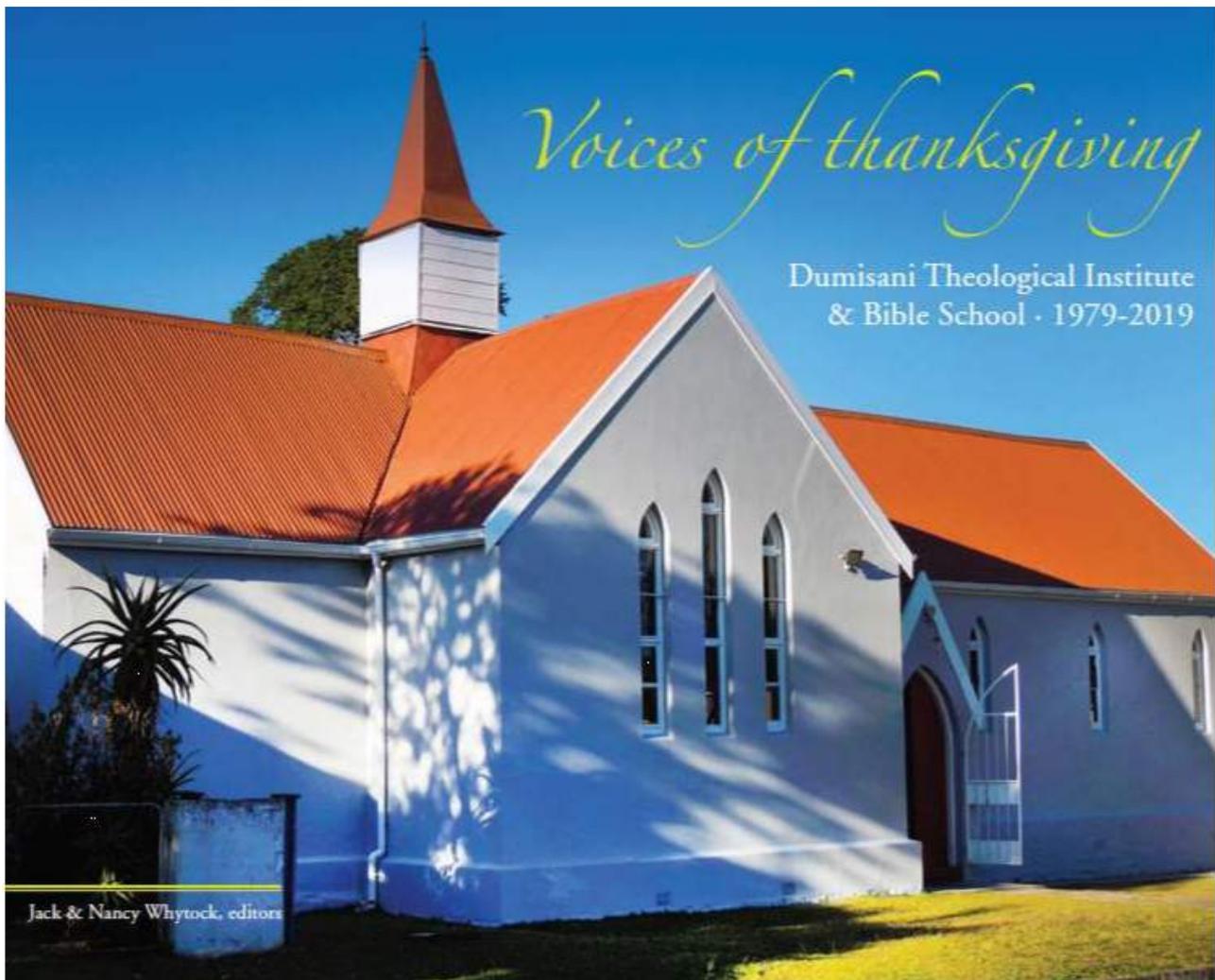


The Presbyterian Banner

March 2019



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FROM THE EDITOR

As one gets older there is a tendency to look back to 'the good old days'. I'm not sure too many ladies would like to go back to Mondays as washing day, followed by ironing, mending, cleaning, shopping and baking days. Saturday night was bath night with happily the day of rest and worship on Sunday. In fact, while Thursday was often pay day, shopping had to be spread over more than one day and mum had to do it – no late night shopping, no fridge to keep things edible (maybe an ice chest).

Ah yes, there was no such thing as the good old days! Well perhaps the general sense of order, a general acceptance of a Christian framework of values. The children could walk to school safely. And we made our own fun. Singing around the piano, youth fellowship at church. But now the consensus is gone. We are materially well off and pensioners who own their own home have never had it so good. But there is a lot of pessimism among Christians. The old familiar world has gone and adjusting to the new situation is worrying. How will our children deal with it?

Every age has its challenges but the Christian church itself is pressured on all sides. Some have been squeezed into the secularist mould, doctrinal confusion abounds. The prosperity gospel has snared many and a general spirit of pessimism exists among conservative evangelicals.

