

Samoa Women's Empowerment Through Vocational Training



The women of Talofa Village in Savaii with Aaron Moore, the EHC Australia/New Zealand Project Manager

EVERY Home for Christ Christian literature distribution ministry is embarking on a new project of empowering women in Samoan villages by training them in making small items for sale. The project will have three training centres – two in Savaii and one in Upolu (each of Samoa's two islands). Each class will teach sewing, stencil design and floristry. However, women will be able to major or focus on one of the subjects if they wish. It is generally expected that women will choose the three subjects. Training one group of women is expected to take four to six weeks in total.

The project has generated much excitement among the women of Samoa. One woman has said: 'This project will enable women to make goods to sell and in this way increase their now "poor family income".' Another, Faufoi, says: 'I'm 39 years old and have seven children ranging from four months to 20 years of age. My family is very poor. We try selling what we can. Sometimes we go to market but nothing sells! We make 30-40 tala (\$A\$15-\$20) per week, and it's not enough. It will be helpful if we can learn to make our own clothes in order to make a living.'

Still another says: 'I have 11 children and 20 grandchildren. Our village used to be very poor and we lived in open fale (shacks with open walls and a simple roof). I will bring my children and grandchildren to attend the training and think it will be very beneficial.'

– Every Home For Christ. everyhomeforchrist.org.au

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Amazing Grace In The Life Of Andrew Chan And Myuran Sukumaran

DR Mark Tronson recently wrote an article in *Christian Today* to the effect that 'boring testimonies are much the same but their product is the strength of the evangelical church.'

'Growing up in a Christian home, a sound grounding in Christian understanding and faith, attended Sunday School, Youth Group, gave their lives to Christ, off to tertiary studies, professional women, married Christian men, now families of their own ... The evangelical Christian Church across the board, whatever denomination, whatever heritage or race or colour, this self-same testimony becoming followers of Jesus Christ is the mainstay and life blood of such churches,' he writes.

This is so very true, but from time to time we hear testimonies of those who we say have been 'gloriously saved' – 'from the guttermost to the uttermost'. And we are presently in the midst of the sad saga of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, on death row in Indonesia, with Australia begging for mercy and the commutation of their sentence to life in prison.

One of the pastors who has ministered to these men reports that one of Andrew Chan's messages to his family and friends last week was: 'I'm proof that Jesus is alive, give glory to Jesus. Important note: please pray for the other people on the sentence. there are eight other people and they are already in solitary. Six of them are in solitary, two more are still being assessed, but you could imagine the six in solitary.'

It has been reported that Andrew continues to be strong in faith and is ready to meet the Lord, but he feels his work is unfinished, he feels that there is a lot more he can do in prison, in reforming drug addicts, making sure none of the prisoners leave and become drug dealers themselves, and especially as he wants to share Christ with many more people.

One of his former cell-mates came to Christ through his ministry. He was an Imam in the prison mosque and a drug lord in the prison. He was arrested and imprisoned as a gangster but with the guidance of Andrew Chan came to know Christ. Andrew baptized him in the prison and began mentoring him one on one. He joined a Bible Study group in Kerobokan. There are other prisoners, like one very hard-core convict who hated Andrew intensely, and even more because he had become a Christian. Andrew demonstrated the love of Christ to him, and eventually this hardened criminal broke and has come to faith in Christ. He is still in prison and still being mentored in his faith. There are many stories like this about Andrew.

Myuran Sukumaran too is reported to have become a believer, but not as strong as Andrew. Myuran's mother is a believer and prays for her son's salvation.

Whatever the circumstance, 'ordinary, garden variety' or spectacular tinged with infamy, God's grace is truly amazing. It is always an expression of the wonderful fact that 'there is no love like the love of Jesus, never to fade or fall' and always compels us to cry 'O turn to that love, weary, wandering soul, Jesus pleadeth for thee.'

– Bob Thomas

INDIA: Supreme Court Ruling A Coup For Hindutva

'SCHEDULED castes' and 'scheduled tribes' are those deemed to be backward, requiring affirmative action and government benefits. India declared Independence in 1947. In the 1950's the Nehru government passed a law limiting the definition of 'scheduled caste' to members of the Hindu faith. The theory behind the law was that upon leaving Hinduism, converts would escape the constraints of caste and be free to rise above it. In reality, caste in India is like a stain that never washes out – it is inescapable. Consequently, scheduled caste Hindus who convert to Christianity still suffer caste discrimination, yet without access to benefits or reserved job or university places, leaving them truly impoverished. Unfortunately, as Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) ideologues rightly note, caste discrimination extends deep into the Church. Christians have been appealing through the courts for more than a decade for benefits and reservations to be allotted equitably: according to need, not religion. However, Hindutva promotes religious apartheid and strongly opposes equity.

In 1976 the court ruled that, if a Christian born to scheduled caste (Hindus) converts-to-Christianity wants to 'return (convert)' to Hinduism and receive scheduled caste benefits, he/she should be free to do so. The ruling thus set a limit of one generation, ie, a Christian 'returning' to Hinduism could claim the caste status his/her parents had prior to their conversion. In 2006 the Kerala High Court ruled against KP Manu, a 'returnee' to Hinduism. Manu's scheduled caste (Hindu) grandparents were the first in his family to convert to Christianity. Born to Christian parents in 1960, Manu 'returned' to Hinduism in 1984, claimed the scheduled caste status of his grandparents and got a reserved government job. However, the local Hindu community did not accept him, suspecting him to be a fraud, as he did not participate in Hindu rituals. The Hindu community complained, saying Manu was not entitled to a reserved job because his parents were Christians. With that, Manu's job was terminated and he was ordered to pay back the salary he had earned. When the Kerala High Court upheld the termination, Manu appealed to the Supreme Court. On Thursday 26 February 2015 the Supreme Court ruled in Manu's favour, setting aside the High Court judgment. It also extended the 1976 ruling, removing the one generation limit so that now any Christian 'returning' to Hinduism is guaranteed the caste of their ancestors along with the benefits.

