way by shifting to an “accept and affirm” model, but by being intentional about adapting to the clear challenge posed by this legislation so as to remain faithful to our calling, and act with wisdom and grace.

At its meeting on 5 October 2021, the General Assembly of the PCV received the report of a special purpose committee that seeks to inform the church as to the new environment we all need to adapt to and operate within. Ministers and commissioned elders can make that report available to interested members of the church. The report acknowledges that the task of formulating a denominational response to this legislation has only just begun, and that significant further work is required, particularly in the short term, in anticipation of the law taking effect in February 2022. The GAV unanimously passed nine resolutions that seek to give effect to a range of responses that we believe will position us well to be able to continue to operate faithfully within the new legislative framework.

Key takeaways from this for the wider church are:

- We see the passing of this legislation as a serious threat to our task of ministry and mission but are determined to adapt so as to continue our work and calling unhindered.
- We will seek to establish a clear picture of what is currently happening with respect to teaching and practice at the grass roots level, so as to make a clear assessment of risk and steps required to mitigate risk with respect to this legislation.
- We will review the 2019 General Assembly statement: “The Presbyterian Church of Victoria Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage” so as to take this new legislation into account. As a church, it is vital that we hold to a clearly articulated and up to date statement that expresses our agreed position on sex, gender, and marriage based on biblical conviction, so as to remain united in both our belief and practice.
- The church will prepare and enact protocols and codes of conduct relative to the Act, including steps to train ministers, elders, and

Session-appointed ministry leaders in dealing with all relevant issues in a manner consistent with our stated position as outlined in the revised statement on sex, gender, and marriage.

- We will enact a Social Media policy and seek the compliance of all ministers, elders, and Session appointed leaders.
- We will stand by every member of the church who may become the subject of a complaint under the act. Every member ought to know the levels of support and practical assistance that are available to them should they become the subject of a complaint under either the criminal offence provisions or the civil response provisions of the act, what the limits of such assistance are, and how that support may be accessed.
- We will keep a watching brief on implementation of the Act and keep the wider church informed with a view to further refining our protocols, policies, and procedures.
- We will overture the GAA in relation to this matter, cognisant of the fact that we are a federal church with obligations and accountability nationally, and also cognisant of the fact that to date two other jurisdictions within the federal church have witnessed the passing of similar legislation (ACT and QLD), and as such a federal response is required to maintain unity of belief and practise across all jurisdictions of the church. Denominational unity is key to standing together against a common threat.
- The Moderator and Clerk of the Assembly will engage with the leaders of other like-minded denominations in order to develop a coordinated and strategic response to the Act and its implementation. Inter-denominational unity is key to standing together against a common threat.

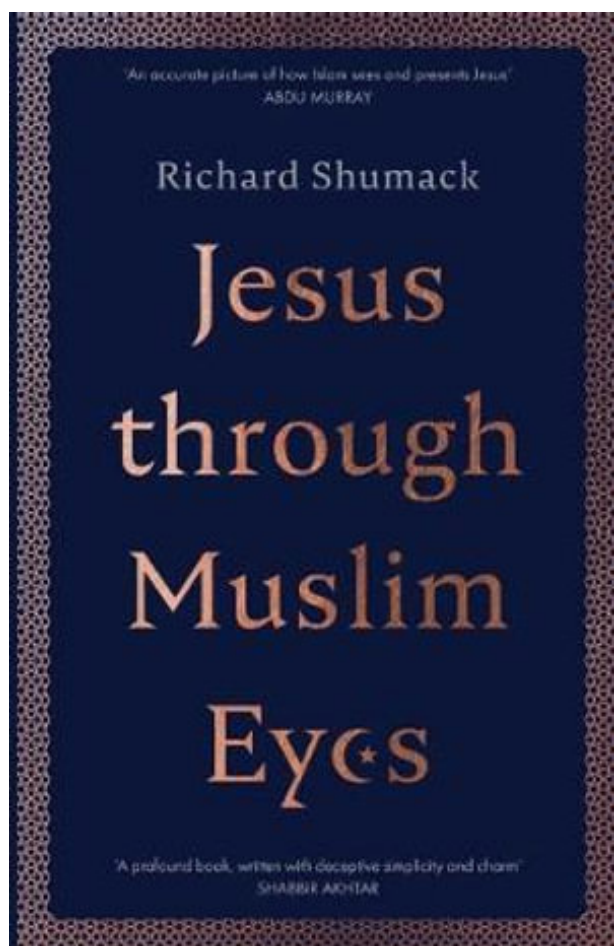
Please pray for the church as we seek to adapt to this new and challenging legislative environment within which we are called to continue to faithfully hold out the word of life.