This issue of our magazine wants to turn our eyes back to fundamental realities. Preaching recently at Carrum Downs on James 1:1, I noted that James, most likely Jesus' half-brother who at first did not believe, characterises himself simply as a servant. How much more should we so regard ourselves! But we, like James are servants of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. If this is so all must be seen in the light of God's plan. If the nation of Israel was descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, James who is writing to Christians, recognises that Christians, that is, believing Jews now joined with believing Gentiles, are the twelve tribes, God's people, his holy nation. Whereas in Jesus' day Jews were either in Palestine or dispersed among the nations, all Christians (Jew or Gentile) are scattered among the nations, aliens in the world with no fixed home here but on the way to the true promised land.

In this light the trials and problems of life are seen in a way far different from the world. In themselves trials are not enjoyable, but in the light of the plan of our Saviour we are to reckon trials 'pure joy'. Sinclair Ferguson (*Let's Study James*) writes: We can easily develop a tendency to become defensive, passive, self-protective, or even defeated whenever things go against us. How we react to trials is often just as significant as the trials themselves.' God intends the trial to test the genuineness of our faith and lead us towards maturity. There's a crown of life for those who persevere under trial (James 1:12). When temptation comes we are not to 'give right in' but look to Christ and in his strength resist the devil and hold fast to our Saviour who, for the joy set before enduring the cross despising the shame.

Courage, brothers and sisters! Be strong and very courageous! The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

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Psalm 2: The Lord's Anointed Reigns!

Rev. George Ball, Taree

Psalms 1 and 2 form the introduction to the Psalter. They are like twin pillars through which we enter. They are the lens through which we should view the landscape before us. Psalm 1 introduces us to the perfect man who listens to God's Word, who loves it, and lives by it. This man would make an ideal king. He meets all the qualifications (cf. Deut. 17: 18-20). Psalm 2 identifies him. He is the King's Son who has been installed on God's holy hill, who reigns over the nations. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of this psalm is that the LORD reigns through His Anointed Son. This is the consistent message of the Psalter: e.g. Psalms 47:7, 93:1, 95:3, 96:10, 97:1, 98:6 and 99:1, etc. It's also the consistent message of the New Testament. 'The Lord reigns'.

But you say, '*It doesn't look like it – I listen to the news!*' Drought and fires continue to dominate our national news. The tensions in the Middle East are never far from the headlines. A Cold War is brewing. Then there are the things that happen in our own lives and families. It doesn't much seem like the Lord reigns!

This psalm was given to encourage a disheartened and discouraged Israel. It didn't much seem like the Lord reigned then either. After a promising start with Kings David and Solomon it was downhill thereafter. Israel disappeared as a nation in 720 BC. Then Judah was taken captive by Babylon in 586 BC – never to regain independence again. To say 'the Lord reigns' seemed like a sick joke. But appearances can be misleading. Things are not as they seem. Listen to the message of this psalm.

It's carefully constructed. It has four stanzas of three verses each. Each stanza includes a quotation from a different speaker. The kings of the earth (3). The Lord in heaven (6). The Lord's Anointed (7-9). And the psalmist (10-12). It's quoted or alluded to some 18 times in New Testament – more than any other psalm.

1. Earth's Kings and Rulers Rebel (1-3)

The psalmist asks, '**Why do nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?**' (v.1). They are constantly plotting (*lit. 'meditating'*) ways to oppose the LORD and His Anointed. The 'why' is not a serious question. It's the 'why' of astonishment. Why do they bother? It doesn't make sense. They're on a hiding to nothing. They may have the numbers – it's the *many* against *two*. But they don't know that, 'one with God is a majority'.

They say, '**Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us**' (v.3). The bonds and cords were the leather thongs that kept the oxen in place. The kings and rulers refuse to be in submission to the Lord. They don't want to be saddled with constraints. They want the freedom to run their own lives and make their own choices. Their attitude is the same as the citizens in one of Jesus parables, '**We do not want this man to reign over us**' (Luke 19: 14).

When and where did this spirit of rebellion begin? In the Garden. Adam and Eve believed the serpent's lie. They were deceived when he said, '**God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**' (Gen. 3:5). The 'carrot' he used was freedom and autonomy. As a result, rebellion is in our DNA. We now (think) we know better than God (if there is a God!) We now know that what He called 'good' is evil. We now know that the world was not created but evolved over millions of years from a big bang. We now know that marriage should not be restricted to one man and one woman. We now know that every day is the same. We now know that a woman has the right to decide over matters affecting her own body. We now know that gender is a matter of personal choice. And we want the freedom to decide when and how we die. We are free!

This rebellion peaked when wicked men conspired to kill God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. After Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin in the wake of the healing of the lame man in the temple courts, Luke describes how the church, '**lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'**'. For truly in this city there were gathered together against your

holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place' (Acts 4: 24-28). This is the first recorded prayer in the life of the Jerusalem church.