The SC ruling has sent shockwaves through the Christian community which has been lobbying for equity. The ruling consolidates inequity and the religious apartheid of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism). Furthermore, the court ruling legitimises the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad's ghar wapsi ('home-coming' / 're-conversion') campaign, just as the VHP is escalating its efforts across the country. The SC ruling essentially establishes an incentive for impoverished Christians to 'return' to Hinduism. 'Those who left the Hindu fold had made a mistake,' said BJP (Hindu nationalist) MP Yogi Adityanath. 'We are trying to rectify their mistake through ghar wapsi. Ghar wapsi shall continue until a law on religious conversion is brought in ...'

If such a law was in place at the time of Independence,' he said, 'then the population of Christians would not have risen from a mere 0.7% to 7%.' VHP president Pravin Togadia has expressed concerns that if Hindus [who comprise 72%] are not protected from 'forced conversion' they will become a 'minority in their own country'. He is calling for India to be made a Hindu Rastra (Hindu State) to 'protect Hindus from discrimination'. Meanwhile, Sadhvi Prachi Arya, a prominent VHP leader, has vowed that the ghar wapsi program will continue until the 150 million people who, she claimed, have left the Hindu fold since Independence, are 'reconverted to Hinduism'. Nothing leaves impoverished Christians (the main targets of ghar wapsi) more vulnerable to 're-conversion' than the caste discrimination within the Church.

– Elizabeth Kendal, International Religious Liberty Analyst And Advocate, Adjunct Research Fellow In The Centre For The Study Of Islam And Other Faiths At The Melbourne School Of Theology, And Director Of Advocacy For Christian Faith & Freedom based in Canberra, Australia.

PRAY THAT GOD WILL:

- Pour out His Spirit of repentance, grace and courage upon the Church in India, eliminating caste discrimination within the Church, proliferating generous and sacrificial love for the Body of Christ.
- Raise up advocates who will 'speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.' (Proverbs 31.8,9 NIV); may India's gross inequity and religious apartheid be denounced and challenged at home and abroad.
- Comfort, provide for and greatly bless all those Indians who choose to trust and follow Christ in spite of the cost being violent persecution and crippling poverty.

ALSO – (URGENT) – Please remember the more than 200 Assyrian Christians being held captive by IS in Syria and the 35 Copts being held captive by IS in Libya. Recently, the decapitated body of a Copt named Mansour Saad Awad was discovered on the outskirts of the town of Mechili, in Cyrenaica, eastern Libya. IS has issued threats against Copts in northern Sinai, ordering their expulsion from Wilayat Sinai (the IS province of Sinai).

Some 30 Coptic families have fled their homes but between 200 and 300 Coptic families remain, having nowhere to go. Pray for the Christians of the Middle East.

ISIS Terrorists Announce their Next Target: Pope Francis

THE ISIS Muslim terrorists have announced that their next target is Pope Francis, but the Pontiff says he will not change his mission of 'closeness to the people.' ISIS seems intent on carrying out more attacks against Christians, this time targeting the Pope and the Vatican.

Commander Domenico Giani, head of the Vatican police force, said in an interview with Italian state publication *Polizia Moderna* recently that Islamic State threats against Pope Francis are 'real' and not just media propaganda. 'This is what emerges from the talks I have had with Italian and foreign colleagues,' he said, stressing, however, that he was unaware of any specific plot. Threats against the Pope and the Vatican go beyond ISIS' apparatus operating out of Syria and Iraq. They extend to the 'lone wolves,' those in Western countries appearing to be ordinary citizens, who are more dangerous because they are unpredictable, the security chief explained.

Giani has commanded the Vatican security force for the past nine years, but ISIS' advent as well as recent developments in the Middle East have made threats against the Pope and Rome more acute. 'The Pope is fully aware of the danger,' Giani says, 'but he is not compromising the style of his pontificate, based on closeness to the people, that is, on personal contact with the greatest number of people possible.' The Vatican Police and Interpol exchange intelligence with each other as well as with other investigative services, receiving valuable information even from Muslim states, Giani revealed. According to Giani, 20 of the 138 Vatican police have received 'special training' that enables them to carry out 'anti-terrorist actions. Some,' he said, 'accompany the Pope during his international travels.'

Giani also shared that the Vatican makes use of the latest security technology and has an operational centre 'of high technological level,' which collects data from 'thousands of surveillance cameras' installed in Vatican City as well as in extraterritorial Vatican properties.'

– Breaking Church News

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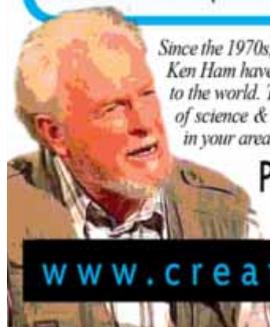
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Salvos Stores Launch Salvos Street Boutique

SALVOS launched their first-ever *Salvos Street Boutique* on Thursday 12 March within their Darlinghurst (Sydney) Salvos Store. The Street Boutique will be encouraging fashion savvy, budget conscious consumers to shop at their local Salvos Stores and discover affordable fashion, while helping the community and the environment.

