

# SOUTHERNCROSS

MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

FEBRUARY 2020

## New year, new life

PUBLIC BAPTISMS DRAW A CROWD

*Youthworks in Burundi • Do we love our enemies?  
Bushfire coverage • Messiah on Netflix*



# Celebrating new life is “chaotically beautiful”



Standing room only: Family, friends and church members wait for the baptisms to begin outside St John's Cathedral in Parramatta. PHOTO: Simon Hall

**When** it comes to making a public declaration of faith in Jesus, the more people, the more rejoicing.

In the lead-up to Christmas, several Sydney churches held large services with dozens of people baptised or confirmed.

For example, St John's Cathedral, Parramatta is not only one of the oldest Anglican churches in Sydney, but also has a great location in the heart of Parramatta. So it made sense that the joy of 35 baptisms and confirmations should not be locked up within the building but shared with the people of the city.

Eight hundred congregation members, family and friends gathered in the square outside to witness the confirmations and baptisms, which used a large pool set up in front of the parish hall.

"St John's 10 congregations meet in four different languages, each with their own culture and identity," says the cathedral's senior minister the Rev Canon Bruce Morrison.

"Our unity isn't merely formed around a common campus, it is a shared commitment to see our city transformed by the hope of the risen Christ."

Canon Morrison says that because the language groups and congregations sometimes act like silos, people can be unaware of what God is doing outside their own congregation.

"Our answer was to meet, all together, as one congregation, to celebrate and welcome new believers," he says. "We have never managed to meet as one group previously – partly because we don't have the facilities, and partly because of the language barriers."

"We overcame the issue of space by meeting outside. We overcame the issue of language by meeting first in language groups and then in one climactic meeting, all together, for the actual baptisms and laying on of hands – and of course, for food!"

"We chose songs that could be sung in all four languages. Our language pastors baptised people from their own congregations."

For St John's Persian language pastor, Dr Michael Safari, the day was one of great joy.

"The Persian congregation enjoyed an encouraging time of fellowship with their cross-cultural brothers and sisters," he says. "We were overjoyed to sing praises to our God in several languages."

Likewise, for the cathedral's senior Chinese pastor, the Rev Ken Tang, "we enjoyed the gathering of many nations before Christ in the centre of Parramatta City. The laughing, the singing and saying 'Amen' together is a wonderful experience of witnessing Christ together."

Canon Morrison says the event was a great gift for the church.

"This was the first time we have ever had all our congregations together," he says. "We all knew, in theory, that there were other congregations but we had never experienced it. It was like we were unwrapping a huge present."

"Quite a number of baptisms were by immersion [in a pool], which is a great visual representation of the gospel," he adds. "Each one of the 35 baptisms and confirmations was another demonstration of God's saving grace at work amongst us. Three children were baptised. The remainder were youth and adults – some recently come to Christ."

The event was so successful that it has already been locked into next year's calendar.

In the southwest, at Cabramatta Anglican, there is already an annual combined baptism and confirmation service for people from its Mandarin, Cantonese and English congregations. This year, Bishop Chris Edwards stepped in for the Bishop of Georges River, Peter Lin, at the service, which was attended by 300 adults and 35 children.

Senior minister the Rev Min Yaw Law told *Southern Cross* that, in his introduction on the day, he said that "this service is a celebration of God's amazing grace because, among the 43 candidates, the youngest was six months and the oldest 89!"

"Also we have a candidate who was literally illiterate and two candidates were former atheists and retired university professors from China."

"Therefore, it's never too early or too late, [and you're never] too unworthy or 'too qualified', to come to the saving grace of Jesus."

Mr Law says the church's training and growth system is bearing fruit and the Chinese ministry has "flowered and reaped fruits after many years of sowing. We have a great harvest this year: 35 adult baptisms and confirmations, 13 infant baptisms and four receptions!"

The church has also organised short-term mission awareness trips to rural areas of NSW for those who have been equipped, and sent a pastor to a neighbouring country to do mission. Cabramatta Anglican also plans to do cross-cultural mission in rural parts of Cambodia this year.

The church's bilingual website includes Sunday sermon audio and script, which is open to the public in order to bring new opportunities for growth. Although the church also has baptisms throughout the year, the bishop is invited annually for the service that includes confirmations.

"The service was bilingual, led by Bishop Chris Edwards – who replaced Bishop Lin in English – and I translated for him into Chinese," Mr Law says "Apparently he was overwhelmed by the dominantly Chinese-speaking, chaotically beautiful atmosphere!"



Never too late: The Rev Min Yaw Law (right) baptises an older convert at Cabramatta's combined baptism and confirmation service.

## Love (and water) overflows at Redfern



All in: Matt Johnson baptises Indigenous Australian Karon in a joyful ceremony at South Sydney Anglican Church.

**People** from the US, Britain, China, Vietnam, Russia and Australia walk into a church... it sounds like the start of a joke but it was actually the start of new life for 10 people baptised recently at South Sydney Anglican.

"In Redfern, we often find people when they have absolutely hit rock bottom. We love them and share Jesus with them," says senior minister, the Rev Matthew Johnson.

"This year, we worked hard on running the *Christianity Explored* course on a semi-regular basis. I delegated more responsibility to people in the church to run home groups and I spent more time focused on evangelism. So I was constantly inviting people on the fringe of the church to come along to the course."

The invitees came from a variety of ministry activities run by the church at its Redfern base. "At our Friday night soup kitchen [OzHarvest distribution] we are having more and more Mandarin speakers turn up," Mr Johnson says. "So we have been doing short gospel presentations every Friday night before the food distribution and inviting people along to *Christianity Explored*."

"Seven Chinese people did the course with Mandarin subtitles. Three of them decided to become Christians – one from Vietnam and two from mainland China. As a result, we have now started a Mandarin church service on Sundays with 15 people regularly attending."

The multicultural nature of the area also drew in a Russian-speaking lady named Polin.

"Polin was first introduced to Christianity through our Friday night food distribution," Mr Johnson says. "She wanted to come along and help out, but we explained that to be a volunteer you needed to be a regular member of our church. So Polin said, 'Okay,' and she started coming to church most weeks."

At this point, Polin was not yet Christian. She had grown up in Communist Russia with very little knowledge of the Bible. But she began serving on Friday night and showing a genuine interest in Christianity.

"We did *Christianity Explored* with her, this time with Russian subtitles, and she finished the course saying she now believes in Jesus!" Mr Johnson says.

The only non-recent convert was Peter Boyce, a well-loved figure around the churches of inner Sydney, who decided that after more than 30 years as a Christian, he should make the most of this opportunity and get baptised.

"Exactly why he'd never been baptised was a little bit hazy," Mr Johnson says. "But Peter loves sharing the gospel and getting baptised was a perfect opportunity to invite family and friends to hear the gospel, yet again."

Formerly known as one-one-seven church, South Sydney Anglican has as its vision "A community overflowing with faith, hope and love in Jesus". As the tables groaned with a dumpling lunch and the water overflowed from the small baptism pool, the congregation was left rejoicing with 10 new brothers and sisters.

## Finding new life late in life



"I've become one of you guys": Bishop Chris Edwards with Ray Turner, Chris Lawes and the Rev Marty Symons.

**We** are used to seeing groups of teenagers lined up for confirmation by the local bishop but there was a twist recently at St Michael's Chapel in Anglicare's Farrer Brown Court.

The Bishop of North Sydney, Chris Edwards, was at Castle Hill to confirm two residents, one of whom had just come to faith. Eighty-two year old Ray Turner and 75-year-old Chris Lawes gave their testimonies before residents, family members, Anglicare staff and volunteers, as well as a delighted Anglicare chaplain, the Rev Marty Symons.

Mr Turner came to Farrer Brown Court with a lot of questions about Christianity. After completing the *Christianity Explored* course, he approached the chaplain and declared, "I've become one of you guys".

According to Mr Symons, "Since Ray became a Christian, a transformation has come over him. He comes to devotions every morning, to chapel services and to Bible study. He is consuming the Bible a lot and it's a privilege to get to know him."

Mr Lawes was already a Christian and a long-time resident of Farrer Brown Court but, from his wheelchair, gave a strong testimony.

"I attend the services here, and Bible study in the guidance of Marty Symons, and he has made my belief in Christ – along with what the Lord wants for me – very clear to me," Mr Lawes said. "I am delighted to be here in front of you all to pledge myself to the Lord."

According to Bishop Edwards, "Both Ray and Chris have had people talk to them about Jesus throughout their lives. They held the 'pieces' but it was while Marty sat with them and they opened the Bible together that all the pieces came together."

Mr Symons said he's seen a big change. "Chris comes to church and Bible study and I've seen huge growth in him. I'm looking forward to seeing what God is going to do with Chris for the rest of his life."

It just goes to show, he adds, "It's never too late to ask Jesus into your life. No matter what you think you've done or the guilt you carry, there is nothing that Jesus' blood cannot wash clean".





Burnt out: The charred remains of the Ulrich family home in Bargo.

## In the fire and the flood

### Judy Adamson

*“We’ve had a mini-flood here,” is the cheerful response from Wollondilly rector the Rev Steve Swanepoel when he’s asked about the weather.*

“There’s been wonderful rain. We had a 10- to 15-minute heavy downpour yesterday afternoon, it was raining off and on during the night and it’s still raining now!”

His enthusiasm is hardly surprising. His parish is just southwest of Picton, and the community was hard-hit by fires in the lead-up to Christmas – particularly in Bargo, Buxton and Balmoral.

Parish members Ruth and Rob Ulrich lost their home in Bargo while they were away, but their daughter Sarah was in the house preparing for her wedding in late January. She saved the wedding dress her mum had been making for her but all gifts were burnt along with everything else when the house was destroyed.

However, Mr Swanepoel says, Sarah “has just been completely overwhelmed by people’s generosity... how people loved her and cared for her” after the fire – including immediate financial support for the family from Anglican Aid and the parish of GyMEA.

“Anglicare jumped in as well to offer hampers and toys so we could continue the Christmas carols [at church],” he says.

While he adds that recent weeks have been incredibly difficult for locals, “it could have been much worse. We saw winds changing at the last minute with flames literally at people’s doorsteps, and people testifying to the fact that within minutes of their home being consumed, the fire turned back on itself.

“There were people standing in their gardens praying for the winds to change – and they did.”

Amid what can only be termed devastating losses this bushfire season, across the Diocese there have been similar close calls – and losses – in Lithgow, the Shoalhaven Coast, the Blue Mountains and surrounds plus the Southern Highlands.

By late January close to 18.75 million hectares had been burnt across the country. In addition, 28 people are dead, more than 2500 homes destroyed and, reportedly, a billion animals have been killed.

Archbishop Davies and Dean Kanishka Raffel arranged a special service of prayer for the bushfires on January 19 which, by God’s grace, says Dr Davies, “also became one of thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the much-needed rainfall. Yet, our prayers for those directly affected are still important, as are our prayers for the breaking of the drought... as prayer is an expression of our dependence upon God for all things”.

The rector of Sutton Forest, the Rev Jeremy Tonks – who had to evacuate with his wife Danielle four times between New Year’s Eve and January 10 – says there has been “great rejoicing” at the rain that has fallen. However, he knows it will take significantly more to remove the threat of further fires. Ongoing care and support is also needed for those who’ve lost homes or property in Wingello, Bundanoon and elsewhere, or who had to evacuate through a wall of fire.

“Many people drove through flames on Saturday the 4<sup>th</sup> to get out,” he explains.

“They were told it’s too late to leave but they left, and they’re traumatised by that... there were three tankers sent to protect a score of cars that were trapped [at the town entrance] and then escort them out through the flames... they’re real triggers for people.

“The mood in Bundanoon is very positive, largely because most of us dodged a bullet. But everyone knows somebody who’s lost their home.

“I heard the saying again the other week, ‘How do you know which god is the right one amid all the gods?’ I say, go for the God that turned up every time.

