

15 November 2014

Vol 77 No 10

Free On Request: office@nlife.com.au

ICC Delivers Aid + Witness In The Midst Of War

IN the last month, Erbil absorbed 150,000+ refugees fleeing the ISIS advance. Tens of thousands of these are Christians from the cities of Mosul, Qaraqosh, and the Nineveh plains.

ISIS is shockingly inhumane and seemingly without precedent. What is truly inhumane (not normal to humanity) is the radical love we see as the Church cares for its 'neighbour.'

To care for them, to love them, to expend time, energy and treasure so that they are cared for ... that is inhumane! To the Iraqi on the ground, this outpouring of love is inexplicable.

This love has been seen in the packages of food, water and medicine purchased by International Christian Concern donors and delivered by local churches, using dozens of workers who were themselves displaced by ISIS' advance. To learn more about how ICC is helping victims of persecution in Iraq, download their free October newsletter: <http://ow.ly/DwPEH>



Tents distributed by Christians to shield refugees from the 115 degree temps.

YOU Can Commemorate The 500th Anniversary Of The Reformation

SO! where will YOU be three years from now? You could be with the World Reformed Fellowship at the Luther Hotel in Wittenberg, Germany, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses.

WRF has reserved the Luther Hotel in Wittenberg for most of the last week of October 2017. Those who participate in the WRF General Assembly in Sao Paulo in March 2015 will get early notification when registrations open for the 2017 event. For enquiries go to: wrfnet.org

Major Bible History Museum Planned

ARCHAEOLOGICAL and historic treasures, including ancient Torah scrolls, early New Testament texts, rare Biblical manuscripts, first edition Bibles, a replica of 1st Century Nazareth, hi-tech interactive displays and Biblical artifacts will all feature in *The Museum Of The Bible*, to be built near the National Mall in Washington DC just three blocks from the US Capitol. The eight-story building of 430,000 square feet is expected to be opened in 2017.

BGEA President Franklin Graham, speaking at an event in Oklahoma City on 2 October, announced the launch of the project. Steve Green, President of Hobby Lobby, said 'Washington is the museum capital of the world. We invite everyone – adults, children, the intellectually curious and the most seasoned of scholars alike to the Museum Of The Bible to explore the most influential book ever written.' – *Decision Magazine*

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Rev Fred Nile Affirms: Australia IS A Christian Nation

In his speech to the NSW Parliament on 6 November 2014, Rev Fred Nile stated: AUSTRALIA is a Christian nation. In the last Census more than 63% of the people claimed to be Christian when we totalled all Christian denominations—Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed, Congregational, Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ancient Church of the East, Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite and many other Christian churches. We need to note that not all Christians answer that voluntary question about religion to maintain their privacy. Our nation is a Christian nation because our laws are based on the Judeo-Christian ethic of the Bible, such as the Ten Commandments. Our Australian flag also bears the crosses of three saints—St Patrick, St George and St Andrew. The Australian Constitution defines us as a Christian nation when it states in its preamble: 'Whereas the people of (the several states) humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and under the constitution hereby established.'

The key words here are 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God'. Almighty God is the God of the Christian Bible. From the beginning our Federal Parliament and our State Parliaments have always commenced with a Christian prayer, following the tradition of the British Parliament way back in the 1600's when the first Parliament prayer was read—it was quite a long prayer that has now been shortened to the one we use today. Our first Federal Parliament opened on 9 May 1901 with Christian prayers led by the Governor-General and the singing of Psalm 100. The following statements by founding fathers indicate that they believe they were establishing a Christian nation. Alfred Deakin, who was Prime Minister in 1903-04, prayed: 'God preserve these people and grant its leaders unselfish fidelity and courage to face all trials for the sake of brotherhood. Thy blessing has rested upon us here yesterday and we pray that it may be the means of creating and posturing throughout all Australia a Christ-like citizenship.'

Sir Henry Parkes, the 'Father of Federation', who was born in 1815 and died in 1896, said: 'As we are a British people—predominantly a Christian people as our laws, our whole jurisprudence, our constitution are based upon and interwoven with our Christian belief, and as we are immensely in the majority, we have a fair claim to be spoken of at all times with respect and deference.'

In 1898 another of the founding fathers of our nation, Sir John Downer, stated: 'This Commonwealth of Australia from its first stage will be a Christian Commonwealth.'

There is no doubt that Australia was a Christian nation at its founding. The Australian people have not voted in any referendum since that date to change that. However, confusion has arisen because of section 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution, which states: 'The Commonwealth of Australia should not make any law establishing any religion.' People have become confused because they thought that referred to the Christian, Muslim or Buddhist religions. In those days 'any religion' referred solely to Christian denominations, which were regarded as religions such as the Church of England. The fear was that the Church of England and Australia would try to establish a state church as is the rule in England.

