

Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Christian Basics 8 Towards the End Times

Towards the End Times

A few years ago in a Year 5 Religious Education class, a boy told me that they had been learning that the earth is moving a little further away from the sun every year. Then the time will come when it will start moving closer to the sun until finally – in about 500,000 years – it explodes. He was quite terrified by the thought!

Scientists regard the earth as finite, but in fact see danger points for the human race long before then. There are concerns about the ability to feed our ever-increasing population, about the adequacy of our water-supplies, about oxygen depletion... Add to that the worries about human-induced problems like dangers from nuclear war, the ozone layer, the energy crisis... It can seem like a very bleak picture!

Peter writes about the finiteness of the universe, too. He relates it to “the Day of the Lord” when “the heavens will disappear with a shrill noise, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth with everything in it will vanish” (2 Peter 3.10). Our confident expectation is “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home” (v.13; compare Revelation 21.1). For Peter, it is not the purpose of God that this present system go on for ever and ever. Whatever human selfishness and stupidity may do along the way, God who is the Creator and Lord of history will bring it all to an end in his right time.

As we look towards the end times, it is of utmost importance how we live (v.11) – “do your best to be pure and faultless in God’s sight and to be at peace with him” (v.14b). This is an area of Biblical teaching where many writers have confidently set a “timetable” – and sharply disagreed with one another! Peter refers to the teaching of “our dear brother Paul” on the subject – “There are some difficult things in his letters which ignorant and unstable people explain falsely, as they do with other passages of the Scriptures” (v.16).

The Promise

The Old Testament prophets spoke on a number of occasions about the end times. “The day of the Lord” sometimes referred to divine visitations in history (Amos 5.18-20; Joel 1.15). But at other times the reference is to an event at the end of time (Joel 3.12-15). “When that day comes... the Lord will be king over all the earth” (Zechariah 14.8-9). Woven throughout the Old Testament are a whole series of passages referring to a messianic figure who will come and whose role is seen to include “bearing the punishment on behalf of all those who have gone astray (refer to Session 2, pp.4-5). “The Day”, however, is especially seen as a day of judgment (Malachi 3.1-5).

The New Testament sees the time we live in as “the last days” (Hebrews 1.2). The promise of the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2.28) has occurred (Acts 2.16-17).

However, we look forward to “the age to come” when the promises of God will be completed for us (Mark 10.29-30). What we experience here of God’s grace and Spirit is just a foretaste of what he will give in the coming age (Ephesians 1.13-14; Hebrews 6.5). Indeed, what Christ achieved by his death and resurrection will be brought to consummation by his return in glory.

End-Time Events

We live in times of tension and conflict. The Christ has come. The ransom has been paid. The good news of salvation is freely available for the peoples of the world. Yet among the wheat there are weeds to be culled out at the harvest and destroyed (Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43), there are worthless fish to be thrown away (vv.47-50).

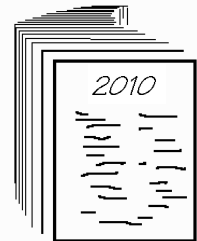
Jesus taught that one of the Kingdom qualities is persecution for doing what God requires (5.10-12). Jesus warned and reassured his followers, “The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!” (John 16.33b). Indeed, “the world” is often another term for what Paul calls “this present evil age” (Galatians 1.4).

Satan claims power here. Note his temptation of Jesus in which he offered “all the kingdoms of the world” to him (Matthew 4.8-10). See how Paul calls him “the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God” (Ephesians 2.2) and “the evil god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4.4).

By his death and resurrection, Christ has broken the power of Satan – “now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown” (John 12.31); “Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature... so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death” (Hebrews 2.14). But, though defeated, a guerilla war continues as the Devil opposes the redemptive purposes of God. During this age there is continuous struggle between demonic evil and the Kingdom of God (Revelation 12). As Paul puts it, We are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age” (Ephesians 6.12). God has rescued his people “from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven” (Colossians 1.13-14).