“The cross of Christ is an amazing place to be. It’s the only place where it’s safe. It’s a place where the trauma has actually burnt out.”

In Lithgow, the Rev Mark Smith is praising God for rain and the fact there is no fire threat at present.

Prior to Christmas he, his neighbours and the RFS had to battle to save the rectory when a “super-fast moving” fire burnt through his back fence and hedge, and was extinguished only metres from the house.

“It’s no light thing when we talk about God being a consuming fire,” he says. “[After such experiences] you get a deeper appreciation of what God is saying there.

“There’s a deep underlying trauma for some people who’ve battled fires, come up close or who’ve lost [homes]; there’s sleeplessness and anxiety and they need prayer and practical help.”

He says the fires have been a powerful teacher for those “who feel they’re in control... we’re entirely not in control. Pray that we would learn from that and turn and fully repent. People have been praying to God – but they should learn about the God that they’re praying to.”

Down at Milton-Ulladulla, the Rev Ross Maltman had three parish families lose their homes, while others spent exhausting days defending their properties or lost all their farm stock. He and others have made many pastoral visits, seeking to support and encourage those distressed by losses or events around them.

Displaced tourists sat patiently for hours on Mr Maltman’s church lawn on January 2, waiting for the opportunity to evacuate because “the roads were blocked from Milton nearly all the way back to Batemans Bay,” he says.

“Some were there until 3am the following morning before it was safe to go”.

The local evacuation centre is now a recovery centre, and many church members have been working alongside Anglicare Disaster Recovery teams, or the Red Cross, with other members of the community.

“They’ve been very prayerful and supportive of others,” Mr Maltman says. “We’ve just been ministering alongside people and sowing the seeds for gospel opportunities in the future – if not at the time.

“For me [the important thing is] that in the end they might see they can’t do things on their own, but they might turn to God who can help them in this life and the life to come.”

Anglican Aid and Anglicare Sydney both have bushfire appeals, and Anglican Aid has already raised close to \$550,000. To donate go to [www.anglicanaid.org.au](http://www.anglicanaid.org.au) or [www.anglicare.org.au](http://www.anglicare.org.au).

### AREA BURNT

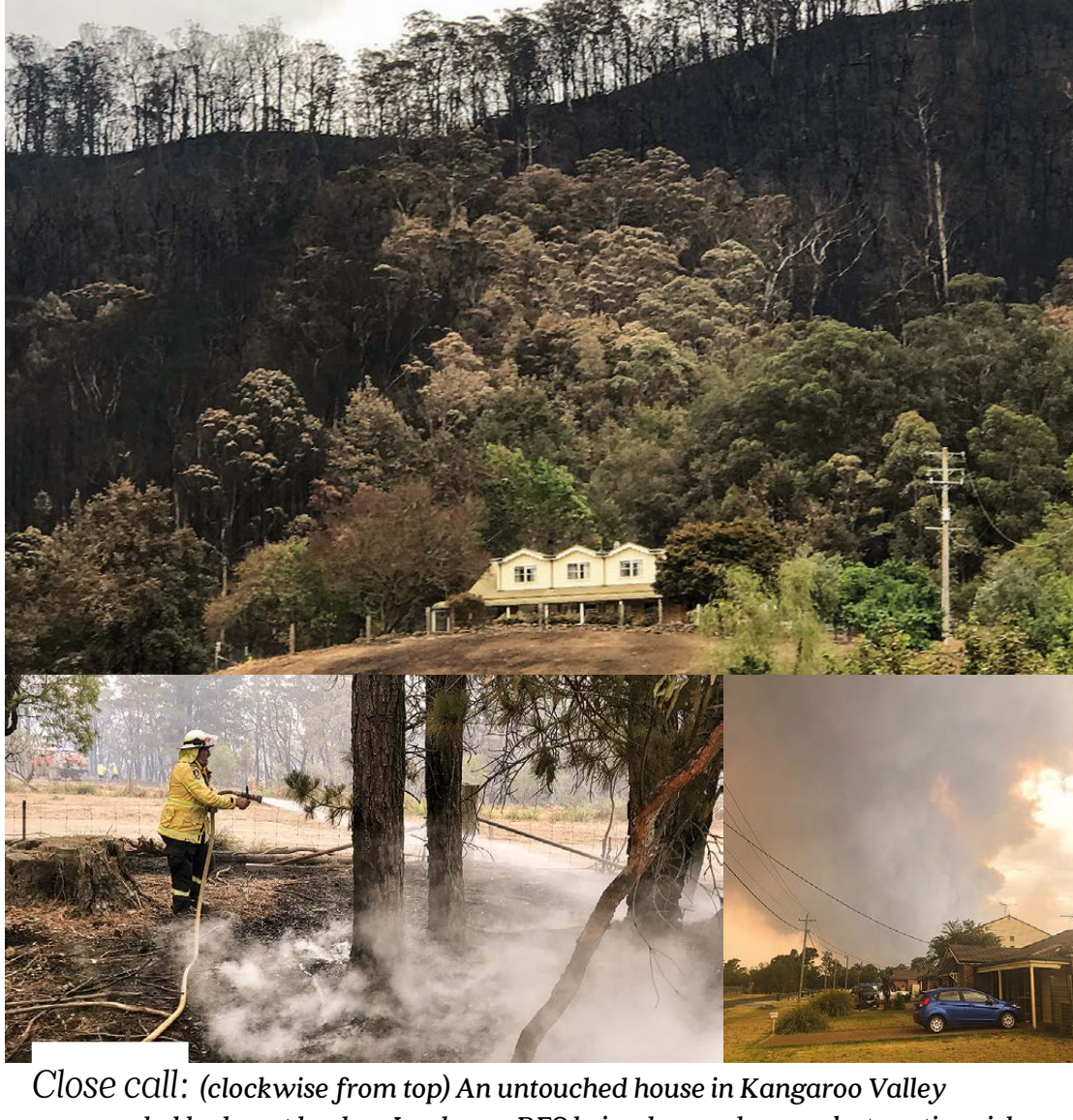
NSW: more than 5.3 million hectares (about 6.6 per cent of the state)

Australia: more than 18,734,930 hectares

The area burnt across the nation is equivalent to:

- more than the entire New England region of the USA, which includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont;
- 82 per cent of Great Britain;
- 106 per cent of Cambodia
- About 70 per cent of New Zealand

Sources: state and territory fire authorities, World Bank, Geoscience Australia, thecommonwealth.org, nationsonline.org



Close call: (clockwise from top) An untouched house in Kangaroo Valley surrounded by burnt bush; a Jamberoo RFS brigade member works to extinguish embers in Penrose; plumes of smoke rise from a fire just outside Tahmoor.

### PRAY FOR:

- the long-term recovery process in affected communities: that people would receive support for their physical, spiritual and emotional needs – particularly those traumatised by their experiences and losses
- the firefighters’ fatigue, and that they would be able to continue doing their job well and safely
- those who’ve lost homes and livelihoods – that they would be lifted up, as well as willing to accept others’ generosity
- for local businesses and industries struggling to make ends meet
- for gospel opportunities to arise, and be handled with sensitivity
- people to be brought to faith through what they have experienced
- drought-busting, fire-quenching, God-glorifying rain

### GIVE THANKS:

- for the rain that has fallen
- for the services made available, for individual donations, relief packages, disaster recovery teams, pastoral care and financial assistance from Anglicare, Anglican Aid, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and all levels of government
- for the volunteer firefighters of the RFS as well as professional fighters at Fire and Rescue NSW
- that many have become stronger in their faith or open to faith

## ON THE FIRE GROUND

If anyone needed a reminder that fires have been burning in different locations for months, they’d only have to talk to the Rev Rob Meischke, RFS chaplain for the Southern Highlands and assistant minister at Sutton Forest – who says he’s been involved with “this fire” since December 2.

During that period, with the parish’s blessing, he’s been working almost full-time with the fires – travelling to the front line, to individual fire stations, to hospital, the fire control centre and people’s homes, providing whatever is most needed in terms of conversation, pastoral care, encouragement and a listening ear.

“They’re very tired, but they’re determined to keep going,” he says. “Firemen are used to putting fires out and they don’t like it when they can’t do that.

“The thing that I’m really working on is to encourage the members to talk through their traumas. Very much in a gentle way, but to trust each other enough and take the time to talk through the things they’ve experienced so they don’t end up being controlled by them later on in life.

“In a lot of ways, the work I do is going to get busier once the fire stops.”



Hard yards: Jodie McNeill and the Jamberoo brigade at work.

Rector of Jamberoo the Rev Jodie McNeill is an RFS volunteer, so has been seeing action first-hand with his local brigade.

Among his time “on” was Sunday, January 5, when he and the Jamberoo team arrived in Bundanoon with five other fire trucks. They were told the fire “was expected in 20 minutes’ time, here are the hoses, get ready – and you think, ‘Oh my goodness,’” he recalls. “There was just this wall of smoke and the crack of trees falling down, and you’re expecting any moment for it to appear.”

When the fire threat turned in another direction, the crew drove to Wingello where buildings had been burnt to the ground “but the place was still very much alight... we had to put out possessions that were smouldering in the backyard. The ground was hot, there was smoke and soot everywhere, and it was quite sobering to know that you’re involved in the care of the possessions of someone you’ve never met.

“We also went down a fire trail to try and extinguish more fires... some of the trees were burning on the inside, so it was a bit eerie because there wasn’t any wind, and there we were trying to put out these fires that couldn’t be put out because it was so hot.”

Mr McNeill says that Christians need to be praying for “the long process of dealing with the physical and emotional scars, the burns and broken hearts of those who are grieving”, but – particularly for those involved in the emergency services as chaplains or volunteers – “that God would give us the right things to say at the right time.

“One of my prayers is that people will be able to look back on the fires of 2019-2020 and say, ‘That was when I met the Lord Jesus and was saved’ – that through this crisis they will find Christ,” he says.

Mr Meischke has already noticed people becoming closer to God in recent months. “I’ve seen people become stronger in their faith because of this and I’ve had conversations with atheists who are talking openly about the power of prayer and the idea that only God can stop this fire,” he says. “They’re interesting conversations.

“I’m hoping that by the time God sends enough rain to stop the fires, people will be ready to thank him for it.”

## Prayer, care and gratitude

*People filled in St Andrew’s Cathedral on January 19 for a special prayer service in response to the worst bushfires on record – after the worst drought on record.*

The Dean, Kanishka Raffel, while giving thanks for the rain, noted that “this has been a summer unlike any other... we gather to grieve the destruction of so much that is precious to us all. We gather to offer sympathy, support and comfort to those who grieve and to assure them of our commitment to ongoing care.

“We gather to acknowledge our failures to care for the land, and to seek God’s mercy in sending rain, bringing healing and comfort, and help to persevere and to rebuild lives... Most of all, we gather to proclaim the comfort, help and hope that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”

During the service the Senior Assistant Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, Bruce MacDonald, came forward to receive sustained applause from the congregation by way of appreciation for all our firefighters have done, as well as Dean Raffel’s message of condolence for those grieving and “grateful thanks... for the courage, selflessness and determination of our fires”.



Front line care: During the Cathedral prayer service Dean Kanishka Raffel interviews (from left) the Rev Lt Col Craig Potter, senior chaplain of Operation Bushfire Assist; the Rev Ian Rienits, Anglicare chaplain and a member of the Disaster Recovery Chaplains network; and Ms Esther Singenstreu, State Manager of Disaster Recovery for Anglicare.

Preaching from Job 1 and 2, Bishop Michael Stead noted Job’s response to the tragedies that befall him “helps us to know how we should respond to the tragedy of these bushfires”.

“Let’s respond by turning toward each other in compassion and by turning toward God in prayer and dependency,” he said. “Let’s admit that we are not in control, accept that we won’t always know what God is doing but nonetheless cling tightly to God and his goodness, and pray for his mercy to this broken world as we long for the world to come.”