Rev Philip Mercer is the Convener of the Ad Hoc Committee to Consider the Denomination’s Response to the Passing of the Change or Suppression Prohibition Legislation.

REVIEW:

JESUS THROUGH MUSLIM EYES

REVIEWED BY ROB PAIX



Jesus Through Muslim Eyes
Richard Shumack (SPCK Publishing : 2020)
ISBN 978 02810 819 36

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Recently a Muslim friend asked me this question: “You seem to know so much about Islam and understand that Muslims also love and revere Jesus. So why haven’t you become a Muslim yet?” That certainly took the conversation to the heart level!

Indeed, any Christian who has spent much time engaging with Muslim friends may have led with a question of their own: “Since even the Qur’an attests to Jesus’ miraculous birth and sinless life, why wouldn’t you go to him for help in getting to heaven? Wouldn’t Jesus be more help to you on judgment day than Muhammad?” And the answer comes back, “No, Muhammed is the final prophet and has brought to us the perfect religion. It is you who will have trouble on judgment day because you are seeking to make Jesus more than a prophet.”

For the Christian looking at Islam, the things that are utterly unique about Jesus, even as attested in the Islamic canon, end up being little more than historical curiosities. They just don’t seem to have any theological significance. In fact, to read anything into them is seen by Muslims as denigrating Jesus and blaspheming God.

This issue is at the heart of *Jesus Through Muslim Eyes*, a book that was short-listed for the 2021 Australian Christian Book of the Year. Now the author is not, of course, a Muslim looking at Jesus through Muslim eyes, but a Christian responding to the challenge of his Muslim friends. They challenged him to seriously consider and embrace the “Muslim

Jesus,” that is, Jesus as he is seen in Islam. Author Richard Shumack is an academic who specializes in Islam and the defense of Christian belief, most notably as Director of The Centre for the Study of Islam at the Melbourne School of Theology, and a research fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity. In his previous book, *The Wisdom of Islam and the Foolishness of Christianity*, Shumack presented a philosophical case for Christianity in comparison with Islam. *Jesus Through Muslim Eyes* is pitched at a more popular level.

EASY TO READ

It may surprise people how easy this book is to read. The style is conversational, and pithy stories from the author’s life and experiences are used to illustrate abstract points and concepts. The book is clearly laid out in four parts, the chapters are short and to the point, and the flow of thought is easy to follow.

PART ONE: THE MUSLIM JESUS

In the first part, Shumack introduces the Muslim Jesus. That is, the portraits of Jesus as he can be found in the various Islamic sources. These include: Jesus as he would have been known in Arabia at the time of Muhammad, the Jesus of the Qur’an and Islamic traditions such as the hadith, the Sufi (mystical) Jesus, and a contemporary presentation of the Muslim Jesus.

Already there were some new revelations for me. The contemporary version of the Muslim Jesus that Shumack describes for us comes from Turk-

ish writer and journalist Mustafa Akyol. This was the first I had heard of Akyol and I am not sure how influential he is. Elsewhere, Schumack points out that famed early Muslim historian Al-Tabari mentioned reports stating that the flight to Egypt was a fulfillment of prophecy and that Jesus told his disciples he would sacrifice himself for them. However, again, the Islamic sources provide no further explanations or implications.

The rest of Shumack’s book goes on to test this rather variegated Muslim Jesus over against the Christian Jesus in terms of history, doctrinal controversies, and practical guidance on the ideal religious life.

PART TWO: CHRISTIAN CONSPIRACY?

Part Two, then, examines the questions: Is it the Muslim Jesus who is more at home in history? Have Christians therefore been involved in a conspiracy to corrupt the historical Jesus and fabricate a “Christian Jesus?” As Shumack explains, the Apostles, the Council of Nicea and Paul are the alleged conspirators; the Ebionites and “Jewish Christian” Gospels (such as the Gospel of the Hebrews) are the conspired against. But, like many conspiracy theories, while it may be very convincing to the believers, it cannot stand up to rigorous scrutiny. Along the way, Shumack observes that Muslims and Christians are in a similar position when it comes to verifying the reliability of their historical texts. In this respect, the Ebionite “Gospel of the Hebrews” would not even pass as an authentic hadith.

Shumack's contention is that the Qur'an has essentially appropriated various oral traditions that were floating around in Arabia, in the process of "cleansing" them of any report that is unacceptable to the emerging Islamic faith. As such, Islam does not offer any new or independent information about the historical Jesus. Thus, "the Muslim Jesus appears to have emerged out of religious conviction, not out of the pages of history." (p. 73)

PART THREE: IS JESUS MORE AT HOME IN ISLAM OR CHRISTIANITY?