The climax of Satan’s opposition to the Kingdom of God will be the appearance of a person who will embody evil – “The Day will not come until the final Rebellion takes place and the Wicked One appears, who is destined for hell. He will oppose every so-called god or object of worship and will put himself above them all. He will even go in and sit down in God’s Temple and claim to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2.3-4). This is the “Enemy of Christ” (or Antichrist) to whom John refers (1 John 2.18,22; 4.3; 2 John 7). Note that there were already many “enemies of God” (antichrists) and a “spirit... from the Enemy of Christ” (antichrist).

Revelation graphically describes this person as the Beast, satanically inspired and empowered to do wonderful signs (13.1,3,13). The aim of the Beast is to draw the worship of people away from God (vv.8,12). He will demand total allegiance of his subjects – religious as well as political – and



will use economic sanctions to compel submission (vv.16-17).

Against those who refuse to submit, fierce opposition will be directed (v.7; Matthew 24.21). Those who stand steadfast in their faith in Christ, refusing to worship the beast, will win victory over the beast, even in death and martyrdom (Revelation 15.2).

This time of great trouble will also be a sign of the beginnings of divine judgment on Satan and his followers. Revelation describes these judgments in symbolical terms as seven trumpets (chs.8-9) and seven bowls (ch.17).

These judgments will involve plagues and disasters expressing God's anger towards evil (15.1,7; 16.19). Before they occur, God will seal his people (7.1-8), who will be protected from God's anger (9.4) and will be preserved intact in the terrible conflict with satanic power, even though they suffer martyrdom (7.9-17).

The Return of Christ

The *Nicene Creed* affirms, "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

The return of Christ – his Second Coming (Hebrews 9.28) – will bring the rule of the Antichrist to an end. Several Greek words are used to describe it.

Parousia means "presence" or "arrival". The same Jesus who was taken up into heaven will again visit the earth in personal presence (Acts 1.11) at the end of the age (Matthew 24.3) with power and great glory (v.30) to destroy antichrist and evil (2 Thessalonians 2.8); to raise believers who have died (1 Corinthians 15.23); and to gather his chosen people (Matthew 24.31; 2 Thessalonians 2.1).

His return will be an *apokalypsis* – an "unveiling" or "disclosure", when the power and glory that he laid aside at his first coming (Philippians 2.6-11) will be disclosed to the world (1 Peter 4.13). Christ is now reigning as Lord at God's right hand (Hebrews 1.3; 12.2; 1 Corinthians 15.25), but his reign is invisible to the world. It will be made visible by his *apokalypsis* (1 Corinthians 1.7; 2 Thessalonians 1.7; 1 Peter 1.7,13).

A third word, *epiphaneia*, "appearing", indicates the visibility of his return (1 Timothy 6.14; 2 Timothy 4.8; Titus 2.14).

The New Testament has many references to the return of Christ and many writers have endeavoured to help us by putting them together into a coherent scheme. I believe that is as impossible as it might have been trying to write the life of Jesus from the Old Testament, even though, in retrospect, we can see how it all fits together.

Some points, however, are clear. (a) It will be a personal and visible return to earth. (b) It will be glorious and majestic, in contrast to the humiliation of his first coming. (c) It will be sudden and unexpected – in fact, the time is unknown, except to the Father (Matthew 24.36). (d) It will be the complete and final triumph of righteousness.

The Last Judgment

We have already noted that believers who have died will be raised and gathered with believers still living to be with the Lord. Jesus said, "The time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice and come out of their graves: those who have done good will rise and live, and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned" (John 5.28-29).

In Session 1 we noted that "God approaches humankind in revelation on the basis of an atonement – or in judgment" (p.6). God's patience waits long for people to respond to his redemptive work in the Son and his convincing work by the Spirit. But the time will come when it will no longer be "the day to be saved" (2 Corinthians 6.2).

Jesus was about to send his "brothers" – his disciples and representatives (Matthew 12.48-50; 23.8) – into the world and the final destiny of people would rest on how they had received these messengers (24.46; 10.40). Revelation 20.11-15 speaks about people being "judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books." But this judgment on the basis of works leaves no option but the lake of fire. Salvation is only possible for those who have their name "written in the book of the living."

