

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA  
may 1998



# The Trinity

...what does it mean?

Mother's Day: Emulating Mary • Dealing with Prejudice • Money: Investing in Heaven

# prayer

## MAY

- 21 Praise God that our Ascended Lord has been given "all authority" and pray for the growth of His Kingdom among human beings.
- 22 Elspeth Slater from Canterbury, Melbourne S.I.M. mentoring pastors' wives among the Gourma people of Burkina Faso, west Africa.
- 23 Presbytery of Hastings, N.S.W. North Coast; 6 parishes, 4 home mission stations, totalling 22 congregations with attendance of 720, 1 retired minister; Mr. N. Foreman, clerk.
- 24 Arabic Evangelical home mission station, at Toongabbie, Western Sydney; 55 communicants, 60 children and youth, 2 elders.
- 25 Wendy Eyles from Camp Hill, Brisbane, missionary in Indonesia with O.M.F. (Overseas Missionary Fellowship).
- 26 Presbyterian Ladies College, Sydney (at Croydon) - the 1100 students, staff, council and Principal W.T. McKeith.
- 27 Hungary's 10 million people (62% R.C., 24% Protestant, 13% non religious) and the witness of the Reformed Church (1100 congregations with some 2 million people associated).
- 28 The congregation at "Kirkbrae" retirement facility, Kilsyth, Melbourne; 50 communicants; those who minister there.
- 29 Bruce & Jill Murray of Hurstville, Sydney involved in lay training with L.I.F.E. for 18 years.
- 30 The Global March for Jesus; the national gathering in Canberra.
- 31 At this Pentecost praise God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, and pray earnestly that He might revive the Church.

## June

- 1 Presbytery of Torrens, S.A.; 3 parishes, 3 home mission stations, totalling 11 congregations with attendance of 300, 2 retired ministers, 1 deaconess; Mary McGregor, clerk.
- 2 Unanderra parish, near Wollongong,

N.S.W.; 55 communicants, 10 children and youth, 5 elders; Richard & Karen Keith.

- 3 Mareeba parish, North Qld. including Dimbulah; 20 communicants, 2 elders; vacant - pray for Interim Moderator and preachers.
- 4 Ian & Robyn Stewart, teaching at Tahlee Bible College on the NS.W. Central Coast.
- 5 Joanne Cutler from Parramatta, N.S.W., missionary at Talua Ministry and Training Centre, Vanuatu with APWM.
- 6 The Reformed Churches of Australia (our fellow member in the Reformed Ecumenical Council) with 50 churches and 10,350 members.
- 7 Colin and Julianne Steele from Riverside, Northern Tasmania, missionaries with Christian Literature Crusade at present in Australia (Wagga).
- 8 Hallelujah Korean home mission station, Ashfield, Sydney, 50 communicants, 25 children and youth; Rev Byung Kim.
- 9 Robert Kuiper from Tasmania, missionary in Niger, West Africa.
- 10 Albury parish, N.S.W., including Cookinburra; 155 communicants, 40 children and youth, 13 elders; now vacant.
- 11 Harland and Marie Kerr from Glenorie, Sydney, veteran Bible translators (1954) into the Wiru language of P.N.G. with W.B.T.
- 12 Presbytery of North Queensland; 10 parishes, 1 home mission station, 1 military chapel totalling - 21 congregations

with attendance of 1060 - 3 retired ministers, 1 deaconess; Malcolm Pierce, clerk.

- 13 Charleville-Blackall parish, Western Qld, including Augathella, linked with the P.I.M. patrol; 20 communicants, 15 children and youth, 3 elders; Terry and Judy Sadler; Jeff and Kerrye Parry.
- 14 A strong Gospel witness by the Christian minority (5%) among the 4 million people of Jordan (94% Muslim).
- 15 Bible Society work in war-ravaged Croatia (5 million people - 73% R.C., 15% Orthodox) producing and distributing God's Word.
- 16 The wise implementation of decisions of State Assemblies by their various Committees and the Presbyteries and Sessions.
- 17 Ann Backhouse from Toowoomba, Qld, missionary nurse in Pakistan since 1982, home for family reasons; the ongoing work of Kunri Christian hospital.
- 18 Nelson Bay parish, including 3 congregations; 70 communicants, 20 children and youth, 10 elders; vacant.
- 19 The coming school holidays; safety for all families and holiday ministries to children.
- 20 Pray for the 26 million people of North Korea, suffering a severe famine - the provision of food, and the hope offered by the Gospel. The population is 68% non religious, and 30% followers of Korean religions.

ap

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# Building a model image

Robert Benn

‘So you’re an adulterer?’ I said. He reacted immediately and angrily. ‘I never want to be thought of as an adulterer! I didn’t plan it. I hated myself for doing it.’

