

Persecution In Indonesia Has A New Face – A Four-Year-Old Child's

Little Intan (pictured), aged four, lost her fight for life early on the morning of 14 November, the victim of a bomb attack on her church in Indonesia the day before. Three of her friends, Alvero, Triniti and Anita, were also badly burned. The youngest is just two years old. Please pray for Intan's grieving family and for the other three children as they recover in hospital.

Several petrol bombs were thrown into the car park at Oikumene Christian Church in Samarinda, East Kalimantan Province, at 10.30am on 13 November. The church service had just ended and the congregation were heading back to their vehicles. The children were first to reach the car park.

Police have confirmed that the main suspect is a convicted terrorist who was released on parole in 2014. A man was detained after a citizen's arrest close to the scene.

Pray that our loving God who 'heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds' (Psalm 147.3) will be very close to the families of Intan, Alvero, Triniti and Anita. Ask God to fill members of Oikumene Christian Church with His peace. Pray they will put their complete trust in Him and not be cowed by fear. Pray that the authorities will clamp down on extremism and intolerance, to prevent a return to the intense persecution Christians in Indonesia suffered in the past.

– Release Partners; *The Jakarta Post* via *Worldwide Photos*.



Cliff Barrows, Longtime Billy Graham Associate, Called Home At 93

Cliff Barrows, music and program director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, passed away on 15 November at Carolinas Medical Centre, Pineville, aged 93, following a brief illness.

As longtime director of music programming, and later television and radio programming, for Billy Graham Crusades, Barrows traveled the world with Billy Graham since the first Crusade in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1947. Barrows hosted the weekly *Hour Of Decision* radio program, heard around the world, for more than 60 years.

Cliff Barrows and Billy Graham met in 1945 while Barrows was on his honeymoon. The two men soon formed the first team of what was later to become the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

'Cliff Barrows was the voice behind my father for 60 years, emceeing the platform for his Crusades and *The Hour Of Decision* radio program,' said Franklin Graham. 'Not only was he one of my father's closest friends, but he was a friend to all of us on the team and in the family. He was very much a part of our family. My father has said: "The remarkable contribution Cliff has made to my ministry cannot be measured in human terms. I love him like a brother." His counsel and suggestions were invaluable. He was a great friend and he will be missed by all of us. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Ann and the entire Barrows family.'



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Parliament Shines A Light On ISIS Religious Genocide



On Monday 28 November the Federal Parliament, for the first time, debated the genocide of Christians and other minorities at the hands of ISIS.

Labor's Chris Hayes introduced the motion seconded by the Coalition's Kevin Andrews. It recognised that Christians, Yazidis and Muslim minorities have been subject by ISIS to genocide. Similar motions have already passed the United States Congress and the UK Parliament. Now it is Australia's turn – a move that would empower the United Nations to go after the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

The genocide against Christians in particular has been terribly under-reported by the world's media. It was great to see the Australian Parliament shining a light on this. The next step is for the Parliament to now bring this motion to a vote, something we hope can be achieved early in the New Year.

The decision to allow this is now in the hands of the Turnbull Government. Thanks to the 15,000 people who signed Australian Christian Lobby's *Stop The Genocide* petition. Your voices are being heard.

But we must not stop until the motion has been voted on. Please keep spreading the link to the petition. If you received petition forms in the mail, please encourage your friends to sign or better still, direct them to the electronic link.

This week's move in Parliament is a great step forward but we will not rest until we get a vote on behalf of the persecuted.

- Lyle Shelton, Australian Christian Lobby, Canberra

PLEASE NOTE:

The next issue of *New Life*, NL2016-12-15, will be the last issue for this year.

Would advertisers and contributors please submit material for this issue by 12 December 2016?

The first issue for 2017 will be published on 15 February 2017. *New Life* thanks all advertisers, contributors and supporters for their help and encouragement during this year, and looks forward to serving you in 2017.

SUDAN: Khartoum's Jihad To Eliminate Opposition

The Islamist and Arabist Government of Sudan is waging a jihad to eliminate opposition to its Islamist and Arabist policies. The GoS's policy of racial and religious genocide is rooted in an April 1993 fatwa which labelled the marginalised non-Arab Muslims rebelling against the state as 'apostates'. Describing the long-persecuted non-Muslims (mostly Christians) as 'kaffirs (infidels) standing in the way of Islam', it decreed that 'Islam has justified the fighting and the killing of both.' Because the US is hungry for Sudanese intelligence on Islamic militant organisations and the EU is desperate for Sudanese co-operation to stem the flow of migrants, the GoS can commit its crimes against humanity with almost total impunity.

