

## Creation Cries: 'Give Thanks' – Ken Duncan



### A Chronic Lack Of Awe

HAVE you ever wondered why days seemed to last forever when you were a child ... and now it feels like we blink and another week's over? The pace of life is faster than ever and we can trip over just trying to keep up. We have all this technology to make life easier, yet no invention that can slow down time. A 2012 study published in *Psychology Today* has revealed the real problem: we're all suffering from a chronic lack of awe. During the study, some volunteers watched imagery that was funny, while others watched 'awe inspiring' imagery. Surprisingly, those who watched the 'awe inspiring' imagery felt like they had more time, as if time had slowed down. And it makes sense.

I'm sure that like me, during childhood you spent countless hours outdoors looking up at the clouds, or the magnificent night sky. But as we grow older, we can tend to stop looking up and spend more time looking down – at computer screens and smart devices.

My basic philosophy is best summed up by these words: 'For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.' (Romans 1.20)

I consider myself an average photographer, with a great God – I'm merely an interpreter of God's creation. My 'office' is the lush rainforests of the Daintree, desert wonders like Uluru and our magnificent, endless beaches. I've travelled the world, interpreting God's creation and I've come to realise that the only appropriate response is an overwhelming sense of 'gratitude.'

Gazing into crystal clear water at the foot of a glorious, roaring waterfall is like staring into the face of God – truly comprehending His creative nature and His rich blessings. Walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen colour and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. (Consider Matthew 6.29.) Take a moment to really stop and smell the roses; lie on your back and stare up at the stars, like you used to when you were a child. Perhaps over the years, it's not just your childlike sense of awe that's left you but also your childlike faith. Maybe it's time to recapture that, too.

### 'Thank You' – The Password

Enter with the password: 'Thank You!' Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank Him. Worship Him. (Psalm 100.4). When we truly immerse ourselves in God's creation, we can't help but feel thankful. It creates a certain sense of perspective – the same God who created the Universe is taking care of each one of us.

I believe God has an incredible destiny for Australia and for us as Australians. As we start to say 'Thank You,' He'll start to open up those doors even more. At a time when there's so much fear and anxiety around the world, what is the answer? I believe the answer is faith and thankfulness for what God has done, is doing, and is going to do.

The National Day of Thanksgiving is on Saturday 30 May, 2015. It's an opportunity for us to stop as a nation and say 'Thanks' to God and to each other for the blessings we all enjoy. For more information visit: [www.thanksgiving.org.au](http://www.thanksgiving.org.au)

– Ken Duncan, award winning Australian photographer and Ambassador of the National Day of Thanksgiving.

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## URGENT: Intercession Called For Franklin Graham

*– The enemy would like nothing more than to silence this mouthpiece for God who is confronting and pushing back darkness in our generation.*

BILLY Graham was a pastor to presidents and certainly addressed the moral slide in America as far back as the 1950's, but Franklin Graham seems to be wearing his dad's mantle on steroids.

The once-prodigal son is not shrinking back from hot button cultural and political issues. Why is Graham so bold? Because he sees an Islamic storm coming against America [and] ... he has strong discernment and enough boldness to go toe-to-toe with the principalities and powers that have targeted Christians for destruction.

'For Muslims, peace comes only through submission to Islam. When they speak of peace, they mean submission to their religion,' Graham says. 'Worldwide, tens of thousands of men, women and children have been slaughtered in the name of Allah, under the bloody flag of Islam.'

Graham made it clear that followers of a peaceful religion do not cut off the heads of innocent people in the barbaric fashion the world has watched recently [and] that believers in a peaceful religion do not kidnap 300 young schoolgirls as Boko Haram did in northeastern Nigeria in April and reportedly sell them to men to be sex slaves. Men who practise a peaceful religion [he continued] do not detonate bombs on an American street during a marathon race to kill and maim innocent people. He said no one who belongs to a peaceful religion would even consider hijacking jet airliners and flying them into buildings occupied by thousands of innocent people beginning their workday, as happened in New York on 9/11. He says that no peaceful religion would tolerate, let alone practise, female circumcision, require a woman to have her husband's permission to leave her home and take up employment and restrict her ability to receive justice in the case of sex crimes. A peaceful religion would not condone and allow a father to drown a daughter in a swimming pool in front of the family in the name of family honour because she might have stayed out late in the evening with her boyfriend. 'Why haven't the 3.5 million Muslims in North America rejected this gross, barbaric and despicable behavior by their fellow Muslims on American soil?' Graham asks.

IHOPKC's Mike Bickle last month called for Believers to support and pray for Graham as he has 'boldly yet tenderly taken a Biblical stance in warning in relation to Islam, gay marriage and several other important subjects.'

'I'm making an even more fervent call for intercessors to rise up and pray for Graham day and night. The enemy would like nothing more than to silence this mouthpiece for God who is confronting and pushing back darkness in our generation. Likewise, those who subscribe to anti-Christ agendas are raging against his voice.

Saints, let's make it a priority to lift up Graham in prayer, wage spiritual warfare against the attacks on his life and bless his ministry. Amen?'

*– Jennifer Leclaire, Charisma News, 20 February 2015.*

## IS Seizes Assyrian Christians In Hasseka

HASSEKA Province in Syria's north-east is contiguous with Nineveh in northern Iraq and historically home to many Assyrian Christians. Since early 2012 the region has been heavily infiltrated by Islamic jihadists entering from Turkey (to fight the Kurds) and coming across from Mosul with a view to establishing a Caliphate. Presented with the options of conversion to Islam, subjugation with jizya (protection money), death or exile, most of Hasseka's Christians opted for exile and fled. Only a remnant remained.