Psalm 2 is the lens through which they viewed their encounter with the Jewish authorities. As a result, their prayer is framed by the conviction that the events surrounding Jesus death and resurrection were ordained by God himself. Interestingly they made no direct appeal for safety or protection – their main concern was for the spread of the gospel. God clearly answered their prayers, which is obvious in Acts 4:31, 'And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness'. This is the world we live and witness in. Kings and rulers' rebel against the Lord and His Anointed. It's a hostile world. Like Peter and the apostles, we are called to be witnesses, we too have been given the Holy Spirit, 'we must obey God rather than man' (Acts 5: 29).

2. The Lord in Heaven Responds (4-6)

How will the Lord respond to this rebellion on earth below? We're in for a big surprise. There's no crisis in heaven. No panic. He's not biting His nails. In fact, He's sitting relaxed and laughing on His heavenly throne. The threat to Him is as ridiculous as your goldfish declaring war against you. The thought is so absurd and ridiculous that laughter is the only response.

Then His laughter turns to wrath (v.5). Perhaps He will send His armies to stamp out the rebellion on earth? No. We're in for another surprise. He says, '**As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill**' (v.6). It seems something of an anticlimax. Hardly the stuff of which threats are made. Until we understand who this new king is. He can't be any of the kings of Israel or Judah. They were all ultimate failures. But the Lord made a promise to David, '**I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son**' (2 Sam. 7: 13). This king will be a son of David and the Son of God. That narrows it down to one person – the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to Zion – Jerusalem. 'It was there that God met with us by way of sacrifice. Jesus died in weakness and

shame for our sins. That's how God's kingdom was planted. Because God planted it, it is guaranteed to grow. It will prove undefeatable' (Dale Ralph Davis). The Lord did what His enemies tried to prevent. While they were plotting destruction, the Lord sealed the outcome by installing His King on Zion.

3. The Lord's Anointed Reigns (7-9)

The Lord's anointed King (*the Messiah*) now speaks. He reveals Heaven's secret. He reports what the LORD said to him. '**The Lord said to me: You are my Son; today I have myself begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession**' (7-8).

The apostle Paul in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch sees the 'day' fulfilled and confirmed in the resurrection of Jesus. He says, 'And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm, "**You are my Son, today I have begotten you**"' (Acts 13: 32-33).

Jesus was always the Son of God; now by virtue of his resurrection and ascension he is the Son of God with power.

Paul also writes concerning Jesus that He, '**was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead**' (Rom 1:4). Though Jesus was always the Son of God, now by virtue of His resurrection and ascension He is the Son of God with power. His authority extends over the nations. His kingdom is worldwide. Solomon prophesied as much when he said, '**His dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth**' (Psalm 72:8). After His resurrection Jesus told His disciples, '**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me**' (Matt. 28:18).

Paul writes that God raised Jesus from the dead, '**and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named . . . and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church**' (Eph. 1: 20-23).

Paul further states, **‘He must reign till all His enemies are brought under His feet’** (1 Cor. 15: 25). This psalm is telling us that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns over all things. God the Father has delegated all power and authority to His eternal Son. Christ is now the mediator King. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

His authority is total and irresistible (v.9). The exalted reigning Christ, **‘shall break them (the rebel nations) with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’** Pottery is no match for an iron rod. Spurgeon comments, ‘Those who will not bend must break. Potter’s vessels are not to be restored if dashed in pieces, and the ruin of sinners will be hopeless if Jesus shall smite them’. Such a thought should strike terror into the heart of every opponent of Christ.

4. The Call to Rebels to Repent (10-12)

The psalmist urges the rebellious kings and rulers to respond appropriately and wisely. He exhorts them to, **‘Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son’** (10-11). It’s an appeal to lay down arms and make peace with God through His Son. He urges them to repent of their sin and rebellion and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and seek His forgiveness. It’s the Old Testament way of saying, **‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved’** (Acts 16: 31). It means worship the Lord, honour Him, reverence Him and submit to His gracious rule. The ‘kiss’ is not a romantic kiss but the sign of submission. Defeated kings in ancient times were required to kiss the hand of their conqueror.

The psalm ends as Psalm 1 begins, with a beautiful beatitude, **‘Blessed are all who seek refuge in him!’** The promise of blessing is not limited to repentant kings and rulers. It’s for everyone. Kidner aptly comments, *‘There is no refuge from Him - only in Him’*. The Lord’s coming will cause the whole earth to fear, and the only escape from fear is to fear Him.

PSALM 117

All nations, Praise the LORD,
All peoples in accord
his glory raise.
Strong is his love for us
and the LORD’s faithfulness
stands firm from age to age.
O praise the LORD!

Missionary Zeal: Unspent Treasure

Rev C. John Miller (1928-1996)
Orthodox Presbyterian Church [US]

Scripture conveys significant measure of God’s foremost intention for his Word and for the church to whom it is entrusted: It is intended to glorify his great name in its orientation toward the salvation of the lost! God had a missionary purpose when he gave mankind his Word. His desire to reveal himself to men pervades Scripture from Genesis to Revelation (Genesis 3: 15, Revelation 22: 17).