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North has suspended peace talks with the GoS in response to Amnesty International's 29 September report on the GoS' use of chemical weapons in Darfur. As this *Prayer Bulletin* has reported previously, the GoS has also used chemical weapons in the Nuba Mountains. The SPLM-N has long maintained that the GoS only engages in peace talks so it can prolong humanitarian crises. Today, with roads becoming passable again now the wet season is over, the SPLM-N warns that Khartoum 'is building up military forces from its militias and army, preparing for a dry-season offensive in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile.' As we prepare for Christmas, the Christians of the Nuba Mountains are preparing for another season of aerial bombardment and genocidal jihad.

Meanwhile, Christian schools and churches operated and attended by ethnic Nuba and other 'southerners' are coming under increased pressure. In Wad Madani, the capital of Al Jazirah state, a Christian school belonging to the Sudanese Presbyterian Evangelical Church has endured more than two months of intense harassment, intimidation and pressure. Established in Wad Madani (188km south-east of Khartoum) by the American Mission in 1901, the Evangelical Basic School has 1000 students aged three to eighteen. In September the GoS accused the community of providing material support to the SPLM-N, a charge the school denies. The school was raided three times in two months. The principal, a dozen teachers and another pastor were arrested, questioned and bailed (at great expense). Furthermore, the National Ministry of Guidance and Endowments attempted to take over the school. On 14 November, in response to parent protests, Wad Madani's Appeal Court for Administrative Affairs cancelled the order to close the highly regarded school. This does not mean the battle is over! Meanwhile in Khartoum, five churches have received notifications that their buildings will be demolished – three belonging to the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC), one to the Presbyterian Church and the other to the Episcopal Church in Sudan.

Also in Khartoum, the trial of Nuba pastors Rev Hassan Abdelrahim and Rev Kuwa Shemaal, Darfuri student and convert Abdelmoneim Abdelmoula and Christian aid worker Petr Jasek (a Czech national) continues. On 3 November investigator Abdelrahman concluded the argument for the prosecution. Jasek stands accused of giving money to 'some individuals' (ethnic Nuba) which the prosecutor maintains amounts to support for the war against the state. For investigating and reporting persecution, Jasek stands accused of 'espionage' and 'tarnishing Sudan's image internationally'. For speaking at an international conference about the plight of Sudan's persecuted Church, the Rev Hassan and Kuwa stand accused of 'inciting hatred against the state'. Darfuri convert Abdelmunim Abdelmoula is accused of being an accomplice in these 'subversive activities'. Cross-examination commenced on Monday 7 November and continued on 14 November.

The case for the defence has now begun. Doubtless the GoS would like to use this trial as a warning to others, so as to silence all talk of persecution and genocide.

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- the Spirit of God will fortify all Sudan's pastors, evangelists, teachers and other Christian leaders, providing them with all the wisdom and grace they need to lead Christ's flock through dark and stormy times.
- God, who rules over Heaven and Earth, will intervene in the trial of the Rev Hassan and Kuwa, Abdelmunim Abdelmoula and Petr Jasek, comforting, sustaining and equipping the believers, and gracing Khartoum's judges with insight and the courage to deliver justice.
- the Lord of Hosts will deliver Sudan from this evil regime. 'Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Your hand; forget not the afflicted. Break the arm [action and power] of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none' (Psalm 10.12,15 ESV).

Prayer For Sudan:

*'O Lord, You hear the desire of the afflicted;
You will strengthen their heart;
You will incline Your ear to do justice
to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the Earth
may strike terror no more.'
(Psalm 10.17,18 ESV)*

– Elizabeth Kendal, author of *Turn Back The Battle: Isaiah Speaks To Christians Today* (Deror Books, Melbourne, Australia, Dec 2012) which offers a Biblical response to persecution and existential threat; and *After Saturday Comes Sunday: Understanding The Christian Crisis In The Middle East* (Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, USA, June 2016). See www.ElizabethKendal.com

Christian Teachers Care For Suffering Refugee Children

Imagine being a teacher with a classroom of rowdy kids. No matter what you do, you can't calm them down or get them to stay seated. They refuse to pay attention to anything you say, and they seem to be just plain naughty. Sound tricky? Now imagine your classroom is a tent set in a refugee camp. As Jessica Roost of Tent Schools International says, 'Educating this particular population comes with a lot of challenges.'