In Part Three Shumack goes on to question whether the Muslim Jesus is even at home within Islam! This perhaps illustrates how difficult it is to "cleanse" the reports about Jesus from all that is "offensive," for so much about him is unique and remarkable. Shumack highlights features of the Muslim Jesus including the virgin birth, the titles given to Jesus ("Messiah"), his speech, his behaviour and the key role he is said to play on Judgment Day. Even references to the Last Supper and Jesus' self-sacrifice have come through into the Islamic material. Yet all these features fit into Islam rather awkwardly:

However beautiful Islam might be Jesus doesn't appear to fit comfortably into it. He is different to all other Muslims. He turns up mysteriously, identifies unusually, talks strangely and acts weirdly. Too many of his titles are anachronistic; too many of his words are dislocated from their context; too many of his actions are out of the box. He is accommodated but never quite accepted for who he really is. In short, we have seen that Jesus does not appear to be at home here. He feels too big for his limited role. Of course, just how much bigger is the key dispute between Christianity and Islam. (p. 99)

Shumack ends Part Three by arguing that "in the end, in Islam, Jesus is striking, but dislocated. In Christianity, he is gloriously, and religiously at home." (p. 102)

PART FOUR: FOLLOWING JESUS

Part Four brings the book home by looking at the practical outcome: what would it be like to follow the Muslim Jesus or the Christian Jesus? The issue here is that Muslims tend to understand Islam and

Christianity to be the same kind of religion, and therefore feel that followers of both faiths should be able to find a common religious ethic that transcends different views of Jesus. However, for the Christian, the road that the Muslim Jesus walks is virtuous but impossible for us to walk because of sin. Meanwhile, for the Muslim person, the Muslim Jesus is not sufficiently Islamic – indeed he is quite dismissive of law (Shari'a) which is the very heart of Islamic guidance for the righteous life!

The question then arises: how is it that Christians can claim to be following the Christian Jesus? Here we come quite literally to the crux of the matter. The following that the Christian Jesus calls for is of a wholly different kind. For the road that Jesus walked led to a cross. And it is at this cross that the enigma of Jesus is resolved. It is through the transformational event of the cross and resurrection that sinful humans may become followers.

"The Qur'an describes a beautiful religious walk along a road smooth enough to traverse in your own strength. The Gospels portray a humiliating and mysterious journey in which God carries you over steep and insurmountable obstacles by his Spirit." (p. 133)

Shumack contends that the most neighbourly approach is simply to be honest – to acknowledge and embrace the gulf between the two visions of Jesus. "The Muslim Jesus wants you to be a better person; the Christian Jesus wants you to be a whole new person," and "only the true Jesus can get you to your eternal destination" (pp. 138-139).

That we are talking about entirely different conceptions of the relationship between God and people should come as no surprise to the thoughtful Christian. Yet it is the route by which we have arrived at this point that is important. Shumack's work here provides an opportunity for a Christian to come alongside a Muslim in stepping through the issues surrounding the person of Jesus and clarifying just what is at stake.

CRITICISMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I do have some small criticisms. I suppose anything written at a more popular level runs the risk of oversimplification. In chapter one Shumack con-

cludes that the pre-Islamic Jesus of Arabia “was essentially the orthodox Christian Jesus.” Surely there were prominent non-orthodox Christian Jesus’ around too. Otherwise why, for example, would the Qur’an record Allah as saying, “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’” Surah 5.116

Additionally, Shumack relies heavily on just a few authors, particularly Tarif Khalidi. This may be what leads him to conflate the kind of Islamic literature called “Tales of the Prophets” (Qisas al-Anbiya) with the Sufi Jesus. In fact, “Tales of the Prophets” material is far more complicated than that. The argument would be strengthened with a little more sophistication here.

I must admit to some enduring unease about the title of the book. It did not prepare me for something quite so polemical. A more descriptive (honest?) title would perhaps be: A Christian Looks at the Muslim Jesus (And Finds Him Wanting). To be sure, the disclaimer (if we can call it that) is made in the Prologue. But there is still an air of “bait and switch” about the title.

Is this, then, a book to give to Muslim friends? Certainly, as Peter Riddell says in his “blurb,” this book will be very helpful to Christian readers. But it has also won plaudits from some Muslim scholars for its contribution to Muslim-Christian understanding. So, I think it could also be given to a Muslim friend, though I would recommend telling them about the author and character of the book upfront.