(Continued on Page .4.)

CHHATTISGARH, INDIA: Bastar Ready To Explode

THE Indian state of Chhattisgarh in North India's tribal belt has long been a hot-bed of hindutva (Hindu nationalist) activism. Thousands of Christians – often under duress – have been 'returned to the Hindu fold' in ghar wapsi (home-coming) 're-conversion' events. When India's desperately impoverished and disadvantaged Dalits ('untouchables') convert to Christianity they lose their scheduled caste status along with the benefits that affords. Hence the economic benefits of 're-conversion' can be very alluring.

On 10 October the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment in Narendra Modi's BJP-led government, Thawar Chand Gehlot, confirmed that Dalits who convert to Christianity are no longer considered Dalits and therefore no longer have rights to Dalit 'reservations': affirmative action, reserved jobs and places in education.

Since early May hindutva activists have been encouraging Hindus in Chhattisgarh's southern Bastar district to use the Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj Act to issue rulings banning Christianity. (This Act facilitates rural self-government by empowering village assemblies.) By the end of July some 50 villages across Bastar district had used the Act to ban non-Hindu religious practice. Persecution has soared and Christians are being intimidated, abused, assaulted and even denied access to food rations and water – all with impunity. In September, Christian organisations in Chhattisgarh filed a petition in the Bilaspur High Court contesting the constitutionality of the bans.

'Reconversion'

On 9 October Dinesh Kashyap, an MP from the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party, visited Madota village. While there he conducted a re-conversion ceremony in which he washed the feet of 35 'neo-Christians' (presumably converts) and announced their return to the Hindu fold. Kashyap stirred up the local Hindus and left them fuming over conversions. They have since directed their hostility towards the Madota church and the regular prayer meetings being held there.

Persecution with impunity is prevalent across Bastar. *Morning Star News* reports that on Sunday 19 October a group of around 30 Hindus besieged a Christian worship service in Madota. Most of the Hindus remained outside chanting anti-Christian slogans while five militants entered the church and beat the Christians, including women and children. Local Hindus subsequently forbade the Christians from using the water pump near the church. Also on Sunday 19 October some 25 Hindus staged a similar attack on a church in Farasgaon. The next day a Christian named Laxman was beaten unconscious in Tokapal area by his three Hindu brothers and was unconscious for 24 hours. Other Christians and churches have been threatened.

In a purported effort to ease communal tensions, local officials in Madota invited Christians to attend a mediation meeting on Saturday morning 25 October. The Christians were told that the sub-divisional magistrate, deputy superintendent of police and town inspector would be there to discuss the district administration's response to the Christian petition in the Bilaspur High Court. Though the Christians attended, nobody else did. The Christians waited at the meeting place all day. In the evening a truck carrying some 50 Hindu militants arrived. Wearing saffron bands and armed with swords, sticks and axes, they violently attacked the defenceless Christians, accusing them of 'forcible conversions'. Fifteen Christians were wounded, with 12 requiring hospitalisation for serious injuries. Some Christians are so afraid they have gone into hiding. Bastar officials refuse to admit that religion had anything to do with the attack. Chhattisgarh Christian Forum president Arun Pannalal believes that the manner in which the attack was orchestrated raises suspicions that local officials were complicit with the attackers.

This is an extremely dangerous situation. Chhattisgarh – indeed the whole tribal belt – is a tinderbox of anti-Christian radical Hindu nationalist communalism due to decades of unchecked hindutva activism.

– Elizabeth Kendal,

author of *Turn Back The Battle: Isaiah Speaks To Christians Today*

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- the petition in the Bilaspur High Court will be successful; may religious freedom be upheld and impunity end.
- God will supply the Chhattisgarh Christian Forum and all other Christian organisations aiding Chhattisgarh's persecuted and imperilled believers with everything they need: wisdom, insight, courage, strength, faith, personnel and funds.
- God will intervene in this hostile and exceedingly dangerous, incendiary environment, calming the situation and removing those who would like to light the fire and fan the flames.
- India's Christians will draw ever closer to Christ and grow in faith as they experience His presence. 'Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in You my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.' (Psalm 57.1)

NEWS

Rev Fred Nile Affirms: Australia A Christian Nation (From Page 2)

THE fear was that the Church of England and Australia would try to establish a state church as is the rule in England. That is why that particular provision was included in our Constitution. It was in no way included to be negative towards the promotion of the Christian faith in Australia or change the nature of Australia as a Christian nation. It is a pity that section 116 has been misunderstood by so many people, particularly academics. It is important for them to stop trying to claim that we are a secular nation by quoting section 116.

It should be noted that another of Australia's Prime Ministers, Sir Edward Barton, also made a strong stand that Australia was a Christian nation in its laws, culture and convention. It is important, as we know, that parliaments, both Federal and State, open each morning in prayer and continue these traditions.