Sometimes those inattentive students have a lot more going on than just a problem with obedience. Ms Roost says their brain is so focused on the trauma they've endured, they can't get to that place where they are ready to learn. That's why she has helped write a guide for educators that will help them better identify and treat students struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Trust, authority, and love — these are some of the primary concepts the book seeks to explain, as the children have 'been thrown into this situation where nothing is certain, nothing is known, everything is a mystery.'

Ms Roost believes that it's the job of the Christian educator to be able to listen to their fears and to be able to show them Christ's love. – MNN

SAT-7 – God's Footprint Over The Middle East

Christian television broadcaster SAT-7 says more than 21 million people now watch their channels across the Middle East and North Africa; an increase of 76% in five years. Saudi Arabia, where blasphemy against Sunni Islam is punishable by death, and Syria both now have a 'very significant' number of viewers, says the broadcaster. More than 10 million people watch the Christian TV station's three Arabic-language channels at least once a week, according to a new survey carried out between April and July this year. Terence Ascott, founder and CEO of SAT-7 says one cause of the growth may be that 'many people are deeply distressed by the situation in the Middle East, and the messages of faith and hope that SAT-7 broadcasts are very attractive.'



– Christian Today

Iraqi Christians Returning Home

Christians are returning to towns in Iraq's Nineveh Plains after being driven out by ISIS forces two years ago. When the Islamic State took over and attempted to establish their caliphate, Christians and other minorities were forced to either flee or pay an extra tax. Some were even killed. ISIS has now lost most of the territory they originally took over. The battle for Mosul is still raging. For other Iraqi towns, however, relief has finally come and Christian refugees are moving back to their homeland, eager to restore their churches. Christianity has been present in the Nineveh Plains of Iraq since the 1st Century. – Christian Headlines

A PM's Christian Faith Guides Her

Theresa May, UK Prime Minister, recently told *The Telegraph* newspaper that her Christian faith guides her in making difficult decisions. She said her faith gives her confidence to know she's 'doing the right thing.' Mrs May admitted that the Brexit debate keeps her up at night, but said her faith is helping her with her decision-making and is foundational to her leadership style. The only child of a clergyman, she is a practising member of the

Church of England. Mrs May said her childhood upbringing instilled the core values of Christianity that benefit her important role, giving her a 'sense of service.' – Christian Headlines

Beyond Disability Bible

Joni Eareckson Tada and her Christian Institute On Disability, have produced the *Beyond Suffering Bible*. Filled with thousands of notes and features, the *Beyond Suffering Bible* is the first study Bible to directly address those who suffer and the people who love and care for them. It invites readers into a conversation about suffering and its place in a person's life. According to the authors, each feature has been created to provide readers with valuable information, meaningful encouragement, and challenging applications as they encounter God's Word. Joni says many people in the throes of suffering, disappointment, and despair, feel utterly stuck in their circumstances. 'They see no hope beyond their day-to-day drudgery of disability routines, but when hurting families place themselves under the shower of God's mercy, suddenly the clouds part and they realize there's hope, life, and even joy beyond their suffering.' – ASSIST News Service

PAUL BARKER TAKES UP 'A NOBLE TASK'

Missionary Teacher Returns As Melbourne's Newest Assistant Bishop

Dr Paul Barker was consecrated as an Assistant Bishop of Melbourne in St Paul's Cathedral on 12 November. Fifteen Asian church leaders joined their Australian counterparts and local Anglicans. Dr Barker, who has worked as a Bible scholar in Asia for the past seven years supported by the Church Missionary Society, was consecrated by Archbishop Philip Freier and welcomed to the episcopate by Archbishop Ng Moon Hing of South-East Asia, Archbishop Stephen Than Myint Oo of Myanmar, Archbishop Glenn Davies of Sydney and visiting bishops, clergy and laity from around Australia and the region.



He returns to the Diocese of Melbourne, where he served as Vicar of Holy Trinity Doncaster from 1996-2009, Archdeacon of Box Hill for eight years from 2001 and as a Visiting Lecturer at Ridley College in Parkville for nearly 20 years.

Dr Barker's roles for the past seven years have included Visiting Scholar at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and Adjunct Lecturer at the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. He has been Asian Regional Co-ordinator for Langham Preaching and Langham Scholar Care, in which role he has trained preachers in the region.

Bishop Barker earned his doctorate, published as *The Triumph Of Grace In Deuteronomy*, 20 years ago at the University of Bristol. The new bishop assumes responsibility for the Jumbunna Episcopate within the Melbourne Diocese, succeeding Bishop Paul White, who has taken up a new part-time role of Assistant Bishop for Growth Areas Ministry. Bishop Barker is pictured (above) to the right of Archbishop Freier.