On Monday 23 February at about 4am, Islamic State jihadists stormed 35 Assyrian Christian villages along a 40km stretch of the Khabour River south of Qomishli in Hasseka Province, forcing some 3,000 Christians to flee for their lives. Churches were razed and at least 150 Christians are now captives of IS, which recently called for Christians to be killed. IS has reportedly demanded a prisoner exchange with Kurdish forces. If the Kurds do not release their captured jihadists, then the Christian captives will be horrifically killed.

- Pray for a miracle and that God's promised presence will be palpable as God dwells with His people. This is the 'sanctuary' (miqdas: place where God dwells) promised to the faithful in Isaiah 8.11-14a.

### **NIGERIA: Boko Haram Spreads Terror**

When Boko Haram attacked Baga in Nigeria's far north-east on 3 January, it razed the town, seized the military base of the multi-national force stationed there and killed an estimated 2,000 civilians. From Baga, Boko Haram moved against the Borno capital, Maiduguri, which they failed to infiltrate, though they did capture Monguno on 25 January, along with its large military base. It also launched attacks in northern Cameroon and south-east Niger. Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin have agreed to assemble a regional joint force to tackle the problem and totally 'dismantle' Boko Haram.

On 11 February Boko Haram used two girls as suicide bombers in an attack on Diffa in south-east Niger, killing seven. On 16 February a female suicide bomber was used to attack a bus station in Damaturu, Yobe State. On 21 February the Nigerian Army liberated Baga, scoring a significant victory. There were many casualties and the jihadists were forced to abandon much weaponry. Mopping up continues. On Sunday 22 February a seven-year-old girl died along with seven others when Boko Haram attacked a market in the city of Potiskum, Yobe, using the seven-year-old girl as a suicide bomber. Terrorism continues. US military equipment to aid in the fight against Boko Haram has arrived in Cameroon. On Tuesday 24 February, Chadian soldiers engaged Boko Haram fighters near Garambu in Nigeria's far north-east, reportedly killing 207 jihadists. In a separate incident gunmen stormed the Hope Academy compound in Emiwo, Kogi State, south of Abuja, on Monday night 23 February and kidnapped American Free Methodist Church missionary Rev Phyllis Sortor. Nothing else is known at present.

- Please pray that the Lord would break through His enemies in northern Nigeria.

### **SUDAN: Systematic Persecution**

THOUGH the Bahri Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in North Khartoum holds documents proving ownership, a Muslim businessman has been given permission to develop the church's land on the grounds that government agents, who infiltrated the church and established an illegitimate committee, sold the property to him. Much of the church has been demolished and numerous believers arrested, including pastors. On 6 January a court ruled in favour of the legitimate church committee. However, the illegitimate committee appealed and the ruling was overturned in the Supreme Court. On 18 February the police issued the church with a court order to relinquish the property. The church's lawyers have lodged an appeal. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Rev Yat Michael and Rev Peter Yein Reith have also been detained while Sudanese Intelligence is waging a campaign of intimidation, vilification and confiscation against Mr Rafat Samir Mussad Obid, the chairman of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church Council responsible for church buildings and land. This is all part of Khartoum's campaign of systematic intimidation and persecution of the Church and of South Sudanese residing in Sudan. While South Sudan has a largely Christian population, Sudan is predominantly Muslim. However, many thousands of Southern Sudanese who fled the long civil war to live in the north are now so rooted there, they chose to remain. There are still churches in the north to meet their needs, although some have come under pressure in recent months. 'The longer these two men are held in a secret location, the greater the risk of them being tortured,' said Amnesty International UK Director Kate Allen. Please pray.

### **LAOS: Church Leaders Imprisoned For Praying**

ON 12 February the People's Court of Savannakhet Province ruled that five Christian leaders – pastors (Mrs) Kai-thong, Puphet, Muk and Hasadee, as well as lay-leader Tiang – were guilty of a criminal offence causing death. They had been arrested in June 2014 as they gathered to mourn Mrs Chan's death after a long period of illness and hospitalisation. Because they had prayed with Mrs Chan, the Christians were deemed to have practised medicine without a licence, for which they were issued huge fines and sentenced to nine months in prison. – Elizabeth Kendal

## **The Privilege And Challenges Of Leadership**

*DAWN Penny, CEO of ACCESS Ministries, the provider of Special Religious Instruction in Victorian State Schools, spoke at a CMA Breakfast in Melbourne on Thursday 26 February on her work of leading a child-centred Christian organisation, especially concentrating on the privilege and the challenges of her work.*

### **My Journey To Leadership**

My motivation as a leader is to 'make a difference'. This goes well beyond self-interest and ambition and I know that I have been equipped to have the courage and conviction to confidently push on the doors of change, which is both exciting and fearful, but I hold on to the hand of the One who called me; for it's in His power alone that we bring grace to the world.

An understanding of how to influence and encourage people to behave in particular ways was important as I was growing up, as it helped me to make sure my disabled brother, Russell, was included by my friends in all our various games and activities as I built a community of acceptance around him, where he felt he was safe and included. So initially, for me, to lead was in part driven by a wish to achieve as much as possible for both of us – in a way to make up for what Russell might otherwise not be able to achieve. As a result, through my schooling, tertiary education and early career as a lawyer, I was continually taking on new challenges, attending leadership courses and up-skilling my professional expertise in an effort to stay on top of the game.

### **Leadership: A Topical Issue**

While leadership has clearly been a long-term human fascination, one could argue leadership has rarely been under greater scrutiny than it is today. Journalists and various commentators make careers of deconstructing Prime Ministers as their parties, and the electorate at large, show increasing impatience and intolerance of fallibility. And while our three or four most recent Prime Ministers have adopted more of a US-presidential style of campaigning and governing, there is little evidence that this style of leadership appeals to voters.