Jeff McCartney, Salvos Stores Eastern Sydney Area Manager says, 'Everybody has a love for fashion, and with *Salvos Street Boutique* we have created an explosion of styles whilst thinking of the environment. This is also where the "Old" meets "New" with a stylish independent feel.' Salvos Stores have been helping struggling families and individuals for over 125 years, and have raised millions of dollars to support The Salvation Army. Pre-loved and recycled furniture, clothing and goods are donated to the stores and then sold at reasonable and fair prices. All profits from these sales go towards running vital Salvation Army programs which assist the less fortunate. Goods are also distributed free of charge to those in need through The Salvation Army's network.

BCA Returns To Norfolk Island

THE Bush Church Aid Society of Australia is delighted to announce that the Society is once again supporting ministry on Norfolk Island with the appointment of the Rev David and Mrs Crystal Fell as BCA Affiliates. Previously, BCA supported ministry on Norfolk Island when the Rev Captain Rod and Mrs Christene Oldfield served there until 2010. Since then there has been a series of visiting locums.

Under the new arrangement, the Church of England on Norfolk Island and the Diocese of Sydney will cover the direct costs of ministry while BCA will provide pastoral and prayer support for the Fells. This reflects BCA's past engagement with the island, as well as its current experience in supporting ministry on Kangaroo, King and the Furneaux Islands.

'We are thrilled by this opportunity to reach another remote community for Christ,' said the BCA National Director Mark Short. 'It allows us to partner with others and draw on the insights and experience we have gained over many years of mission. God has prepared the Fells well for their new appointment. For the past six years they have lived within walking distance of the Norfolk Island pines at Manly, where Mr Fell served as Assistant Minister of St Matthews Anglican Church. On Norfolk Island they are hoping to work with God's people to grow existing congregations, reach out to youth and young families and build on the many opportunities to connect with almost 30,000 tourists who visit the Island each year.

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God Brings Hope In Hopeless Times – ROCK Ministries

JESUS is the ROCK and the focus of the Summer Gospel ROCK Mission in Clayton, Melbourne, was on JESUS, who is the only hope for the world in troublous, perilous times, in 2015 and beyond.

The ROCK ministries team consisting of 69 members (mostly teenagers) presented their annual summer mission (6-12 January) to the children of Clayton and beyond.

Team members came from Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania and were supported by the Clayton Ministers/Pastors Prayer Group.

Thanks are expressed to the Kingston Council for making the spacious grounds of Namatjira Park available for the mission.

Angela Crawley as ROCK President and husband Nick Crawley (School Chaplain) provided inspirational spiritual leadership ably assisted by Nick Boys (ROCK Vice President) and David Jensen. Kerry Jensen organised the adult team members in the provision of refreshments to everyone during the mission.

The team members exercised their spiritual gifts in Holy Spirit love and unity in presenting the Gospel of hope through acted Bible stories, plays and related group craft activities each day:

Day One: Joseph felt helpless when thrown into jail for something he did not do, but look what God did! (Genesis 37-46)

Day Two: Esther felt hopeless when her people, the Jews, were going to be killed, but look what God did! (Esther 4-9).

Day Three: The jailer felt hopeless when there was an earthquake, but look what God did! (Acts 16.16-40, especially vv22-34).

Day Four: Bartimaeus felt hopeless because he was blind, but look what God did! (Mark 10.46-52)

Day Five: Peter felt hopeless when he denied his best friend, Jesus, but look what God did! (Luke 22.54-62).

The daily episodes of the drama, prepared and directed by team members Catherine Wentworth and Josh Crawley, depicted dramatic, humourous hospital scenes and hope-inspiring events in the 'Hope Medical Centre'.

Children's attendance at the park averaged 100. The adult attendances (with other children) ranged from 44 on Wednesday to 75 on Thursday and passers-by lingered to watch and hear the Gospel. The Saturday evening family fun celebration at Clayton Presbyterian Church was enjoyed by about 120 children and 130 adults as the ROCK team conducted games, contests and activities on the church tennis courts. An episode of the drama was presented and a hope-themed film was shown in the church hall.

The Sunday evening Gospel Worship and Thanksgiving Service was led by the ROCK team on the church tennis courts at 6PM . This concluded the mission. After a BBQ meal, The gathering of about 110 children and 120 adults enjoyed items by the keenite groups and the adults team group. The epic finale of the drama was appreciated by all, followed by a Gospel challenge ending ROCK Mission 2015.

– Dr Des Gaffney, ROCK Promotions Officer.



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'INTO ALL THE WORLD ...'