‘Mike, you have to face the reality of what you have done, otherwise you will never deal with it as it should be dealt with – before God, and with Sharon.’ He cried. And then over a period of three years he dealt with it. Happiness is now restored.

But why is adultery so evil? Why is it one of the most soul-destroying sins?

Because it is an act which destroys God’s image in us. And what is that image? Essentially, it is the fact that God is one Person yet three – distinct, personal and equal. We therefore describe God as the Holy Trinity. This doctrine of the Trinity is the glory of the Christian faith. It is drawn entirely from revelation, and not found in any other world religion. It is part of Christianity’s uniqueness.

Within our God we find the perfect expression of love which never seeks its own advancement. Self-centredness is



completely absent.

Further, we also discover that within the Holy Trinity there is perfect interpersonal knowledge; perfect harmony in creating and caring for the world; and perfect commitment to the welfare of one another within the mystery of the oneness of our God.

The Trinity teaches us that love and commitment are ultimate values because

they come from the heart of God.

And God’s image is what we bear. The image encompasses what we are as moral, thinking beings, who relate to God and each other.

That’s why Mike’s action was so despicable! It was totally self-centred, and destructive. It stands in absolute contrast to what God’s image in him was supposed to signify. As he lived out God’s image in his relationship with Sharon, the key-note should have been loving-kindness, centred absolutely in her. Self-centredness should have been absent. Sadly, it wasn’t. And that’s why the wound was so deep and the grief so overwhelming.

God’s magnificent and perfect commitment to personal relationships spills over to us. It is the foundation from which He reaches out His saving hand, ‘not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance’.

For our part, repentance will turn its back on everything that is an expression of self-will, self-centredness and selfishness. This kind of repentance will acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

God, then, invites us to be remade in His image. The result will always be that His very nature of loving-kindness, mercy, and love will capture us, and His holiness will grow in us. We will become like the Trinity. And that’s why every Christian must honestly renew his or her mind by discovering the meaning of the Trinity.

In this issue of *Australian Presbyterian*, our team of writers will explore the wonder of the Holy Trinity. The issue contains some challenging truths which we hope will bring a fundamental balance to our understanding of worship, mission, marriage and the values which guide our lives. The Scripture calls us to love the Trinity with all our heart, soul and *mind*.

Our attempt to explore the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity is meant to challenge much intellectual shallowness in the Church, and set our hearts on fire with the glorious truth that God is Three in One.

Robert Benn,

Convener, National Journal Committee 

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# Trinity and relationships

*Who we worship decides who we are, suggests John McClean.  
Be sure it's the Triune God of the Bible.*

People say “You are what you eat”. The truth is: “you become like your god”. Who or what you worship will decide the kind of person you become. The Greek or Roman gods were selfish and unpredictable, and gave a person every right to be the same. So, if you worshiped Mars, the god of war, violence would seem normal and you would aspire to victory. Living peacefully with others would have been a failure.

Think about the god who lives in the imagination of many Australians. He is a lonely god: not needing anyone or anything, uninvolved with the world. People may talk about this god's love, but they know (or suspect) that it is a general niceness with no heart or passion. He has arranged the world to suit himself and we have to put up with it – “life is like that”. This god is worshipped from a distance and his worship is undemanding, because he does not really care about it. He is respected and honoured, especially at significant life events, but he and you expect no more than that.

When god is like that, then we can happily focus on ourselves, and use the other people around us to suit ourselves. The key to life is independence. Love is politeness and sentimentality, not passionate commitment.

But that is not the God Christians worship: the true God, the maker and redeemer who reveals Himself through scripture by what He does and says. He is



the triune God, the one God who is Father, Son and Spirit. He is trinity in unity, three persons who are eternally one in loving intimacy. The “Trinity” is not a confusing theological idea, nor esoteric mysticism, rather it is the classic Christian summary of who God is. Since we become like our God, how will this affect our lives? I want to help you see that worshipping the Trinitarian God has huge implications for the way you live.

What God is like: The best place to start this journey of understanding is with the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8). That does not simply mean that God is loving, or that he has made love. It means that from eternity God has been three persons bound together in intimacy – loving and being loved. When you get to the heart of the universe you don't find a lonely God,

but One who has always loved and known love. Because God is involved in personal relationships, we aren't surprised that that's also how he treats us. His love for us is passionate and committed and he knows us and intends that we will know him (1 Cor 13:12).

Because God is triune, relationships are the real stuff of life. In fact they are the only ultimate thing. We are like God and are made to relate to him, so we are made for relationships. After being friends with God, knowing and loving people is the big thing in life. Life is not mainly about contentment or success or power or money. Funnily enough, it is other people who give us most of our satisfaction. I guess that's why a friend of mine says that playing golf alone and a hitting a hole in one, would be worse than not hitting one! We want other people to share our excitement.