Recent events have shown that Australia is expecting more from our political leaders. And for that matter, not just our political leaders, but as the mainstream media attests, there are daily reports providing critical appraisals of all kinds of leaders – in business, the law, sport, academia, and the Church.

Thankfully, the teaching of Jesus Christ and the fundamental attributes He demonstrated as a leader, are as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago, and these, combined with a genuine determination to nurture and build new leaders, act as a powerful guide for me, as we navigate ACCESS ministries through a period of profound transformation.

### **ACCESS Ministries: The Context Of My Leadership**

ACCESS ministries has the privilege today of carrying the torch for Christian Education in Victorian schools. In fact we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, beginning in 1890 in Geelong and then the Joint Council for Religious Instruction in Day Schools in 1920 and of course in 1945 The Council for Christian Education in Schools was formed, now named ACCESS.

As can sometimes be the case for leaders, I arrived in the position of CEO during a period of considerable challenge and disruption, and while some of the challenges being confronted are very contemporary and have really only been played out over the previous 12-18 months, we continue to confront other challenges that have existed in one way or another over the 125 years in which ACCESS Ministries and its predecessor organisations have provided Christian Religious Education and more recently Chaplaincy services to Victorian Government schools.

Externally, the tension between church and state and the role or otherwise of faith in the context of secular state education has always existed, but has certainly become a more public issue in recent years.

*(Continued On Page 5)*

### **CO-PASTOR POSITION VACANT Lygon Street Christian Chapel (Carlton, Victoria, Australia)**

We are seeking expressions of interest for a theologically-trained Co-pastor to join the ministry team at

Lygon Street Christian Chapel.

#### **We Are Looking For Someone Who:**

- Understands the Word of God and is passionate about proclaiming the Gospel.
- Has a consultative leadership style.
- Has the ability to work with a team of pastoral staff/elders and lay leaders.
- Has an interest in nurturing the development of a pilot ministry for mature-aged adults and retirees and other ministries as required.

#### **Please Address Expressions Of Interest To:**

Board of Elders,  
Lygon Street Christian Chapel  
Attention: Steve Dunham

**Email:** [dunhamsteven@yahoo.com](mailto:dunhamsteven@yahoo.com)

**Phone:** 0424 933 314

## MEET ... DAWN PENNEY

*(Continued From P.4)*

Operationally, in addition to the impact of continuing media attention on the place of faith in government schools, our operations within the schools system are being placed under much tighter government and regulatory control – and receiving much closer examination from school principals, the school community and a group of parents with a stated objective of removing all faith-based programs from all government schools. While some of the tactics employed by special interest groups and some individuals within the media and government have challenged what I consider are the principles of fair and reasonable conduct, I must say most emphatically that I have no objection to the notion of good governance, good regulation and good performance reporting – especially when it is applied to ensure children are offered the best, safest and most nurturing environments in which to learn.

So in this context of a highly dynamic operating environment, the other major challenge is the effective management of our stakeholders – first and foremost our Church Membership of 12 denominations, but also our many funders and supporters and of course, our staff and volunteers.

### **How To Lead At This Time?**

In considering how best to lead ACCESS Ministries, one can apply some of the same principles of good leadership exhibited by leaders across business, politics and academia, and while we differ from, 'for-profit' businesses, which have a relatively clear primary objective of making money, we do have to run a sustainable and solvent enterprise in order to continue our work, with the majority of our income generated through sales of our curriculum materials, contributions from our member churches, funds raised in local communities and donations from our supporters. So in this operating environment, there are a number of aspects of leadership that I am applying.

### **Empower, Equip, Release**

I consciously work at ensuring that one of my primary functions is that of an 'enabler' – managing the working environment in a way that encourages creativity and problem solving at all levels. I acknowledge the term innovation is overused these days, but I truly believe that environments that encourage innovation – properly managed and strategically aligned – do benefit from a more collegiate and collaborative approach to change. To further promote an 'enabling' environment, I am investing my effort and time in thinking through situations and challenges with individuals in a way that empowers them to own the strategy or the solution. I then ensure they are equipped with the appropriate resources to fulfill their assignment and then I 'release' them by giving them both the authority and the responsibility to deliver on their objectives.

### **Collaboration And 'Captain's Calls'**

Much has recently been written about the decision-making process in Canberra – and I certainly relate to the difficulty in knowing when to be seen as a determined, courageous and decisive leader and when to take a much more collaborative and collegiate approach. Where possible, I am a firm believer in evidence-based decision-making and to that end, we have recently undertaken qualitative research with key stakeholders including heads of all our 12 member churches plus key contacts in government, our support networks and our board and senior staff.

I remember as a young intern holding close to the wise words of John Stott: 'The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not co-ercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve. The chief characteristics of Christian leaders is humility, not authority, and gentleness, not power.'

I acknowledge the privilege ACCESS ministries has to work with children and young people and the opportunity we have as an organisation to present a model for all our potential future leaders, and as I lead at this exciting phase in our journey, I try to balance:

- Empathy and courage;
- Self awareness with humility;
- An inward focus, with a clear eye to the evolving external environment and ultimately with faithfulness and prayer for what God wants for this, His work.

We are indeed privileged to be given permission to work within those Government schools who choose to receive either our SRI or Chaplaincy services and we commit to the highest standards in all our interactions with children, teachers, parents and the school communities.

**'FATHER, FORGIVE ...'**

## **Coptic Church Bears Pain But Expresses Forgiveness**

THE Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and its Affiliated Regions held an ecumenical service on Tuesday 24 February in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, to mourn 21 Coptic (Egyptian) Christians whose lives were taken by Islamic State fighters in Libya, part of a rapidly escalating trend of systematic violence against Copts in the region.