The fervour of men like Calvin, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Knox, Edwards and Newton to reach out to the world with the gospel came out of their embracing of that purpose as their own. This is what we need to learn from our forebears; indeed, this is what we need to learn from God himself. We need to come to grips with God’s missionary purpose for his Word. John Newton once commented that *“Calvinism was one of the worst systems preached theoretically, but one of the best preached practically.”*

I fear that Reformed Christians today have fallen into the error of preaching the doctrines of grace theoretically instead of preaching them practically and using the truths of Scripture to draw men to Christ.

Instead of using the Bible as our instrument to draw men into fellowship with God, biblical doctrine has become our grounds to exclude those-even other believers-who disagree with us. Instead of using Scripture as the sword of the Spirit to conquer men for Christ, we spend our energies defending it, as if it were fragile and easily broken. Yet we have seen throughout history that God’s power and blessing has been most evident not on those who have assumed a defensive posture toward the lost of the world, but on those whose first concern is to see God save them.

I do not wish to dismiss the church’s responsibility to guard her sheep from wolves teaching false doctrine. My problem lies solely with the assumption that such concerns must

have first place in the normal ministry of the church. I am persuaded that this overturns God's standard order for the church and its ministry. God's first priority for his church is to proclaim the gospel to the lost, bringing them to salvation. This is followed by a cultivation of the life and unity which that gospel produces among the people of the Lord Jesus. And finally, in that context, as a living testimony to the power of the Word, the church defends herself against error.

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We know that Calvin shared our concern for true doctrine, but it is noteworthy that he did not suffer from the reversal of priorities that we do. Calvin knew the Bible as a great missionary book in a way that few moderns do. For him it was largely a book of promises centring on Christ's conquest of the nations through gospel preaching. This can be seen in his commentary on Isaiah 2:3, where he says that men out of "all nations" will be conquered by "the doctrines of the gospel" and stream to Christ. Commenting on the verse that follows, he adds: "By these words he first declares that the godly will be filled with such a desire to spread the doctrines of religion, that everyone not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge will desire to draw others along with him. And nothing could be more inconsistent with the nature of faith than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast."

Calvin was not slow to translate his own missionary vision into action. During the years 1555 to 1562, eighty-eight men were trained and commissioned by Calvin as pastors to France. Additional works established in Holland and Scotland by men trained by Calvin were greatly blessed. In Scotland, the response to Christ was so overwhelming that one contemporary observed that "the sky rained men."

In other lands like Germany, England, Wales, Poland and Hungary, flourishing Presbyterian and Reformed churches were planted and strengthened by men trained in Geneva. Even such ardently Catholic lands as Italy and Spain were touched by their influence. An amazing zeal for Christ's cause and the glory of God were instilled in the men Calvin taught.

Yet somewhere in the years between Calvin's century and ours, our working theology has become abbreviated in a way that would have dismayed such a pioneer in missions. Our emphasis on the wonderful doctrines of grace has somehow come to mask and perhaps (in our own minds) even justify a deep-seated indifference to the lost.

Evangelism, God's first priority for his Word and his church, has become a peripheral activity in the lives of many local congregations. Often it even raises eyebrows as a theologically questionable undertaking because it is so far afield of our usual defensive posture! Louie Barnes noted this attitude in his aforementioned report. Unlike other denominational leaders whose church rolls were shrinking, Barnes observed that Reformed churchmen "*sense very little urgency in this situation.*" In fact, he says, "*many of my colleagues believe that a rapidly expanding, active 'church' is proof positive that doctrinal or ethical compromise has certainly taken place.*" ...

If we as a Reformed community are to regain our strength, we need to recover a biblical theology of expectancy founded upon the knowledge that the sovereignty of God is not restricted to the salvation of a few individuals. Scripture clearly connects it to God's saving purpose as it relates to all the world, as evidenced in his own missionary character, as sealed in his promises, and as defined by his gift of all authority to the Son as the Lord of the Great Commission. Scripture's great message to man is the offer of life in Jesus Christ, and God's intention is that many hear the message and be saved.

Extracted from: *The Unspent Treasure: Our Missionary Legacy*, C. John Miller, *Presbyterian Guardian*, October 1979, pages 5-6 as reproduced in *The Harvest Call* (OPC), 2/2019.

PRAYERS:

+ For a spirit of urgency to proclaim Christ's resurrected glory and His rule over all dominions.

+ For the overwhelming proclamation of the gospel.

Boy Erased

Gospel Coalition

Boy Erased is a well-acted and moving film based on Garrard Conley's 2016 memoir of the same name. It is about the teenage son of a Baptist preacher and his wife who is out himself as homosexual. It charts the journey of the son as he attends a traumatising gay 'conversion therapy' programme. It uses unethical practices, the kind that spring to mind when one hears criticism of the suggestion that therapy can help people who are gay 'move away' from their lifestyle.