As we look more closely at God's relationships within himself, we can see what our relationships are meant to be. I want to look at three important aspects of God's triune nature, and see the relevance they have for us.

**I**ntimacy: The Father, Son and Spirit have a unity that is based on intimacy. They share all that they have with each other. Jesus speaks of being “in the Father” and the Father being in him (John 17:21). He knows the Father and the Father's words and deeds (John 5:19, 7:16, 8:28, 14:24). The Spirit takes what is the Son's and

*Whoever desires to understand and take delight in the words of Christ, must strive to conform his whole life to Him. Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity if you lack humility, and therefore displease the Trinity? Lofty words do not make a man just or holy; but a good life makes him dear to God. I would rather feel contrition than be able to define it.*

*Thomas a Kempis “The Imitation of Christ”.*

shares it with us (John 16:14). God (the Father) knows the Spirit's mind, and the Spirit knows his will (Rom 8:27). This intimacy is such that seeing the Son means seeing the Father (John 14:9) and having the Spirit means having Christ (John 14:18, Romans 8:9-11). The persons of the Trinity are inter-dependent.

What is true for God is true for us. We are made for close personal relationships. In a real relationship you know some one at more than a superficial level, you listen to them and speak, you see what they do, how they react and you share yourself with them. A mature person is not an independent loner, but has friends to trust and share with.

**S**elflessness: God is not a selfish God. The persons of the Trinity do not seek their own glory at the expense of the others. The Son does not seek his own glory, but his Father's (8:50, 54). When the Son is glorified, it is by glorifying the Father (John 14:13, 17:4-5). As you read about Jesus in the gospels, you see the Son rejoicing to obey his Father. In the same way when the Son is exalted, so is the Father. The Spirit seeks the glory of the Father and Son and in them he is glorified. There is no hint of jealousy, competitiveness or selfishness.

When you are genuine in a relationship, you also focus on the other person and not on yourself. Relationships are not a way to meet your own needs and assert yourself but a way to serve other people (which has the surprising result of meeting your needs!). A great person is not a master but a servant (Mk 10:42-45). This is very different from the women's magazines which look at relationships and tell you "how to get out when he is dragging you down". It is a world away from looking after "the most important person - you".

**E**qual but ordered: The Father, Son and Spirit are equal in every way. The famous Athanasian creed confesses that the Godhead of the Father, Son and Spirit "is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal". As sinners we naturally want hierarchies and power arrangements to set up relationships. Either we seek out dominance, or we like being controlled. However, God is not like that.

It may come as a surprise to us that the Son obeys the Father, or that the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son. We assume that any one who obeys, or is sent must be less than the person who has authority over him or sends him. We need to remember that in God's triune relationships there is an order, but it is not a matter of inequality, nor of greater significance or power.

This means that being equal to others, and having a close personal relationship with them, does not mean that we must relate to each other exactly in the same way. The times I submit to others does not rob me of significance, and the authority I have in some settings does not make me greater.

**B**eing a real person: What does worshipping the Triune God show us about being real people? God's nature gives us insight into what really matters in life - caring, personal relationships.

As an age we are obsessed with fulfilling ourselves. The gospel of the Triune God shows us the empty spaces that will be filled when we have a loving relationship with God through Christ in the Spirit, and when we let that relationship change the way we relate to each other. Self-assertion is not the path, nor is lonely meditation a way of getting in touch with yourself. The real you will only be found in the setting of relationships.

When we see this we will start to be ready, even eager, to serve people. We will want to listen to them and know them, and to speak honestly about ourselves. It won't mean that everyone knows all our darkest secrets, but we will want open relationships, and will not selfishly shut ourselves off from other people.

Let's think about how we will act in some specific relationships and activities.

- **Evangelism:** The gospel is all about relationships. Jesus talks about "life": "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). He says life is knowing God through his Son (John 17:3). We need to show people that the offer of the gospel is not merely a "ticket to heaven" or a good insurance policy, but an entry into the family life of God; being the brother and sisters of the Son (Rom 8:29).

Our methods of evangelism must reflect this, they must involve relationships. The men who stand in the streets of my town and shout the gospel, but never engage in conversation, are missing this. We should not be surprised that the most effective outreach happens within families and friendships. We need to get to know people, as we help them get to know God. This doesn't mean that you can never talk about Jesus to the lady you meet on the bus. But even then, you will want to hear and understand her.

- **Church:** Jesus' vision for his people is unity, being bound to one another as the Father and Son are (John 17:20-23). Our unity will come from a relationship with God, founded in the truth of the gospel and discovered by genuine faith. Our rela-

tionships will be intimate and loving. We are not like the crowd in a shopping centre, a random collection of whoever happens to be in the same building. We need to know each other and care for each other.