This nation should be proud of its Christian traditions which have become stronger, not weaker, through the flood of immigrants who have brought with them their Christian faith from countries such as Korea, Greece, India, Italy and now refugees from the Middle East who have come to Australia with a strong Christian faith.

We thank God for the contribution that these people from other nations have made. I regard them as reinforcements in this debate, increasing the percentage of Christians in our nation. We thank God for them. — Rev Fred Nile

'Lifting The Bar' On Australian Coaching



'IF we are going to do church planting well in Australia we need coaches who understand and connect with Australian culture as well,' says Craig Tucker, newly appointed to head up the developing and mentoring of coaches for Geneva Push, the Australian church planting network.

Craig has decades of experience as both pastor and church planter, and he takes up the position convicted that Australian planters need Australian coaches. 'The whole genius of church planting is you get to think about, "How do I reach people in this particular cultural context in this quarter of the city, state or this part of Australia?" So a church planter needs to think like a cultural missionary. It is vital to have a coach who understands that context as well.' Australian church planters currently have the opportunity to partner with a number of church planting organisations, but only Geneva Push offers exclusively Australian coaches with tried and tested planting experience.

'The great thing about the Geneva Push network is that it already has lots of church plants and church planters on the ground and lots of coaching relationships already happening,' Craig says. He will be in charge of mentoring Geneva Push's existing network of 60 coaches, and recruiting more to service the growing number of churches being planted through the non-denominational network.

For further information on the Geneva Push, contact Mark Hadley at mark@genevapush.com or 0413-164 446.

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'SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER'

Brisbane Christians Create The World's Largest Mock Tax Haven Prior To G20

WITH the eyes of the world on Brisbane ahead of the G20 Summit, local Micah Challenge advocates are seeking to make the most of the spotlight. On 8 November, approximately 100 advocates from churches across Brisbane dressed as corporate accountants and transformed part of Brisbane's CBD into a 'tax evader's paradise' of palm trees, mocktails, beach chairs and briefcases to shed light on the issue of multinational tax dodging.



Approximately \$160 billion is robbed from developing nations annually, more than the \$128 billion received in foreign aid in 2012. With this tax revenue available to developing countries, it is estimated that around 350,000 children a year could be saved. Supporters of the Micah Challenge anti-poverty campaign hope the world's largest mock tax haven will send a clear message to G20 leaders that more action must be taken to address secrecy in the global financial system for the benefit of the world's poorest people.

According to John Beckett, National Co-ordinator of the Micah Challenge campaign, the issue of corporate tax dodging is seriously undermining progress against global poverty. 'Extremely conservative estimates show that poor nations are losing more money through tax dodging than they receive in foreign aid – with some suggesting it could be up to two or three times as much,' said Mr Beckett. 'This money rightfully belongs to the citizens of these countries and should be used to provide essential services like health-care, education, infrastructure and water. Instead, much of this money is being siphoned off through tax havens into the pockets of the wealthy.'

Mr Beckett said G20 leaders were already taking positive steps in this area, but expressed concern that summit discussions may not result in concrete action. 'We're concerned the decisions made could primarily benefit wealthy countries represented at the table, and not the citizens of developing nations,' he said.

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Prisoner Releases: What's In It For North Korean Regime?

YOU'D like to think they were just acting in good faith, but the reality is: what does the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stand to gain by releasing two captured Americans? Todd Nettleton, a spokesman for Voice of the Martyrs USA, says, 'The last two Americans being held by North Korea, including Kenneth Bae, who is known to be a Christian and was there, at least in part, to do Gospel work, those last two Americans (and Matthew Miller) have been set free.'

Is this a good faith move connected to an expectation? Does it mean a thaw in relations? After holding these Americans for months, why the sudden release? Nettleton suggests that even the experts can only offer speculation. Could it be a public relations move to restore Kim Jong-un's image after a long absence? Although the prisoner releases are seen as welcome relief, Nettleton is quick to add, 'There are still thousands of North Korean Christians in prison camps in North Korea. Their names are not known. Their stories have not been told. No international government is really pressing for their release, so they are the people that we need to continue to pray for. Where we have opportunity, we need to continue to have a voice for them.'

Juche, the worship of the leader Kim Jong-un and his predecessors, leaves no room for any other religion. As a result, Christians face unimaginable pressure in every sphere of life. Anyone discovered engaging in clandestine religious activity may be subject to arrest, arbitrary detention, disappearance, torture, even public execution. 'Your prayer is needed for those who are already followers of Christ', says Nettleton. 'We need to pray for God to protect them and watch over them. There is a great need to pray for encouragement because it would be so easy to become discouraged in a country that completely hates and dominates Christians.'