Among special guests at the service was the Governor of NSW the Hon Margaret Beazley, who laid a wreath at the front of the Cathedral.

Almost \$5000 was collected, which was donated to Anglicare and Anglican Aid’s bushfire appeals.





## “No worries, mate” links with Burundi

God’s provision: David Nduwimana (left) with Youthworks CEO the Rev Craig Roberts and Eugénie Kathiabwa.

**Christians** are used to what others may call coincidences as they see God at work through networks of believers. But sometimes, a string of “coincidences” turn into a stunning display of God’s providence.

Such was the case when Youthworks CEO the Rev Craig Roberts got an email from the president of the Baptist Union of Burundi, Pastor Jean Jacques Masabo. Burundi is an East African nation, formerly a German and Belgian colony, bordered by Rwanda and Tanzania.

“Over Skype, Jean Jacques explained to me that churches in Burundi are overflowing with young people,” Mr Roberts says, “but because of the ravages of civil war and the AIDS epidemic, there are very few mature Christians. He was concerned that young people are not putting down deep roots in the gospel, so his church will be ‘a mile wide and an inch deep’.”

Mr Roberts immediately decided that Youthworks would provide churches in Burundi with free ministry resources, and Pastor Masabo replied, “Brother Craig, that is very generous! Are these resources only available in English?”

There was silence for a few moments, Mr Roberts says, “then I said, ‘What language would you like them to be in?’ He said, ‘Kirundi is the language of the children. Swahili is also good. We could get by with French.’ I said, ‘No worries, mate’ – not having a clue how Youthworks could do this!”

It was then that the series of coincidences led to Sydney Anglicans partnering with this struggling African church to produce a translation in three different languages.

“A few days later, I had a meeting with [the Rev] Naomi Ireland, the family and children’s minister at St Matthew’s, Manly,” Mr Roberts recalls. Amid conversation he jokingly asked her, “I don’t suppose you speak Kirundi?”... and quick as a flash, Naomi came back with, ‘You mean the language of Burundi?’

“So, four days after I’d promised to help Jean Jacques, I was on the phone to ‘Burundi Dave’ – St Matthew’s music minister, David Nduwimana.”

Mr Nduwimana was almost in tears at the thought of helping translate Youthworks’ signature youth ministry resource into his heart language. “I was really excited when I heard about this project to help youth in Burundi,” he says.

“I thought, ‘Yeah, this is the new generation. The country is still young. This is my opportunity to help them understand and follow Jesus. We need to make this happen’.”

The final piece of the puzzle came when Mr Roberts shared the story so far during a service at Life Anglican Church in Quakers Hill.

“I was interviewed up the front and asked to share something exciting happening at Youthworks,” he says. “I told the story of Jean Jacques and ‘Burundi Dave’. The senior minister, Geoff Bates, cut me off and said, ‘After church, you’ve got to meet that lady!’ and pointed to Eugénie Kathiabwa up the back of the church with her husband and children. Eugénie told me she had worked for the Burundi Department of Education, where her job was translating educational resources from English to Kirundi!

“So, in God’s magnificent providence, within a couple of weeks, he’d led me to two Burundian Christians in Sydney Anglican churches who were fluent in Kirundi, Swahili and French.”

The rest, Youthworks hopes, will be history. Mr Nduwimana and Mrs Kathiabwa have eagerly worked on translating *7 Principles of Effective Youth Discipleship* into three languages, so it can be made available free to churches in Africa, potentially impacting at least 150 million youth and children.

“Because of the political issues young people in Burundi are stuck,” Mr Nduwimana says. “They often get drawn into things to help them forget their situation like drugs, alcohol or joining rebel groups. Churches don’t have the resources to help.

“For me, the translation was like writing a song. When I sent my Swahili translation to Eugénie, I wasn’t sure what she was going to think about it. When she sent me a message saying, ‘Man, I like it. I don’t have so much to change in this’, I was like, ‘Yesssss!’ That was really encouraging.”

For Mrs Kathiabwa, too, it was rewarding work.

“When Craig Roberts was talking about Youthworks at church and he mentioned Burundi, I was so surprised that there is something which is happening in my country from here in Australia,” she says. “I couldn’t believe my ears!”

The new resource will be launched this year in Africa.

“For the people reading the resource, I would encourage them to take into consideration all the ideas in order to keep young people in the church, so they can grow in the faith,” Mrs Kathiabwa says. “This is a great thing.

“I want to say to people reading *Southern Cross*, keep praying and helping to work with young people and youth to help them grow in the faith. Because if the youth of a community or a country are believers, that country will be safe. We have a brilliant future.”



## St Paul’s pastor presents PTC

No barrier: Danny Au Yeung (left) with some of his Mandarin-language PTC students at Carlingford.

**The** Rev Danny Au Yeung, an assistant minister at St Paul’s, Carlingford, is a man on a mission. He wants to spread the use of a Mandarin translation of Moore College’s Preliminary Theological Certificate (PTC) among Chinese-speaking Christians.

“Chinese PTC is a very valuable resource to build up our lay people and prepare them for leadership among our Chinese congregations,” Mr Au Yeung says.

“It has been digitised and its six subjects are now available over the internet. This allows for flexible study and provides useful practice questions. But, in spite of its good potential, it has fallen out of use in the past two years or so.”

As a first step, St Paul’s, Carlingford launched the Chinese PTC in its Mandarin-speaking congregation and formed a group for three months to study the *Introduction to the Bible* or *Old Testament 1* units. Mr Au Yeung says he was “blown away” by the response.

“When registrations closed, we had 35 people sign up!” he told *Southern Cross*. “The aim is to raise people’s horizon to have a deeper appreciation of God’s wonderful plan of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures.

“At the end of the day, we need leaders who are deeply convicted and have a sound knowledge of the Bible, so that they can lead others to do likewise. Chinese PTC allows us to achieve this.”

One participant, Grace, says studying *Introduction to the Bible* “really helped me to understand the flow of the whole story within the Bible and how the books fit together”. Another student, Dong, says the *Old Testament 1* unit he studied deepened his knowledge about the purpose of Leviticus and Numbers, which are two books he had often struggled with.

The correspondence course uses the PTC material translated into Mandarin by Moore College’s Centre for Global Mission, and is run in conjunction with its ministry partner [www.mimaixuetang.com](http://www.mimaixuetang.com). It offers various checkpoints to give students further input and the opportunities to ask questions.

After testing the ground, Mr Au Yeung plans to make studying Chinese PTC a regular pattern of church life at Carlingford, with the possibility that other churches could link up to host groups and share resources.

“Prayerfully this can ignite a PTC movement to equip our leaders, since Chinese churches desperately need to raise up the next generation of Bible-loving leaders for growth,” he says.

For more information visit [www.mimaixuetang.com](http://www.mimaixuetang.com).



## Hope for the helpless



*New home: Barbara Ferguson has supported many women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

**Dr** Barbara Ferguson has fought for many causes in her life. Fifteen years ago she was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for her work in Australia, the Pacific Islands and especially for Vietnam War work with the wounded, refugees and orphans.

But her greatest struggle has come in the past 10 years after she took up the cause of rape-torture survivors and the forest-dwelling Pygmy people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From her work has come a not-for-profit humanitarian aid agency, Pygmy Child Care, which provides education, food and health care for about 150 children displaced by the conflict.

Now, Dr Ferguson has written a book titled *Don't Look Away*, chronicling this story. It begins in 2009 when, after reading of the plight of rape victims in the Congo, she ignored travel warnings to see for herself.

"I went to Africa thinking the eight years I worked in war-torn South Vietnam as a young woman had prepared me, but Congo was a much greater challenge," Dr Ferguson told the book launch at her home church of St Mark's, South Hurstville.

"I do believe God has called me to be in solidarity with the Pygmies, the excluded, the exploited, the least of his children, the last, who will be the first."

Her congregation has been very supportive of her efforts since this first trip. Another supporter is Sydney's Bishop for International Relations, Malcolm Richards, who Dr Ferguson met in the Congolese city of Goma when he was a CMS missionary in the country.

At the launch, Bishop Richards told the congregation that "The Congo is one of the most fragile countries in the world, and its Pygmy people are the worst-off people in the entire country."

He added that Dr Ferguson's work had brought hope to the Pygmies: "Not just hope in this world but spiritual hope as well. The project has connected the Anglican Church in Goma with the Pygmy community and now they have a village where they hear the good news of Jesus.

"This book tells the story of Barbara's ministry to the Pygmies of Mubambiro, and puts it front and centre before us. Don't look away!"

Throughout her 10 visits to the Congo and extensive work setting up the infrastructure needed to support the children, Dr Ferguson has encountered both amazing help and hindrance.

"I describe, in chapter six of the book, my confrontation with a Congolese army colonel who had taken over the not-yet-completed building I had provided for the child care, literacy and sewing classes and for worship services on Sundays," she said. "He was eventually evicted with the help of UN troops from India!"



*Good news: A new believer is baptised; Dr Ferguson with some of the Pygmy children.*

Dr Ferguson's fight is undiminished but time is taking its toll: "In my 80th year, the travel to Congo is becoming too much for me. My beloved brothers are conspiring to confiscate my passport – but it is well hidden. Now, through a series of serendipitous events, God has given me a succession plan in my 'adopted' Congolese family."

She said that Blaise, a refugee from Congo, will gain citizenship and an Australian passport in two years' time, so will then be able to take over the role of travelling to Mubambiro to check on the program. But even then, Dr Ferguson has no intention of looking away.

"By his grace and in his strength I will stand with them till they no longer need me, or the day I die," she said.

Tax-free donations can be made to Pygmy Child Care via the Global Development Group ([www.gdg.org.au/InfoJ893N](http://www.gdg.org.au/InfoJ893N)). Order the book at [www.morningstarpublishing.net.au](http://www.morningstarpublishing.net.au)



# Praying in faith for our land



Dr Glenn Davies

**W***ater* is one of the wonderful gifts of God’s creation. It is the first mentioned element when God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:2) and features on days 2, 3 and 5 of the creation narrative. In the second chapter of Genesis, water is identified as essential for bringing forth new life: ‘for no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth’ (Genesis 2:5).

We all know what it means to be deprived of rain. While our continent is the driest in the world, our current experience of both drought and bushfire make our prayers for rain even more pressing, as only God can send rain. Only he rules the heavens and the earth (Psalms 65:9-10; 147:8; Jeremiah 14:22). We must continue to pray for rain and claim God’s promises in Genesis 8:22.

*As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night,  
will never cease.*

Yet while water is a blessing in God’s creation in bringing forth life, after Adam’s rebellion against God water also becomes a symbol of judgment. Sometimes the deprivation of rain is a judgment of God (Deuteronomy 28:22-24; 1 Kings 17:1); while on the other hand too much water can also reflect God’s judgment, as in the days of Noah and Moses, when God’s people were saved from drowning, but the ungodly perished in the waters. Of course, we only know that these are divine judgments because God reveals that to us in Scripture.

While God commands the rain to fall or not to fall, it would be unwise to draw any direct causal relationship between either drought or flood and the behaviour of those experiencing such hardships today. There is no basis in Scripture for us to infer that too much or too little rain is a specific judgment of God upon the earth and its inhabitants, any more than rain after a drought reflects God’s exoneration of humankind, for he sends rain to fall upon the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).

When Jesus was asked a similar question about causal links between calamity and sin, he strongly rejects drawing a straight line between them. In John’s Gospel the disciples ask Jesus, upon seeing a man blind from birth, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Their premise was clearly wrong in seeking to identify the cause of the man’s blindness in sinful human actions, which could be immediately traced to the man’s condition.

Jesus responds that it was neither this man’s sin nor his parents’ sin that was the cause. In fact, Jesus declares that God’s purpose in this case was to bring glory to himself in healing the man’s blindness.