The local church and the wider fellowship of God's people do not reflect God when our focus is on legal power and procedures. The church is not meant to be a hierarchical organisation where all should know their place and stay where they should. As ordered and organised Presbyterians, we must remember that our rules and structures are meant to serve and support relationships, not stifle and destroy them. We are bound to each other personally in Christ, before having organisational links. It is this underlying unity which we must strive to maintain.

God has appointed people to exercise authority in various ways in the church. They will still have relationships with people and will use their authority to serve others. The fact that you have some authority in the church does not mean that you're more significant than others; if you feel as if you are "at the bottom of the pile", you are still equally important. That is the implication of the Trinity. The theory of Presbyterian church government is that we are overseen by those we have relationships with, and that there are no lesser or greater Christians. Sadly, our practice does not always match our theory!

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Within churches there will be differences in style, in preferences, in culture and in convictions. It is sometimes tempting to feel that we need uniformity to have unity. However God's tri-unity shows us that full unity does not demand bland uniformity. Within real relationships, we can know unity; even when we disagree on something.

- **Family:** Most of us have our most significant human relationships within our families. Tragically, some of us will have had a family which has been degrading and abusive. We may feel robbed that we have not had a loving family. The gospel offers us a better and more real family – through our adoption by God. In God's family you will discover everything a human family has, and far more (Mark 10:29ff). Good families reflect something of God's loving nature, and Christians can build families on the basis of the family life of God.

As we live in our families, we need to remember that they are all about relationships. A family is not mainly an economic unit, or an efficient organisation, or the group of people to make you happy. Families are meant to be the people we know intimately and are committed to serving. Parents and children who are too busy to connect with each other, and who expect the family to bend to their every whim, are not reflecting God's character. Family life requires trust, listening and speaking to one another; it is lived with mutual give and take, not rigid demands.

Parents have authority over their children (Ephesians 6:1), husbands are called

to serve their wives through leadership (Ephesians 6:22-24). This authority does not mean that they are more important in the family, and it is not to be used to make themselves comfortable. God the Father uses his authority to glorify the Son. He loves the Son and rejoices in him. That is the model for human parents. Jesus' loving self-sacrifice is how husbands are to love their wives (Ephesians 6:25-33).

- **Sex:** Our society has a perverted and distorted view of sex. Sexual intercourse is meant to be an experience of great intimacy in a relationship where husband and wife are committed to each other in love. Pornography, one-night stands, brief flings, and the search for the perfect sexual experience rip sexual expression out of its proper setting and make it impersonal, self-centered and dissatisfying. The doctrine of the Trinity shows us that a relationship of exclusive commitment must first be present. Only then can sexual intimacy deepen and enrich it.

- **Society:** Do we live in an economy or a society? Our governments increasingly assume that economic relationships are the only ones that matter, and that success is measured by the bottom line. This meant that the Federal Government would not apologise to the Aboriginal people for several generations of genocide and dispossession of their land because it might cost the rest of Australia too much money.

This "economic rationalism" is individualistic and selfish; it focuses only on what is best for most individuals. But people are always bound up in a web of relationships,

and to treat them as isolated individuals makes them less than human. As Christians we have to think about society as a whole, and about knowing and serving each other, not just making money. Our thinking about society must question many of the assumptions of our political leaders, regardless of which party they represent.

In the Nicene creed we confess the God we worship:

*"We believe in one God the Father...*

*We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ the only Son of God eternally begotten from the Father ...*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,*

*the Lord the giver of life,*

*who proceeds from the Father and the Son*

*who with the Holy Spirit is worshipped and glorified ..."*

To worship this God is to know that there is passionate, personal and committed love at the heart of the universe. In His very essence, as Father, Son and Spirit, we discover that the ultimate reality is personal relationships. To worship this God, to know and love Him, to enter into His life, is to become committed to knowing and loving others. This is what it means to be real. After all, who you worship will decide who you become.

*John McClean is the minister of Cowra Presbyterian Church, NSW, and has a special interest in theological issues, particularly those relating to the doctrine of the Trinity.* <sup>ap</sup>

# The Scandal of the Trinity

*Robert Carner describes his pilgrimage from cult to church.*

I spent the best part of three decades in a spiritual desert. I was raised in a church that put more emphasis on “form” than “content”. During my years of Sunday School, training classes and confirmation classes, I heard Bible stories and learned about the traditions of the church, but I don’t recall ever hearing about how it applied to my life as a young teen or to my eternal destiny! Like many young men, by the time I was 15 I had drifted away from the church.

At 19, my mortality and awareness of the transcendent was challenged by a term of military service in the central highlands of Vietnam. It was an unpopular war filled with political and social controversy.

The Western media showed reports of Buddhist monks delivering a speech, drenching themselves in petrol and setting themselves alight in protest. I had no personal interest in Buddhism but came under the conviction then that if there was a true religion, it would be marked with that kind of commitment.