But, he says, keep praying for more North Koreans to respond to the Gospel. Nettleton explains, 'VOM is involved in Gospel radio broadcasts across the border into North Korea. We're involved in balloon launches that carry Gospel tracts, and even complete New Testaments. Plus, there are Ministry Packs containing a New Testament, a USB thumb drive loaded with Christian material, and basics like socks, shampoo, and noodles. More than 1,500 of these Ministry Packs will be distributed to North Koreans in and outside of North Korea this year. 'Pray that there will be fruit from those efforts and the efforts of others to share the Gospel with North Korean people because they live a very hopeless existence.' VOM workers find that even packs distributed outside the country often make their way back into North Korea, as North Koreans send them as gifts to family members.

For more information go to: <http://www.persecution.com>

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A MAN AND HIS MISSION ...

Daniel Nalliah Launches Campaign To End Abortion Torture

DANIEL Nalliah, founder and leader of Rise Up Australia Party, has launched a major new campaign to protect babies being killed by abortion in Victoria from being tortured by abortionists during the death procedure. Though the 2008 Abortion Law Reform Act in Victoria exempts abortionists who kill unborn children from prosecution for murder, the Federal 2010 Criminal Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition And Death Penalty Abolition) Act, which takes precedence over Victorian law, makes the torture of any person by or with the consent or acquiescence of any public official a criminal offence punishable by 20 years in prison.

Mr Nalliah says that unborn puppies have more rights in Victoria than unborn children of our own species. It was unacceptable, he said, that in a society that called itself civilized, unborn children should not only be killed but tortured before they were killed. He says that unborn children of 17 weeks' gestation or more are fully capable of experiencing the trauma and suffering of their own death-agony. Yet the law did not require them to be given an anaesthetic.

Mr Nalliah plans to write to all newly-elected members of both Houses of the Parliament of Victoria after the 29 November election to invite them to contact him personally to say what steps they are willing to take to protect unborn children from torture at the hands of abortionists killing them in Victoria.

Simpcha 2014

CELEBRATE Messiah New Zealand Director Scott Brown will be the special guest speaker at Simcha 2014 to be held at the Phillip Island Adventure Resort on the weekend of 5-7 December. Other speakers include Celebrate Messiah Australia Executive Director Lawrence Hirsch and Celebrate Messiah board member and Principal of Harvest West Bible College, Dr Ashley Crane. The conference theme

will be *Under His Wings*. Registration closes Friday 21 November. For more details phone (03) 9563 5544, email simcha@celebratemessiah.com.au
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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

'Smithy' Doco Film In Final Stages

IN 2013, Australian God's Squad founder John Smith visited U2's Bono in Dublin. The Irish singer recorded a short video on a mobile phone in support of a film project documenting the Aussie preacher's life.

'We're trying to talk John Smith into doing a movie and we are excited about that potential,' Bono said. 'It will appear as fiction but we know it's fact – his life.'

For almost two years, Melbourne documentary filmmaker Don Parham has been working with a small team to produce a feature-length film examining the extraordinary life and times of John Smith. Parham has conducted extensive interviews with John, his family members and associates. Video producer Warwick Vincent has digitised hours of archival footage and rare photographs. An initial fundraising campaign raised over \$50,000 to enable production to begin on the project.

'Our Stage 1 production budget is actually \$150,000,' Parham explained. 'If we can raise another \$50,000 by the end of November, we will complete the film by mid-2015 and seek further funding from DVD sales and corporate entities.'

John Smith is battling cancer – he had ten rounds of chemo treatment in 2014 – but the irrepressible campaigner remains active. He still speaks to students about the Christian faith and he recently participated in activities associated with the God's Squad National Run.

Parham and his team have launched a second fundraising campaign via Pozible's crowdfunding program. See www.pozible.com/smithydoco for more details.



John Smith checks out Glenna trying her hand at makeup.

Two More Book Launches For Crosswinds – Life On The Wing

PEOPLE in Melbourne and Brisbane will have the opportunity to meet and hear MAF pilot/author Ron Watts as his book 'Crosswinds' is launched in two more capital cities: Melbourne: Saturday 29 November, 2-4pm, St Mark's Anglican Church, 302 High St Templestowe VIC 3107; Brisbane:

Sunday 7 December 2-4pm, 'Hilltop Haven' 267 Schoeck Rd, Sheldon QLD 4157. RSPV: For catering, please ring Freecall 1800 650 169 or email maf@maf.org.au



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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Changeover At Langham Partnership Australia

SINCE the 1980s, Wendy Toulmin has been the driving force in Langham Australia. Wendy was part of the team that formed the Langham Trust down under in 1980-81 to raise funds and awareness of the Trust's work in Australia. In 2001, when the Trust was restructured to become part of Langham Partnership International, Wendy became the Chief Executive of Langham Partnership Australia, a role she has continued until 2014. With Wendy's guidance and leadership, LPA has become a significant contributor to the worldwide Langham Partnership, including active support for each of the three global Langham programs: Scholars, Preaching and Literature, set up under the ministry of John R.W. Stott. LPA is grateful to God for her enthusiasm, efforts and leadership over the years, as she now prepares to leave Langham in early December and take up a new challenge.