Moreover, Jesus uses the incident to draw a more important lesson, namely, that any calamity should cause us to ponder our response to God and his Son, Jesus. In other words, when God’s usual blessings are withheld, we should neither blame God nor should we be tempted to think God does not care, or worse, that he does not exist. Rather, calamities such as blindness or drought are opportunities for us to respond to Jesus, the light of the world: for the time will come when we shall lose that opportunity of responding to God’s grace in Christ Jesus (John 9:3-5).

A similar point is made by Jesus in Luke’s Gospel when asked about the death of some Galileans at the hand of Pilate, as to whether they were worse sinners because they suffered in this way. On the contrary, replies Jesus, neither they, nor those who perished when the tower of Siloam collapsed upon them, were being punished for particular sins. Rather, such calamities happen in this world so that people might become aware of their own sins, their need to repent and turn back to God, lest they perish (Luke 13:1-5).

We live in a world which is marred by the effects of sin. We live in what theologians call a “fallen world”. It is no longer the pristine Garden of Eden but the weary world of death, disease and decay – groaning, as it were, awaiting its own redemption (Romans 8:22). Yet God is a merciful God and uses calamities to awaken our slumber, so that we might recognise the illusory nature of our self-sufficiency. C.S. Lewis makes the same point about pain in his poignant monograph, *The Problem of Pain*:

*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world* (p 91).

Pain, calamity or any kind of suffering is God’s wake-up call to us all. We cannot make it rain. Only God can do that. We can build dams, take preventive action to store water and heed the scientific warnings about climate change, but we are dependent upon a Sovereign, all-loving God to whom we cry out that it might rain.

We offer our prayers, not on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of his promises to hear us when we pray. It was a wonderful sight to see God’s blessing of rain upon our parched earth in January and we pray for more, but it would be yet more wonderful to see Australians turning back to God in repentance and faith. Let us pray for both outcomes.

SC

## A PRAYER FOR AUSTRALIA IN DROUGHT AND FIRE

Our heavenly Father, creator of all things and especially the creator of this land and its original peoples, we call out to you in these desperate times. Our hearts cry out to you for those who have lost loved ones, and those who have lost properties in the wake of recent, ravaging fires.

Father we pray, in your mercy, restrain the forces of nature from creating more damage; in your mercy protect human life. Thank you for all volunteers, Rural Fire Service personnel and emergency services who selflessly step into the breach to fight bushfires. Thank you for the work of police and authorities who helped evacuate and shelter those who were displaced. Bring comfort and healing to all who suffer loss.

Remembering your promises of old that seedtime and harvest will never cease, we pray that you would once again open the heavens to send refreshing rain upon our parched land. In your mercy, we prayed for rain and you answered these prayers, when, despite the forecasts, you brought forth rain to quench many fires in January. Again show us your mercy by breaking the drought across our land and bringing life back into the earth, so that crops may grow and farmers may bring forth their harvest once again. We bring these requests to you, in the name of your Son, who died and rose again for our deliverance. Amen





# Training ministers of the word in a semi-literate world

Ready to serve: Bible school graduates in the Diocese of Kindu.

*We want to help students across the world understand and teach the Bible – but not everyone learns the same way, writes MALCOLM RICHARDS.*

*In 2005 my wife Elizabeth and I were sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to work in an isolated diocese in the centre of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – the Diocese of Kindu on the Congo River.*

When we arrived, Masimango Katanda, the diocesan bishop and now Archbishop of Congo, appointed me head of theological education in the diocese. He pointed to a block of land that looked like revegetated jungle and told me to start a Bible school so that parish-based gospel workers could be trained. The country had been at war for seven years and not much had survived. All church buildings, bibles, books and other resources had been destroyed.

Building anything in such a country brought logistical challenges. In this isolated part of Congo, building materials were scarce and expensive and a functional institution was an unknown quantity in a country where nothing else was functioning. However, as planning for the new Bible school got under way, we realised that an even bigger challenge would be designing a suitable curriculum to prepare people for word-based ministry.

## SEMI-LITERATE STUDENTS

A key issue that confronted us was the low literacy level of our prospective students. Christianity – especially evangelical Christianity – is a word-based religion, so the models of ministry are word based.

On one hand, literacy is not a prerequisite for salvation as oral learners can hear the Bible taught and learn to follow Jesus faithfully. On the other hand, words need to be read and comprehended by some in the community if faithful ministry is to happen.

While in Australia we take for granted that our schooling system will produce people with good comprehension skills and critical thinking, in Congo and many parts of the majority world this is not the case. A typical student starting at our Bible school would have completed three or four years of high school. If asked, students could read any passage of the Bible aloud. However, when asked questions about the passage, most would be unable to interact with the Bible text to find the answers. Any answers given would be based on information previously learned in another context.

Despite years of education, our students start Bible school as semi-literate (or functionally illiterate), so the task of learning basic word ministry skills is difficult.

An example would be learning to preach or prepare a Bible study. While in our context we would assume the ability of the student to comprehend the big idea of a Bible passage as a first step in preparation, this is not the case for those with limited literacy.

In some cases, teaching people to find the big idea of a passage is an endeavour that takes months or years.

## CONTEXT-DEPENDENT LEARNERS

A further issue in curriculum design is the recognition that most of our students are context-dependent learners. This means that information for information's sake is not retained easily.

Learning is facilitated when the student has a context for the information being received – that is, he or she can easily see how the information will be used, now or in the future. It is estimated that at a sizable proportion of those from Western cultures are contextual learners, but this figure is closer to 90 per cent of people from the majority world.

For example, the traditional design of a Bible school syllabus would include streams of information in Biblical Studies, Christian Thought and Ministry, without integration principles for current or future ministry. For students that are context-dependent learners, something more integrated but still solidly biblical is needed so they can be properly equipped.

## HOW CAN THE CENTRE FOR GLOBAL MISSION (CGM) HELP?

Back in 2005, together with the team in Kindu, I developed a three-year syllabus for our Bible school that took these issues into account. The Bible school is still functioning and has trained well over half the full-time ministry workers in the diocese.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest the graduates are better prepared for ministry than the students who were taught before them with a more traditional syllabus. They are now able to effectively use the word of God in their regular ministries. That syllabus, and all the courses, were written in Congolese Swahili and they now require a full revision so future Bible school students can learn and serve God most effectively.

CGM is a ministry of Moore Theological College that seeks to serve the wider church by providing theological education resources. We receive requests from churches and organisations around the world asking for help with resources to train ministry workers.

The main resource we currently offer is the translation of the Moore College correspondence course material (better known as the Preliminary Theological Certificate, or PTC). This resource continues to be an effective tool in many contexts, and we remain firmly committed to its development.

However, there is sometimes a need for different training material that takes into account student literacy and context-dependent learning. In these places, Moore College recognises the need to find, identify or develop training resources that are effective and context-appropriate, and do this through the ministry of CGM.

The need for such resources is not isolated to the majority world. Many involved in parish ministry in Australia will recognise that the same issues apply in their ministry, where church members do not possess high-level literacy skills and may well be context-dependent learners.

If we are to find a solution to these requests for help, it will take an extended time and significant investment. We would value your prayers and partnership as CGM seeks to address these issues. **SC**

For more information about CGM, go to [cgm.moore.edu.au](http://cgm.moore.edu.au)

Bishop Malcolm Richards is the director of Moore College's Centre for Global Mission.



*Bishop abroad: Malcolm Richards last July at the Congo River in Kindu.*



*Crossing the river: Archbishop Masimango Katanda and his wife Naomi.*



# Jesus' response to rising opposition



*Are we willing to really love our enemies, asks TIM SWAN.*

**I**n April 2014 the Islamic militant group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Christian girls from their high school in northern Nigeria. Almost six years later more than 100 girls are still missing, and over 1000 other children have been kidnapped. Christians in the area are being told to leave their homes or be killed, churches are being bombed, Christians are being tortured and martyred.

Recently I was sent a song written in the Christian area of Moskota, which was attacked in Cameroon. Some of the lyrics said:

*Moskota village has become the scene of the agonies of Boko Haram.*

*Only the dead, only the displaced...*

*Our founder Pastor Mokoni paid the price.*

*And when a pastor falls in Africa doesn't that mean anything?*

Christians face horrific persecution in many countries and, to a much smaller extent, there is rising opposition in Australia. How should we respond? Should we stay under the radar at work so we never face opposition? And should we make sure never to send missionaries to countries where they may be killed for their faith?

On the other hand, should I offer to go as a missionary to somewhere like Cameroon? Should I encourage people to go and tell members of Boko Haram that Jesus died for their sins, that unless they turn to God they are damned, but that Jesus offers forgiveness and grace and a place in his kingdom to glorify God forever?

In Luke 6, we see Jesus modelling and teaching how to respond to rising opposition. In 6:11 we read that the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders had become Jesus' enemies and were seeking to destroy him.

## A VISION FOR THE KINGDOM

Jesus knew the world's salvation depended on his going to the cross, and the proclamation of the gospel message, through suffering, for the joy of all peoples. So, he prayed and appointed 12 apostles to train and send out, as he said, as sheep among wolves. To carry the gospel amid enemy territory, knowing most of them would be crucified as he would be.

He called his disciples together and gave them a vision for the kingdom of God, showing it by healing the sick and sharing about kingdom promises, where the hungry will be satisfied and his people leap for joy. The crowd of disciples in Luke 6 would soon be ridiculed for trusting in Jesus. They'd be cast out of the synagogues and cut out of society by powerful enemies of Jesus like the Pharisees.

The 12 apostles would carry the gospel to the ends of the earth – run out of city after city; stoned, beaten, crucified. That is the context into which Jesus said, "I say to all who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you (6:27-28).

Perhaps people at work sneer at you because of your faith and block a promotion. But Jesus says, "love your enemies". We say, "Jesus, how?" And why would anyone do that?

In verse 35 he gives two reasons. The first: "your reward will be great".

Many people work for a reward from a boss. Here, Jesus talks about receiving a reward from God himself – the creator of all things, who created you to love your enemies and glorify him.

In verse 38 Jesus says of this reward, "give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap". Some say this promises prosperity in this life. We know that's not true because he's already said in verse 21 that in this life you will be hungry and weep, you'll be reviled for following him, but your reward is great in heaven. *That* is a powerful reason to love your enemies.

Jesus' second reason is that "you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful". So, love your enemies because by doing so you will show the world you are a son of the Most High. Isn't that the most precious thing? If you've come to Jesus, you are his son or daughter. Love your enemies and you will show the world something supernatural has happened to you. It will be inexplicable until you say: it's because God loves me and is merciful and kind to me.

I read about a man in Morocco whose first exposure to the gospel was satellite TV. While watching, he heard Christians praying for all people – whereas a standard Muslim prayer was for Allah to kill all non-Muslims. This man saw a prayer, and it led him to Christ. If a Christian keeps on loving when anyone else would have stopped, it's evident they are a child of God.

Some have suggested this is unrealistic. Jesus must be exaggerating; we're not *literally* meant to turn the other cheek. But didn't Isaiah prophesy of Jesus that he gave his cheeks to those who pulled out his beard (Isaiah 50:6)? Don't we read that Jesus didn't withhold his clothing and the soldiers cast lots for it? And when he was cursed, didn't he pray for them, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"? And didn't he lay down his life to take away the sins of those yet his enemies?

Did not Jesus, by loving his enemies, show the depth, width and height of God's mercy towards sinful, undeserving human beings like me and you? And did he not, by loving his enemies, bring us into his kingdom? So, when he says, "Love your enemies" this is not exaggeration. This is how the heirs of the kingdom, the brothers and sisters of Christ, are to act.

You might say, "Tim, I find it hard enough to love members of my own family. If I was in Nigeria and someone broke into my home, kidnapped my daughters and burnt down my house I would find it very hard to love them, pray for them and bless them".

Of course you would. So how is this possible? In verse 39 Jesus told four mini parables about putting this into practice.