The Missionary Challenge At The Belgrave Heights Summer Convention

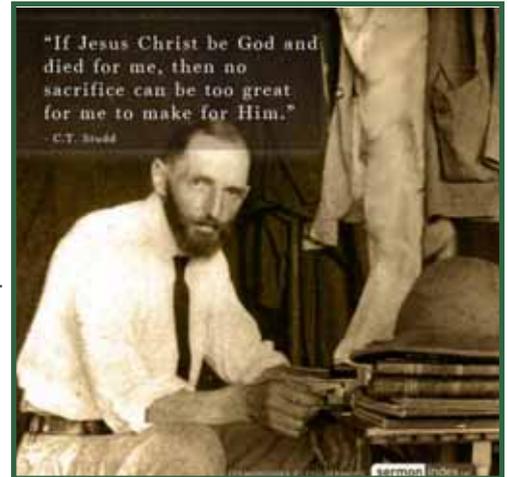
THE vision of Belgrave Heights Convention is to see spiritually mature Christians, whose faith and practice is anchored in the Bible, serving as Spirit-filled, pure and powerful witnesses for the Christian family, church community and the world. Cross-cultural ministry has always been a major part of the convention's ministry. Countless young people have committed their lives to overseas missions during the Summer and Easter meetings.

As usual, the foyer of the auditorium was used by many of the agencies affiliated with Missions Interlink to display their stands of literature, visual aids and saleable items. Representatives were always available to answer questions and make known their prayer needs.

One service at each convention always has a global focus, and the offering is distributed among the Mission Interlink societies. This year they received \$4,291. John Risbridger challenged us this year with his message *For Jesus And The Gospel: Missional Faith In A Needy World – Mark 8.27-9.1*. He said that the world admires sacrificial determination in sport, business, politics. Isn't following Jesus more important than these? John challenged us with the motto of C.T. Studd, who gave up a cricketing career and his family fortune for the work of missions. 'Jesus was not a military conqueror or a preserver of Jewish culture,' John said. 'To be our Messiah He had to surrender His life to God – a sacrificial offering for the world! The first disciples answered Jesus' question (vv27-30). They embraced Jesus' teaching (vv31-33). They accepted Jesus' challenge.(vv34-9.1.).

John challenged us to follow Jesus as He walked the path of self-denial. As His disciples, we too must walk the same way. 'Does God have *all* my life, or just the leftovers?' he asked. 'When I give my time or money, does it cost me something? The way to discovering what God created me for is by giving up my selfish ambitions to His will. Not everyone is called to overseas service, but we are all called to submerge ourselves in the Life of Christ and walk in His way.'

– Barbie ('Mrs DP') Prout



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TERROR SECURITY FUNDING UNFAIR TO CHRISTIANS - Fred Nile

THE Christian Democratic Party believes that the NSW Government's \$18 million funding for school security needs to be explained and clarified to the Christian community. The terror security funding has been allocated predominantly to Jewish and Islamic schools around NSW. 'It is reassuring that the Government is taking measures in protecting school children, but can the Government guarantee that there is no threat to our Christian schools?' asked Rev Fred Nile.

'There has been a series of vandalism and hate messages towards Christians in the past year including the desecration at a Ukrainian Church in West Sydney, vandalism at St Andrew's Catholic Church and the Virgin Mary statue at St Charbel's Church in Punchbowl was destroyed along with hate messages and broken windows.

'What we are experiencing world-wide is predominantly Christians who are being threatened, persecuted and attacked, and one would presume that in the Government's announcement of security measures in schools yesterday, that our Christian schools and churches would equally be included,' the Christian Democratic Party Leader, Rev Fred Nile, said.

CDP Calls For Moratorium On Coal Seam Gas Mining In NSW

THE Rev Fred Nile, Leader of the Christian Democratic Party has called for an immediate moratorium on Coal Seam Gas and any mining process that involves fracking Coal Seam Gas in NSW. Last week, Tasmania extended its moratorium on fracking for another five years citing serious concerns for landowners, and public and environmental health. Germany, France and New York State have all banned fracking.

'We are in a critical time. There is an urgent need to protect NSW and our future water and land from CSG. Our country stands on the brink of being irrevocably damaged by the impact of CSG, with 53% of the landmass of Australia under current exploration license for unconventional mining,' said Rev Nile. 'Our state's best farmland, forests and water catchments are under threat from Coal Seam Gas fracking and Coal mining. Even our water catchment here in Sydney is under threat.'

Respected leading music entrepreneur and filmmaker Annie Wright has joined the fight. In 2013, as a direct response to the gross industrialisation of rural, regional and some sectors of urban Australia by Coal Seam Gas, Annie formed Aussies Against Fracking, a platform movement and vehicle enabling hundreds of members of the entertainment industry to voice their opposition to CSG.

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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Upcoming CMA Training Modules To Help You

CMA training modules are important, brief, inexpensive ways for church and ministry board members and staff to keep abreast of important issues facing the ministry sector. Two important such events are soon to be held in Melbourne:

1. Lessons From The Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses To Child Sexual Abuse

This event will be held on 1 April at 1.45pm for a 2pm start, concluding at 3pm, at NewHope Baptist Church, Blackburn VIC. As more and more organisations are called before the Royal Commission, some themes are emerging about what constitutes a good response to an allegation of abuse. Moores will present a roadmap for making sure your organisation doesn't trip up on this important issue. This event will be followed by:

2. Managing The Motivational Needs Of Employees In Christian Organisations, from 3.30pm to

4.30pm, again at NewHope Baptist Church, Blackburn VIC. Go to: www.cma.net.au for more information.

2015 ESA Reunion

ESA will hold their 2015 Reunion Dinner on Saturday 27 June. Pat Hallett says it will be a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and support the work of ESA through fundraising on the night, all the while enjoying a great meal together. Go to www.esa.org.au for details.