Wendy Toulmin (left); Gillian Smiley

Gillian Smiley currently works for Peirson Services in Brisbane after working in senior executive roles in the South Australian Public Service the SA Bible Society and the Bible Society in Australia. Gillian has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of LPA, and attended the Langham Partnership International Council in USA at the start of November, prior to commencing full duties later this month. For more info go to: australia@langham.org

Geneva Push Takes Stock At Give Thanks Breakfast

WITH the year drawing to a close, Geneva Push is taking time to look at God's goodness in 2014. In four years, Geneva Push has completed 100 assessments and launched 50 new churches. Geneva Push is holding breakfast meetings to celebrate what God has done through their supporters, coaches and the hard working church planting couples and their teams; and to look to the future and identify the many places needing new churches evangelised into existence. There will be two events: **SYDNEY:** Thursday 20 November at The Morrison, 225 George Street, from 7.30am to 8.30am, and **MELBOURNE:** Thursday 27 November at Gill's Diner, Rear of 360

Little Collins St, from 8am to 9am. RSVP at:

<https://thegenevapush.wufoo.eu>

The Wisdom Of Islam And The Foolishness Of Christianity

MUSLIMS view Islam as a deeply rational faith and take pride in its philosophical tradition. At the same time, many view Christian belief as being at best paradoxical, and at worst nonsensical. Until now, many Muslim objections along these lines have gone unanswered by Christian thinkers, but in *The Wisdom Of Islam And The Foolishness Of Christianity*, philosopher of religion Dr Richard Shumack tackles nine key Christian ideas that Muslims find philosophically troubling. For more go to: <https://publicchristianity.org/store>

PLEASE NOTE: New Life's Annual Break

There will be two further issues of New Life for 2014 – on 1 and 15 December.

The first issue for 2015 will be posted on 15 February 2015.

Would advertisers and contributors please consider their needs and submit material for the next two issues by 29 November and 13 December respectively.

Contact Mignon by **Phone:** 0434 313 646; or **Email:** office@nlife.com.au

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PERSECUTION WATCH

Vigilante Justice In Pakistan Costs Christian Couple Their Lives

REGIONAL police in Pakistan have arrested at least 44 people in connection with a pair of brutal vigilante killings. Authorities also beefed up security in Christian neighbourhoods in Clarkabad, not far from Lahore, the capital of Punjab in the central region.

Greg Musselman, a spokesman for the Voice of the Martyrs Canada, says a young Christian couple fell foul of the infamous blasphemy law. 'It's a draconian law, and it is used against the Christians often.' He explains. 'They [the couple] were completely innocent; it was not a case of blasphemy. It was actually over money. The Islamic clerics got people all excited and worked up, and they attacked this couple.'

26-year-old Shahzad Masih and his five months-pregnant wife, 24-year-old Shama Bibi, were accused of burning the pages of a *Qur'an*. Before long, the couple was surrounded by a mob that beat them with shovels and tortured their bodies in a kiln at the brick factory where they worked.



Family member holding one of the surviving children. (Photo courtesy World Watch Monitor)

– Ruth Kramer, Mission Network News

ARGENTINA: Baptist Church To Demand Federal Investigation Into Attempted Murder Of Pastor

PUEBLO Grande Baptist Church, which Pastor Nieva leads, will demand federal oversight of the investigations into the assassination attempt and a campaign of intimidation towards the church and its members. Pastor Nieva and his colleague Daniel Carreño escaped unharmed when they were shot at multiple times while driving in Río Tercero on 21 October. National and provincial Baptist leaders in Argentina expressed alarm at the attack, pointing out that it is the latest and most severe instance of a pattern of threats and harassment against the church, which works with victims of domestic violence, sex trafficking and drug addicts.

KYRGYZSTAN: Restrictive Religion Law To Be Tightened

KYRGYZSTAN has announced proposed plans to tighten its already very repressive Religion Law and to introduce harsher punishments for those convicted of taking part in unauthorised religious activities. The new restrictions were suggested on 9 October by Kyrgyzstan's State Commission for Religious Affairs. Under the

proposed changes, all religious organisations will be required to re-register with the authorities, and the number of founding members required for organisations seeking registration will rise from 200 to 500. It is already difficult to gather 200 founders to register a church, particularly in small rural communities. The draft changes also require people working or volunteering in any capacity within a religious organisation to gain a state licence that must be renewed every year. Similarly, every institution offering religious education will be required to obtain an SCRA licence.