This immediately raises a question- what about those who haven't heard? Salvation is only through the redemptive work of Christ. God is both loving and just and he can be trusted to do what is right.

We note some principles here. Those who have not had the law of Moses will be judged without the law (Romans 2.12); they have the light of general revelation (1.20) and the law written in the heart (2.15). Those who "keep on doing good, and seek glory, honour, and immortal life; to them God will give eternal life." On others who "are selfish and reject what is right, in order to follow what is wrong" God will "pour out his anger and fury" (2.8-9).

The question should never be used as an excuse for unbelief on the part of those who have heard the gospel. Nor should the response be taken to excuse us from sharing the gospel with others. Since the Gentiles have perverted the light of general revelation (1.21ff) and the Jews have failed to fulfil the law (Galatians 3.10-12), we need to be aware that the final basis of Judgment is relation to Christ.

Jesus spoke of two destinies. The righteous (those who are right with God) will go to eternal life, but the others will go to "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25.46). Heaven – or hell.

Gehenna (the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*, "valley of Hinnom") was situated outside Jerusalem, where children had been sacrificed by fire to Molech (2 Chronicles 28.3). It was later used as a refuse tip the smoke from whose fires went up continually. It became a prophetic symbol for judgment (Jeremiah 7.31-32) and later for the final punishment.

God has the authority to throw people into hell (Luke 12.5). It is the place whose "fire never goes out" (Mark 9.43), the "eternal fire" (Matthew 18.8), the "lake of fire and sulphur" (Revelation 20.10), the final destiny of the beast, the false prophet and "whoever did not have his name written in the book of the living" (v.15). Jesus also spoke in terms of darkness (Matthew 8.12; 22.13; 25.30).

While both fire and darkness are symbolic of punishment, they describe the fearful reality of banishment from the presence and blessings of God in Christ (Matthew 7.23; 25.41; 2 Thessalonians 1.9).

The Present Call of Christ

On 4th December 1963 the Blackburn family were in the final throes of packing to go from Childers to Stanthorpe. We were well organised – everything was being carefully packed, labelled, catalogued. The removalists were due the next day. At about 8.30am the mail came. It included the October 26 issue of *Christianity Today*, a fortnightly periodical from

U.S.A. I had no time to read it, but, to relieve the pressures, flipped over to the “What if...” cartoon which was a regular feature. It showed a man with a prophecy chart looking over his shoulder at three angels blowing their trumpets. The caption – “You’re early!” That raised a chuckle.

WHAT IF...



You're early!

Then, at 9.00am the doorbell rang. It was the removalists- a day early! Suddenly, our priorities radically changed. Much of our careful labelling, packing and cataloguing went by the board! I still recall our typewriter getting tucked in near the top of the load – no box, no label!

In our second Session, we noted that “we are called to live ‘between the times’ – between the time of the incarnation and the time of his return in glory and judgment” (p.3). Christians have always lived “towards the end times” – always aware that the promised return of the Lord Jesus is near, always doing those things that he has given us to do. And that is the key. It is not for us to plot a time line of events that the Father has kept in his own counsel but to be constantly about the mission he has given us to do.

Nearly 2000 years ago, Paul wrote, “Listen! This is the hour to receive God’s favour; today is the day to be saved!” (2 Corinthians 6.2c). The church has always had to live in that awareness. It has brought urgency as well as joyful anticipation. In the light of the imminent Return of Christ, we cannot become lax in either life or mission. In the light of the coming judgment day, there is good news to spread abroad!

At the present time, we are rightly challenged to look at our mission and set “missional goals” – for five years, ten years, fifteen years... – and some denominations have declared the 1990’s “the decade of harvest.” We do not know when our Lord will return. What we do know is that “this is the hour...”, that “today is the day to be saved!”

For reflection...

How important is it that we be aware of what the Scriptures teach about the “end times”?

- In what ways should the certainty of the Second Coming of Christ have an impact on the life and mission of the church?