– *The Melbourne Anglican*.
Photo by Janine Eastgate,
Story by Mark Brolly.

'Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.'

– 1 Timothy 3.1 (NIV)

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'THINKING OF GOD'

'Protestify' Conference Sets Scene For Reformation Celebration

With the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation now less than a year away, TOGCON ('Thinking Of God Conference') held at Christ College, Sydney on 23 November was a curtain-raiser to a year of celebration, affirming the faith re-discovered and proclaimed by the Reformers of the 16th Century, and its continuing relevance in the Church today.

Kamal Weerakoon, Director of Pastoral Initiatives for TOG, gave an overview of the day: 'We're here to celebrate the heritage of the Protestant Reformation, and its recovery of the Biblical Gospel. But we're not mere traditionalists. We look back to our Protestant forebears to remind ourselves of how they could see that the established, institutional church of their time had muddied the Scriptural Gospel with centuries of human tradition. What gave them that clarity of view? What was the lodestar, the compass, that guided them as they peeled back those layers of confusion to recover the Gospel Christ entrusted to His followers – the Gospel that the church should faithfully preserve and pass on, not obscure?'

'Western society is becoming increasingly anti-Christian. In developing nations, persecution of Christians is on the rise. Crosses and church buildings have been torn down in many parts of China. How can we respond? What will give us a clear view of the Gospel? What will be the lodestar, the compass, which guides us to proper ministry, which appropriately responds to our increasingly conflicted, contested situation? And what will motivate us to give ourselves – sacrificially, painfully – to the task of ministering this Gospel? We at Thinking Of God find the answers in the dynamics of Reformed Theology. After the early days of the Reformation, the newly Reformed churches were stabilised by the production of confessions which summarised the Reformed faith, and nourished through liturgical and devotional resources to inculcate this faith in churches and individual Christians.'

(Continued on p.7)



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THINKING OF GOD – PROTESTIFY CONFERENCE

(Continued from p.6)

Simon Manchester, Rector of St Thomas' North Sydney, took up the theme of *Reclaiming Our Roots, Stretching The Mind And Heart*. Focussing on Romans 8.28-30, 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.'



He called for an enlarged view of the Lord Jesus Christ and for Christians not to look in the mirror for their salvation but out the window – to the Cross in order to see the span of the plan of God and let this be a spur to prayer and witness.

'God's call is very powerful,' Simon says. 'You know you have been predestined because you've been called, and His call is not just internal but it is also external. When God calls He overcomes our resistance. The believer stands in God's sight in the performance of Christ as His righteousness is imputed to him. In return the believer should be humble, thankful and excited as a result of his new life in Christ.'

(Continued on p.8)

**Read: *Can The Theory Of Evolution Survive
The Attack Of Science?***

by David Holden,

at www.defenceofthefaith.org

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a black top with white polka dots, is smiling and holding a red folder. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

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THINKING OF GOD – PROTESTIFY CONFERENCE

(Continued from p.7)

John McClean is Lecturer in Theology at Christ College, Sydney, where, he says, he has ‘the privilege of teaching the most glorious truths to people who really want to know them’. John delivered *23 Theses For 21st Century Protestants*. Among the points made are the following:



The Reformation of the church in worship and doctrine according to the word of God is still urgent. The church is both the bride and herald of Christ; and in both roles needs to be faithful to Christ. The Scriptures must stand over the church and critique it. false worship, doctrine that obscures the Gospel, corrupt government of church.

The central message of the Reformation for Christ’s honour and the good of His people is that the church must worship faithfully, preach truly and be governed well. In the West, at least, the church must be reformed from late-modern culture, especially secularism and consumerism. The Reformation ‘solus’, still summarise the Gospel and set the agenda for our mission and message.

Scripture alone is till our watchword. We know God truly through His revelation in His inspired Word in Scripture. The Bible is God’s authoritative covenant book which must guide and rule His Church. There have been several ‘battles for the Bible’. The Reformation debate was about the church and Bible, where did the authority lie? The long battle from the 18th to the 20th Centuries was reason and Bible – the truth and authority of the Bible – we have trouble imagining that anything could speak with authority to our experience or preferences. The debates about sexuality are the most obvious example. See the cultural preference; the cultural demand for affirmation of personal freedom, especially sexual freedom. We can expect increasingly, inside the church, to find Scripture questioned, probably not so much about its historical veracity, but its relevance and ethical reliability. 21st Century Protestants need to recommit to Scripture; to know it, value it and let it speak to them.