## LOVE IN PRACTICE

<sup>1</sup> "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?"

Those blind to loving their enemies can't lead others. The Pharisees can't lead on this. The Romans can't teach you this. But here's the good news: a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher (v40). And who's the teacher? Jesus. The one who did love his enemies. Our trouble is that we too often look on the horizontal. We look around and say, 'At least I'm more loving than *that* guy'.

<sup>2</sup> So, "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye" (v42).

Two things need to happen for people to be fully trained and love their enemies. Take the log from your own eye, then take the speck out of your brother's eye. The goal is that both you and your brother grow to be more like Jesus your teacher!

Is there a log in your eye? Will you remove it? Imagine if all Christians were log-free, able to see clearly to help their brothers and sisters become fully trained like Jesus.

In the Greek this section says, "take out the log, take out the speck, because no good tree bears bad fruit". If you're a good tree, you'll get rid of the log and bear fruit! You'll get rid of the log and see clearly. You'll help others.

<sup>3</sup> "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart" (6:45).

Moses said again and again of the law: "Take these words to heart" (Deuteronomy 11:18; 32:46). Psalm 119:11 says of the godly man: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you".

This is how Jesus' disciples bear fruit. That's why you read your Bible and go to church and Bible study each week: to lay up God's word in your hearts that you might become like Jesus, bear good fruit and so love your enemies. So, treasure up God's word in your heart.

<sup>4</sup> Build your house on the rock or the sand (vv46-49).

It took me until quite recently to realise this wasn't about where it's better to build a house. The lesson is to put God's word into practice: don't just hear it, do it! The 12 apostles put Jesus' words into practice. They loved their enemies, praying for kings and all in authority. They blessed Jews and Gentiles with the message of the kingdom, not shrinking back from calling the world to believe.

The floods and torrents of life came but the house built on the rock stood firm. They became like their teacher. They took the logs from their eyes, treasured up God's word, produced good fruit, showed themselves sons of the Most High – and great is their reward in heaven. Through their witness, God gathered multitudes into the kingdom to glorify him.

## THE "M" WORD

The apostles didn't shy away from going to hostile cities or speaking the gospel to enemies of the cross, and all were martyred except John. Should they have pulled back from preaching under opposition? Was persecution and martyrdom a defeat? Do we say, "Oh, poor Peter, James, John and Andrew, if only they'd gone back to fishing, they could have had comfortable lives? If only Matthew had stayed working for the Roman tax department?"

No. We rejoice that they gave their lives. We rejoice that they loved their enemies, showing what it is to be a son of the Most High. We rejoice that through their love, multitudes were saved.

When you read testimonies from the early church, many of them hoped for martyrdom. Yet I don't think we speak about it much in our circles. The apostle Andrew, for example, preached the gospel in Scythia, Colchis, Greece, Epirus and Achaia – where he was crucified. He welcomed his martyrdom, hung on the cross for three days and continued to proclaim Christ, with the result that many onlookers began to believe in Jesus.

Have we stopped loving our enemies and going to them because we're now afraid of being uncomfortable for Christ? According to Open Doors, 11 Christians are killed every day for following Christ – including in areas where CMS and Anglican Aid are working. It could be one of us. But is martyrdom now unthinkable for Australian Christians? How would you feel if your son, daughter or friend went to Afghanistan, loved enemies of the gospel, shared Christ with them, and then was killed? The Bible would take that as a victory. Would you? Would you rather your tombstone read, "Passed away peacefully aged 97", or "Martyred for proclaiming Christ"?

I've been reading the supremely convicting biography of John Paton, who in the 1880s was a missionary to cannibals living on the islands now known as Vanuatu. Any missionary knew that others before them had been clubbed to death and, literally, eaten.

But missionaries like Paton kept going there for the love of these enemies of the gospel, praying that one day they might know Jesus, be set free from bondage and gathered around the throne of God in heaven. The blood of more than 100 missionaries was shed loving Vanuatu. One converted islander recounted, "The danger was very great, but [we saw] that they were willing to die for us". Now Vanuatu counts itself as 90 per cent Christian.

When Christians are like Jesus in being willing to die to bring a people the gospel, sooner or later some on the field and in the sending nation start to pay attention.

I've heard sermons on Luke 6 say loving your enemies means loving those who annoy you at work, that annoying brother or sister at home, and actively planning how you can bless them, pray for them and share the gospel with them. That is absolutely true. As a Christian you must do that. But loving your enemies doesn't stop there. It will include, yes, loving Facebook trolls and responding with the gospel. It will include lovingly engaging with journalists and academics.

It also includes loving those who are hostile to the gospel such as Boko Haram. It means praying and supporting our brothers and sisters in places of persecution. It means praying for Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Afghanistan and North Korea. It may mean going; it may mean giving your life.

If you're of retirement age, it may mean that instead of going to a retirement village you go and preach the gospel to Boko Haram. If you're younger, it may mean gathering others to go to a hostile people group with the gospel. For a world to know Jesus, we must show the world how Jesus loved his enemies.

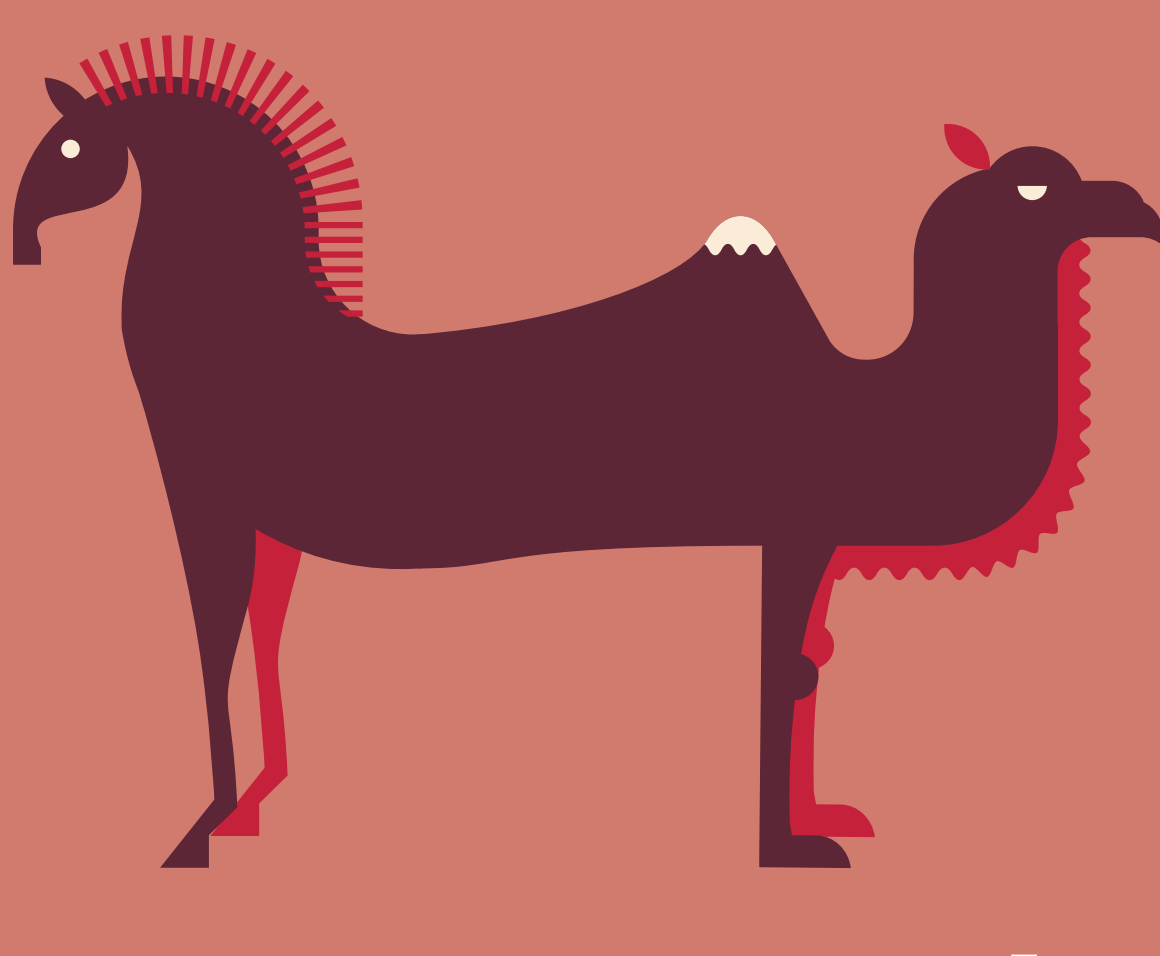
My prayer is that in this context of rising opposition to Christian faith, in Australia and across the world, we might follow Jesus' example in Luke 6. When his enemies were trying to destroy him, he didn't shrink back. He raised his voice in prayer, raised up new leaders to send to the ends of the earth, showed and taught the glory of the kingdom of God and taught his disciples to love their enemies.

So, let's not leave the log in our eyes and just be hearers, but remove it and help with the speck in our brother's eye. Let's store up good in our hearts that we might produce good works.

And from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, from northern Nigeria to North Korea to Sydney's North Shore, let's follow Jesus' words and love our enemies, showing ourselves to be sons of the Most High, heirs of the kingdom of God.

To the glory of God forever.





# Horse or camel?

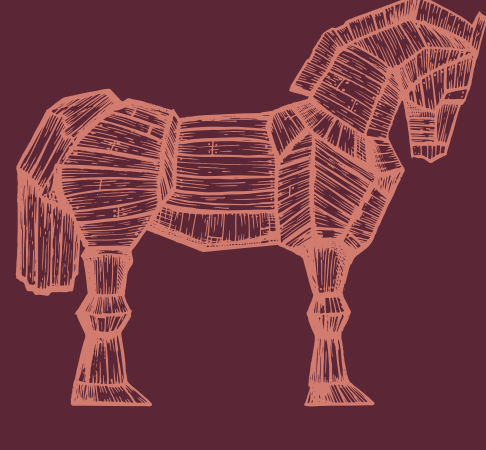
Michael Stead

**A**ccording to comedian Allan Sherman, a camel is a horse that was designed by a committee. The Federal Government released the second exposure draft of the Religious Discrimination Bill in December, which sought to address concerns that had been raised in the consultation process with faith leaders and others. While this exposure draft is a significant improvement on the first version, the piecemeal approach to addressing some issues means that the Bill is beginning to look more like a camel than a horse.

The drafting of the Religious Discrimination Bill was always going to be a challenge, because it is modelled on existing anti-discrimination legislation. Other anti-discrimination legislation protects *individuals* against discrimination. However, when it comes to religious belief, there is an added dimension, because religious belief is expressed in association with others. This means that a Religious Discrimination Bill needs to protect both the right of a religious individual to manifest his or her faith and the right of groups of religious people to run religious institutions as a manifestation of their faith.

The Religious Discrimination Bill seeks to provide this double protection. It protects a person from discrimination on the basis of religion – for example, being denied employment because of religion, or being denied goods or services because of religion. At the same time, it also protects religious institutions from being forced to operate against their faith – for example, being required to employ someone who is hostile to the religious basis of that institution, or to allow their property to be used for activities contrary to their religion.

The Bill recognises it is *not* discrimination when a religious institution positively preferences staff who share the religious faith of that institution – a Muslim school that seeks to employ Muslim teachers is not discriminating *against* Buddhists, Christians and Jews (for example), in the sense that they are objecting to these faiths in particular. There are merely seeking staff who align with the religious ethos of their institution.



## A TROJAN HORSE?

Some public commentary on the Religious Discrimination Bill has mistakenly claimed it will increase discrimination against the LGBTI community. This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the Bill. The Religious Discrimination Act 1984 has nothing to do with discrimination on the basis of sexuality – that is a matter for the Sex Discrimination Act 1984.

To allay these concerns, the second exposure draft now has this note added to key provisions: “This subsection does not permit conduct that is otherwise unlawful under any other law of the Commonwealth, including the Sex Discrimination Act 1984.”