Furthermore, the maximum fine for unauthorised religious activities will increase to the equivalent of 14 months' average wage in Kyrgyzstan. The SCRA will also be given the power to formulate and execute all state policy on any matters relating to freedom of religion. At present the SCRA is an administrative facilitator. If granted the powers proposed, the SCRA would not only be given the same level of power as a government ministry, it would also be able directly to interfere with the internal running of religious communities.

– Barnabas Fund

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MEETING A CHALLENGE

Creating A Global Wave Of Prayer For Persecuted Christians

CHURCHES in the UK and Ireland are helping create a global wave of prayer for persecuted Christians on 16 November, the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. A report endorsed by the Prince of Wales has concluded that Christians are the 'most persecuted religious minority in the world.' Prince Charles said it was 'an indescribable tragedy that Christianity is now under such threat in the Middle East.' Recent fact-finding trips to the Middle East by Release International have highlighted a growing exodus of Christians from the lands where the Christian faith first took root after Pentecost – often in the face of persecution. As Christianity has spread, so has persecution; but not only under Islam. Christians are persecuted under Communism, Authoritarianism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

TODAY:

- An estimated 30,000 Christians are detained inside North Korea's brutal prison and concentration camps.
- More than 1,000 Christians, including church leaders, remain imprisoned without trial in Eritrea.
- An estimated 200 Christians are currently imprisoned in Vietnam.
- Christians come under increasing attack by Hindu Nationalists in India.
- The authorities in Iran have cracked down on the growing number of house churches, currently detaining more than 50 Christians.

'Add to that, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan and many more. Increasing numbers of Christians face violence, imprisonment and death as global instability and uncertainty increase,' says Paul Robinson, the Chief Executive of Release International, which serves persecuted Christians around the world. 'But at Release we know that prayers, coupled with actions, create change. For IDOP this year we focus especially on believers who have been imprisoned because of their Christian faith, and their families, who suffer separation from their loved ones. These are our brothers and sisters on the frontlines of faith, who have suffered great loss – and who need our support. 'IDOP is a time set apart for Christians around the world to remember our brothers and sisters worldwide who suffer persecution, simply because they confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Please do take part in this year's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, and stand together as one.'

RESOURCES:

Release has produced the following resources to help churches plan their times of prayer:

- A free IDOP guide, including background information on Prisoners of Faith, Bible teaching, suggestions for prayer and youth activity.
- A free PowerPoint presentation, including a persecution map of the world, a briefing on five Christian prisoners, and a Prayer for Prisoners.
- A 10-minute DVD, *Scattered*, which includes brief testimonies of Christian former prisoners in Iran, with specific prayer points.

All are available from releaseinternational.org Through its international network of missions, Release International serves persecuted Christians in more than 30 countries around the world by supporting pastors and Christian prisoners and their families; supplying Christian literature and Bibles; and working for justice.

New Life Website: www.nlife.com.au

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Principal of SMBC,
asks:

"When did you last *weep*
for those who are *lost*?"



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Five Faces Of Islam: How Are Australian Christians To Respond?

MILITANT, mystical or moderate – what is the true face of Islam and how should we respond? Australian Christians need to be informed and equipped to understand and engage with Muslims, says international missiologist John Azumah, who will speak at Australian CMS Conferences in January. Rev Dr John Azumah grew up in a Muslim home in Ghana, became a Christian at school, and went on to study theology. Now Associate Professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, Georgia, USA, John will speak on *Understanding Islam* and *Being A Christian Witness In A Muslim Context*.



'We need to be able understand the five faces of Islam if we are to engage with Muslims in a meaningful way,' John says.

- **The First Face Of Islam** is the mystical, spiritual, popular face so well known and practised in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It is very attractive in these parts of the world and even in the West.
- **The Second Face Of Islam** is the missionary face. Islam is aggressively involved in mission work, or da'wah, across the world. We want to understand this face and how as Christians we can engage with it, and equip Christians to understand and withstand it. In Africa, for instance, while Muslims are coming to faith in Christ, Christians are also becoming Muslims. We need to not only share the Gospel with Muslims but also to teach our people to understand the nature of Islamic da'wah.
- **The Third Face Of Islam** is the ideological and political face, which seeks to make Islam the religion of the state and seeks to implement sharia law. Within that, minorities, especially Christian minorities, suffer all kinds of discrimination.
- **The Fourth Face Of Islam** is militant face that we see on the news everyday. I would want us to see how Christians can begin to make sense of it, and how Christians, especially victims in such violent contexts, can respond in a Christian way that is a witness of the Christian Gospel – yet not underestimating the threat of this face of Islam.
- **The Fifth Face Of Islam** is the progressive face of Islam that many people are not aware of. It seeks to critically re-read Muslim sources and to engage with the militants and challenge them. There is a battle for the soul of Islam going on right now.