Please Pray For Auntie Cath And Ministry To The Indigenous People Of East Gippsland

PRAYER is asked for comfort and courage for Auntie Cath Solomon as she gets back into her ministry to many young people in East Gippsland, after the sad loss of her son in January. Cath also greatly values your prayers for the kids, young people, parents and families who are associated with the Koorie Kid's Church. It is Cath's greatest desire that they come to know God's saving grace in Jesus. Please pray for one young local man in particular who is a potential leader and follower of Jesus but is

struggling at the moment with family pressures and issues.

Young Lives Transformed at CMS 'Summer Under The Son'

WILL Thiel, Director of SUTS reports that during the five days, some 10-15 youth became Christians, including a couple with non-Christian families and one who has been in trouble with the police, involved with drugs and has a difficult home life.

Multiply'15 – Geneva Push Church Planters' Conference

GENEVA Push church planting movement is holding their *Multiply 15* Conference from 18-20 May. They are planning to have great speakers, relevant workshops, fellowship with other planters, information, support and networking for wives, and the opportunity to be assessed as possible church planters. Go to events@genevpush.com for more information.

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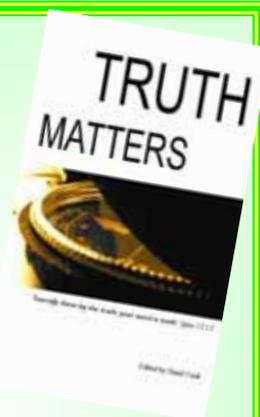
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THE WORD @ WORK ...

Massive Bible Society Scripture Distribution Under Way In Egypt

THE distribution of 1.65 million Scripture leaflets designed to bring comfort to a nation in mourning is well under way across Egypt, following the murder of 21 young Egyptian Christians by ISIS in Libya four weeks ago. 'This is by far the most widely distributed Christian leaflet in Egypt's history,' notes Ramez Atallah, General Director of the Bible Society of Egypt, which created the leaflet the day after the video of the killing was released. Distribution of the leaflet, entitled *Two Rows By The Sea*, began just two days later, on Wednesday 18 February at Pope Tawadros' weekly Bible study in the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo. The leaflets were rapidly made available in churches across the country.

Nationwide Distress

'Because of the nationwide distress over these brutal assassinations, and because the leaflet was so quickly available, Christians have been distributing it everywhere – streets, shops, buses, and trains,' says Mr Atallah, 'and it's reaching people from all walks of life: we have heard many cases of Christians receiving it through Muslim friends and neighbours who got it first!'

The leaflet features a poem about the faith of the young men, and contains a collection of five Scripture passages. 'We wanted to provide something that would comfort the grieving,' notes Mr Atallah. 'People are in despair about what happened. They're feeling lost and have so many questions about why those young men were killed. And while there are no easy answers, the Bible reminds us that there will be times of trial but that God's love for us is everlasting. 1 Peter 4.12, for instance, says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering." It goes onto say, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you".'

Mr Atallah says that the killing of the young men has united Christians and Muslims in the troubled country. 'ISIS hoped that by showing the video of the murder, they would foment sectarian strife in Egypt between Christians and Muslims, but it has had the opposite effect. Christians have responded by sorrowfully calling out to God, and Muslims have shown love and care towards them. Please join us in praying that during this period of sadness and unprecedented openness, God will use this Scripture leaflet to comfort and challenge many Egyptians.'

– United Bible Societies



Christian Books Worldwide – Living Up To Its Name

CHRISTIAN BOOKS Worldwide, based in London, produces and provides classic Christian books in a variety of languages for Christians in many parts of the Developing World. They report that the last year has been encouraging, with the growth in both second hand book distribution and new projects in various languages. Twelve books of sermons by Spurgeon, Ryle and Lloyd-Jones were published in Swahili, and another 12,000 were re-printed mainly for distribution in Tanzania. Roger Weil's *Foundations Of The Christian Faith* was published in Vaiphei and Hindi, with a re-print in Burmese. Feed-back indicates that this amount of literature distribution is having an impact on Kingdom advance beyond human assessment.

Still more encouraging is news that two local writers have written their own *Confession Of Faith* and *Catechism*. One is in Tamil for South India and Sri Lanka, and the other is in Portuguese for Mozambique. A group in South India have formed an editorial board to promote new local writers and have asked for support in this work. Besides these, a commentary on *Ephesians* in Nepalese was released, as well as CBW's first book in Zulu – *Marks Of A Healthy Church. What The Scriptures Teach* was published in Myanmar. Some of these books are being used in Pastor Training Conferences in Myitkyina and Mandalay. To complete the list, CBW was able to publish four books in Ukrainian and Russian.

Beside vernacular editions CBW has increased its impact with selected second hand books, sending out over 10,000 last year together with 2,000 French books. These books are sent out with correspondence to the recipient, so they are not sent blind. Please pray for the safe arrival of these precious books.

Go to: www.christianbooksworldwide.org for further information about this growing ministry.

PERSECUTION WATCH

Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau Pledges Allegiance To Islamic State

THE Nigerian militant group Boko Haram has pledged official allegiance to Islamic State, also known as ISIS, according to an audio statement released online and reported by www.nbcnews.com. *NBC News* reports that in the audio, a man claiming to be Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau appears to address Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, and also calls on Muslims throughout the world to declare a similar loyalty.

NBC News says the message, posted via Boko Haram social media accounts, was confirmed by Flashpoint Intelligence, a global security firm and an *NBC News* consultant. According to Flashpoint, the audio confirms what many analysts have said would happen: a bridging between Boko Haram and Islamic State, Boko Haram is also following Islamic's trend of releasing messages online and mimicking the terror network's propaganda.