Better still, digest it and use it as a guide to your conversations with Muslim friends about the person of Jesus.

Finally, there is evidence of a lack of attention to detail on the part of the editor/publisher. The book’s lone diagram, given on page 70, is unreadable. I also noticed some sloppiness in the spell-checking and compilation of the endnotes.

LAST WORD

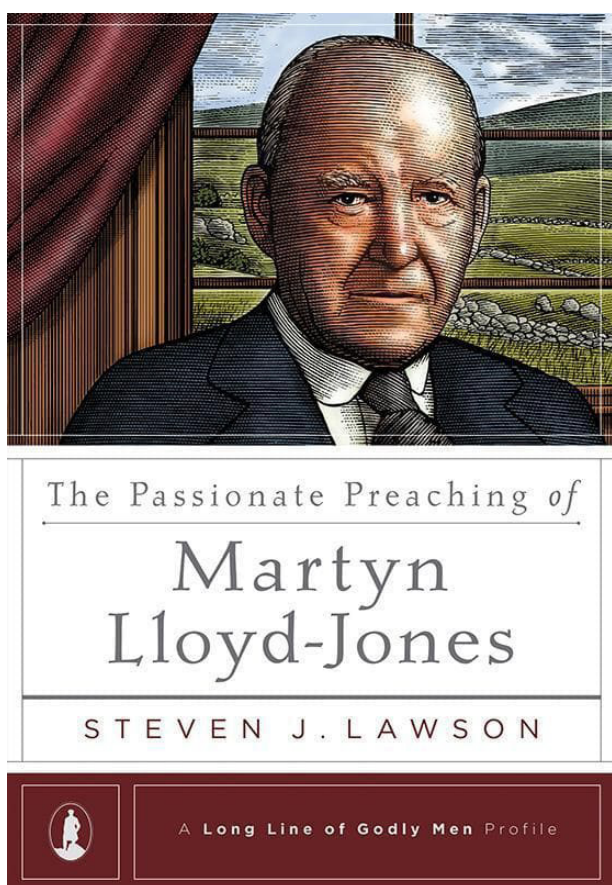
So how did I answer the Muslim friend who asked me why I hadn’t converted? Basically by saying that I need a saviour, not just a series of prophets telling me how to live a better life. As Shumack writes of the Christian Jesus at the very end of this book, “I’m sticking with him.”

Rob Paix is a part-time cross-cultural worker at Dandenong Presbyterian Church.

BOOK REVIEW:

THE PASSIONATE PREACHING OF MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN MCDONALD



The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones
 Steve Lawson (Reformation Trust: 2016)
 ISBN: 978 1567 696 387

Martyn Lloyd-Jones came with me on all my visits when I first arrived in Benalla. Sort of. The recordings that became his book *Preachers and Preaching* played wherever I travelled over the first several months. His insights, not only into the preparation and practice of preaching, but also into the character and ministry of the preacher were tremendously helpful to me.

We cannot explain the revival of either Reformed theology or expository preaching without Martyn Lloyd-Jones. But before Lloyd-Jones' arrival at Westminster Chapel in London shortly before World War II, consecutive expository preaching was almost forgotten. In *Preachers and Preaching*, he wrote, "In preaching the message should always arise out of the scriptures directly." The fact that so many of us can hardly imagine preaching being anything other than working verse by verse, section by section through a book of the Bible owes a lot to his influence.

There are several books that introduce us to the Doctor. His assistant Iain Murray wrote a 2-volume biography (*Banner of Truth*: 1990), a reflection on his significance entitled *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace* (*Banner of Truth* 2008), and a shorter single volume biography (*Banner of Truth*: 2013). There's a very engaging documentary call *Logic on Fire* (Media Gratiae: 2015), a kids book called *The Doctor Who Became A Preacher* by Rebecca VanDoodewaard (*Banner of*

Truth: 2018), and a more controversial academic assessment of his life and ministry edited by Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones entitled *Engaging with Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Apollos: 2011).

What Steve Lawson gives us is something different to them all. There is a brief yett informative biography at the start. But the remaining eight chapters answer the question, ‘What made Lloyd-Jones Lloyd-Jones?’ by drawing out themes from his life and ministry: He was sovereignly called, Biblically based, distinctly expository, carefully studied, divinely focused, doctrinally grounded, theologically Reformed, and Spiritually empowered.

Lawson dives deeply into the Doctor’s writings, not only to pluck out practical tips but to unearth the valuable principles and convictions that can shape faithful ministries today and in any age. It becomes abundantly clear that Lloyd-Jones’ ministry was not cold and intellectual, but vibrant and experiential. As he defined preaching, it is “logic on fire”.