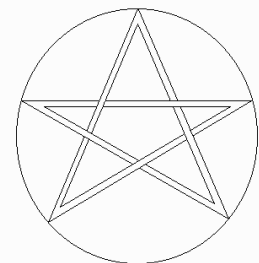
- How should the knowledge of the certainty of the Second Coming affect our lives as individual Christians?
- Reflect on our present news and history. How significant is it that it is not for us to know the day nor the hour?

Understanding the New Age Movement

Understanding the New Age Movement

In April 1982 we opened the *Courier-Mail* to see a full-page advertisement proclaiming "THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE". The same advertisement had been inserted in major newspapers around the world by Benjamin Creme.

Among other things, the item said, "Throughout history, humanity's evolution has been guided by a group of enlightened men, the Masters of Wisdom. They have remained largely in the remote desert and mountain places of earth, working mainly through their disciples who live openly in the world. This message of the Christ's reappearance has been given primarily by such a disciple trained for his task for over 20 years. At the centre of this 'Spiritual Hierarchy' stands the World Teacher, Lord Maitreya, known by Christians as the Christ. And as Christians await the Second Coming, so the Jews await the Messiah, the Buddhists the fifth Buddha, the Moslems the Iman Mahdi, and the Hindus await Krishna. These are all names for one individual."



In 1986 in a previous parish we screened a film entitled, "Gods of the New Age." The film had been recommended to us by UCA Moderator, Rev. Ray Hunt. The viewing was well-attended and opened our eyes to a movement that seemed to be "sneaking in", infiltrating society in many ways. At the close of the film some public servants came up to express concern about seminars on New Age thinking that they were expected to attend. Other reports emerged of New Age input into the training of the army and police.

Our Deaconess took her holidays in USA and on her return commented on the appearance of rainbow emblems all over the place - often with the colours reversed. Was it just a symbol of hope in a despairing world? or did it have some other significance?

Our junk mail included a leaflet calling on us to join in "a million minutes for peace" and included a variety of prayer and meditation suggestions for us to choose. About the same time the media carry a story of meetings of psychics around the world to concentrate their psychic

powers at the same precise moment to bring peace and usher in the new age.

In retrospect we recognise all these seemingly-unrelated events as part of the New Age movement and the claim that humanity has passed from bondage to the Age of Pisces (the fish being seen as a symbol of Christianity) and now enters the Age of Aquarius in which each person will be his/her own god.

In part, the origins of the movement go back to Madame Blavatsky who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Among the stated aims were "to oppose the materialism of science and every form of dogmatic theology, especially the Christian, which the Chiefs of the Society regard as particularly pernicious; to make known among Western nations the long-suppressed facts about Oriental religious philosophies, their ethics, chronology, esoterism, symbolism; to counteract, as far as possible, the efforts of missionaries to delude the so-called 'Heathen' and 'Pagans' as to the real origin and dogmas of Christianity and the practical effects of the latter upon public and private character in so-called Christian countries."

Blavatsky had previous involvement in Spiritism. But whereas the latter sought immediate contact with a deceased relative, for instance, Blavatsky was seeking contact with "spiritual Masters" as the source of a whole system of spiritual beliefs and occult powers.

In its modern form the New Age movement arose out of the counterculture of the 1960s in America and Europe. The movement is a blanket term applied to a variety of people, organisations, events, practices and ideas - all directed to a spiritual and social change that will usher in a New Age of self-actualisation. This entails throwing off both traditional monotheism (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and secular humanism (rationalism, atheism, scepticism). Allowing for this diversity, a number of fairly common characteristics can be noted.

Evolutionary optimism - we are moving upward to a New Age of spiritual discovery. This requires the "cleansing" of our planetary consciousness. (Some New Agers believe that opponents of the movement must be removed.)

Monism - all is one and one is all. The New Age viewpoint tends to dismiss the diversity of creation and to seek a kind of peace in which the individuals lose their identity.

Pantheism - everything that exists is "God". The New Age "God" is not a moral being to be worshipped as supreme. Rather it is a principle within each of us, a force within that we can realise and harness.