'The Coptic Orthodox Church has a continued history of love and forgiveness in the face of persecution. We come together as a community to support each other and ensure our Church, one of the oldest Christian Churches in the world, can continue to thrive,' said His Grace Bishop Suriel, of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne.

The community also fears for the lives of three Coptic brothers and their cousin, who were kidnapped by masked gunmen, presumed to be Islamic State, in Libya. 'I suspect there are even more Copts captured by ISIS and more tragedies to come,' Bishop Suriel added. 'These horrifying executions and kidnappings of our fellow Christians have devastated our community and is a crime against all humanity. We are calling upon all Australians to raise the plight of attacks on Christians in the Middle East so, together, we can end this brutal persecution.'

Nevertheless, Bishop Suriel, quoting extensively from Scripture, called on all present to exhibit a spirit of forgiveness in obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the footsteps of martyrs who had gone before, noting that the 21 Libyan Martyrs had made a good confession as they were slain. 'This is what it means to be a Christian and to be a witness to Christ', he told the congregation, which included several Imams who came to express their condolences to the Copts. 'We must continue on, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Romans 12.12), knowing that, in times like these, the Lord is with us, caring for, carrying and loving us.'



## **'Stand For The People Of The Cross' – ACM Honours The 21 Coptic Martyrs Of Libya**

HUNDREDS of Egyptian Australians and members of the Australian public attended a rally in Martin Place, Sydney on Sunday 22 February to honour the 21 Coptic martyrs of Libya, to share in the grief of their families; and to protest against the growing threat of ISIS.

The event commenced with the National Anthems of both Australia and Egypt followed by a reflective hymn and one minute's silence to commemorate the 21 men who lost their lives. ACM's spokesperson Monica Mikhail delivered a strong speech calling on the Australian Government to:

- Support President Sisi in his call for international intervention in Libya.
- Offer all practical assistance to the Egyptian Government to safely return home Egyptian citizens trapped in Libya.
- Grant special consideration for the inclusion of Christians from the Middle East and North African region in any humanitarian intake.

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**'THEIR VOICE GOES OUT ...'**

## **SAT-7 TÜRK Now Broadcasting On The Government Regulated Türksat Satellite**

SAT-7 TÜRK is the first and only Christian channel on the government regulated Türksat 4A satellite. It is historic, and more than 50 million viewers in Turkey and many more Turkish speaking viewers in Europe and Central Asia will be able to watch SAT-7 TÜRK.

'We are overwhelmed and truly believe it is a miracle that we can finally broadcast on Türksat. We have hoped, dreamed and prayerfully anticipated this launch since the station began airing on SAT-7 ARABIC in 2006. It is really a miracle and we are very thankful to God for what He has been doing,' says Melih Ekener, Executive Director of SAT-7 TÜRK. It is a huge step forward. Until now, SAT-7 TÜRK has only shared satellite time on other SAT-7 channels and, more recently broadcast 24/7 on the Internet – reaching a quite limited audience. 'Türksat 4A is the most popular satellite, with the largest audience in Turkey reaching more than 50 million viewers and wider audiences in Central Asia, Europe and the Middle East. We are ready for this launch even though, at this point, we only have a total staff of 20 people. We will make it!' effused an enthusiastic Melih Ekener.

### **Number Of Programs Will Increase In 2015**

SAT-7 TÜRK is already familiar with producing different kinds of programs such as drama, documentaries, music, worship, children's, women's and youth programs and, more recently, live shows. The staff produced 360 hours of new programming in 2014, but this is expected to increase dramatically in 2015.

### **The Hand Of God**

Dr Terence Ascott, Founder and Chief Executive Officer at SAT-7, is also impressed by these exciting developments. 'So many things have miraculously fallen into place over the past few months that it is impossible to miss seeing the hand of God in facilitating the start of SAT-7 TÜRK broadcasting on Türksat. We give God the praise for this exciting development, and also recognise the signal this sends to the world about the Turkish authorities' positive attitude towards Christians and other minorities in the country.' To tune in SAT-7 TÜRK, go to the TURKSAT 4A satellite at 42° East, transponder 33 (11,825 MHz Vertical). To watch SAT-7 TÜRK online: [www.sat7.org/tv2/TV2\\_turk.html](http://www.sat7.org/tv2/TV2_turk.html)



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### Fred Nile Demands Government Include 'Non-Halal' Labelling On Food

REV Fred Nile declares that, 'Australian people are being discriminated against and are being forced to eat food which has been prayed on to the Islamic god "Allah"...' It is estimated that 80% of food which Australians consume has a 'halal certified' ingredient. Now 90% of all meat, including, beef, lamb, chicken and fish is 'halal certified'. Thousands of our supermarket products like bread, dairy, fruit and vegetables, bottled water, shampoo, dog-food even chocolate Easter Eggs have been halal certified. Fred Nile claims, 'We as Australian citizens are being discriminated against and have not been given our democratic freedom of choice! Christians and non-Muslims are being deceived to pay a tax which has not been regulated by the Government. This is discrimination against people who do not want to consume food and buy product which has been prayed on in accordance with the Islamic Sharia Law!'

According to the last census, the non-Muslim population is 98%. 'Why then, I ask the Government, are we paying an Islamic food tax on almost our entire food-chain?' Citizens should unite and voice their opposition to having their democratic rights to freedom of choice. Australia is NOT an Islamic Nation. Citizens must have much more 'NON-HALAL' choice at the super-market.

'I urge the government to make it a priority to investigate the "halal industry" and to include clear labelling of "halal" and "non-halal" on ALL products and food. Right now, the food industry is being sabotaged by money making, self-vested greed via an unnecessary, hidden, deceiving tax which every Australian is paying every day!'