The ultimatum

One of the saddest scenes finds protagonist Jared (Lucas Hedges) confronting his father (Russell Crowe) about their strained relationship. 'There's no changing me,' Jared tells his father. 'You are going to have to be the one who changes.' For Jared, there can be no meaningful father-son relationship so long as his dad thinks a gay lifestyle is sinful. 'I'm gay, and I'm your son,' he says. 'And both of those things are not going to change.'

The father's fidelity to Scripture's witness on sexuality, however, is the only variable that can be changed, Jared implies. Change your view, or lose your son. This is the ultimatum implied to anyone in the audience with LGBTQ loved ones. It's black or white. Lose your old-fashioned religious view of sexuality, or lose us. It's your choice.

This is one of many simplistic binaries in *Boy Erased*, that traffics in the 'no shades of grey' neo-fundamentalism of contemporary progressivism.

Valid critique

The film is ostensibly an advocacy piece presenting conversion therapy as unnecessary, ineffective and dangerous malpractice that threatens the safety of LGBTQ youth. Panned by almost every mental and psychiatric health organisation, banned in many countries, and increasingly critiqued by evangelical institutions, gay conversion therapy appears to be a phenomenon on the wane.

When Jared comes out to his father (Crowe) and mother (Nicole Kidman) in the film, they ask: 'In your heart, do you want to change?' Jared, then 19, replies: 'Yes.' And he really does seem to desire change. But by the film's end, having survived the horrors of a Memphis conversion therapy programme called Love in Action, but without having his attraction to other men altered, Jared concludes that he cannot be changed. He embraces what he views as the only alternative: wholly embracing a gay identity.

Tragically, the nature of 'change' Jared is offered at Love in Action is not the change found in the New Testament, where 'new creation' growth is the by-product of our union with Christ in the context of a community of discipleship. At Love in Action, a supposedly 'Christian' organisation, the desired change seems less about becoming like Christ than about becoming less gay and more manly.

Though the programme's leader seems well-intentioned, his tactics are brutal and wrongheaded. In one scene a boy is literally beaten with Bibles while he hunches over a coffin in a fake funeral for himself. Horrifying stuff. There is physical abuse, verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, and trauma that contributes (in at least one case) to a boy's suicide. *Boy Erased* is right to critique these approaches to conversion therapy.

Is change impossible?

The problem is that the film's binary posture makes no room for any approach to sexual desire that involves change in any form. The film reflects our progressive secular culture's oddly rigid view of sexuality as something fixed and immutable, even as this same culture insists on total gender fluidity. So one's gender can be changed, but not one's sexual desires?

Imagine being told that your unwanted desires to drink or gamble or envy are 'just who you are' and that changing your desires is impossible. To suggest an unchangeable given-ness to the matrix of desires that constitutes a supposedly fixed 'identity' is a truly novel and unbiblical anthropology. It is a notion fundamentally at odds with a faith defined by resurrection and renewal, where to be in Christ is to be a 'new creation' (2 Corinthians 5.17).

By targeting Love in Action-style conversion therapy ('pray the gay away'), *Boy Erased* finds an easy target to justify its position that attempting to change sexual desire does more harm than good. But the film is wrong to suggest

that conversion therapy is the main or only way Christians approach discipling of LGBTQ persons. Thousands of churches around the world are walking with men and women who are same-sex-attracted (SSA), working out the complexities of what discipleship and sanctification looks like for them, without asking or expecting their disordered desires to suddenly disappear. The main concern in discipling Christians who feel tension between their sexual feelings and their faith is not sexual orientation but spiritual orientation. The latter is the root issue, affecting all of our desires and behaviour, sexual or otherwise. Indeed, the most important 'conversion' in the Christian life involves a changed heart posture toward God.

Truly erased

Garrard Conley's story is his story, and *Boy Erased* does it justice. It's a story Christians should reckon with, listen to and learn from. But Rosaria Butterfield's story¹ also exists, as does Jackie Hill Perry's², Christopher Yuan's³ and Sam Allberry's, and countless others who have chosen faithfulness to Scripture and identity in Christ over faithfulness to identity in sexuality. Where are the movies about these stories? Would progressives be willing to reckon with, listen to and learn from these stories?

If anyone is truly being 'erased' today, it is those who fall in the category of pursuing Christian faithfulness despite SSA; those who have chosen the costly path of celibacy or the complex pursuit of heterosexual marriage; those who have embraced the cost of discipleship in choosing Jesus over sexual fulfillment. We need more stories like these, showing how Jesus followers can pursue Christian faithfulness even while living with the challenges and complexities of sexual desires.

Every Christian will at some point feel tension between faith and sexual desires, and films like this suggest that there is no way to manage such a tension unless one's beliefs are adjusted to accommodate one's sexual desires.

True liberation

One of the saddest things about *Boy Erased* is that Jared is sent away from his church in his time of need. He's sent to a 'specialist' parachurch programme to work on his temptations in a context far from his local church family. But church members tempted by greed or pornography or heterosexual lust are not sent

away to specialist camps to be 'fixed.' Why is Jared? Same-sex-attracted Christians should be disciplined within the church family, along with everyone else. Their cost of discipleship may look higher than others but, as Sam Allberry has pointed out, the cost is high for everyone.

