

Evangelism in the Modern *Presbyterian Church of Australia*

Assessment item 3 ~ John Duffy [B.Th. Student]

Introduction

Christ's great commission, is the continuing role of the church to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"¹. This review will define Reformed evangelism in the *Presbyterian Church of Australia* [PCA] and its faithfulness to that calling. This will be done by explaining the necessary historical background, listing the various ministries of the PCA, which are based on the church's governmental structure. Throughout, it will criticise the benefits and deficiencies in PCA's evangelism, in the light of recent history (notably the separation of the *Uniting Church of Australia* [UCA] and 'amalgamation' with the *Reformed Church of Australia* [RCA]) and modern culture.

Defining Evangelism in the PCA

There is so much ambiguity regarding the definition of *evangelism* among modern theologians, even amongst the Reformed churches (Calvin v. Barth). As such, in this report, it will be summarised as seeking to stimulate the unregenerate to their need in Christ, instructing them to faith and repentance, and to establish them in a lifelong pursuit of holiness². It encompasses the whole counsel from God's Word about sin and its consequences³. Specifically, the *ordo salutis* of Calvinistic churches such as the PCA consists of the external calling (which the people in church contribute as evangelism), which may (or may not) lead to regeneration and effectual calling exclusively by the Holy Spirit, according to God's decree, in the fullness of His time. If a person is effectually called, they will be converted and simultaneously given faith (leading to trust and repentance) and justification⁴. Many modern denominations follow the Arminian concepts to order faith (as a human act) prior to regeneration. Calvinists believe a spiritually dead soul can no better come to life than physically dead body is able to revive itself, without the unction of the Holy Spirit⁵. This provides a great comfort in evangelism, in that there is only a duty to proclaim the gospel (whether "fruits" are evident or not). It is ultimately the Holy Spirit that germinates and grows the "seed"⁶. And as Charles Spurgeon said (paraphrased), until the Lord provides a list of the elect, we will preach to everyone⁷!

¹ Mt. 28:18-20, Mk 16:15, Lk. 24:45-49, Acts 1:5-8

² Beeke, Joel R. *Puritan Evangelism - A Biblical Approach*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books. 2007. 5-6.

Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. 3rd Ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway. 2013. 136.

³ Smith, T. [Ed.] *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*. Worthington, Penn.: Maranatha Press. 1980. 2:120

⁴ Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Norwich, GB: Banner of Truth Trust. 1984. 415-524.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology - An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. London, Engl.: Inter-Varsity Press. 2000. 657-736.

WCF 1647. Chapters X, XI, XIV, XV.

⁵ Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13

⁶ Matt. 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15

⁷ It is a misnomer that because Calvinists believe in predestination with election, there is no need to evangelise.

Historical Background of the PCA Influencing Current Evangelism

The 1880s revealed an infiltration of Hegelism into the Victorian church⁸. As a consequence, a *Declaratory Statement* [DS] endorsing the *Westminster Confession of Faith 1646* [WCF] and ancillary documents was introduced as the *Subordinate Standard* [SS] to address this doctrine⁹ and other issues. At Union, in 1901, the colonial state churches amalgamated to form the PCA. The unified denomination accepted the same hierarchy of documents for the nation.

The church was still tainted with liberalism so significantly, that from before Union, there was a propensity to join with other liberal denominations. This was exacerbated by Barthianism (diametrically opposing liberalism, but not aligning with Calvinistic doctrine of the authority of Scripture¹⁰) and *Freemasonry*¹¹. After decades of numerous attempts, many churches/members of the PCA, joined with the *Methodist Church of Australasia* [MCA] and *Fellowship of Congregational Churches in Australia* [FCCA] to form the *Uniting Church of Australia* (UCA) on 22nd June 1977.¹² Prior to the UCA, the PCA had 137 international missionaries. 133 joined with the UCA, leaving a total of only four missionaries under the support of the PCA¹³.

The PCA has recently just signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* to join with the *Christian Reformed Churches of Australia* (CRCA). This will impact substantially to benefit the evangelism of these collective denominations, by the pooling of resources.¹⁴

The PCA Form of Government and Impact on Evangelism

The church government focuses around established local *Sanctioned Charges*, which are overseen by an ordained Minister in a Kirk Session of other ruling and teaching elders. The PCA has a hierarchy of πρεσβύτερος, consisting of these Sessions for each parish. Each level of government (although equals before God) are autonomous but accountable to the next level, such that there is *Presbytery* of parish regions, *Assembly* for the state, and *General Assembly of Australia* [GAA]. All elders are of equal voice to each other under Christ, who speaks through the Holy Bible as illumined by the Holy Spirit. The church government is outlined in the WCF, as read in the light of the DS. Because of this structure, there are four tiers of evangelism, being *International* and *National* organisations (authorised by the PCA GAA) and *State and Local* organisations (authorised by individual states, presbyteries or parishes).