The worldwide 'halal tax' estimate is \$2.7 trillion per annum and growing strongly. All non-Muslims are unknowingly paying a contribution everyday via our crucial food-chain. The Christian Democratic Party strongly opposes the imposing of Sharia Law in Australia including its 'halal certification'.

The Government must answer to the 98% of citizens who should not be paying this unnecessary and discriminating tax. It must investigate the 'halal' industry and include in its' Food Labelling measures labelling of 'non-halal' products to all citizens.

– Fred Nile Media Release



I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 5:24 NIV

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## Christian Leaders' Training College Celebrates Jubilee

THE Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea will celebrate its 50th Anniversary this year. New Zealand is organising celebration events from 27 February to 1 March and Australia will celebrate on 28 March. Papua New Guinea will celebrate with events at different locations, with the Banz campus celebrating 17 to 19 April

The College Principal Dr William Longgar and his wife Iru will be attending the celebrations in New Zealand and Australia. The Government of Papua New Guinea will issue a set of stamps to celebrate the event on 30 March.

— John Hunter



## Good News For The Children Of Bethlehem

AFTER so much terrible news from the Middle East, now is time for Mega Voice hope. Canon Andrew White, the Vicar of Baghdad, reports: 'We have just given the Mega Voice speaking Bibles to the children of the Mar Ephrem School that we helped build in Bethlehem. Oh it was so wonderful to see such joy and hope amongst these little people as they got Mega Voice. What a wonderful chance to share good news and hope. You too can buy one from Megavoice!'



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## **Andrew Chan's Testimony, In His Own Words:**

I FOUND myself in here (Kerobokan Prison). At first I thought it was no big deal, 'I'll get outta this'. It wasn't until I ended up in solitary confinement that I realised I wasn't going to get outta this. In fact, I figured they were gonna kill me. I had never felt so hopeless and alone before, and decided that if they were going to kill me anyway, I'd just do it myself. I took my t-shirt off and made a noose, and then remembered the Heaven/Hell issue, and decided that if I was gonna kill myself I should make sure I ended up in Heaven. I wasn't sure how to do that, but figured I should pray. I wasn't sure how to do that either, so I looked up and just said, 'God, if You're real ...', and for the first time in my life I began to cry and ended up on my knees. I cried and cried and said, 'God if you're real, send someone who cares about me to see me.' I fell asleep like that.

At 6.30 the next morning a guard woke me up. I woke up cursing him in my usual response, and he said 'Get up, you've got a visitor.' I said, 'I can't have a visitor, no one knows I'm here.' He took me to the visitor area and I saw my brother. I thought, my Mum must have seen this on the news and sent my brother to see about me, because I knew my brother wouldn't just come – we don't like each other. We get along like cats and dogs.

When I got to him, he said, 'Andrew, no matter what happens or how long it takes, I'm gonna be here with you.' I told him to bring me a Bible. I started in Genesis when I got it and thought, 'These are a lot of nice stories', but I got nothing out of it. Someone else came to visit me who was a Christian, and I told him I was reading the Bible but didn't get much out of it, and he told me to read the New Testament. I didn't even know what that was and told him I didn't have one. He had to explain to me that it was a part of the Bible, and told me to start reading the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I read through the New Testament a couple of times, but didn't really notice any change. I just didn't get it.

Just before my court date, I remember reading Mark 11.23,24, where it says that if you have enough faith you can say to this mountain, 'Be removed' and God will do it. So I said, 'God, if You're real and if this is true, I want You to free me, and if You do I'll serve You every day for the rest of my life.' I went to my court hearing and they convicted me and gave me the death penalty.

When I got back to my cell, I said, 'God, I asked You to set me free, not kill me.' God spoke to me and said, 'Andrew, I have set you free from the inside out, I have given you life!' From that moment on I haven't stopped worshipping Him. I had never sung before, never led worship, until Jesus set me free.' My last appeal is on the President's desk for review. If he doesn't grant it, I'll be executed. It's not that I fear death, but I promised Him I'd serve Him for the rest of my life, and I feel I have more things to do. So if you want to pray, you could pray that I'll be released.'

*(Chris Makin, from 'Leading The Way', an International Evangelism Organisation, advises that this article was produced in 2013. It was forwarded to us by the Rev R. Perry Smith. – Ed.)*

## **Bangkok Church Filled With Ex-Buddhists Has A Big Vision**

IN a storefront location on a bustling street near two malls and a university lies a glittering diamond in God's Kingdom, a church poised for growth in a nation where only 1% follow Jesus.

'We started with three people,' says Gai Tanangunvirog. She and her husband Khajorn lead Tai Church, which has grown to 100 and already planted five churches in other provinces of Thailand.

More than 70% of the church are former Buddhists. During a weekend Valentine conference this week, some 220 Buddhists received Christ. 'Every week my staff shares the Gospel,' notes Pastor Khajorn, who has an evangelist's heart and is a sought-after speaker in other churches in Bangkok. 'We have a big

dream,' says Gai. Gai says that a decade ago the Lord revealed in a dream the church would grow to 60,000 people. 'It's such a big number it's hard to imagine,' she confesses. 'People ask me why we're so busy. I tell them our vision is not from man but from God.'

It can be challenging to reach Buddhists in Thailand. 'They don't want to stand out as different,' Gai observes. 'Some family members get upset and then they back away from that pressure. They are afraid of rejection from friends and family.'