Sam writes: 'Jesus said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8.34). The key word is "anyone". To follow Jesus, all of us will have to say a deep and profound no to some of our deepest intuitions and longings. Jesus doesn't put "self" in front of "identity"; he puts it in front of "denial." This call needs to be spelled out. Jesus goes on to say there is a sense of "losing our life" in following him, that there will be times when it feels as if obedience to him is taking life from us. And yet the glorious paradox is that by going through this loss we are actually gaining life. By denying self and following Jesus we don't become less, we become most truly ourselves.'⁴ In the upside-down kingdom of God this is what true liberation looks like. It is the freedom to follow Christ rather than our fickle hearts; the freedom of being caught up in God's story rather than our own; the freedom of not being slaves to our desires.

Contrary to the tragic reductionism of *Boy Erased*, there are many paths of faithfulness and flourishing for the Christian with SSA. There are certainly paths of unfaithfulness: sanctifying one's desires rather than submitting them to God; shrugging off Scripture's authority when it feels confining. But many are walking the faithful paths daily. They are in your church. They are in your family. Their testimonies need to be heard. They need your love and accountability on their journey, just as you need theirs.

This is an edited version of an article on the Gospel Coalition website, the full article can be read here:

www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/boy-erased-sexual-desire-cant-change-religion-must/

1. www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/homosexuality-the-christian-faith-a-lecture-by-and-qa-with-rosario-butterfield/

2. *Gay Girl, Good God: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been* ISBN 978 1 462 751 228

3. *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope.* ISBN 978 0 307 729 354

4. www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hope-help-sexual-revolution/

CARDINAL SIN?

The announcement of the guilty verdict on Cardinal George Pell has resulted in mixed reactions.

Rowland S. Ward

By the time you're reading this you will have probably heard enough talk about the conviction of Cardinal George Pell, one time the third most important figure in the Vatican, for sexual abuse of two minors in St Patrick's Cathedral in 1996 and 1997. Of course, the conviction by a jury does not mean Pell is guilty, but he is guilty in the eyes of the law. He no longer has a good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim 3:7) and he should be reduced to lay status by the Roman Catholic Church.

Pell vehemently denies all charges. His appeal has to be on a point of law and not a mere attempt at a retrial of the case, but it is difficult to see it succeeding. Robert Richter, QC, the most celebrated criminal defence barrister in Australia, well known for dismantling with great forensic skill the cases against his clients, did not succeed in the trial. Even if he was to succeed in the appeal that would not make Pell innocent, nor could his position in the church be rehabilitated.

Pell was regarded as a conservative on moral questions in a changing world. It is understood that a group of wealthy conservative Roman Catholics are largely funding his legal defence. Those who share that conservative outlook are likely to see him as the subject of trumped-up charges by left-wingers or the emotionally disturbed.

There is something to be said for attitudes to Pell's guilt or otherwise reflecting attitudes to the Roman Church generally. The hierarchy's failure to address abuse in the church as sin as well as in breach of the law of the land, is appalling. To shift priests to other parishes, to place obstacles in the way of victims obtaining redress is unconscionable. Even the just-held Conference in Rome on the subject, doubtless deliberately timed in advance of the Pell decision (known in December but subject to a suppression order until today), failed to speak as clearly as an honest church would.

Pell, Archbishop of Melbourne (1996-2001) and of Sydney (2001-2014), was ordained in 1966 and created a cardinal in 2003. Sex abuse allegations were increasing. They had been swept under the carpet by his Melbourne predecessor, Archbishop Little, as Pell was later to acknowledge. In 1996 he introduced the *Melbourne Response* which provided for payments initially capped at \$50,000 on condition of confidentiality. Nevertheless, claimants found the procedure legalistic and lacking support for victims. It certainly saved the church many millions - the Age

newspaper estimated \$62 million. In Sydney in 2007 a former altar boy John Ellis brought a claim against the Archdiocese of Sydney but failed since the Archdiocese was not an incorporated body. The Archbishop had brought about the change of policy so as to use this mechanism rather than supply an entity to sue as had occurred previously. Yes, it was a legal defence (now outlawed in most states) but it was thoroughly objectionable on a moral and spiritual basis. Here was a cardinal sin. (Apparently the Australian church has paid out some \$276 million in claims up until March 2017, and it is thought around 7% of priests have been offenders.)

Pell is an intelligent man but conveys a lack of empathy. He is also an ecclesiastic, loyal to his church although hardly orthodox – remember his debate with Richard Dawkins reported on by our Rev. George Ball in May 2012 *Presbyterian Banner*? Interestingly, Pell's 1971 Oxford PhD was entitled, *The exercise of authority in early Christianity from about 170 to about 270*. In that period of history there was certainly not the centralised hierarchical structure that developed in the next century after Constantine recognised Christianity as a legitimate religion in 313 and Theodosius I mandated it as the religion of the Roman empire in 380. Confession was not private in the ear of the priest then: that Irish Church invention was some centuries in the future. In those early days, as the New Testament evidences, penitents confessed publicly and demonstrated their repentance.