He was never content to explain a passage unless it led to application to real lives. In fact, his prescription was to follow the New Testament epistles where the first half was given to doctrine and the second half to the living out of the doctrine. How many preachers strive for that amount of application? And how many congregations gratefully receive it?

Ultimately, though, the essential mark of Lloyd-Jones’ ministry must be its anointing or unction. While the words ‘anointed’ and ‘anointing’ get used without much definition today, for Lloyd-Jones the meaning was clear. It is not about a feeling or a response. It is “freedom and clarity of speech, an authority” (*Courageous Christianity*, page 190-191).

That authority will not come just by imitating Lloyd-Jones’ practice. But it does come from embracing his convictions, and diligently and expectantly proclaiming the living God to dying people.

Lawson’s book is a helpful mirror in which to assess our own preaching and ministry. May God grow Lloyd-Jones’ convictions and expectation in us all.

Stephen McDonald is the minister of the Benalla Regional Parish.



PRAY FOR MORE



Many in Australia will not know this man. He is Pastor Kalsakau Urtalo from the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu. A few months ago he went to be with Christ.

He was once the Principal of Talua and Assembly Clerk. He gave wise counsel and leadership to

many in the Church and stood firm for the gospel. Ian and Jenni Smith served under him during their time at Talua. Ian writes:

On rare occasions in life, one comes across someone who is a mentor, a leader and a brother – to me Kalsakau was all three, as well as a dear friend. The impact of his ministry at Talua is felt in every church on every island of Vanuatu every week. He embodied a commitment to the gospel of grace, servant-hearted leadership and a desire to see the next generation of Christian leaders well prepared to minister the truths of the Scriptures in ways that are culturally appropriate. I have learnt so much from him. He will certainly not be forgotten.

Praise God for men and women such as Pastor Kalsakau. Please join us in praying that God would raise up more like him. Pray the Lord of the harvest.

MOTOR ISAAC YAT

Motor Isaac Yat was formerly a South Sudanese refugee who settled in Australia. He subsequently joined the Clayton congregation and was granted Australian citizenship. In 2008 APWM sent him to assist the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan in its training ministry.

Following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013, he shifted his ministry to the 400,000 South Sudanese refugees in the refugee camps in western Ethiopia. In these camps there are approximately 100,000 Presbyterians with 90 congregations!

The Presbyterian Church of Australia has supplied Bibles for these refugees. Earlier this year we ordered just under 5,000 Nuer Bibles which have now arrived in Ethiopia. In 2019 Motor married a South Sudanese refugee, Julia Thom.

Some months ago Motor and Julia travelled to South Sudan to obtain a passport for Julia. They then went to Egypt for medical treatment and to address a visa issue. By the time you read this,

Motor will be back in Ethiopia for the next phase of ministry in the camps — distribution of the Nuer Bibles along with Nuer Shorter Catechisms paid for by a generous Australian congregation.

Motor and Julia recently announced that they are expecting a child in early 2022. It is hoped that Motor and Julia will be able to visit Australia in the second half of 2022. At present Motor's financial support needs a substantial boost. If you are interested in supporting this ministry then please email finance@apwm.org.au.





DANNY & JEN COOKE

Danny and Jen, together with their four children recently concluded two and a half years of ministry in the village of Sulphur Bay, on the island of Tanna, in Vanuatu.

We are very grateful for Danny and Jen's willingness to serve and to the Orange Presbyterian Church which was willing to release them for service. Please pray that God would keep on raising up people for such service.



ROB & EL FALLS

After many COVID-related delays Rob & El Falls are now serving at the Talua Theological Training Institute in Vanuatu. We praise God for their willingness to serve with our oldest Partner Church and for the partnership of the many who made this possible.

Please pray for them as they commence what we pray will be many years of fruitful service.

WHAT THE EVENING NEWS WON'T TELL YOU

When you turn on the evening news or open a news web page, have you noticed that there's something missing? Something they're not reporting? They fail to report what God is doing across the world as the gospel goes out.

APWM recently launched 'APWM Partnership News', a fortnightly global mission newsletter which seeks to tell something about God's work.

APWM Partnership News seeks to provide:

- An update on what God is doing through the missionaries sent out by the Presbyterian Church of Australia.
- News from our nine overseas Partner Churches.
- A wider perspective on global mission trends.
- And more...

Download a sample here: shrtm.nu/WUpw

Sign up for APWM Partnership News:
shrtm.nu/NSAb



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