International Evangelism

When the UCA formed, approximately 66% of Presbyterian people and assets

⁸ Cooper, Paul F, Burke, David A. [Eds] *Read in the Light - The 1901 Declaratory Statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*. Stanhope Gardens, NSW: Eider Books. 2019. 53-64.

⁹ Ibid. 38-39.

¹⁰ Barth is very closely aligned with Calvin in most matters, however his understanding of the doctrines of election and the nature of Scripture in relation to man differs significantly. Reeves, Michael. *On Giant's Shoulders - Introducing the Great Theologians from Luther to Barth*. Nottingham, Engl: Inter-Varsity Press. 2011. 156.

¹¹ Fraser, Rev. G.I. *Christianity and Freemasonry - What is the conflict?* Melbourne, Vic.: Presbyterian Church of Victoria. 1998. 37-47.

¹² Cooper, Paul F, Burke, David A. [Eds]. *Burning or Bushed - The Presbyterian Church of Australia 40 Years On*. Stanhope Gardens, NSW: Eider Books. 2017. 5-19.

¹³ Murray, Kevin. *Overseas Mission: Crisis and Opportunity* in Cooper, Paul F., Burke, David A. [Eds]. *Burning or Bushed - The Presbyterian Church of Australia 40 Years On*. 2017. 244.

¹⁴ <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/presbyterians-and-reformed-churches-move-closer/>

depleted the PCA. This posed a significant temporal and financial crisis on all ministry resources. It did however provide a significant opportunity to reassess the optimum use of God's resources, including in evangelism.

As a consequence, world evangelisation under the *Australian Presbyterian World Mission* [APWM] morphed into three forms of missionary support:

1. Missionaries of PCA serving a foreign Partner Church, which the PCA accepts responsibility (eg. *PC South Sudan*, *PC Japan*).
2. Presbyterian ministers working under PCA-approved agencies (eg. *Whycliffe Bible Translators*, *Mission Aviation Fellowship*)
3. Communicant members of the PCA recognised as missionaries with PCA-approved mission agencies.

The benefits¹⁵ of this opportunity has enabled the denomination to:

- Develop and refine cross-cultural mission policy to enhance long term goals of PCA evangelism.
- Enhance interaction with various mission/evangelistic agencies.
- Enhance pastoral care for missionaries and evangelists in the field.
- Develop relationships with similar overseas Reformed churches.
- Enable more direct contact for imminent communications (due to fewer field workers).
- Relatively easy access with current missionaries and evangelists for mentoring/preparation of prospective missionaries and evangelists. (This is subject to folk who are not in dangerous, persecutory countries).
- Able to specifically define various evangelistic roles and responsibilities.

The main problems PCA (and many denominations today) face in global evangelism are two-fold. Firstly, the current generation don't consider world evangelism to be "exotic" or "exciting" as in past generations. There is a possible range of reasons, including ready-travel to anywhere or greater exposure to cultures locally or by internet/media. Secondly, when folk are challenged to evangelise overseas, many folk are more concerned about the local Australian ministry.¹⁶

National Evangelism

There are several organisations for nationally-directed mission and evangelism in the PCA. They include *Presbyterian Inland Mission* [PIM] (of Rev Dr John Flynn legacy), and *Indigenous Ministries*.

PIM evangelises to remote and regional Australia, by means of travelling pastors. This has been a ministry since 1912, where evangelists/ministers travel in many regions of

¹⁵ Murray, Kevin. *Overseas Mission: Crisis and Opportunity* in Cooper, Paul F., Burke, David A. [Eds]. *Burning or Bushed - The Presbyterian Church of Australia 40 Years On*. 2017. 255.

¹⁶ Ibid. 256.

Australia where churches have closed down or service remote properties. Mostly travelling by road (there are a couple of pilots), they bring the gospel (and often material or skills support) to the “bush”. This ministry is supported by parishes and individual donations.

APWM administers the Australian *Indigenous Ministries*. PCA supported many devout and faithful indigenous ministries, and remains in close communion with former “Missions”¹⁷. Despite the tragic history of social dislocation and abuse, the PCA had, and has, a great love for our indigenous souls (often in historic antagonism with the Commonwealth government’s history).

State Evangelism

Each state has their particular emphasis on ministry and evangelism. In Queensland, with which the author is familiar, these include *Home Mission* charges (for parishes that are unable to financially sustain ordained pastors), “church planting” ministries (evangelistic ministries into new areas), and youth ministries (YNET). Other states have similar models of evangelism. Home missions are subsidised by the PCQ, and are usually churches diminished by loss to UCA/other denominations or regional circumstances (eg. town population decline).

YNET is a particular ministry whereby the church evangelises and disciples young folk. It does this by camps and events oriented to three groups based on education/age: Grades 3-6 (age 7-13), Grades 10-12 (age 14-17) and “Schoolies” (17-20). These young folk are then directed into a local assembly to be nurtured.