Transformation of consciousness - a "rebirthing" or reawakening to self. New Agers are often encouraged to be initiated - whether by meditation, drugs, yoga, martial arts, the use of crystals... The goal is to feel oneness with everything and to realise one's own divinity or "higher self."

Create your own reality. New Age ethics is not rooted in any objective moral order.

Unlimited human potential. One writer says, "You are unlimited. You just don't realise it." New Age books promise psychic powers, astral travel, precognition and much more.

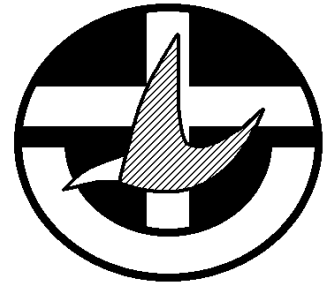
Spirit contact - now called channelling - claims to put people into contact with the thoughts of "the Masters". Predictably the messages are less than Biblical. Some have even claimed to channel Jesus himself and have him saying such things as, "The sayings in the Epistles and in the Gospels and in Revelation to the effect that my blood saves from sin are erroneous."

Religious syncretism - the essence of all religions is one. The appeal is to a supposedly mystical core that unites all religions - that all is one, all is God, we are God, we have infinite potential, we can bring in the New Age.

One writer has described New Age spirituality as "a rather eclectic grab bag of Eastern mysticism, Western occultism, neopaganism and human potential psychology." It is clearly anti-Christian, though this fact is usually kept carefully hidden. It looks for a one-world government and a one-world religion, both under the control of a New Age "Christ".

The Uniting Church in Australia

Throughout this School we have been endeavouring to give basic teaching on the Christian faith. This has not been exhaustive, but has dealt with major themes from a Biblical perspective. Broadly speaking, our concern has been (a) to know God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - from his revelation and in our lives; (b) to understand the church as a Body with a mission to fulfil; (c) to grasp some of the values and principles that our Lord expects of us in our lives; and (d) to perceive the challenges and respond to the motivations of "the end times" in which we live.



Since this School is an activity of the Uniting Church, reference has been made, where appropriate, to the source documents of that church. In this we are not suggesting that the UCA is the "only true church", or that its doctrines are above correction. Indeed, the *Basis of Union* affirms a willingness to "remain open to constant reform under his Word" (para 1).

The point is that being a Christian does involve us in membership of a particular Body of the Lord's people. In this way we are ourselves nurtured and encouraged in our faith, we exercise our gifts to build up the Body and we are committed in ministry and mission. Understanding our particular church helps us in this involvement.

The Way into Union

The *Basis of Union* begins with these words, "The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia. They pray that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit..." (*Basis* para.1).

This union came into effect on 22nd June 1977. It was the result of extended negotiations and a poll of all

confirmed members. There were two motivating factors. One was the ecumenical movement which highlighted Christ's desire that his people be united "so that the world will believe that you sent me" (John 17.21). These words do not necessarily imply the need for one big church organisation. However, they seemed to have particular significance within a sceptical secularised Australia. The other factor was practical. In our far-flung land, there were so many places where ministries were needlessly overlapping and where resources were not being effectively used.

Because of different constitutions of the churches coming into Union, all Methodist churches became part of the UCA (the Wesleyan Methodist church was a post-war import from the USA and had not been part of the Methodist Church of Australasia), most Presbyterian churches (where one-third of the members so voted, the church remained Presbyterian) and almost all Congregational churches (as well as the membership vote, individual congregations could vote to be "in" or "out").

Presbyterianism

The historical origins of Presbyterianism are in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The principles were enunciated by the Reformer John Calvin (Session 5) in Geneva, a city that became a beacon-light for Protestants for centuries. The Church of Scotland modelled itself on the pattern of the Reformed Church in Geneva and showed itself a Church reformed according to the Word of God in its doctrine, worship and church government. Inspired by the Scottish Reformer John Knox, Scotland adopted the Presbyterian system of Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and a General Assembly, with a preaching ministry of the same order, and with equal rights of ministers and lay elders in all church councils. The Church of Scotland strongly emphasised "the Crown Rights of the Redeemer", as King and Lord of His Church, and strenuously resisted any encroachment by the State upon the right of the Church to control its own teaching and practice.