A few years later, through workmates, I had a fleeting encounter with spiritualism, which at best recognises Jesus as an ascended master or a magician. Then, in my late 20s I thought I had found the Truth. In reality, I had been hoodwinked into the bondage of the dogma and practices of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The JW’s believe that Jehovah is the “Almighty God”, while Jesus is only a “Mighty god”, a created being, the reincarnation of the Archangel Michael. They misrepresent the orthodox understanding of the Trinity as three gods in one.

After six months of training (indoctrination), I took great pleasure in my ability to twist professing Christians into “doctrinal pretzels” over their understanding of the “trinity”. Simply, most of the folks I spoke to had no understanding of the triune nature of God. Many were told, “It is a mystery, just accept it!”

In a very real way, the cults are the unpaid debts of the churches – we need to teach “sound doctrine” and we need to answer the questions that people are asking!

I vividly remember attending a Mormon funeral service where the congregation joined in singing, “I believe in Christ, he is my King ... With all my heart to him I’ll sing ... I believe in Christ, he is God’s Son ... I believe in Christ, he stands supreme ... I believe in Christ my Lord, my God! ... I believe in



Christ, he ransoms me.” This song was one of the two sung at the funeral of my friend’s father. Lloyd was a member and local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, better known as the Mormons.

Later in the service I heard the conductor say that Jesus was not God, but the Son of God. Mormons teach that there are many gods ruling over the many universes – in fact, devout Mormon men aspire to become “a god” and to rule over their own universe in the afterlife.

The Jesus they sang about at this funeral is the spirit brother of Lucifer, not the same Jesus I read about in my Bible! But they are so caring and sincere, and they openly proclaim a love for Jesus Christ! However, regarding the Christian nature of the Trinity or triune nature of God – they

wholeheartedly deny it.

I live and minister next to the largest Islamic mosque in Queensland. Especially during Ramadan, my wife and I frequently hear their calls to prayer while we are inside our home. I know the Imam (worship leader & teacher) and others within their community quite well. I know that they are religious, and I believe that they are dedicated and sincere.

In my early contacts with some of the zealous young men I heard the phrase, “Allah is one, Allah had no son”. This is a subtle way of saying that Jesus (‘Isa’ in Islam), was not the son of Allah – in other words they are saying “Jesus is not the Son of God”. Jesus is merely one of the more than 1200 prophets they acknowledge. At least one Islamic author lists him as one of Allah’s 22 “prominent prophets”. Again, the Trinity or triune nature of God is wholeheartedly denied.

Earlier this month I met Roger, a friend who has spent much of his life in membership and employment within the Worldwide Church of God (Armstrongism). Until just a few years ago he was taught, “God is neither one person nor the Trinity. God is a family into which we may be born and also become God”. This is a blatant denial of the trinity.

However, by God’s grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit, this international organisation has undergone a transformation and spiritual awakening. Under the leadership of Joseph Tkach Sr. and Jr., the organisation has turned from its old teaching and has embraced biblical Christianity. In May 1997 the Worldwide Church of God was accepted as a member of the National Association of Evangelicals.

The Old Testament clearly describes the nature and character of God, and frequently reminds us that only God has the “right” to certain titles. In the New Testament, these same titles and characteristics are often applied to Jesus, and there is never even a hint that He is unworthy of them – spend a moment and check a few out.

## JESUS – New Testament

Jn 1:3 Col. 1:15-17	Jn 1:1 Jn 20:28 Heb 1:10 Lk 2:32 Heb 1:8	Acts 2:21- Acts 4:12 2 Peter 1:1	Rev 1:17 Rev 2:8 Rom 10:9	Jn 8:24 Jn 8:58 Rev 22:13 Titus 2:13	2 Tim 4:1 2 Cor 5:10 Jn 13:19 Jude 25	Jn 8:12 Jn 1:9 Rom.
14:10 Jn 18:5						
<b>Creator</b>	<b>God</b>	<b>Saviour</b>	<b>1st &amp; last</b>	<b>I AM</b>	<b>Judge</b>	<b>Light</b>
Gen 1:1 Isa 40:28	Jer 32:18 Isa 43:10 Isa 45:22 Isa 43:3,11	PS 106:21 Hosea 13:4 Isa 45:21	Isa 44:6 Isa 48:12 Isa 41:4	Isa 43:10 Deut 32:39 Ex 3:13-14	Gen 18:25 Joel 3:12	Micah 7:8 Isa 60:20 Ps 27:1

## YAHWEH – Old Testament

# Divine Connection

*Peter Moore shows why it is so important to understand that God is three as well as one.*

Read carefully their renewed doctrinal understanding on the Trinity: “The testimony of Scripture is that God is one and reveals Himself in three distinct personalities. As Matthew 28:19 teaches, we are baptised into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our heritage is not to become God, but rather, glorified children of God” (*Transformed by Truth*, p212).