In South Ghana, John developed a Gospel ministry to unreached people groups who migrated from the predominantly Muslim north. Fifty-eight congregations were established in a little over a decade. *Operation Go Back Home And Tell'* was organised for converts to go back to their home towns and witness to their kin. Many congregations in north Ghana were revived and new ones established.

'I believe that is the heartbeat of the Church, so I want to talk about equipping the whole Church to take the whole Gospel to the whole of the Muslim World,' said John. 'As someone who comes from the Muslim faith myself, sharing the Christian Gospel with Muslims is my passion and I want to share it with you at CMS Summer School.'

In the 1990's a bursary from CMS enabled John to complete a doctorate in Islamicism in the UK. He later served as a CMS missionary to India in the early 2000's. He will speak at these CMS conferences in January: Summer School, North Tamborine, Qld, 2-7 January; Summer School, Katoomba, NSW, 3-9 January; Summer Encounter, Edwardstown, SA, 8-10 January; Summer Under The Son, East Burwood, Vic, 12-15 January; Tasmania, Summerview, Port Sorrell, 15-18 January; WA, Summer School, Camp Wattle Grove, 23-25 January. More information is available at www.cms.org.au/summerconferences

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Romans 12.3-8

FOR REFLECTION:

What are gifts for, according to verses 4,5?

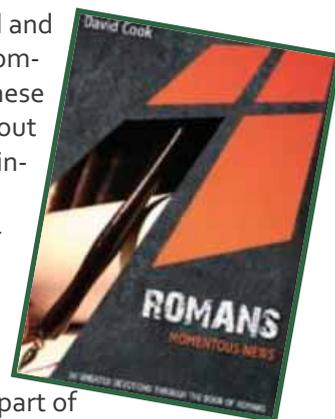
How can you be more diligent in the exercise of your giftedness?

Which of the seven areas of ministry most relate to you and how can you apply Paul's exhortation?

THE 1st Century Christian came to Christ, was baptised and immediately became part of a fellowship, a family, a community of God's people. Thus, Paul's first direction in these verses is to show how renewed thinking works its way out in the new family of the church. It is a reflection of the individualism of the Church in the West that such an emphasis would be much further down the order of priorities in the curriculum of discipleship today.

The believer is to think 'soberly' (v3), sensibly (as in Mark 5.15), according to the giftedness God has given him. Such gifting is contrary to our deserving (v6).

The believer must think humbly of self, for he/she is part of a body (v4,5), is not independent but interdependent.



Paul lists various gifts in verses 6-8, and it is important to note that none of his gift lists, here or in Ephesians 4 or 1 Corinthians 12, are identical. There is a great diversity in God's gifting, it is never static and God may well gift the same person differently in varied spheres of ministry. The fact that Paul uses participles in describing the gifts shows that they are not to lie dormant but are evidenced as they are used. Paul lists seven giftings. In the last three he describes the disposition with which they are to be exercised. See verse 8 'contributing', they are to be generously and rightly motivated, not for self-aggrandisement; taking the lead, they are not to slacken off; showing mercy, a personal intimate service to those in need, do it cheerfully, not in a grudging way.

I read an article recently on the elderly in which the author said that the elderly are often dominated by a fear of being a nuisance. In showing mercy to the elderly, we must be cheerful or they may well develop a 'death wish' so as not to be a nuisance any longer.

Here then is renewed thinking in relation to the church: sober, realistic, humble, exercising our gifting in both a joyous and self effacing way. How can you discover your gifting? Ask your church leadership what needs to be done

and ask them to direct you into the area of service for which they believe you are gifted. Don't add to your burdens the task of discovering your gifts – leave that to your spiritual leadership. Then get on and exercise your gifts to His glory, within the body of which He has made you a part.

– David Cook

Content taken from 'Romans: Transforming News' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

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BOOKS WORTH READING

FROM PENTECOST TO PATMOS: Acts To Revelation, Craig L. Blomberg (NT Introduction and Survey Vol 2); Nottingham: Apollos, 2006. ISBN 978-1-78359-138-1

CRAIG Blomberg is Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, Colorado. This is the companion volume to his widely-used textbook, *Jesus And The Gospels*, reviewed in *New Life* during 2009. It covers *The Acts Of The Apostles, Letters (Pauline And General* in chronological order, as far as it is possible to discover) and the book of *Revelation*. This book started as lecture notes and later became a correspondence course. The focus is on surveying the structure and contents of the various Bible books, solving the main exegetical cruxes and dealing with the key matters for contemporary application.