Local Evangelism

The individual sanctioned parishes within the state are autonomous as to the financial support of denominational evangelism and individual parish ministries. This means the Session, with *Committee of Management* [Presbyterian equivalent of Biblical “deacons”¹⁸] input, determine the parish distribution to support individual missionaries or evangelistic ministries. Each parish performs their own evangelistic ministries, and many align with local para-church evangelism organisations (eg. *Operation 513*, *Creation Ministries International* [CMI]). Individual parishes may also form “church plantings” in the Presbytery¹⁹. These endeavours are dedicated evangelistic ministries with a view to establish a permanent assembly for worship and discipleship in those locations. They may receive grants from the State assembly for these purposes.

Support Resources for Evangelism in the PCA

The PCA provides substantial support for church and individual evangelistic endeavours at all levels of the denomination.

Theological Halls

First and foremost, the PCA GAA (and respective State Assemblies) strictly monitors

¹⁷ APWM. 2019. *Rick & Kayleen Manton 1080p*. Vimeo. October 13, 2019.

<https://vimeo.com/362462772?fbclid=IwAR1rf3PC0c5vjdijXH6oGfAS95-1D0P4QL4kmEmjrmlQUUp7tVIJ5gYOpa0>.

¹⁸ “Deacon” is not a formal office in the PCA. *Deaconesses* are formally trained ministers, caring for ladies and children (eg. Schools). *Presbyterian Church of Queensland - Rules*. 2019. 74.

¹⁹ Parish boundaries are no longer adhered, pertaining to any ministry.

and regulates the various theological colleges which train the officers of the church, including ministers, evangelists and missionaries. The *Queensland Theological College* [QTC] and *Presbyterian Theological College* (Victoria) [PTC] offer accredited and unaccredited courses for ministry candidates (both ordained and unordained), cross-cultural missionary pathways (cross-cultural), specialised women's evangelism and youth evangelism. Study for callings to ministry/mission/evangelism (after examination by presbyteries for suitability) are subsidised by the individual State assemblies.

Gospel In Society Today (GIST)

Although GIST (and similar) PCQ ministry is not fundamentally evangelistic, it provides resources appropriate for supporting personal and individual member's evangelism, including tracts and books. It provides apologetic resources specifically addressing the issues modern Australians encounter, in the light of the Scriptures of Jesus Christ.

Local Parishes

Of course, the edification of the saints into maturing holiness is included in the endeavours and activities previously mentioned. Discipleship (and sanctification) is intimately promoted to prepare the saints to evangelise, and new converts to spiritually mature, since evangelism is the role of all Christians, as enabled by the Lord. Many churches have *Mission Committees* to co-ordinate the evangelistic activities in their parish. Evangelism is promoted effectively in the local PCA churches' members in worship services (preaching, prayer and offerings), Bible studies, catechising (*WCF, Longer & Shorter Catechisms*), regular fellowships with invitations to missionaries on furlough and supported agencies. Prayer meetings include specific mission and evangelism. Local fellowship groups within PCA (such as youth and ladies) also have particular evangelism oriented awareness and support programmes²⁰. This enables all members of PCA to contribute according to the gifts, talents and abilities to the extension of God's kingdom here and abroad.

Conclusion

Glancing superficially at this review, one could be forgiven for assuming the PCA members have a "holier than thou", spiritual-elitist attitude to other denominations. This is however not the case. The author solely prays that it is recognised that Presbyterians in deep humility and reverence before God, are driven by gratitude (for His redemptive works in their lives), to obey His commands out of love and sacrifice to evangelise for His glory.

The trials through history have tested the faith of the Presbyterian saints (Hegelism, Freemasonry, Barthianism, UCA, modern "societal" apostasy). But these trials made them cling closer to God, and provided fantastic opportunities to examine themselves and enhance their means of evangelism. Human nature being flawed, they are not perfect. *Only sinners, saved by grace*, which is why they also strive for the lost.

The PCA form of government assists in directing and supporting evangelism in their

²⁰ Many senior folk would remember the immensely popular *The PWMU* Cookbook*, which has been continually published since 1904. It's first historic goal was to generate income towards evangelism, and secondarily help ladies (many isolated) with home economy. **Presbyterian Women's Mission Union*.

own societies and cross-culturally, down the street and throughout the world. May the Lord continue to bless His people as living sacrifices to His glory.

Sing unto the Lord, bless his name;
proclaim the good news of His salvation day by day! (Ps. 96:2)

Sola Dei Gloria

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<<https://vimeo.com/362462772?fbclid=IwAR1rf3PC0c5vjdijXH6oGfAS95-1D0P4QL4kmEmjrmlQUUp7tVIJ5gYOpka0>>. last accessed 16-09-2019.

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