Similarly, the note added to clause 8(6) in relation to health practitioner conduct rules makes it clear that the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 would continue to apply if, for example, a medical practitioner refused to provide a service on the basis of a person’s sexual orientation.

This makes clear – despite claims to the contrary – that the Religious Discrimination Bill does not permit a religious body to discriminate on the basis of sexuality (or race, age or disability), nor does it allow a medical practitioner to discriminate on the basis of the sexuality of a patient. Something that is currently unlawful discrimination will remain unlawful discrimination.

The only slight qualification to this is in relation to statements of belief. Clause 42 says that a mere statement of belief, in and of itself, does not constitute discrimination. This is arguably nothing more than a statement of the current law and, if so, then its only impact is to limit the overreach of a clause in the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (which led to the Porteous complaint), and to limit future overreach in other jurisdictions.

One of the key areas of concern raised by faith leaders about the first draft of the Bill was that the definition of “religious body” excluded many religious charities such as faith-based hospitals, aged care centres and campsites.

The Government has responded to these concerns by expanding the definition of “religious body” to include all religious public benevolent institutions (PBIs), and providing specific (more limited) exemptions for religious hospitals, aged care providers, and camp operators.

While these amendments address (to a degree) the examples raised with the Government, it is a clunky solution – or, to return to the camel metaphor, it is decidedly “lumpy”. It makes no sense to use PBI status as the arbiter of religious purpose. The exemptions are too specific – what about faith-based residential colleges? What about faith-based publishers? The Bill will end up with a multiplicity of exceptions, and then exceptions to the exceptions.

Other key changes in the latest exposure draft include the following:

- The Bill now makes clear that it is permissible for a religious institution to give preference in employment to those who share the faith of that institution.
- A new provision has been added that extends the protections against discrimination to an individual or corporation that “has an association with an individual who holds or engages in a religious belief or activity in the same way as it applies to a person who holds or engages in a religious belief or activity”.
- The Bill (rightly) does not protect statements of belief that “vilify”. However, the first draft had no definition of vilification. The second draft corrects this omission - vilify means “incite hatred or violence towards [a] person”.
- Qualifying bodies are now prevented from imposing rules (such as social media codes of conduct) that restrict people from making statements of belief in their personal capacity, unless they are an essential requirement of the relevant profession, trade or occupation.
- Local council by-laws (e.g. a council that bans street preaching) are no longer relevant in determining the limits of “lawful religious activity”.
- The courts are no longer the sole arbiter of what is “reasonably” in accordance with a particular religion. The test is now whether “a person of the same religion” could reasonably consider something to be in accordance with their particular religion.

While this Bill is a positive step forward, there is clearly more work that needs to be done. The Attorney-General invited submissions on the revised exposure draft, and the Sydney Diocese, along with other faith groups, have made submissions recommending further improvements – particularly in relation to definition of a religious body – to ensure that the final Bill is more horse and less camel.

Once the Attorney-General’s department has considered these submissions, the Bill will be introduced to Parliament in the coming months, and then referred to the Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to allow for further public consultation. Depending on the timing of the report, it may be mid-2020 or later before the Bill comes back to the Lower House for consideration.

SC

The Right Rev Michael Stead is Bishop of the South Sydney Region.

# Abortion or adoption

Kara Hartley

**L**ast September the NSW Parliament passed the Abortion Law Reform Bill, which effectively decriminalised abortion in the state.

The Sydney Anglican Synod met shortly afterwards, and so took the opportunity to pass a motion expressing its regret at the passing of the Bill. The final clause urged Christians to advocate for reforms to laws and policies relating to adoption and fostering. Essentially, the hope is for adoption to be an easier, more realistic option for women considering an abortion, as well as offering the possibility for children to grow up in a safe and nurturing family.

As a kid of the '70s I was surrounded by children who were adopted. I don’t think I fully appreciated what that meant at the time, but it turned out that in my quiet street there were four families who had adopted children. At my local primary school, we had children from two local foster families. These were the days before abortion was commonplace. As an adult I have friends who were adopted. I’ve shared a house with a friend who is adopted, and my husband is adopted. In his case, his adoptive parents took him home from the hospital to join their family.

According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in the decades prior to the mid-1970s it was common in Australia for the babies of unwed mothers to be adopted. The peak years for adoption were 1971-72, when almost 10,000 adoptions took place. These statistics don’t speak to the complexity around adoption in this era. Social stigma regarding unwed mothers, economic restrictions and the practice of closed and even forced adoptions have in some cases caused trauma for mothers and their adopted children. Notwithstanding these hurtful experiences, adoption was seen as a valuable and important approach to caring for and protecting children.

Today the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. There were 310 adoptions finalised in Australia in 2018-19, with 82 per cent of these being Australian children. There has been a 64 per cent decline in adoptions since 1994-95. There are a number of factors affecting adoption numbers, including declining fertility rates, availability of birth control and increased support for single parents.

According to Anglicare there is also a significant decline in the number of women voluntarily relinquishing their children at birth. In recent years most children who are adopted were previously the subject of a court order or formally in the care of the Minister for Family Services and could never be safely returned to their birth parents.

Yet while lower adoption rates continue, they do so alongside an increasing number of abortions. The ABC reports there were approximately 65,000 terminations in 2017, which is apparently less than is commonly understood.

To be clear, this isn’t to say adoption is the natural, direct response to reducing abortions, but it’s certainly true adoption can provide a safe and nurturing environment for the most vulnerable among us and should be offered as an alternative to abortion. Sadly though, the path toward adoption, while needing great wisdom and care, can be a lengthy and difficult process.

Adoption is a concept very familiar to Christians. It lies at the heart of our relationship with God. He has adopted us in Christ (Ephesians 1:5), making us his sons and daughters. Having been outside the family of God, actually his enemies, through Christ we are no longer slaves. We can now call God *Abba*, Father (Romans 8:14-17).

Adoption is something we know, perhaps in a more profound way than any other group in society. We know it comes from the heart of a kind, compassionate, loving God. So given our Church, through the Synod, agreed to advocate for changes in legislation for adoption, my hope is that this short article will contribute to a bigger conversation about how the local church and individual believers can actively support the adoption and fostering of children in Australia.

Anglicare makes a very worthwhile contribution in this regard and there are many Christian families who have sought to adopt and foster children. Yet there’s more to be done.

As I consider my husband – not only adopted into an earthly family but now adopted into God’s family as he was raised to know Jesus – I am reminded that in God’s providence we have the opportunity to not only provide earthly care and kindness to the most vulnerable, but eternal hope and confidence. Let’s see if we can continue to live out the call of our Synod motion.

SC

The Ven Kara Hartley is Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry in the Sydney Diocese.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### NAVIGATING “FAKE NEWS”

Thanks for Scott Monk’s oped feature piece on the media (SC, December 2019).

I felt a few items could be added to his list of things Christians should do when navigating the “choppy waters” of “truth v fake news”:

1. The media and we readers/consumers are tainted by sin.

If you want the news to be perfect, good luck with that – the media is tainted by sin in the framing of the news and in reporting it. In addition, journos (who write the articles) and subeditors (who write the headlines) make mistakes. Newsrooms are busy and deadlines are very short.

Our reading of the news is also tainted by sin. We use the confirmation bias as a lens to filter the news through, seeking out stories that reinforce our own opinions and discarding those that might challenge our thinking.

2. Avoid using the term “fake news”.

It is a catchy term used by authoritarian regimes and political leaders who don’t want the public scrutiny the media brings. Regimes and leaders use it to discredit news that doesn’t make them look good.

Calling something “fake news” is designed to throw people off (nothing to see here) and shut down discussion. Instead it should make us ask why they are so defensive.

A diverse, free media has an important role in a democratic society. It will never be perfect, but we should support it and advocate for it.

I have heard the media attacked from the pulpit and I think the pulpit is for more important messages – especially when some of the parishioners in our churches come from countries where the media is a government mouthpiece and truth is officially suppressed.

3. Check before you share.

In his excellent book *Talking to Strangers*, Malcolm Gladwell says we tend to “default to truth”.

We humans mostly take what people say at face value and need a lot of evidence before we disbelieve someone. Research also shows we are hopeless at judging when the truth is being told to us.

Social media allows deliberate lies, distortions of the truth – and just plain unchecked information – to be shared widely and quickly. Check facts when you can and reread the article or post before you hit “share”.

Carrie Bengston  
Clovelly

In his article “Truth v fake news”, Scott Monk bemoans the fact that “Facts are optional... Opinion is king”. Later, he quite rightly condemns *The Washington Post’s* description of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as an “austere religion scholar”.

He then adds that the headline “revealed a pandering to the elites and their current social justice agendas”. Fact or opinion?

Marie McInnes  
Springwood

### WHAT AN ENCOURAGEMENT!

How encouraging it is when we hear of senior ministers and assistant ministers in our Diocese prepared to uproot their families and move on to a new challenge in ministry.

Sometimes ministry couples can become too settled and comfortable to even prayerfully consider an approach from another church within our Diocese, let alone one in another state or outback Australia.

With so many parishes without a permanent senior minister, the task of parish nominators is very difficult. We in the beautiful Illawarra and Shoalhaven have several vacant parishes at present with church members longing for leadership and plenty of opportunities to make the gospel known to the lost of our area.

We are excited that Oak Flats, Berry and Gerringong have recently been able to welcome new excellent ministers while Bomaderry, Kangaroo Valley, Shoalhaven Heads, Albion Park, Bulli and Dapto, to name a few, are still looking.

Pray that the Lord of the harvest will convict other ministers to prayerfully consider a move.

David Mulready  
Acting rector of Bomaderry (since October 2018)

### RETIREMENT SERVICE

I’ll briefly comment on some thoughts that came to me after reading the article by Chris Edwards (SC, December).

Regrettably there are retirees who have an expectation that all Christian retirees should use their time in visible service areas.

It is an assumption that time in retirement is wasted by those who choose to travel, enjoy a slower pace of life, read, relax and anticipate the unexpected.

If we have an attitude of availability for God to work through us, any input we have in the lives of grandchildren, neighbours, casual acquaintances and friends must be just as significant for the kingdom as those who retrain for service in their retirement.

Annette Lawrence  
Nowra

### PREACH, HEAR, OBEY

As an octogenarian organist I will resist the urge to comment on church music, as Dave Parker does in his thoughtful essay on “The battle of church” (SC, December) – although I think some churches have thrown out the baby, the bath and the bathwater.

Instead, a few comments about sermons come to mind. If we imply that the method usually used in sermons is “the lecture model” we are admitting there is something quite wrong with the sermons we hear. I would argue that most of the sermons I hear are quite rightly not lectures in the sense we normally give to that term.

The method of delivering a sermon varies from one preacher to another, but one thing a sermon must have is passion, exhorting the listeners and pleading with them while teaching them. Some good preachers carry out that task in a quiet and reserved way while some, including many great men of the past, can be quite demonstrative and loud.

As we sit and listen to the sermon our hearts should be lifted, our consciences softened and our minds enlightened. If people give the impression that they can’t sit and be inspired by the word of God for 20 or 30 minutes the fault lies with them.

Preachers, of course, have to ensure that their sermons really *are* sermons and are not boring, but that’s for them to deal with. Our role as listeners is to hear and obey the word and, of course, we should pray for our preachers and encourage them.