Christ alone, a Reformation slogan, must still be ours. 21st Century Protestants must hold to Christ as the fullness of God and the source of all His redemptive blessings. The completed work of Christ is essential in our understanding of salvation, in our view of revelation (the church being ruled over by the word of Christ), in our piety because Jesus is our all-sufficient mediator; in church government as Christ rules His church through Word and Spirit, by ministers not legislators.

What threatens to replace Christ today? 21st Century Protestants must value Christ over pleasure, comfort, satisfaction and self sufficiency in the most hedonistic culture that has ever existed. We are obsessed with comfort and addicted to pleasure. The 21st Century Protestant must call people to painful discipleship in Christ.

For more information about *Thinking Of God* and *TOGCON* go to: thinkingofgod.org

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Gospel Recordings Says: 'Rejoice With Us'

We are encouraged to see staff trained at the Sydney recordist training courses in 2014 recording: Yousif (Australia), James (Kenya), Michael (South Africa), Dave (Vanuatu), Candra (Indonesia) and Lot (Thailand). Recordist training remains a significant challenge and we've been working on a system for producing online recordist training materials.

Over 800 sets of *Look, Listen And Live* flipcharts were sent to PNG this year in a single order. This physical distribution is dwarfed by our online distribution which sees around 20,000 hours of material downloaded each month from our website.

We have been excited about several projects GRN supporters have given generously to this year:

- Solar panels for Pakistan – enabling the team to work during frequent blackouts.
- Office for Philippines – giving the team no rent to pay and no fear of eviction.
- Bikes for Thailand's Motorbike Gospel Team – allowing them to reach isolated people in the mountains of Northern Thailand and encouraging evangelism.
- 100 Sabers sent to Nigeria.
- Recording and translation projects in Pakistan, Philippines and Madagascar.
- Recording and distribution project in Malawi.

We rejoice to hear of the great work being done by our Centres around the world. Sadly our work in PNG has stalled once again as the new worker was not able to continue. Our work in India has also encountered ongoing setbacks.

Our Information Systems team works hard to keep our systems working well and up to date. They make it possible for you to download the story of Jesus in nearly 6,000 different languages and dialects from our websites and allow us ready access to work on the recordings. Our new responsive website is the result of six people's work over many months.



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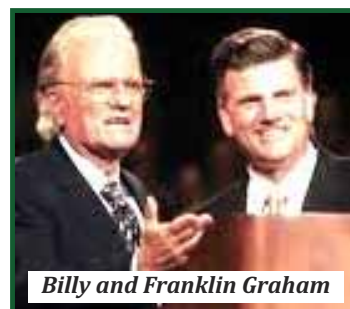
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DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Billy Graham's Advice: How To Pray For Young People

Evangelist Billy Graham has offered advice on how Christians should pray for young people who have turned away from the truth of the Gospel. The 98-year-old evangelist shared his thoughts in response to a reader of his website whose daughter dropped out of church once she left home. Dr Graham said thankfully, many such young people come back to the church with a deep and sincere commitment to Christ – especially when they have children of their own. In the meantime, he said, it's important for parents to pray for their children and remember that God will give wisdom to those who ask for it.



Billy and Franklin Graham

'Pray that God will help them realize that they need Him, as God can soften even the most hardened of hearts. And in addition, ask God to help you know how you can encourage them in the faith.'

Dr Graham's advice is based on personal experience: his son, Franklin has referred to himself as a 'Prodigal Son' and told how, growing up, he rejected faith and embraced a life of rebellion. Dr Graham said that eventually Franklin got tired of running from God and gave his life to Christ at age 22.

– Gospel Herald

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– Jeff M. Sellers, Editor, Persecution News Service, Morning Star News.

For more information go to: www.ElizabethKendal.com



TURN BACK THE BATTLE: Isaiah Speaks to Christians Today.

With persecution escalating globally, **Elizabeth Kendal** calls us to revisit the prophecy of Isaiah, maintaining that Isaiah 1-39 provides an unambiguous treatise on how God's people are to respond to persecution, suffering and existential threat. For purchasing options, visit:

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INDONESIA: Ahok's 'Blasphemy' Case

Having concluded their investigations, Indonesian police have now named Jakarta's ethnic Chinese Christian Governor Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama a suspect in a blasphemy case. Speaking to a press conference on Wednesday 16 November, the head of the National Police's Criminal Investigation Department (Bareskrim), Commander General Ari Dono, confirmed: 'Although there are different opinions among police investigators, most agreed that the case should be settled in an open trial.'