NBC News says that so far, Islamic State has not responded. Laith Alkhouri, director of MENA research and analysis at Flashpoint, said it is likely the terror group would accept Boko Haram's apparent proposal. The message by Boko Haram was in the same format as messages released by other groups that have pledged to fight under the black flag, and in those cases the terror group has accepted, he said. 'Boko Haram is not only one of the strongest groups to support ISIS, it's also in [an] area ISIS has very little, if any, control,' Alkhouri said. 'This gives ISIS the extra credibility and the additional territory to further its growth around the world.'

NBC News says the announcement came after five bombs exploded in and outside the Nigerian city of Maiduguri, killing at least 54 people and wounding 143 others in Boko Haram's northeastern heartland.

– Michael Ireland, Senior Reporter, ASSIST News Service answermike@gmail.com



ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi (Photo via Wikipedia)

History Destroyed By ISIS

ISIS continues its quest to rid the world of history that doesn't agree with their ideology. Case in point: the destruction of Jonah's tomb in Nineveh, and now the smashing of relics in nearby Nimrud. President of Reach Beyond, Wayne Pederson, says this destruction is offensive to all religions.

INDIA: Police Detain, Beat 20 Indian Christian Missionaries

POLICE in the city of Jaipur, Rajasthan, in northern India, detained a group of 20 Christians distributing leaflets to local residents on 26 February and took them to the police station, where they were kicked and beaten before being released. The Christians, who were missionaries sent from the city of Hyderabad, encountered hostility from local people to their literature distribution. 'We had left the spot,' says Surendra Kumar, one of the Christians arrested. 'But those people opposed to us followed us till the place where we were staying. There again, they called the police. The police picked us up and took us to the police station. We were made to get out of the police van by being kicked and then, inside the police station, the cops lined us up and hit

us with belts on our hands and wrists.'

Canadian Pastor Missing After Aid Trip To North Korea

THE senior pastor of a Canadian mega church has failed to return from a humanitarian mission to North Korea, and the Canadian government has reached out to try to locate him, his Toronto-based church said on Monday. According to a story by Andrea Hopkins for Reuters, Rev Hyeon Soo Lim, 60, has made hundreds of trips to North Korea. He helps support a nursing home, a nursery and an orphanage in the Rajin region, said Lisa Pak, a spokeswoman for the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in suburban Toronto. North Korea and China have clamped down on Christian groups in the last year, and several American Christians have been detained by North Korea.

Reuters reported Pak said they have not heard from Lim since 31 January, but were not initially worried because he is an experienced traveler and knows the country well. They also thought he could be caught up by North Korea's quarantine of foreign travelers who may have been exposed to Ebola. – Jeremy Reynolds, ASSIST News Service

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'THEIR VOICE GOES OUT ...'

Wesley Mission's Easter Sunrise Service Goes Global

FOR more than 50 years Sydney's Wesley Mission has been taking the message of Easter to Australia – but now it's taking it to the world. In a national first, Wesley Mission's Easter Sunday Sunrise Service will be broadcast live on the web from the Sydney Opera House to an international audience. As the sun rises over Sydney Harbour and voices join in hymns of praise, people from around the globe will be able to watch the iconic and inspirational Easter Sunrise Service by logging on to www.wesleymission.org.au

Key local broadcast times on the internet are:

- Sydney, Australia, 6am Easter Sunday 5 April (AEST).
- The United Kingdom, 9pm Saturday 4 April
- US (East Coast), 4pm Saturday 4 April.
- US (West Coast), 1pm Saturday 4 April.
- Capetown, South Africa, 10pm Saturday 4 April.
- Apia, Samoa, 9 am Easter Sunday 5 April.
- New Zealand, 8am Easter Sunday 5 April.

'From its origins with the Rev Dr Sir Alan Walker preaching at a Sydney drive-in theatre in the 1960's to its broadcast on national television and radio, Wesley Mission's Easter Sunrise Service has been innovative, inspiring and engaging,' Wesley Mission Superintendent the Rev Dr Keith Garner said. 'We are now taking the service to a new level and embracing a worldwide audience which will hear a message of resurrection hope and new life which is immensely important in a world beset by conflict and fear.'

The service will be led by Dr Garner, who will also deliver the address to a national audience as the service is broadcast through Channel 9 and simulcast on Hope 103.2 FM and other stations across Australia.

Seen On Facebook:

The Greatest Man in history is Jesus. He had no servants, yet they called Him Master. He had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. He had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

FEBC Calls For Prayer

REV Kevin Keegan, National Director of FEBC, writes: A month ago I was in Bangkok for the FEBC International Council conference. It was a great time of meeting together as co-laborers for the Gospel, to encourage each other in our work. It was also a time of sharing about difficulties and challenges faced.

We are aware that security in a number of locations is again an issue, often in places where we have enjoyed openness and a relaxing of restrictions on our ministries.

It seems that a season of openness is coming to an end and restrictions are increasing. Closure of radio stations is a very real possibility in at least four countries that I know of. One colleague who grew up under an oppressive regime said, 'I have never seen it so bad.'

Our mission as part of FEBC International Association is 'to communicate the Good News among the nations by media, to inspire the hardest-to-reach to follow Jesus Christ.' This is something our enemy, the evil one, fights against, using principalities and powers. Will you pray with me that we may soon hear of release, breakthroughs, safety ... and that we all will know the strength that comes from unity in the Spirit?