– Mark Ellis, special to ASSIST News Service

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## PERSECUTION WATCH

### NEPAL: Christians Forced To Convert To Buddhism In Rural Village

A Buddhist monk visiting the predominantly Christian Borang village in Nepal's Dhading district forced all the Christian villagers to convert to Buddhism and ordered them to stop all Christian worship. Two of the church's leaders refused to obey the orders and were attacked in response. Commissioned by a political leader from the RPP Hindu nationalist party, the monk came to the village to preach Buddhism. All of the Christian villagers were locked inside a hall and forced to listen to the Buddhist teachings and to accept Buddhism. They were asked to bow down before a statue, go around the village carrying Buddhist scriptures on their heads, and to place Buddhist flags on their houses.



Refusing to obey the orders, the pastor and elder of the church were attacked. Although the church elder managed to escape, the pastor was captured and beaten for three days. He was then forced to place his finger print on a document stating that he would stop running the church and that he would not report the incident to police authorities or leave the village.

Led by the Buddhist monk, a group of assailants attacked the church on 1 February. They destroyed the furniture and church building and tried to set fire to it. They also attacked the pastor's home, cutting off the electricity and phone lines. Not allowed to use the phone or leave the village, the pastor is still in Borang. Local Christians told Barnabas Fund that they are particularly concerned about the health of the church pastor since there is no information about his current condition. The church was unable to meet the following Saturday, the normal day for worship services across Nepal.

Although local police were sent from Setung to the village to find out what happened, the locals, under pressure from the attackers, reported that there had been no problems. The police then returned to Setung without reporting the incident.

Although Nepal is over 80% Hindu, Buddhism holds close ties to the majority religion; the birthplace of its founder is said to be in Lumbini, southern Nepal. Dhading district, however, has the highest number of Nepali Christians, with some villages being almost entirely Christian. *– Barnabas Fund*

#### SYRIA: 90+ Abducted From Christian Villages

THE Islamist jihadi group Daesh (Islamic State) has kidnapped at least 90 people from mainly Assyrian Christian villages in north east Syria. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the kidnappings took place on 24 February, following dawn raids on Assyrian villages in areas held by Kurdish forces in al-Hasakah Province. The villages, mainly populated by the ancient Christian Minority, are near the Assyrian town of Tel Hmar. The nearby city of Hasakah is divided between Kurdish and Daesh forces.

On 22 February, fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) claimed that they had driven Daesh out of 22 villages, including several Assyrian ones situated between Hasakah City and Syria's border with Turkey. YPG forces also seized 19 villages during an offensive in Raqqa Province, which is next to Hassakeh. Daesh fighters countered by advancing into the Assyrian villages in an effort to regain control. While there are currently no details on those who have been kidnapped, Christians living in these areas had previously received an ultimatum to convert, pay a religious levy (Jizya)

or face death, causing many to flee their ancestral lands.

#### SOUTH SUDAN: Fears Growing For Two Pastors Held By Sudanese Intelligence

PASTOR Yat Michael and Pastor Peter Yen (also named as David Yein Reith in some reports) have now each been held for over a month after being arrested during visits to the country from their homes in South Sudan. The two pastors are members of the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, and both were arrested while visiting Sudan's capital, Khartoum.

#### INDIA: Church Leader Beaten With Iron Bars

A HOUSE church leader from near Mumbai suffered chest and back injuries when Hindu extremists beat him with iron bars and wooden rods. About 25 assailants attacked Pramod Sahu at the garage where he works as a welder, threatening to kill him if he continued to practise his faith. The mob beat him again when he refused to worship a Hindu god. They also tore down an image of Christ and shouted anti-Christian slogans. Pramod's assailants have continued to monitor him.

*– Morning Star News via Release International*

## **Child Abuse Linked To Alcohol Consumption**

THE NSW Council of Churches has backed calls by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education for governments to embrace a broad public health approach to alcohol abuse in response to the release of a damning report on the impact of alcohol on children. The report, *Hidden Harm: Alcohol's Impact On Children And Families*, launched by Australian of the Year Rosie Batty, found that 140,000 children were badly affected by the alcohol consumption of their parents or carers, and alcohol abuse contributed to the placement of 10,000 children in child protection.

The foundation wants a strong focus on prevention, with national public education campaigns acknowledging the role of alcohol in family violence, targeted screening of young people at greater risk of harm, and population-wide policies to reduce the availability and target the price and promotion of alcohol.

The chief executive of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, Michael Thorn, said state and federal governments needed to develop new policies to tackle the problem. 'If only governments would acknowledge that they can do something about problems like family violence by tackling the availability of alcohol, we will see reductions in the incidences of family violence and the severity of family violence.'

The NSW Council of Churches supports consideration of harm minimisation measures to reduce alcohol-related violence including earlier pub closing times, lock-outs, restricting the advertising of alcohol, and raising the legal drinking age.

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## **Watering Down TV Standards Puts Kids At Risk**

THE Australian Christian Lobby has urged the Australian Communications and Media Authority to reject proposed changes to free-to-air television which include abolishing G timeslots, abolishing the AV rating and bringing forward M and MA timeslots. ACL Managing Director Lyle Shelton said, 'Free TV Australia seems to have a reckless disregard for children and the wishes of parents. Most people think there is too much sex and violence on free to air television. Relaxing the rules will only serve to put more of this type of content in front of children at a time where there is widespread concern about the impacts on children of violence and early sexualisation. It would be great if self-regulation of television classification worked, but the industry keeps pushing for weaker standards all the time.'

Free TV has stated that it's up to parents to actively manage viewing, however research suggests that many parents struggle to uphold family viewing rules. One study found that 90% of parents made rules to limit television use, but only 54% were able to uphold the rules over time. 'This is why appropriate standards are so important; it's what parents don't know about their child's viewing habits that is at issue. Relaxing standards on these timeslots would bring potentially harmful content to the screens of our children that will be harder for parents to control,' Mr Shelton said. 'The proposed changes that will also allow alcohol advertising to be brought forward from 8.30pm to 7.30pm. This is during highest rating shows like *The Block* and *Masterchef*, both of which have a high child and adolescent audience. The connection between alcohol advertising and underage drinking has been clearly demonstrated. Allowing these ads to air during extremely popular family timeslots is not a constructive message to send our future generations.'