Now that Ahok has been named, Islamic fundamentalists are demanding he be arrested and incarcerated, as is normally the case with blasphemy suspects in Indonesia. Islamic Defenders Front spokesperson Munarman told the *Jakarta Post*: 'Because Ahok still runs free, we have decided to stage another protest. Ahok should be jailed, it is the legal procedure. All suspects charged under Article 156 (a) of the Criminal Code in Indonesia's history are always imprisoned.'

The next protest is slated for Friday 2 December.



- Elizabeth Kendal

Sheikh Blames Saudi Arabia For Global Rise Of Islamist Terrorism

A leading Islamic scholar has described attacks on Christians by violent Islamic extremists as 'heart-breaking' and condemned Islamic extremism as being 'exactly the opposite' of what Islam teaches. Sheikh Dr Umar Al-Qadri argues that the 'real offenders of blasphemy' are not people who draw cartoons of Muhammad, but those who commit atrocities in the name of God and Islam.

Dr Qadri, who heads the Al-Mustafa Islamic Centre in Ireland, lays the blame for violent Islamic extremism at the door of Muslims who disseminate the Wahhabi-Salafi ideology emanating from Saudi Arabia. The Sunni cleric told parliamentarians, clerics and activists in London's Houses of Parliament on 24 November that the intolerant doctrines of Wahhabism and Salafism have been 'aggressively exported' through hundreds of billions of dollars of funding of Islamic centres in the West and in Muslim-majority countries. 'They have no concept of living together in peace,' he said. Naming the world's most violent groups of Islamist terrorists, he added that the ideology 'has produced Al-Qaeda, Daesh [Islamic State], Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.'

'Wahhabis are still being supported by us in the West,' he said, and called for greater dialogue with people who believe 'in democracy and not the "Clash of Civilisations"', referring to the hypothesis that religions and cultures are inevitably in conflict with one another.

Dr Qadri shared a platform in the House of Lords with the Damascus-based Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatius Aphrem II, at the launch of a report by the Catholic charity Aid To The Church In Need, which assessed levels of religious freedom around the world. It concluded that religious freedom has deteriorated in 11 of the 'worst offending' 23 countries in the last two years, and in seven of the remaining 12, including North Korea, Syria and Nigeria, saying: 'the problems were already so bad they could scarcely get any worse'.



Sheikh Umar Al-Qadri in front of the UK Houses of Parliament, lit up in red for Red Wednesday in support of Christians under pressure for their faith.

- World Watch Monitor

CUBA: What Now For Life After Castro?

Cuban pastors and missions leaders are wondering what Fidel Castro's death will mean for the long-oppressed church on the island nation. While there's hope that it could mean greater freedom for Christians, many are taking a wait-and-see approach for now. Although Fidel Castro was raised Catholic and educated by Spanish Jesuit priests, his revolutionary government was profoundly atheistic for many years. It sent people of faith into exile and re-education camps and banned public dis-

plays of religion. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cuban government ended its atheistic philosophy and declared itself a secular state. The Cuban Church has proved that it can thrive in adverse conditions. House churches have exploded across the island and missionaries in and out of the country describe a continuing spiritual harvest and a hunger for the Gospel. Pastors and missions are generally optimistic about the Cuban Church's future.

- CBN Christian World News

The Faith Of A Faithful Servant

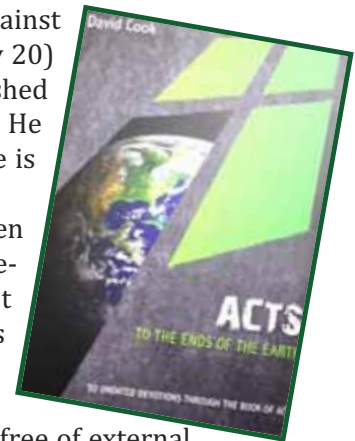
ACTS 9.20-31

Saul baffled the Jews in Damascus who expected him to defend Judaism against the new movement, but now he is preaching that Jesus is the Son of God (v 20) and that Jesus is the Christ (v 22). Luke tells of their reaction: they are astonished (v 21) and baffled (v 22). Meanwhile, Saul grows more and more powerful. He cannot be beaten in argument and so the Jews plan to kill him (v 23). Here is another example of unreasonable and unreasoning blind belligerence.

The reluctance of the brethren in Jerusalem to accept Saul was only broken by the encouraging intervention of Barnabas (v 27). Saul’s activities are described as ‘bold speech’ (v 28), and ‘talk and debate’ (v 29), but again the last resort is not to recognise his argument but to seek to kill him (v 29). For his own safety he is sent to his home town of Tarsus.

The following verse (v 31) is a summary of the life of the church at this time. It is probably about 35AD. The church now has a time of peace. It is free of external threat, strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, growing numerically and living in reverence of God. With Saul’s conversion, the persecutions which followed the death of Stephen come to an end.