I asked Roger how he had personally made this transition and what his “new” understanding of God meant to him. He replied: “Now I know that God loves me and accepts me, and I don’t have to do anything to earn it; a lot of issues are just no longer issues.” I spent the morning with a “Brother in the Lord”!

I started this article and my spiritual journey by stating that true religion would be marked by the kind of commitment someone would be willing to die for. Like Roger, I had a distorted and twisted understanding of God’s Word; we both moved from “darkness to the light of God’s truth”. You see, for both of us – and you too – “at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

It took a long time for me to discover the kind of commitment in religion that I was looking for. Actually I never discovered it in a religion, but in the person of Jesus Christ, the perfect man and the perfect God. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for me!

How can I, in human terms, fully comprehend the “Trinity”? I can’t. But I do know that the Bible is true, and that it tells us that Jesus was, “in very nature God” (Phil 2:6). It tells us that Jesus was there from the very beginning of human history, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). I know that Jesus was called, “Immanuel – which means, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). As a Jehovah’s Witness I had no solid answer to Jesus’ statement that “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58), where Jesus proclaimed His oneness with the Father.

I cannot fully explain the Trinity, just as I cannot fully explain how miracles happen. But I am convinced that the Bible teaches both, so I believe in both! But then again, I do not understand why God chose a sinner like me for salvation – but I’m sure thankful that He did. I thank God for the Love of a Heavenly Father, the saving work of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! Without the work of all three Persons, I would be lost, without God and without hope in this world.

*Rev. Bob Carner and his wife Coral were called to Australia in 1989 by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to serve as church planters in Melton. In 1994 they moved to the Gold Coast to plant a church to reach the Labrador/Arundel community.*

Telephones are useful, but they do have a drawback: you can’t see who you’re talking to. This can create problems.

A few weeks ago, I took a call from a man who introduced himself as Brad. I thought it was the chairman of our committee of management. I started chatting about some committee business, but wondered if I had lost the connection. There was just silence at the other end of the line!

Of course, the Brad I was talking to was not the Brad I thought he was. My raving was futile – and very embarrassing.

But it did prove something. When you want to connect with someone you can’t see, it’s best to check who it is. That’s true on the phone, but it’s also true as we try to connect with God.

My definition of worship is “connecting with God”. It’s at the heart of the Christian life. Yet because we haven’t understood that it’s the *Triune God* we are talking to, a lot of Christian worship doesn’t connect. And I’m not just referring to what we do for an hour or so on Sunday.

We know that worship involves the whole of a Christian’s life. Our “connecting” goes way beyond a weekly church service. It’s a life of obedient trust. But what we do on Sunday is important: it’s the theological heart of our connecting. Through modelling and teaching, it sets the tone for the rest of the week. So I want to explore how we connect with God when we gather with other Christians on the Lord’s Day.

If we wish to connect with God as he really is, then we need to engage in “Trinitarian worship”. This means *connecting with the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit*. There is a huge difference between this kind of worship, and our many futile *non-Trinitarian* attempts to connect with God.

Let me explain. If I were to ask the average member of a Presbyterian Church what he or she did in Sunday worship, I suspect that I would probably get a response like this: “Well, I sing hymns to God, I pray for others, I listen to the sermon, I give some of my money to the Lord and I confess my faith.” In one sense there’s nothing untrue about any of these statements. But, notice where the emphasis lies. Worship is essentially a human activity. It is something that *I* do.



If I asked why they did this, I would probably get a reply something like: “Well Jesus went to church, didn’t he? He read the Bible, He sang the Psalms, He gave to the poor. I’m just following His example.” In other words, worship is what *I* do to connect with God.

Now if we pause here to analyse what’s going on in the mind of the worshipper, we may be surprised to discover that this is *not* distinctively Christian worship. Why not? If the *only* worship that Christians offer is their *own* it falls short of what God requires. This sort of worship is really Unitarian worship, not Trinitarian.

One of the main features of Israelite worship was that the nation could only connect with God as the High Priest offered a sacrifice of blood for them. This High Priest represented the whole nation. All the names of the tribes were written on his breast-plate and shoulders. Israel learned an important lesson here. You can only connect with God in worship when you approach Him through the High Priest’s blood sacrifice.

Similarly, the New Testament teaches that Christians can only connect with God as they consciously approach Him through their great High Priest, Jesus. We draw near to our holy God through the perfect sacrifice and priestly intercession of Jesus, our “worship leader” (Hebrews 8:2).

