

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 18 SEPTEMBER 2016



Moderators-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

Back row: David Jones, Robert Benn, David Cook (just completed his term), Bruce Christian

Front row: John Wilson (inducted last week and now current), Bob Thomas, Allan Harman

The Moderator-General's Last Remarks

The Right Rev David Cook

At the General Assembly of Australia I will report on the state of the denomination, as I see it. Maxine and I are very grateful for the warm reception we have received in each state. I have 5 observations to make, 3 surprises to share and 3 challenges for the church.

Here are my remarks:

FIVE OBSERVATIONS:

1. The healthy state of our three Theological Colleges.

Under the leadership of Peter Hastie in Melbourne, Ian Smith in Sydney, and Garry Millar in Brisbane, the Colleges continue to attract and equip fine candidates for ministry. In years past the theological battleground was fought over what we believe about the Bible and about the Lord Jesus Christ. The battle never ceases, and as long as we have an enemy who either destroys or distorts, it never will. The battle these days is over the content of the gospel and particularly the central doctrine of justification.

This truth means that, in Christ by faith, the Christian is reckoned by God with a righteous standing, as if he or she had kept God's law perfectly. This reckoning and declaration of righteousness is the

unchanging declaration of God the Judge, and is made on the basis of Christ's life, death and resurrection. He kept the law perfectly and He dies to pay the penalty of broken law. We can be certain in our relationship with God. My sin will never accuse me and sin, though present, has been dethroned because of what Jesus has done. Each of our Colleges affirms this vital truth and is worthy of our confidence. BUT REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS THAT THIS BATTLE NEVER CEASES.

2. People who believe the true gospel and are part of a church which proclaims it, are rarely so heavenly minded to be of no earthly use.

In each of our states I have noticed the expansion of aged care facilities to cope with Australia's ageing population. The new facilities in Ashfield and Paddington, NSW, and the new Braemar facilities in WA are typical examples. But not only is there building expansion, pastoral care is being given renewed focus, and indeed people in advanced age are coming to trust in Christ.

3. Outreach, evangelism, and church planting are no longer foreign ideas in our denomination.

The expanding work of APWM overseas is impressive and within Australia the expanding church plants around Mitchelton (QLD), Dubbo and Albury (NSW), and in Hobart (TAS); and the work of the excellent Church Planting Committee in Victoria under the leadership of Richard Wilson is heart warming.

Outreach is vital to the integrity of the local church. In the introduction to his commentary on Acts, the late Professor E M Blaiklock sums up Acts like this, "To press beyond the fringe is always sound policy provided it is done with vigour and devotion." PRESS OUTWARD!

4. Psalm 78 urges generational interaction.

Read verses 1-8. We are to pass onto the next generation, "the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders He has done." The growing work of summer and winter camps in NSW, the vibrant work of Brian Harvey in VIC, and Ynet in QLD is worthy of enthusiastic support. However, we must not neglect children – infants and primary aged little ones require greater attention.

5. The sense of belonging to a nation-wide family.

The help that QLD is providing to SA, and from VIC and NSW to WA, are indicators of a healthy family unity where the stronger care for the weaker.

The work of the creative and hard working National Journal Committee, producing AP has contributed much to this family one-ness as has the social media pages initiated by Scott Kroeger.

THREE SURPRISES I HADN'T ANTICIPATED:

1. The work of PresAid on the initiative of Bob Thomas, where every dollar raised reaches its target supporting overseas projects.

\$1M has now been raised. Bob is about to retire from his convenorship with our thanks and we look to Dean Carroll to continue this vital work.

2. Another retiree is Allan Harman from the leadership of the Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee.

How thankful we should be both for the evangelical quality and quantity of our Chaplains working in the Forces. Allan Harman has widespread respect and has done much to develop the tremendous potential of this work.

3. PIM under the leadership, until recently of Rob Duncanson and Stuart Bonnington, is expanding.

Maxine and I visited Alice Springs and Darwin and were impressed by the solid faithful pastoral oversight of Rob and Jeanette Duncanson in Darwin, and Rob's strategic involvement in Timor Leste is deserving of greater support. We pray for Andrew Letcher and Les Fowler as they take up leadership of this expanding work.

THREE ONGOING CHALLENGES:

1. I know that it is a state issue, but we cannot really justify providing education for the elite; our schools must be centres of evangelism and discipleship of young men and women.

In the book on E H Nash, who did so much work with boys in England's private schools, among them John Stott and Dick Lucas, Nash is quoted as saying, "[Private] school religion fits you for life and ruins you for eternity". Leadership of our schools must be occupied by outgoing evangelical Principals and Councils. When such Principals are appointed, they must be given every encouragement to incorporate the gospel into all school life.

2. No doubt much is happening in evangelism at the local level, but this Assembly must do more than just let outreach happen.

We must actively encourage evangelism and evangelists. Do we believe that there is a City which is above, that there is an enemy and a state of eternal separation from God and all His blessings? Then we must re-double our efforts in prayer, training, and outreach so that the lost may be saved, the elect

called into God's family. Our zeal for overseas mission must be matched by our concern to reach across the street to our fellow Australians.

3. We must understand our unique polity and show respect for it.

We are neither Episcopalian nor Congregationalists. We are people under the direction of Courts of the Church, Sessions, Presbyteries and Assemblies and most of us are members of the Courts which direct us.

Last year we had some controversy at the NSW Assembly when the Ministry and Mission Committee's deliverance contained a motion 'directing' Sessions not just 'recommending' an action to Sessions. We are not free agents. We are subject to the direction of the Courts of the Church. Presbyterians must respect such direction.

We need clear leadership. Israel's problems were often due to a failure of leadership. When this Assembly rises, our Moderator General has no actual authority. (I will just remind him of that now, so you don't feel the need to remind him of that every time he visits your area.) But, Moderator, we have confidence in you. We look to you to represent us clearly and lead us.

You will have many opportunities to encourage Evangelical ministers and ministries. Please make the most of every one! You will have many opportunities in the media to show that our Denomination takes God seriously by taking His Word seriously. We urge you to take every one! You will be faced with many choices as to where you will devote your energies. We urge you to take those opportunities which promote most clearly the interests of the Gospel!

Moderator, you are called to leadership in difficult days. We don't want to add to your difficulties. We will pray for you for the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in all you do. Please be assured of our loyal support as you faithfully represent the interests of God's Kingdom in our land.

My special thanks to: Mike Wharton, our excellent webmaster; to the office members of the NSW Church, especially Jeof Falls, Fergus Tang and Suzanne Jensen, and to the staff of the Ferguson Library – Sue Pacey and Daryl Lightfoot – for their ready help to support any research request.

Thank you to the Church for this enriching opportunity of service.

Source:

presbyterian.org.au/index.php/resources/moderator-s-comments/119-last-speech

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