Congregationalism

The Congregationalists or Independents, in the 16th and 17th centuries in England, showed their desire for a reformation further than the Sovereign, the English Parliament and the Synods of the Church of England had provided during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. They opposed the necessity of rule by bishops, any connection between Church and State, and any compulsion to use a uniform set liturgy in church worship. They believed that each independent congregation should represent the mind of Christ, and that each should govern its own affairs. Each congregation consisted of professing Christians, a "gathered church" called out from the community. Congregationalism sought "a further reformation without tarrying for any" and without direction from the State or any other outside source.

Methodism

The Methodist Church had its origins in the eighteenth-century revival in England under the leadership of John Wesley whose story we considered in Session 3. Those converted to Christ through the preaching of Wesley and his band of preachers were

formed into societies. These "class meetings", as they were called, became the means of nurture and growth to spiritual maturity. The term "Methodist" had been used derisively of the members of the Holy Club in Oxford. It was accepted by the Wesleys and now became the name of the new movement. The hope of Wesley to his dying day was that revival should spread within the Anglican Church. In fact, the attitude of the clergy was such that, within a year of Wesley's death, Methodism had to become a separate Church. Among the key doctrinal emphases are what have sometimes been called "the Four Alls of Methodism" - (a) all men need to be saved; (b) all men can be saved; (c) all men may know themselves saved; and (d) all men may be saved to the uttermost. Besides evangelism, Methodism was always characterised by involvement in caring for people in their practical needs.

The Uniting Church in Australia

The Uniting Church, having come from these three traditions, had to establish new structures and organisation. The principles on which the Union proceeded are stated in a document known as the *Basis of Union*. We have referred to it a number of times already.

The *Basis* (para.16) has this striking statement about government in the Church, "The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises her life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of his Church. The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world.

"The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to her through any of her councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey his will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel."

The structure of these "inter-related councils" is best considered diagrammatically.

Assembly

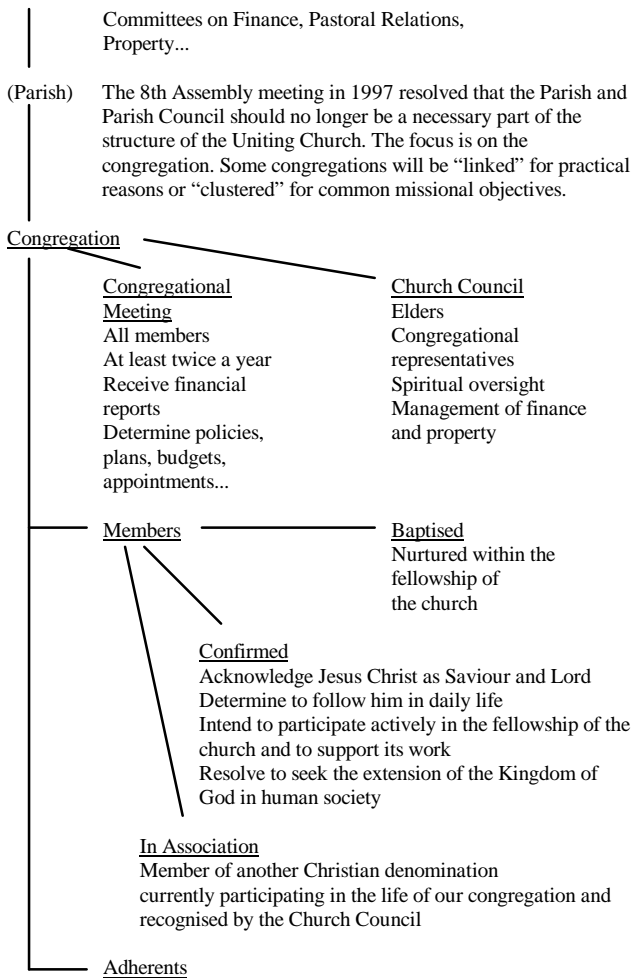
National body
Representatives from all Presbyteries and Synods
Meets every three years
Commissions on Doctrine and Liturgy, Frontier Services, World Mission, Evangelism, Christian Education...