In those early days too, we did not have the emphasis on status, wealth and priestly character. Church leaders were chosen by the people not by a hierarchical few.

The rush outside the Court to condemn Pell to hell is not very productive but reflects at least the frustration and anger of many at the behaviour of the Roman Catholic Church. If he's personally innocent of the offences for which he was found guilty, he is certainly receiving judgment for some sins whether before or after he was a Cardinal, his own and that of his Church. That's not to defend those who see an opportunity to express their hatred of Christianity.

While strongly objecting to the peculiar and unscriptural doctrines of Rome, we deeply sympathise with those Roman Catholics who have a real devotion to Christ and are increasingly biblically literate. In many moral issues we are allies. What has happened affects all Christians and brings blasphemy on the name of Christ. Certainly it is no longer the case one can say, "We trust you." Trust has to be earned and backed up with Safe Church procedures that are comprehensive and unambiguous. 'Be holy for I am holy says the Lord.' #

Mary Queen of Scots: woke movie of the year*

David Robertson, Dundee



And the Oscar for most Woke Period Drama goes to... *Mary Queen of Scots* (although *The Favourite* ran it a close second).

The woke checklist

Women as the heroines (but still victims oppressed by the patriarchal society) – check.

Men dressed in black as misogynistic rulers of the patriarchy – check.

A suitably racially diverse court – check.

Religious tolerance – check.

Promoting gender fluidity – check.

White middle class liberal feminist dialogue – check.

Explicit sex scenes – check.

This film has it all. All the boxes are ticked. All that is missing are the wind turbines on the Scottish mountains proving that climate change awareness is centuries old.

Which is a shame – because as a Scot with more than a passing interest in the history of my own country, I was looking forward to this latest cinematic telling of the story of one of our most fascinating characters, Queen Mary and her English cousin, Elizabeth.

* Woke is a political term of African American origin that refers to a perceived awareness of issues concerning social justice and racial justice. It is derived from the African American Vernacular English expression "stay woke", whose grammatical aspect refers to a continuing awareness of these issues.

Lets begin with the positives. The scenery was great (this is after all Scotland). The acting is also good – especially Saoirse Ronan as Mary and Margot Robbie as Elizabeth. But, unless you want to see a sixteenth century version of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Mary Queen of Scots* has little else going for it.

Hysterical history

After the opening scene the film descends into the kind of historical farce that makes Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* seem like a documentary. It is a dramatic reinterpretation of John Guy's dramatic reinterpretation of the story of Mary (Queen of Scots: *The True Life of Mary Stuart*). As such it is, to put it mildly, somewhat historically inaccurate.

The battles scenes are pathetically re-enacted – coming across more like a couple of small street gangs having a go, than major battles. In Josie Rourke's (the director) version of sixteenth century Scotland there are only castles, rivers and mountains. We see no villages, no towns and no cities.

Some are more equal than others

It's strange that in a film supposedly signalling the virtues of equality there are almost no ordinary people (apart from a few crazy eyed religious zealots listening to John Knox and some Gaelic speaking Highlanders being charmed by their French Queen). The question that also crosses my mind is why in this age of equality, are modern liberals celebrating hereditary monarchy – the ultimate in birth privilege?

But never fear – we know this film is for equality because the courts of both Mary and Elizabeth are turned into racially diverse ones – despite the fact that in a population of some five million in England and Scotland in the sixteenth century there are only records of 360 people of African origin.

It seems strange that at a time when liberals are concerned about a non-transgender person playing a transgender one, they have no qualms about Lord Randolph, Elizabeth's ambassador to Scotland, being portrayed as an African. Or Queen Elizabeth, despite her racist views, having an Asian lady in waiting. I guess the quotas had to be filled. But if that's the case I want to protest that it did not go far enough. If an African-American actress had played Mary then we would finally have arrived at the ultimate Hollywood version of equality!

Down with the patriarchy

According to one review the differences between Mary and Elizabeth are "exploited by the patriarchal system which surrounds them". The same review went on to say that all good period dramas reflect the present – "This story of two independent, complex women challenged at every step by the men surrounding them feels very contemporary and strikingly relevant today".

But that's the problem. I want to see a film about Mary Queen of Scots, the sixteenth century and all the complexities involved. I don't want to see, as another reviewer put it, "a woke queen, spouting proto-feminist dialogue, keeping a racially diverse court, embracing all religions and her courtiers' gender fluidity."

If you want to know about Mary Queen of Scots you should read Antonia Fraser's biography of the same title. On the other hand if you want to know about contemporary society then this film is as good a guide as any.

Some of the dialogue is cringeworthy bad.

"You have not betrayed your nature" Mary tells David Rizzio after catching him in bed with her new husband, Lord Darnley. When Rizzio dresses up as a woman she tells him. "Be whoever you wish with us, you make for a lovely sister".

"I shall be a man" declares Elizabeth – as she prepares to incite civil war in Scotland – something of course which no woman would do.

"How cruel men are!"