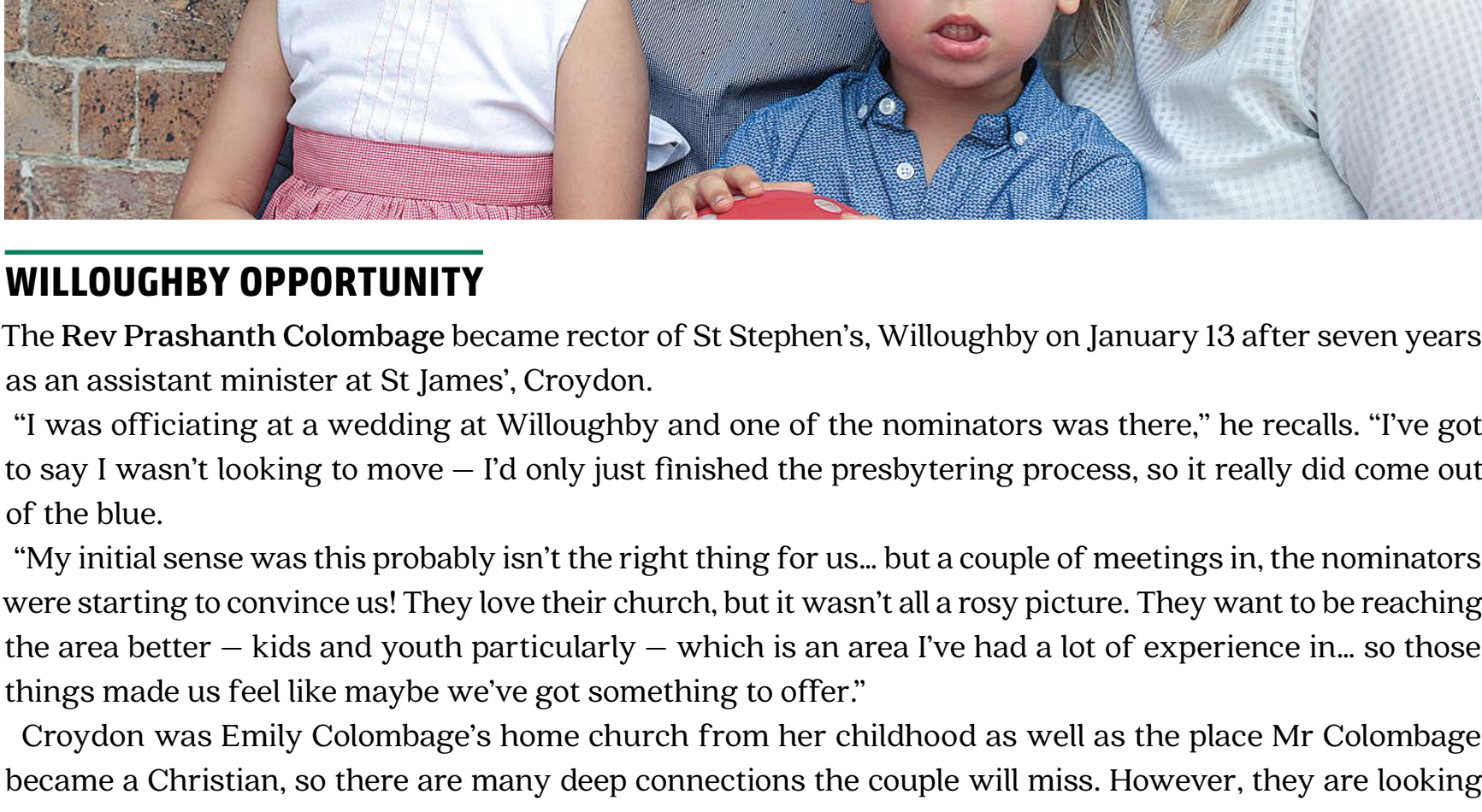
Those I have read about who send text messages to others about the sermon – while it is being preached – seriously miss what listening to a preacher is all about.

David Morrison  
Springwood

Letters should aim to be less than 200 words.

Send to: newspaper@anglicanmedia.com.au or PO Box W185, Parramatta Westfield 2150

## CLERGY MOVES



### WILLOUGHBY OPPORTUNITY

The Rev Prashanth Colombage became rector of St Stephen’s, Willoughby on January 13 after seven years as an assistant minister at St James’, Croydon.

“I was officiating at a wedding at Willoughby and one of the nominators was there,” he recalls. “I’ve got to say I wasn’t looking to move – I’d only just finished the presbytering process, so it really did come out of the blue.

“My initial sense was this probably isn’t the right thing for us... but a couple of meetings in, the nominators were better to convince us! They love their church, but it wasn’t all a rosy picture. They want to be reaching the area better – kids and youth particularly – which is an area I’ve had a lot of experience in... so those things made us feel like maybe we’ve got something to offer.”

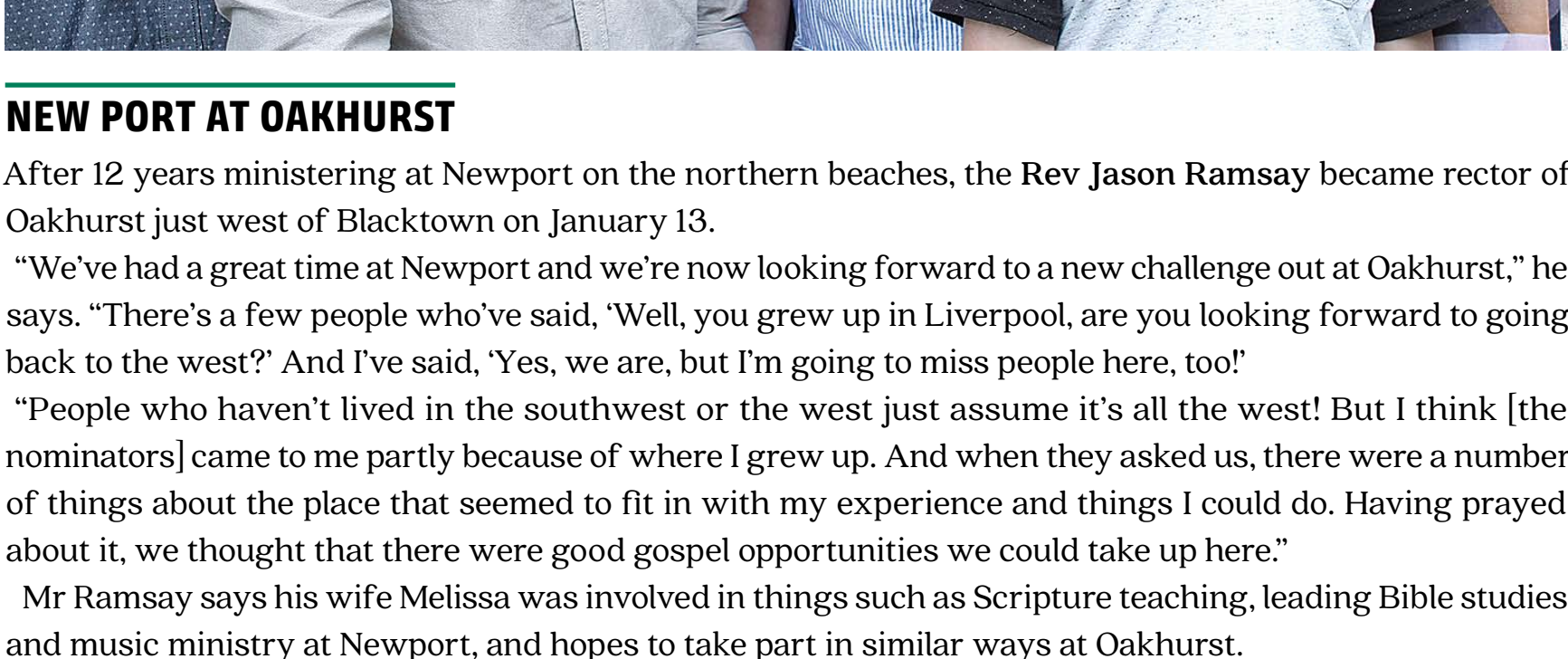
Croydon was Emily Colombage’s home church from her childhood as well as the place Mr Colombage became a Christian, so there are many deep connections the couple will miss. However, they are looking forward with enthusiasm. Mr Colombage says that in the new parish, they want to be intentional as a family about developing connections with the local community – particularly those that will open up as a result of their daughter starting school this year.

“There’s already a brilliant playgroup ministry running at St Stephen’s, so I’m sure Emily will get involved there and in other areas,” he says. “She and a team of other young mums started up a playgroup [at Croydon] on Monday mornings, which has been a real mission field for her.

“She’s a real pastoral person and has a heart for hospitality, so our home’s always been open to people... Emily’s always doing a lot of stuff behind the scenes so that I can do stuff that everybody sees!”

Mr Colombage is also aware that Willoughby is a parish many people have had a connection to over the years. He feels a real sense of responsibility because of its “great history”, and says the church “has some great, committed followers of Jesus who have a real desire to keep going in faith”.

“There are 72,000 people in the local government area – what a great opportunity that is!” he adds. “My prayer is that we’ll be able to help the church make contact with those people, be a positive influence in their lives and, in particular, introduce them to Christ and the gospel.”



### NEW PORT AT OAKHURST

After 12 years ministering at Newport on the northern beaches, the Rev Jason Ramsay became rector of Oakhurst just west of Blacktown on January 13.

“We’ve had a great time at Newport and we’re now looking forward to a new challenge out at Oakhurst,” he says. “There’s a few people who’ve said, ‘Well, you grew up in Liverpool, are you looking forward to going back to the west?’ I’ve said, ‘Yes, we are, but I’m going to miss people here, too!’

“People who haven’t lived in the southwest or the west just assume it’s all the west! But I think [the nominators] came to me partly because of where I grew up. And when they asked us, there were a number of things about the place that seemed to fit in with my experience and things I could do. Having prayed about it, we thought that there were good opportunities we could take up here.”

Mr Ramsay says his wife Melissa was involved in things such as Scripture teaching, leading Bible studies and music ministry at Newport, and hopes to take part in similar ways at Oakhurst.

Their kids have basically grown up on the northern beaches and, while they are sad to be leaving, he says, “They’re interested to see what a different part of Sydney’s like and are looking forward to starting a new school”.

Mr Ramsay is a former schoolteacher and also has a heart for gospel growth in Africa – he teaches the PTC to African pastors through African Enterprise – so the fact that the church includes a large Sudanese congregation, and has a campus of Richard Johnson Anglican School next door, provides what he hopes will be even more fruitful connections in the area.

“I’m looking forward to opportunities with the Sudanese congregation and the congregation generally, who are keen to see the gospel spread,” he says.

### GONE TO THE GONG

At the beginning of this month the Rev Anthony Douglas became executive assistant to the Bishop of Wollongong, Peter Hayward.

Mr Douglas spent 11 years as rector of the parish of Shoalhaven Heads, an hour south of Wollongong, and says he was “taken by surprise” when Bishop Hayward approached him to see if he would be interested in the executive assistant role.

However, that surprise soon turned into interest: “He was looking for someone with my particular skill set who was interested in what the Diocese is doing, and thought I might be good for the role”. After reflection and prayer, Mr Douglas and his wife Jude could see the wisdom in it, so they and their kids have moved to Wollongong, and everyone is busy getting settled.

“We’re sad to leave [Shoalhaven Heads] and they’re sad for us to leave, but I do think it’ll be helpful for the parish to have somebody new, somebody with different experience and different gifting who can stretch them in new ways,” he says.

In his new job Mr Douglas will initially work alongside the outgoing executive assistant, Tony Willis, who has been in the role for many years. He will also be called upon to become acting rector for vacant parishes, and the first of these is... Shoalhaven Heads.

“Things are moving along well in the Heads,” he says. “God’s been generous and the parish is well set up to continue on with its mission. There are ministries now suited to people of every age, which has taken 10 years to get in place, and that means there’s continuity available for people – we don’t lose them to bigger churches. And we have a great children’s and youth minister who is deeply embedded in the community, so the parish won’t be sitting in neutral while we wait for a new rector!”

“We can continue to have each generation passing on the gospel to the next and we can reach out into all the different segments of the local community. There’s also a better match now with who’s inside the church when compared with who’s outside it – a better reflection of the community itself. In a parish where personal relationships rather than events are the key to evangelism, this means God has turned a weakness into an area of strength.”