Synod

State body
Representatives from Presbyteries and Congregations
Meets annually (Queensland every 18 months)
General oversight of worship, witness and service

Presbytery

District body (9 in Queensland)
Ministers and lay representatives from each Congregation
Meets 4 times a year
Pastoral and administrative oversight, stimulation and encouragement of Congregations



Membership of Christ's Body, the church, is a high privilege which also brings to us an active responsibility. It is tragic that many Christians see their membership as mainly passive - as if they are mainly there to "be ministered to", and not to be involved in ministry. Note carefully what Jesus was saying in Mark 10.35-45.

Think again about that passage from Ephesians 4 noted in an earlier session. What gifts do you think God may have given you? In what ways do you think he may be equipping you "for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ"?

John Bunyan 1628-1688

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, near Bedford, into a poor home. He probably acquired his grasp of the English language from reading the Bible. As a youth he was involved in the Civil War on the Roundhead side.



In 1649 he married, and his wife brought him Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and Bayly's *Practice of Piety*. His real religious crisis, described in *Grace Abounding*, began in the 1650's, when he was working as a tinker.

In 1653 he joined Pastor Gifford's Independent church in Bedford and felt called to the lay ministry. A year or two later he began to preach with some success. In 1660, with the restoration of Charles II, he was arrested by a zealous magistrate and spend twelve years in jail for refusing to stop preaching. His imprisonment enabled

him to produce his masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress* and other writings, including some verse.

Shortly before his release in 1672 (his imprisonment was not continuously severe) Bunyan was called to be pastor of the nonconformist Bedford church. From that date most of his time was spent in preaching and evangelism in the Bedford area.

Bunyan is best known for three works: *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1684), *The Holy War* (1682) and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). His well-known hymn, "Who would true valour see" (AHB467), is found in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

He proved to be a master of simple, homely English style, narrative and allegory. *The Pilgrim's Progress* has continued to be a best-seller down to the present day.

Bunyan had been writing, mostly sermon treatises and poems, for about twenty years when the first part of his masterpiece appeared in 1678. Immediately it was clear to him and to his audience that he had found something special, an allegory of the Christian life that included the Reformation emphases on justification by faith and the Bible's availability to all, yet which had the vigour and immediacy of the folk tale. He has constructed a distinctively Christian heroism that is vulnerable, prone to mistakes, and yet ultimately victorious through grace.

To be continued...

While this session completes Module 1 **Christian Basics**, it is a beginning rather than an end.

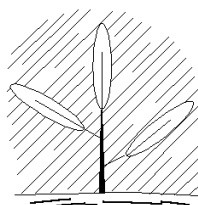
The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. It continues for the whole of life. It is not a matter of training now with the "real race" later on. Always we are both training for the race and in it!

Yet in other ways it is a marathon sprint. The pressure is on all the time. We cannot steady down in the middle distance. We cannot say, "It will be enough if we make it to the finish. We must conserve our energies for later." Some of us have had a lifetime of conserving our energies - we've scarcely run the race at all!

We cannot run it alone. We won't make it without the promised presence of Jesus and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit! But it is as we are willing to "step out" in faith that he will fulfil his promises to us!

And we are in it together. We need one another's help and encouragement along the way. Prayer Cells were not established to give a break in our sessions, but to build important relationships between us. Continue to seek one another out for regular times of prayer together. Perhaps we can link with two or three other members of our congregation to establish other Prayer Cells.

You are encouraged to share in the other Modules of the Antioch School. **Christian Basics** is foundational, but it is a beginning rather than an end. God bless!



Antioch School
Growing Disciples

An Opportunity to Learn and Grow