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THINKING THINGS THROUGH ...

When You're On A Church Search ...

OUR family recently became church hunters, a conspicuous group of seekers trying to find a congregation that fits. We are anxiously stalking various Baptist congregations around Sydney's Inner West to find a new church home. It is a welcome refresher course in what it means to be a newcomer in church. Here are a few lessons we are learning along the way. We are thinking about our needs as a family during our search, and how to choose a church where we will fit. The variety of choices means we are paying close attention to the little things when we visit churches.

Your Digital Picture Matters

Websites are a key part of our first impression of a church. Is the website easy to use and accessible? Does it clearly state the church's outlook and belief? Does it tell us what to expect? Armed with a digital picture of what Sunday would look like we've visited each location keen to meet and connect with other Christians.

Children Are Important

Walking into a new church with a curious toddler is a nerve-wracking experience. I can understand why some parents do not want to attend church with small children. The hassle of getting out of the door in the morning is followed by three hours of baby-wrangling to keep the peace. Juggling naptime, loud noises, new people, mealtime and meltdowns is stressful. Add to this the cultural expectation that your child will be happy, well-behaved and always quiet. As a church hunting parent I notice when childcare/crèche instructions are clear – in the paper handout, mentioned from the front or briefed by an usher. I notice when you look over and give me an encouraging smile as I distract and calm my child. I notice when you are patient with us as I work hard to teach my child how to sit still. I notice when other parents of small children come and say hello. When you welcome and make space for my child you welcome me too.

Connecting Is Important

Introductions, welcomes and connections have been crucial for us as we picture ourselves joining different churches. Can we see ourselves becoming friends with these people? Is this a place where there might be opportunities to serve? It's easy to tell when someone just isn't interested in talking to you. I have visited churches where they are obviously keen to 'welcome' the newcomer, but stop short of meaningful connection or conversation.

Be Intentional

It's scary being a new person at church. It sounds so obvious, but I had forgotten what it is like to step into a close-knit family environment where you don't know anyone. If I, a raised-in-the-pews type Christian, still feel this social anxiety, how much worse must it be for someone who has never been to a church before? Even though I am familiar with the sitting, standing, singing, listening and praying rhythm of church, at each new place I still feel a little on the outside. As I ponder this uncomfortable sensation God draws my attention to the outsiders who so often visit our churches – the lonely, the searchers, the wanderers, the homeless, the friendless, the hungry and the needy.

My experiences as a church hunter have highlighted the need for our places of worship to be places of community. Do you think about how you can intentionally welcome outsiders to your church? Do you pray for opportunities to connect, welcome and share with newcomers?

I know I will carry this experience with me in the hope it will continue to prompt me to welcome others into my life and the life of God's family – will you join me?

– Sophia Sinclair has qualifications in English, Theatre and Journalism. She is a Kiwi living in Sydney

with her husband Andrew and their son Guy.

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Are You Ready For 'The Day'? Romans 13.8-14

This section provides one of Paul's more direct references in Romans to the future coming of Christ. His exhortations are built around verses 11 and 12, '...the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness...' The central motivation for the appeal of verses 8-10 and verses 13-14 is the understanding of the present time, that the day of Christ's appearing is close, the day of 'the redemption of our bodies' (Romans 8.23), the day of judgment.

Therefore, we are to owe no debts but the ongoing indebtedness of loving one another. Just as seeing someone to whom we owe money reminds us of our debt, so too, seeing our fellow believers reminds us of our debt of love to them.

In verses 13-14 Paul returns to his 'put off ... put on' language. We are to put off orgies, drunkenness, debauchery etc and behave decently (v13). In clear contrast to such godless behaviour we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, His righteousness, and not even think about gratifying the sinful nature, that nature which he described in chapters 7 and 8.

Verse 14 is 'Augustine's verse'. The great Fourth Century Christian leader describes his experience: 'I felt

FOR REFLECTION:

Think about what you should take off today and what clothing yourself with Christ will mean to you. In what way is love the fulfilment of the law?

that I was still the captive of my sin ... all at once I heard the sing-song voice of a child in a nearby house. "Take it and read, take it and read" ... I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself this could only be a divine command to open the book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall ... I seized it and opened it in silence. I read the passage on which my eyes fell: "not in revelry and drunkenness ... rather arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetite'. In an instant ... it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled' St Augustine, *The Confessions Of St Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) Book 8, Section 12.

He goes on to tell how he told his prayerful mother Monica what had happened, 'she was jubilant with triumph and glorified You'. We must, like Augustine, make sure we get dressed every day – taking off sin and putting on the righteousness of Christ.



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BOOKS WORTH READING

ADAM, THE FALL, AND ORIGINAL SIN: THEOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES, Ed Hans Madueme And Michael Reeves, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014, ISBN 978-0-8010-3992-8.

DO Genesis 3 and Romans 5 require belief in a historical Adam and a literal fall into sin? Some evangelicals are no longer sure that the answer must be yes. This book seeks to rescue Adam from his historical, scientific and cultural implausibility in the eyes of many in the Church and most in wider society. Really, this dispute is another episode in the (proper) attempt to reconcile faith and science, and the contributors to this collection of essays are united in upholding the Biblical witness.