Luke’s description of Saul’s conversion is now complete. He was indeed God’s chosen instrument to bring about the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. F.F. Bruce says ‘Paul’s contribution to the Gentile mission was unique and far reaching’.



FOR REFLECTION:

Note the experience of the church in Acts 9.31 compared with 6.7. Why will the church described in 9.31 always be blessed with growth?

Saul’s opposition to Christ is apparent from chapters 7–9. How is his union with Christ now shown in 9.20–30? How is your union with Christ evident?

He summarises Pauls’ emphases:

- True religion is not a matter of rules but an expression of the indwelling Spirit in love.
 - In Christ, people constitute the new humanity.
 - People matter more than things, principles more than causes.
 - Discrimination on the basis of race, religion, class or sex is an offence against God and humanity alike.
- ‘If these lessons are important, it is well to give grateful credit to one man who taught them,’ writes Bruce.

Content taken from 'ACTS – To The Ends Of The Earth' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

A Thanksgiving Service To Celebrate The Centenary Of St Margaret’s Presbyterian Church, 107 Hotham St, Balaclava Will Be Held At 10am On Sunday 11 December Come And Give Thanks; Relive Memories; Renew Friendships



SEEN ON FACEBOOK:



Matthew 7.7,8. Ask, Seek And Knock.

Words Of Wisdom:



BOOKS WORTH READING

THE CHURCH: A Theological And Historical Account, Gerald Bray, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8010-3086-4.

Gerald Bray has produced an extremely readable account of the church and how and why the different ecclesiastical bodies that make up the worldwide church understand the church in the way they do. He also asks the more pointed question: why do the different branches persist in their own interpretations of what the church should be, even though they know that by doing this they perpetuate the disunity of the church? Dr Bray's aim in writing is to promote understanding between these branches and to help us appreciate why other Christians think and act differently in church life than we do. He does this without arguing or suggesting that all differences should be just put aside.

Dr Bray emphasises the Jewish heritage of the first Christian churches, though he says that does not mean we can talk about the 'Old Testament church', because, despite our strong continuity with the Old Testament saints, there is also the radical newness of what Christ brought. The best answer to the question of whether Jesus intended to found a church is that He did in fact do so through His Spirit, beginning at Pentecost.

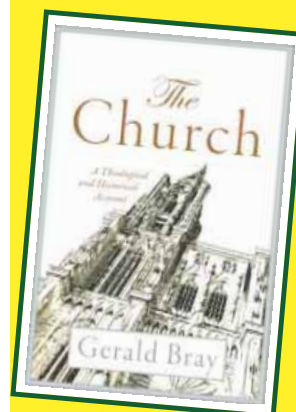
The wide gaps in our knowledge about early church leadership, organisation and worship means that it is simply impossible to have a detailed model for contemporary church life. Mission and outreach were the heart of the early church, not arguments about church structures and procedures. Bray is refreshingly frank about what we do not know, and the result is that we do not have a detailed blueprint of church life to follow, so that the clear principles we do have can be applied with humility and freedom. There is an irenic tone to all of Bray's discussion and advice.

Bray debunks the influential theory of F. C. Baur who claimed that the categories of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' were post-New Testament developments. He then tells the story of the church through the early centuries of struggle and persecution, the triumph of recognition and its becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, the evangelization of Europe and the barbarian kingdoms, the medieval church and Eastern Orthodoxy.

How is the unity of the church to be understood? Following Augustine, Bray insists that it is spiritual and heavenly (and only finally manifest at Christ's return) rather than institutional (eg communion with the Bishop of Rome). Protestantism shattered the external unity of the medieval church, so how can the doctrine that there is 'one' church be reconciled with the reality of division? In the evangelical tradition (influenced by Pietism) believers are able to recognise and have fellowship with believers in other denominations due to common biblical convictions and spiritual experience. In other words, unity is essentially spiritual, not external or organisational.

The church's 'mark' of holiness was understood and practised very differently in Catholic (Counter-Reformational) and Protestant (notably Puritan) churches. As for the universality (catholicity) of the church, fragmented Protestantism cannot really claim that mark of the church. The universality of the church can only now be expressed by preaching the Gospel to all and by welcoming into its membership all who believe, irrespective of language, class, culture, race or social status. Apostolicity involves conformity to the teaching and behaviour of the original apostles, and Bray shows that the only apostolic authority today is found in the writings of the New Testament. There is a healthy realism and sober wisdom in the judgments made and the advice offered by Dr Bray, most notably that it is impossible to recreate the New Testament church in the modern age with total fidelity. The New Testament fails to provide us with all the information we would need to do this, nor are the apostles any longer available to enlighten us, and 2000 years of church history has left its mark on how things are done, and lastly the diversity of world cultures that now make up the church must be respected.