The problem we face in churches today is that many so-called Christian worshippers are trying to connect with God directly. We’ve forgotten that we can only come near to God in the person of our High Priest. To come in any other way is to offend God and arouse His anger.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus has come to be the priest we need. He does what we have failed to do – offer God a life of worship and praise, of love and obedience, and a blood sacrifice that washes away our sins. He comes to stand in for us before the Father, to intercede on our behalf so that when we are confused and lost for words, we are still properly represented before God.

Martin Luther once likened our relationship with Christ to that of a beggar maid who is invited to marry a glorious prince. When we are united to our prince by faith, we become married to Him. Suddenly, a wonderful exchange takes place in which Christ's wealth and entitlements become ours, and ours (which are worthless and corrupt) become His. One of the implications of this truth is that Christians are able to draw near and connect with God as they participate in their High Priest's perfect worship. We dare not offer our own.

But how often are we consciously thinking of this as we take part in the worship of our Sunday services? If we come thinking only of what we have to offer God, we are nothing more than Unitarians. There is nothing essentially Christian about such worship. Christ plays no part in our thinking.

There is a further aspect of this problem we need to consider as we try to understand how we connect with God. How is it possible for us to take part in Christ's merits, and to enter into communion with Him? Paul gives us a clue when he tells us that "we worship by the Spirit of God" (Phil.3:3).

The Spirit is the one who actually connects us to Jesus. He works within us, to generate our trust and love for God's Son. To use Martin Luther's prince and beggar

maid illustration, the Spirit leads us into the marriage, and continues to nourish the bond that's between us.

The Spirit connects us with Christ. He in turn continues to share with us the benefits of his own connection with the Father. Trinitarian worship brings great benefits!

It is helpful to compare the goals of Trinitarian and Unitarian worshippers. The Unitarian worshipper tries to work hard at enjoying connection with God. Unitarian worship is about inspiring people to greater human effort – but in the end our own efforts are so graceless and uninspiring! But the goal of the Trinitarian worshipper will be simply to learn to understand and enjoy the perfect connection that Father, Son and Holy Spirit have among themselves. Trinitarian worship is all about God and His grace – and that really is inspiring.

But the importance of Trinitarian worship goes beyond this. For in the end it is only Trinitarian worship that connects us with God.

With apologies to republicans, consider our relationship with Queen Elizabeth. As Australian citizens we enjoy the benefits of the Queen's government, justice and protection. But these benefits don't come directly. Elizabeth cares for us – and we fulfil our responsibilities to her – through representatives: the Australian Government, the Prime Minister and other ministers, and our local MP.

But imagine if I thought I could do better if I bypassed all that. I send off a lot of chatty letters to Elizabeth. I think I will be best served by a cozy friendship as her pen pal. You can imagine what would happen. My letters would achieve nothing. Not one of the benefits of citizens can come directly, but only through the Queen's representatives. So it is with our connection with God.

Let me finish with two examples of the difference Trinitarian worship makes. The first I have already mentioned. It's about what we do in Sunday church. Instead of working harder to connect better, Trinitarian worshippers are learning how to enjoy the connection the Triune God has achieved.

The second is when we struggle in prayer. James Torrance tells the story of a trip to America. He came across an elderly man whose wife was dying. The man was walking the beach and told him, "I have been trying to pray, but I don't seem to be able."

Torrance did not say what many of us might have said. He didn't say, "try harder". He said: "Jesus and the Spirit are already praying on your behalf". This gave the man confidence to relax and rely on their perfect prayers. It was actually this that helped this fearful man to pray. He had begun to enjoy a Trinitarian connection with God.

And so the question remains. Whose worship are you enjoying? Are you trying to pursue your own (imperfect and ultimately futile) connection? Or, brought to Christ by the Spirit, are you enjoying Jesus' connection with His Heavenly Father? It is only in the second case, that you really are connecting with God. Because it is only in Trinitarian worship that you have taken account of the kind of God who is at the other end of the line.

*Peter Moore is the minister of Coffs Harbour Presbyterian Church, NSW, and convener of the Church and Nation Committee of the General Assembly of Australia and the NSW assembly. He is completing a Master of Theology on election in the teachings of John Calvin and Karl Barth.* <sup>ap</sup>

# Equal but Different

*The pattern of equality in the godhead is the model for men and women, writes Marian Andrews.*

Over the past 30 years, it has become almost heretical to claim that the sexes differ from one another, apart from the obvious physical differences. How all this happened is a story in itself, but what I am interested in is the way in which academics and the media refuse to recognise that there are any significant differences between male and female.

It doesn't matter where you turn, people are almost afraid to admit that men and women are wired differently. Take children's literature, for example. Publishing houses now studiously avoid anything that even remotely looks like sexual stereotyping.

Almost at random, in state school libraries, you find books that are written and illustrated with the new political correctness in mind. Women are dressed as men, and perform men's tasks. Professor Higgins would be proud. A whole generation of authors have rushed to answer his plea: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"

We need to be cautious of attempts to paper over the differences between the sexes. If the differences are real, then it's foolish to deny them.