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## TO HELP THE RISING GENERATION ...

### ARPA Inaugurates The Ramon Williams Scholarship

THE Australasian Religious Press Association, established in 1974, is pleased to announce a scholarship package named in honour of Ramon Williams. Ramon has been involved with ARPA since its foundation, and was awarded the *Gutenberg Award* in 1987 and an *Arpa Citation For Outstanding Service To Christian Media* in 2013. As the founder of World-wide Photos Ltd, he has contributed in a variety of ways to the ministry of the Church in Australia, especially through the provision of photographic material, Christian stories and press releases to the Christian Media and the secular media.



Ramon has been a source of great personal encouragement to many Christians in the media (not least to *New Life* and myself – *Ed*) and many people have been touched by Ramon's thoughtfulness and contact. Ramon's life theme is *Telling Others What Others Are Doing For The Lord* and it is ARPA's hope that this scholarship will be a source of encouragement for a younger member in their developing ministry of *Telling Others*.

#### Details Of The Scholarship

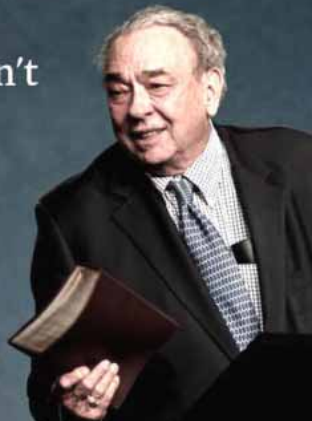
ARPA will provide one annual ARPA Conference package, including registration, accommodation and airfares up to the value of \$1,500 for a younger delegate. The delegate will be under 30 years of age at the time of application and must be nominated or endorsed by a member publication or agency. The scholarship will be awarded on the basis of an application in writing of no more than two pages outlining the reasons for and benefits the person will receive from attending an annual conference and any possible contribution to ARPA at the conference or after the event. Applications will be judged by the ARPA President and the New Zealand and Australian Vice-Presidents, and a recommendation provided to the ARPA executive for final decision.

Closing date for applications for the inaugural year is 15 May 2015. Applications should be emailed to The ARPA Executive Officer, Mrs Elizabeth Harris: [admin@arpanews.org](mailto:admin@arpanews.org)

### Seen On Face Book:

“The Bible doesn't say that God is 'Holy,' but that He is 'Holy, holy, holy.'”

– R. C. SPROUL



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## 'Sermons-To-Go'

### A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

(Largely lifted from Spurgeon's commentary on Psalm 94 in *The Treasury Of David*):

#### Introduction:

'What goes around comes around.'

The Psalmist lived in a troubled world, just as we do today. In his weakness he looked to God for strength.

#### Main Points:

1. A Complaint Against Wicked Oppressors (vv1-7).
2. A Warning To Wicked Oppressors (vv8-11).
3. An Affirmation Of God's Blessings, Even Under Wicked Oppressors (vv12-15).
4. A Plea For God's Help Against Wicked Oppressors (vv16-19).
5. An Assurance Of God's Victory Over And Punishment Of Wicked Oppressors (vv20-23).

#### Conclusion:

(With a quotable quote from CHS to finish:)

'God has but to show Himself, and the good cause wins the day. He comes, He sees, He conquers. Truly in these days we need a manifest display of His powers, for the ancient enemies of God and man are again struggling for the mastery, and if they gain it, woe unto the saints of God.'

God's raising up of Spurgeon in his day was 'a manifest display of His powers'.

Please Lord, do it again today!

**How Can You Be A Change Agent For The Gospel? Romans 13.1-7**

IN the late 18th Century, while reading his Greek New Testament, William Wilberforce became a believer. He then read Philip Doddridge's book *The Rise And Progress Of Religion In The Soul* and determined that he should retire as a politician in order to be more directly involved in ministry.

In the case of Wilberforce, friends like John Newton encouraged him to stay on in the House of Commons and to serve the Gospel there. He did so – and did more than anyone else to see the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Like the Earl of Shaftesbury who came after him, Wilberforce was a social reformer who worked to establish education for the poor. So much in the fields of health, education and social welfare, which we take for granted, can be attributed to the work of these Christian politicians of 19th Century England.



We should pray for more Gospel-focused people like this who will seek to serve the Gospel's interests with integrity from within our Federal, State and Local Governments. The crucial elements of Wilberforce's spirituality were daily self-examination, prayer, morning and evening devotions, an expectancy of Heaven and a recognition of the importance of solitude.

**FOR REFLECTION:**

*How important is this time to think, to you?*

*How can you be more regular in spending time in quiet reflection?*

I raise the issue here because, if we are to cope as God-honouring believers in all the circumstances of our busy lives then we must guard time to think, to renew the mind, for solitude to reflect on what the Gospel says about God, grace and myself as a living sacrifice. Without such solitude, reflection, and renewal which were so vital to Wilberforce there will not be transformed living and we will be sucked along by the proud, apathetic, cursing, vengeful and cynical world.

How best can you serve the Gospel, by being the active lobbyist or the letterwriter or the local Member of Parliament?

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

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*'...We...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.'* (Galatians 2.16)

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## BOOKS WORTH READING

### COVENANT AND COMMANDMENT: Works, Obedience And Faithfulness In The Christian Life, Bradley G. Green, NSBT 33; Nottingham: IVP, 2014. ISBN 978-1-78359-166-4.