Blomberg notes the challenge of working out what is normative in the narrative of *Acts*, which is where the discovery of main themes and repeated patterns of behaviour are of importance. He shows Luke's impressive credentials as an accurate historian and provides a 50-plus page commentary on *Acts*, full of wise judgments and pertinent points of application. In turning to the *Letters*, Blomberg sketches Paul's life and ministry, especially his Jewish heritage and upbringing, his encounter with the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road (that was both his conversion and his commissioning), and theories of what happened to Paul after Acts 28.

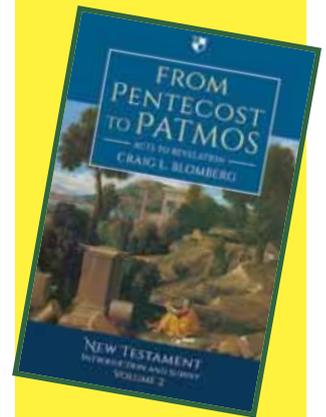
He is right to reject pseudonymity (false attribution of authorship) as acceptable to 1st Century Christians or to countenance the idea that people would have thought it honest to write in Paul's name, and therefore he rejects the common critical theory about who wrote *Ephesians* and the *Pastoral Epistles*. In the face of claims by proponents of the 'New Perspective', Blomberg insists that the great apostle did combat Jewish legalism. He shows that closer examination of Paul's writings reveals that he knew much about the earthly life of Jesus, even though this was not the focus of his teaching in his letters. We are not to set Jesus against Paul, who was his most gifted and effective follower!

Blomberg helps us to correlate the visits of Paul to Jerusalem in *Acts* and the record Paul gives in *Galatians*. He also helpfully refers to Anatolian folk religious background to explain Paul's allegory of the two mountains in Galatians 4. He shows that the theme of thanksgiving dominates *1 Thessalonians*. In both *Letters To The Thessalonians*, Paul instructs about the return of Christ, showing that 'faithful living in the present always remains the first priority'.

Paul's Corinthian correspondence, as summarised by Blomberg, counters misguided views about Christian maturity and the abuse of Christian freedom. He argues for the unity of *2 Corinthians*, especially that chapters 10-13 are in their proper place (despite the sudden change of tone). Blomberg is perceptive in seeing Paul's *Letter To The Romans* as a major turning point in his career. It is his most systematic exposition of the Gospel, for the Roman Church had not yet met him. Blomberg opts for the traditional view of a Roman imprisonment as the place of origin for the *Prison Epistles*, (*Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians* and *Philippians*). He insists that *Ephesians* is genuinely Pauline and was perhaps a circular letter to several churches (including Laodicea).

He likewise sees the *Pastoral Epistles* as by Paul, who perhaps gave his secretary greater freedom in the process of final composition than he did in the drafting of some of his other letters. In the process of explaining the content of the *Pastorals*, Blomberg makes sensible, practical and sensitive application to contemporary church life. He deals with the old furphy that James contradicts Paul's teaching about faith and justification, showing that James and Paul agree that the faith that saves leads to a transformed lifestyle.

(Continued p.16)



'The main strengths of Blomberg's introduction are his up-to-date survey and summary of scholarly opinion (as detailed in his footnotes), the seriousness with which he takes the claims made by the Bible authors, and his focus on the biblical text, with the bulk of this book being commentary on the actual text with application.'

BOOKS WORTH READING

(From p.15) Blomberg shows that, for James, this takes the form of deeds of mercy. Blomberg points out that US Evangelicals have been slow to see that, and for more on this topic, see his earlier book, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches* (IVP, 1999). He sees *Hebrews* as written to a Jewish-Christian house church in Rome, pre-64 AD, under the growing threat of persecution by Nero. This is why the *Hebrews* definition of faith emphasises the need for endurance. He is even-handed in his interpretation of the famous 'warning passages' of *Hebrews*, and he is right to make the point that both Arminians and Calvinists agree that the ultimate test of faith is that it perseveres.

The main strengths of Blomberg's introduction are his up-to-date survey and summary of scholarly opinion (as detailed in his footnotes), the seriousness with which he takes the claims made by the Bible authors, and his focus on the biblical text, with the bulk of this book being commentary on the actual text with application. I recommend this as a thoroughly reliable introduction and survey of the New Testament writings.

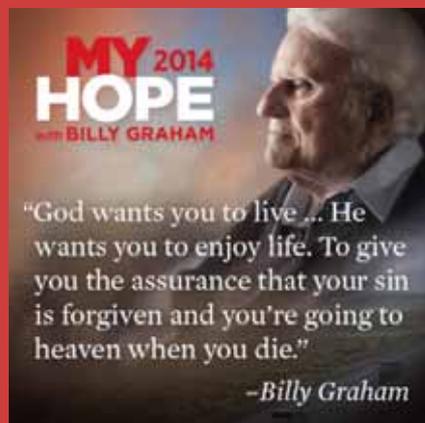
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