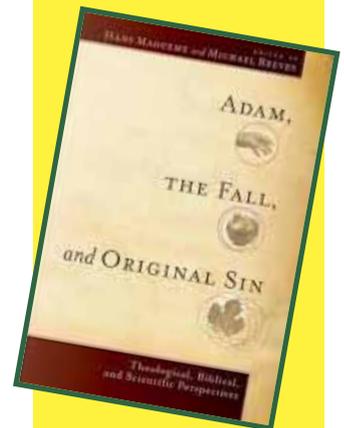
C. John Collins shows how the Old Testament storyline presupposes the historicity of Adam and Eve and their responsibility for the entrance of sin with its devastating consequences, so that it is not true, as often claimed, that the rest of the Old Testament knows nothing of the fall into sin in Eden. Robert Yarbrough surveys the nine references to Adam in the New Testament and shows that his importance is far greater than indicated by just counting the occurrences of his name.

There is a fascinating chapter, written by a scientist, with the nom de plume 'William Stone', that discusses Adam in the context of modern evolutionary theory (a heresy to the general scientific community) and it places Adam at the root of the genus Homo at around 1.8 million years ago, with no proven link to earlier ape-like ancestors. Whatever we may think of the conclusion, it shows us how one scientist is trying to marry his professional life and his faith. Peter Sanlon notes that Augustine insisted that he did not invent the doctrine of original sin, though he did refine and promote it. This doctrine took sin seriously and also elevated the wonder and depth of God's grace in the work of salvation.

Robert Kolb surveys the Lutheran doctrine of original sin, which provided an in-depth exposure of human sin (correcting medieval theologies). Donald Macleod explains the place of original sin in Reformed Theology, showing that the 'covenant of works' does not need to be understood in a legalistic way or as devoid of grace. Thomas McCall argues that John Wesley did believe in original sin and total depravity, though the Methodist movement with its focus on personal freedom has drifted from the convictions of its founder. Carl Trueman studies six representative figures in modern theology for their views on original sin, with a common theme being a denial of a fall into sin as a historical event. Trueman is right in saying that this has grave consequences for theology as a whole, one being that human guilt makes little sense if sin is just a structural feature of the created order.

James Hamilton uses biblical theology to show that Paul was not the only biblical author to see Adam's sin in Genesis 3 as having a cataclysmic effect on his descendants. Hamilton especially has in his sights the recent writings of Peter Enns, with the storyline of the Pentateuch, for example, demonstrating the universality of sin and death. The editors describe Christian doctrine as 'a seamless garment' such that if original sin is denied, Christian truth generally begins to unravel, including our dependence on Christ for salvation. Hans Madueme tackles the clash between original sin and mainstream science, where 'sin' is turned into a biological predisposition and Madueme has helpful comments on what to do when such a clash takes place. The Christian response is not to rail against science and scientist, nor is it to retreat or surrender vital Christian truths.

(Continued On P.16)



'This dispute is another episode in the (proper) attempt to reconcile faith and science, and the contributors to this collection of essays are united in upholding the Biblical witness.'

BOOKS WORTH READING

(From Page 15) Daniel Doriani shows the place of original sin in the theory and practice of pastoral theology, in the context of a society that refuses to believe in human sinfulness (eg popular self-help and management gurus) and a Christian community that often does not take sin seriously. Doriani challenges pastors to fight that tendency, for to give up the category of 'sin' is also to give up God's grace available in Jesus Christ. Every pastor should read and ponder this splendid chapter. Thomas Schreiner provides a verse-by-verse exposition of the key Pauline text, Romans 5.12-19. Noel Weeks tries to untie some of the exegetical knots in Genesis 3 in a way that takes the text seriously. Williams Edgar shows the relevance of a historical Adam and Fall to theodicy, arguing that original sins does not impugn God's goodness. We cannot answer every question, but we can say enough to clear God of the charge of being to blame for the state of the world. Here, then, is a book that will help clear thinking about Adam, sin and God's good purposes in Christ.

– Greg Goswell

DOLPHIN'S LEAP, HIND'S FEET – BECOMING A MYSTIC: Journey, Discipline and Practice, Emeritus Professor Hedley Beare AM, Morning Star Publishing, Melbourne, 2015.

PROFESSOR Beare, who died in 2010 after a long battle with cancer, was a remarkable man – polymath, gifted teacher, educationalist, writer and communicator. He was also something of a modern mystic, and this book is the fruit of many years of reflecting on his mystical experiences and insights, and those of others. He believed that mystical awareness, insight and experience are available to all people provided they are prepared to open their minds and hearts to the possibility and pursue a disciplined practice.

He was also a close friend of mine, and for 15 years contributed many profoundly spiritually insightful articles to *The Melbourne Anglican*, the newspaper I have edited for nearly 20 years.

The book explores how to develop authentic spiritual awareness, considers the approaches and disciplines used by teachers of spirituality over the centuries and tries to give an insight into the lived reality of the saints, seers and mystics.

The book is intentionally practical, attempting to take the reader inside the mystic's mind. Most of the chapters contain exercises or practical applications of the ideas discussed in the chapter. The images suggested by the book's title *Dolphin's Leap, Hind's Feet* symbolise for the author the nature of mystical life, with the dolphin's leap being a metaphor for grace, and the Hind's Feet (a reference to Habakkuk 3.19 – 'He makes my feet like hind's feet and sets me upon my high places') being about the perfect co-ordination of one's abilities, a working-in-harmony with who and what we naturally are and what we can become.

– Roland Ashby, Editor, TMA (*The Melbourne Anglican*)

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