THE latest volume in the popular and reliable *New Studies In Biblical Theology* series is written by Bradley Green, Associate Professor of Christian Studies at Union University, Jackson, Tennessee. He enters the fray of disputes over the place of works in the Christian life, an issue that has been a battleground since the time of the Reformation. This is nothing less than the perennial Gospel-Law relationship that every generation of believers seems to need to thrash out afresh. His basic argument is that, though we are not saved by works, works are a God-elicited and necessary part of the new life of the converted person without compromising *sola fide*.

Dr Green surveys New Testament texts, showing that obedience to God is viewed as a fruit of faith in Christ, with Philippians 2.12,13 the linchpin of his argument throughout the book. Next, Green shows that the new covenant prophecies in *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* point forward to the heart-obedience that is a reality for the New Testament believer. Green argues that the transition from the Old Covenant to the New does not alter the fact that works, obedience and faithfulness are constituent parts of the life of the believer, but under the New Covenant we enjoy a profounder experience of God's Spirit. In both testaments, God saves people by grace, and His saved people have the covenant obligation to obey Him. In other words, says Green, the Mosaic Covenant was not based on works; under that covenant works were necessary but not meritorious.

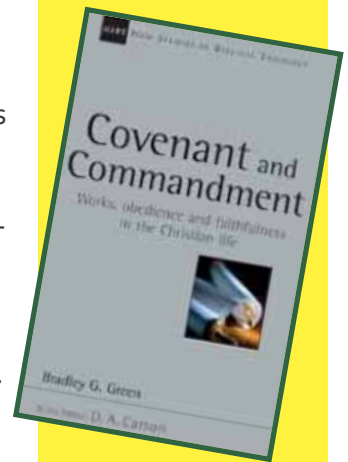
Green warns that the Law-Gospel dichotomy is not to be pushed to an unbiblical extreme, for there is always grace in God's dealings with humanity (Adam, Abraham, Moses), but the Gospel does not free us from the obligation to obey the One who by grace has saved us.

In the best chapter in the book, Professor Green shows how the atoning work of Christ is the wellspring of obedience, using Romans 8.4 as his key text. A Christian without good works is a contradiction and a denial of the efficacy of the cross. Without confusing or fusing justification and sanctification, Green demonstrates that the cross of Christ leads to a transformed life. The Pauline teaching of union with Christ carries the same implication. Our union with Christ through faith is the ground and motivation of our moral transformation more and more in the likeness of Christ.

In regard to the place of works in future judgment (eg Romans 2.6), Green says we are justified by faith, but subsequent Spirit-enabled works are evidence that our faith is real. They are not meritorious and do not as such contribute to our justification before the judgment throne of God. Green examines the views of N.T. Wright and finds them wanting, for Wright does appear to make works (at the final justification) a ground of salvation. Interestingly, Green is ambivalent about the existence of a 'covenant of works', for, he says, the divine arrangement with Adam in the garden was from the outset one of grace, and even in Eden, works were not the ground of Adam's righteous standing with God. Adam and Christ are the two 'heads' of the human race. Green does not want the newness of the New Covenant through Christ to be downplayed, for due to the work of Christ, believers now have a greater measure of God's Spirit, empowering us to live transformed (though imperfect) lives.

This, then, is a richly satisfying book that deals carefully with all the key biblical texts, takes in the whole sweep of redemption in a grand biblical theology, draws on some of the greats of Christian theology (Calvin, Owen, Edwards, Vos, Blocher), and shows how vital it is to live a life of obedience – and all this without detracting from the glorious doctrine of justification by faith.

– Greg Goswell



*'Our union with Christ through faith is the ground and motivation of our moral transformation more and more in the likeness of Christ.'*

## BOOKS WORTH READING

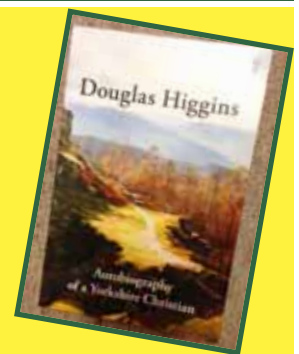
### DOUGLAS HIGGINS, *An Autobiography Of A Yorkshire Christian, Banner Of Truth*, Edinburgh, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-84871-488-5.

BANNER'S publishing this book is the ecclesiastical equivalent of Copland's composing *Fanfare For The Common Man* – and a good thing it is too. We revel in the biographies of the A-listers – Whitefield, Wesley, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones; and the B-listers – Brown, Miller, *Heroes Of The Faith* – in that genre which Iain Murray has made his own. But there's a whole army of foot soldiers out there, many of them 'known only to God', and many whose life and work has been influential in their own circle of family and friends even though they are not more widely known. Douglas Higgins is one of them.

Born and raised near Sheffield, he has spent almost all of his life in that vicinity. After war service in the RAF he trained as a teacher and worshipped and served in what appear to be independent chapels. He was known locally as one who is 'apt to teach', an artistically gifted man with a pastoral heart.

This heart-warming autobiography will bring much cheer and encouragement to those who read it. Perhaps it will especially bring encouragement to those of us whose foot is on the doorstep of old age, for here is the testimony of a centenarian who sets an example of 'finishing well': 'The sixteen years since the Lord took my wife Eileen to Glory have been filled with much kindness and love by my family and friends,' he writes. 'My son ... and my daughter continue to help in many ways ... In all of this I am aware of the Lord's great goodness and provision for me ...' Truly, 'godliness with contentment is great gain'.

*An Autobiography Of A Yorkshire Christian* is a charming book which glorifies God and lights up Isaac Watts' great words: 'A feeble saint shall win the day, though death and hell should bar the way.' Read it and be blessed. – *Bob Thomas*



*'In all of this I am aware of the Lord's great goodness and provision for me ...'*

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