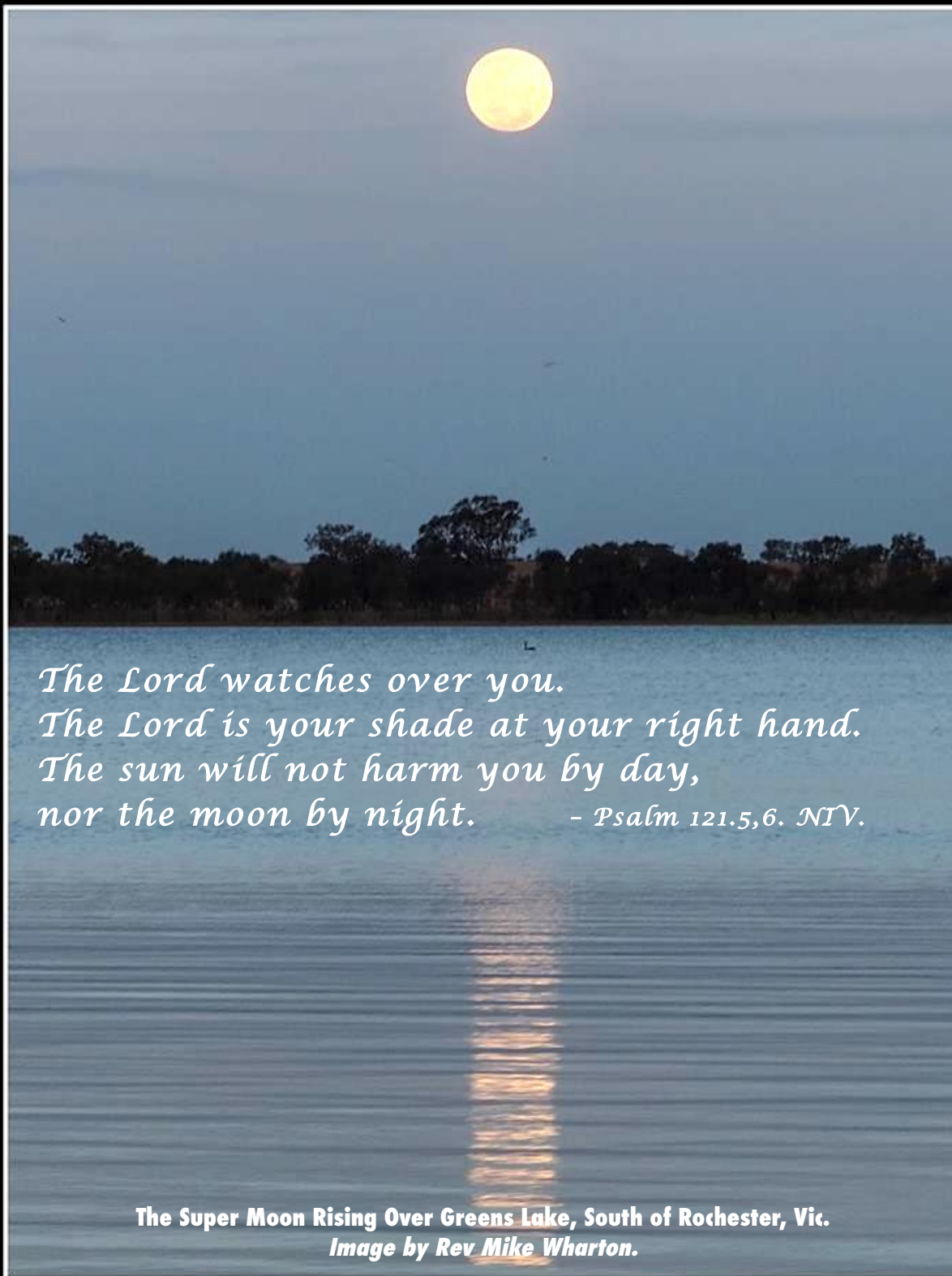
– Greg Goswell



'There is an irenic tone to all of Bray's discussion and advice.'

WITNESS PIC:

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*The Lord watches over you.
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night. - Psalm 121.5,6. NIV.*

**The Super Moon Rising Over Greens Lake, South of Rochester, Vic.
Image by Rev Mike Wharton.**

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