"Sisters do not betray sisters"

"I know that your heart has more within you than the men that counsel you".

Religious bigotry

While *Mary Queen of Scots* is spot on if you buy into the whole rewrite of history as a patriarchal narrative, when it comes to religion it is shallow and superficial in its understanding. There is no exploration of Mary's deep Catholic faith – and the caricature of John Knox's Presbyterianism is so bad that I feel if David Tennant had played his most famous character – Dr Who – instead of Knox it would have been more realistic! In its ignorance and virtue signalling the irony is that this is a film which promotes religious bigotry and intolerance – all in the name of tolerance.

As a Scot this film depressed me. I wanted to scream out that we are not as the film portrays. And then the thought struck me – what if we are? This is not a film that reflects Scotland in the sixteenth century but it is a film that reflects the regression of Western culture today – silly, superficial and shallow.

God have mercy on us. #

Illustration: Focus Features/Working Title Films/Perfect World Pictures/Universal Pictures.

David Robertson is minister of St Peter's Free Church of Scotland, Dundee and associate director of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity [www.solas-cpc.org] He resigns this charge after 30 years to be resident in Sydney later in the year. (A daughter is married in Australia.) David's blog <TheWeeFlee.com> has a large number of followers. The above article is reproduced with David's permission and also appeared in *The Spectator* 3 Feb 2019 (www.spectator.com.au)

UNFULFILLED PROPHECY

How to understand it...

The following principles, in part derived from a study of the significance of the parables of Matthew 13, embody a suggested approach. - RSW

1. The kingdom of God that was the subject of Old Testament promise and expectation has begun with the ministry of Jesus.
2. Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom and equipped them so that they could bring out the old treasures (promises) as well as new (fulfilments), and told them to make known from the housetops what he had taught them in private. The post-resurrection data concerning the kingdom and the church cannot be regarded as other than the public proclamation and elucidation of that revealed in principle by Jesus.
3. Any interpretation of the Old Testament which disregards the disclosures made by Jesus cannot be correct. The Old Testament must be interpreted by the Gospel not the Gospel or the future by a reading of the Old Testament which bypasses the Gospel.
4. The present form of the kingdom is that state of affairs which arises from the Father giving authority to his Christ. It begins with the public ministry of Jesus and is to have a future world-wide development to be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to usher in the eternal kingdom.
5. The Old Testament promise and expectation is to find its fulfilment in and through the church as the realm where kingdom blessings are now experienced. The church is the believing remnant of Israel to which is engrafted believing Gentiles thus forming one body.
6. The devil will oppose the work of the kingdom but force is not to be resorted to gain conversions. The consummation will come when the harvest is ready, but will be unexpected and unannounced. A gradual and steady progress cannot be safely inferred from the data, nor can we establish more than that evil will continue in greater or less degree until the consummation, but there are grounds for great optimism for Gospel work. Tribulation belongs to the entire last days ie from Christ's resurrection until his return.
7. Christ's return will be personal, visible and bodily. It will not be on earth to be seen by a few but in the heavens to be seen by all. It will be accompanied by the general resurrection, last judgement and the eternal kingdom.
8. The watchword for the Christian is faithfulness in a hostile environment.

"Come Lord Jesus, come quickly."

THE BACK PAGE

ULVERSTONE

Elder Ian Hamilton reports: We rejoiced in the Baptism of Jensen Keast on the 17th February. The Rev. Andres Miranda travelled from Victoria to lead the service. His sermon was taken from Isaiah 60 on the subject of Revival and Remaking. There were also a number of family visiting for the special event, some from New Zealand and others from Canberra. We enjoyed a great fellowship lunch afterwards.



Pictured with Jensen are parents Luke and Tessa.

The pictures in the last issue were provided by Esther Hamilton. Our thanks to her and Loretta Hingston for keeping the *Presbyterian Banner* furnished with news and pictures.

BOOK REVIEWS

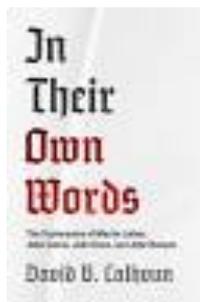
A number of new titles have been issued by Banner of Truth Trust in Edinburgh.



Sinclair Ferguson provides a simple, edifying commentary on James in the Let's Study... series.

Let's Study James is paperback, 141 pages including study/discussion questions. Recommended.

In Their Own Words by David B. Calhoun (232 pp., pbk.) provides testimonies of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and John Bunyan with introductions and commentary by Calhoun, Emeritus Professor of Church History at Covenant Seminary in St Louis. Well worthwhile.



PERSONALIA

David and Mandy **Kerridge** of Maclean PCEA welcomed Ethan Hamish on 19 February, a brother for William, Grace, James and Emily.

Elder Tom Reeve of Mount Druitt reports his 21 month-old grandson **Harry Tsai**, son of Jordan and Mrs Hannah Tsai, has made a good recovery following surgery for congenital Pulmonary Vein Stenosis.

Your
Congregation's
news
could
have
been
here.