The Douglas family would value your prayers as they leave much-loved friends and discover new people and places.

### DIRECTOR’S CHAIR MOVES AT CCL

Dr Chase Kuhn (below left) has become the new director of the Centre for Christian Living at Moore College, in addition to his responsibilities as a lecturer in theology and ethics. He replaces the Rev Dr Tony Payne (below right), who was in the role for five years and is now working as a ministry trainer and writer in residence with Campus Bible Study at the University of NSW.

“It’s well and truly time I started attacking the long list of ideas and projects on my to-write list!” Dr



Payne said. “It will also be inviting to go back to where it all began for me – campus ministry at UNSW – and invest in a new generation of students and trainees.”

The principal of Moore College, the Rev Dr Mark Thompson, called Dr Payne “a brilliant director of CCL”, adding, “He has extended the centre’s work in exciting new areas, organised and chaired a series of brilliant seminars and established a regular podcast on significant issues. I am very grateful for all that he has done”.

Of Dr Kuhn’s appointment he said, “I am very glad that Chase has agreed to take on this responsibility. He is passionate about resourcing Christians with ways to think about what is happening in our world, and maintaining a biblical perspective in the midst of a rapidly changing context for Christian discipleship and ministry.”

Dr Kuhn has issued to take up the CCL role. “There is much to explore at the intersection of biblical faith and everyday issues,” he said. “I am prayerful that the Lord will continue to use the centre to resource Christians to think theologically about their place in God’s world as ambassadors for Christ.”

Added Dr Payne: “One consolation in finishing up as director of CCL is knowing that Dr Chase Kuhn will be stepping into the role. Chase is a deep thinker and a compelling speaker, and it has been a joy to teach ethics alongside him at College over the past three years. I am sure CCL will thrive under his leadership.”



### FROM INNER CITY TO CITY

The Rev Roger Bray will shortly become director of coaching for City to City Asia Pacific/Australia, after eight years as rector of Newtown with Erskineville.

“I’ve been working alongside City to City for a number of years now and they offered me this position,” he says. “I wasn’t planning to leave – this is all a bit of a surprise.

“Having grown up on the mission field in South-East Asia, and then being in ministry in the Sydney Dioceses since 1985, this provides an opportunity to bring both my experience and love for the Asia Pacific together.

“City to City is aiming to see hundreds of churches planted and is supporting this by establishing coaching networks in countries throughout Asia, which effectively means we’re training experienced pastors in the care of church-planting pastors and leaders. My job is to enable this to happen... by working alongside existing networks and denominations.”

Mr Bray says his wife Jane is involved in City to City’s sister organisation Parakaleo, an organisation that supports church-commissioned wives, but she will also continue to work as a practice leader with the Benevolent Society.

The parish commissioned the Brays for this new work, sending the couple out with their blessing, which touched them deeply.

“It was a really moving experience,” Mr Bray says. “There are four congregations in the parish – just a fantastic team... I loved working at Newtown with Erskineville. It’s a place where there are multiple opportunities, despite the fact that there are also multiple challenges given it’s one of the least religious areas in Australia. But it was a huge privilege to be ministering in the midst of all of this, so [leaving is] very much bittersweet.

“We remain trusting in God’s good providence for all of us in this.”

### ANGLICARE CHAPLAINCY MOVES

The Rev Ivan Harris became chaplain at Cobham Youth Justice Centre in Werrington, near Penrith, late last year.

He has previously worked as a school chaplain in western Sydney, in addition to serving six years as the Youthworks advisor for high school SRE – trainings, resourcing and equipping SRE teachers.

The manager of health and justice chaplains at Anglicare, the Rev Stephen Gibson, says, “Ivan has extensive experience in youth ministry and predominantly with those from low socio-economic backgrounds. He is also very well networked with clergy and youth ministers from many denominations, especially in western Sydney.”

Says Mr Harris: “I missed ministering directly to people who are not Christians and sharing the gospel – pastoring people – and at Cobham you’re ministering not just to the boys but to the whole join.”

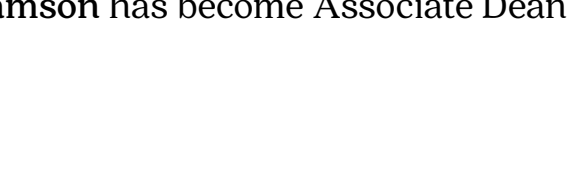
“I have lots of gospel conversations... others will come and join in and we end up having spontaneous Bible studies! It’s a complex place, but every day I just see God at work in people’s lives, and that’s really cool.”

This month Mrs Kate Bradford returns to hospital chaplaincy at Westmead Hospital, after three years of postgraduate study into the origins of modern pastoral care along with work as a chaplain to women at Moore College. She previously spent eight years as chaplain at Westmead Children’s Hospital, plus another two at the Sydney Children’s Hospital in Randwick.

“I’m looking forward to getting back to working with patients and their families at difficult times in their lives,” she says. “We work from a Christian framework and we seek to help them find hope and peace amid their trouble.”

Mrs Bradford begins work on February 10.

In other Anglicare changes, the Rev Peter Ellem has moved from his chaplaincy position at Liverpool Hospital to become pastoral care and volunteer co-ordinator HammondCare Darlinghurst; and, after 15 years as a chaplain at the Prince of Wales Hospital, the Rev Stuart Adamson has become Associate Dean of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care at Morling College.







# Christ crisis

## Stephen Mason

**Messiah**  
Streaming on Netflix

**W**hat if Jesus came in 2020 to bring God’s truth to a post-truth world? What would a polarised media make of his claims?

These are some of the questions posed by *Messiah*, in which a man known as Al-Masih (Mehdi Dehbi) appears in Syria – seemingly from nowhere – working miracles and claiming to know the will of God. Pretty soon he pops over to the USA and his followers grow in number. Is this the Second Coming of Christ or is he a charlatan with an agenda for social disruption?

Enter Eva Geller (Michelle Monaghan), a CIA agent determined to find out who he really is, and so contain a potentially volatile situation. Eva speaks for those of us with a worldview that is so rigid any challenge to our ideology is a threat. But, to be fair, it’s also her job.

At the other end of the character spectrum we have Baptist pastor Felix Iguero (John Ortiz), who is undergoing a crisis of faith. He speaks for those of us who, perhaps troubled by doubt, are desperate to grab onto something that might bolster our belief.

Other characters are either important to the plot or tend to slow the narrative until it feels a bit like a crawl through sludge. But what they do offer is an opportunity to consider how different people with their needs, hopes and baggage might react to the phenomenon.

Add religions, refugees, white privilege, international borders, terrorists and televangelists into the mix and we have a pretty wide canvas. Some people might find themselves poorly represented but I think the writers have tried to be even-handed.

Still, the overarching theme is the big question “Is he or isn’t he?” This is where I struggled with *Messiah*.

If this is all a big con, how does Al-Masih do those miracles? I’m sure someone like David Copperfield could also walk on the reflecting pool at the Washington Monument, but not without a bit of preparation. We know there won’t be any whodunnit-style reveal at the end so, like Eva, we must accept that it is a trick because it could be a trick.

Or if this is the Second Coming of Christ, what is the point? Jesus already did and said the same stuff the first time around. We already have all we need to be right with God. Let’s not forget that on the first visit he also died for our sins and rose from the dead. Surely (as the Scriptures show) the Second Coming is to be a very different affair.

The final shot of the final episode is a clear invitation to the viewer to decide for themselves. And that’s a good thing. Let’s get everyone thinking.

There are people watching this show who have never heard the gospel. Every individual should be given a chance to consider the *actual* Messiah. Everyone needs to choose whether they believe Jesus is God incarnate or a great big fake.

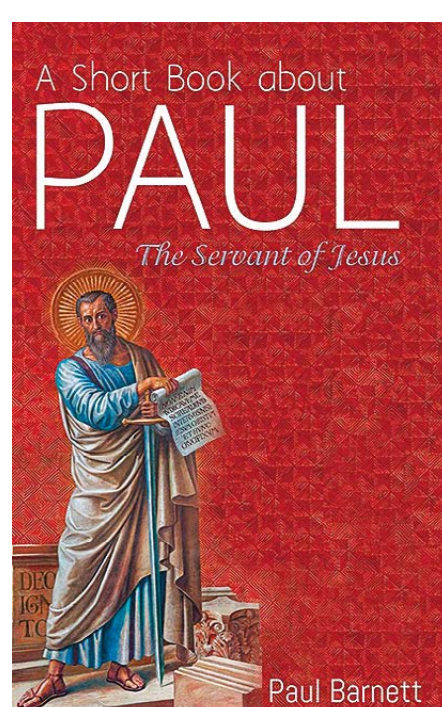
Hopefully viewers of *Messiah* will be prompted to take a serious look at the true Christ and not merely base their decision on the small-screen imitation.

**SC**

## Accessible apostle

### Philip Kern

**A Short Book About Paul: The Servant of Jesus**  
by Paul Barnett  
Eugene: Cascade, 2019



**H**istorians don’t merely assemble a puzzle. Before considering how the pieces fit together, they need to determine which ones belong in the box. Some subjects offer an abundance of resources, while others leave us wishing for more.

Historian and theologian Paul Barnett combines mastery of his craft with a subject that provides plenty of pieces for someone who knows where to look. The result is that this portrait of the Apostle Paul, while relatively brief (I’ll come back to that in a moment), offers a rich presentation of his life and work.

The picture of Paul that emerges is fresh without being idiosyncratic. *A Short Book* reveals a fuller, more textured portrait of the apostle in smaller compass than any other volume I’ve come across. It works because Barnett sees the pieces and their relationship to one another with exceptional clarity as he draws upon Paul’s writings, the Acts of the Apostles, the wider New Testament canon and sometimes Paul’s broader cultural setting. He fills each chapter with perceptive discussion that never becomes heavy. The result is a readable book that offers fresh insights at every turn.

Some elements are striking. Seeing all 40 of Paul’s companions listed over two pages testifies to his ability to build and work within a team. Equally engaging is Barnett’s presentation of Paul as both keeper of the tradition and theologian in his own right.

Paul’s indebtedness to the tradition – that is, teaching that finds its roots in the ministry of Jesus and is passed down by Peter and the Jerusalem church – shows Paul didn’t invent Christianity. He was, inevitably, forced by new situations and conflicts to extend the theological, liturgical and ethical traditions in new directions, but did so in ways entirely consistent with the truth he received.

As this theme unfolds across the arc of the book, Barnett shows how the apostle can simultaneously protect the tradition while bringing the gospel to bear on new realities. Such is the work of pastoral ministry.

*A Short Book* contains few footnotes, and the interaction with scholarship is minimal. This enhances the reading experience but on occasion raises a point of tension for me. I want the book to remain “a short book about Paul”, but occasionally would like more evidence. For example, Barnett on page 35 observes that “blasphemers” (such as the Christians persecuted by Saul) could choose either expulsion from the synagogue or undergoing 39 lashes. But how do we know the accused had these options? Of course, were such questions answered, the book would soon outgrow its title.

By the end of *A Short Book* the reader will have engaged with Paul’s biography, context and message. To his credit, Barnett doesn’t sidestep the challenges – including Paul’s purported arrogance, unnuanced view of gender relationships and homosexuality, or reorientation of the teaching of Jesus away from what was rich and affirming into an obsession with sin and the cross. Inevitably, not everyone will find Barnett persuasive on these issues, but his treatment combines pastoral warmth with historical and biblical evidence.

This slim volume is a valuable resource for members of Bible study groups, will no doubt be read by prospective theological college students, and will appear on reading lists for introduction-to-Paul courses. Few books cover the ground in such an engaging and accessible manner. I know of none which succeeds so thoroughly yet can still be called *A Short Book About Paul*.

**SC**

*Dr Philip Kern is head of the Department of New Testament and Greek at Moore College.*