My own quest to understand the difference between the sexes has taken me back through time. I look with wonder at Mary, the handmaid of the Lord. I salute Sarah who called her husband Lord. I take heart that in every generation there has been a faithful line of women seeking to order their relationships according to the Word of God. And I am convinced that this line will continue to the end of time.

My own search came to an end at the beginning. In the beginning God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

Here we discover that men and women are made as the image, or in the likeness of God. Our relationships with each other are meant to be patterned on God's own nature.

The Bible makes it clear that one of the most important things we know about God is that He is a trinity of persons. The Westminster Catechism puts it like this: God is three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one divinity, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by personal properties.

Understanding God as three Persons in one Godhead helps us understand ourselves. First, there is order in the Trinity: God exists



as Father, Son and Spirit. These roles are not interchangeable or reversible. They exist throughout eternity. And while the Bible reveals that there's a clear order in the Godhead, it in no way implies that there is any inequality between the persons. On the contrary, while there is order in the Godhead, yet the three persons are equal. It's on this divine pattern that we are meant to base our male-female relationships.

The principle of "equal but different" is not always easy to grasp. An example from the natural world might help. Imagine a science teacher taking a block of ice from the freezer, and putting it in a beaker over a flame. If his students are watching, they see the ice melt to water then ascend as steam. Lesson one – these three substances are all H<sub>2</sub>O – all the same in essence. Lesson two – these three substances are all different in form and purpose. If this were a Christian school, Lesson three might be that this gives us an idea of what God is like; three Persons, the same in substance, different in order and purpose. The teacher is quick to point out that we need more than this to understand God, because H<sub>2</sub>O has no personality.

However, the problem in the world today is that people will not recognise the truth that equality and difference are principles that are compatible.

After all, they are compatible in God. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit, but each Person is equal in power and glory. Sadly, the world can't see this. It believes that equality demands sameness. This has unfortunate results for women.

Women are applauded today for donning overalls and taking on men's labour. (What's new? Down on the farm, women have always pitched in when necessary, and helped their menfolk with labouring work!)

But now, women are encouraged to think of themselves as a separate race, competing in an egalitarian work-place with the male opposition.

Tragically, they have been sold a lie! The fact is that we are one human race, equal before God. Both sexes are His beloved creation, equally guilty of sin, and equally in need of the Saviour. We are two persons, one humanity.

Nevertheless, despite our equality before God, there is a definite order in function. Men are vested with responsibility for leadership. God crowned Adam with headship. The husband is head of the home in the same way as Christ is the head of the Church... and gave His life for her. Right there in Eden, Eve put her hand to the crown that was not hers, and discovered it to be a crown of thorns. Ever since, men have refused this crown, or women have grasped it at their peril.

Some feminists argue that freedom in Christ makes it possible to share headship. This order did not come about because of the fall, nor is it done away by the atonement. It is part of the master plan for human relationships in the image of God.

Headship requires men to be considerate to their wives. Husbands, be considerate of your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner... or the fragile vessel (1 Peter 3:7).

Likewise, this passage of Scripture tells wives to be submissive to their own husbands. All of this is in the context of Christ's sufferings for us, which were endured in submission to the will of His Father. The pivotal act of history was an act of submission.

Submit! I wish there was a more palatable word in the English language. To the average person submit means you lie down like a doormat and get walked over. Not so for the Christian! The word used in Scripture is a military term meaning to keep rank, to maintain the battle order, to keep in step. There is no inferiority implied.

God sent Christ to tell us who He is and who we are. Thus we understand that ultimate reality is personal relationships in which men and women rejoice in the fact that they are equal but different.

*Marian Andrews, wife of Stewart has been a member of St Stephens Presbyterian Church, Tamworth, NSW for 11 years. She is the author of Recover the Family and publishes a regular womens' newsletter.*

# Investing in Heaven

*Russell Lander offers some advice for a secure future*

**A**s a Christian, the greatest outcome of my life will be to meet Christ on His return in the company of my family and friends, and then to spend eternity with Him. My hope is founded on 1 John 3:2: "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." And high on the list of my hopes is to meet up in heaven with those to whom I've witnessed about my faith in Jesus Christ.

For non-believers, however, with no vision of a life to come, the best outcome of life is often seen as being to end up with the maximum complement of worldly comforts and toys, security and approval.

Sadly, Christians also can easily fall into the trap of hoarding wealth and conveniently overlooking Christ's Great Commission to reach the lost while there is yet time. However, if you read God's word regularly you can't claim ignorance as a defence, as the danger of trusting in riches is something the Bible has a lot to say about.

For me, the most chilling such passage is 2 Peter 3:11. The apostle has just prophesied that on "the day of the Lord" the universe will be destroyed with intense heat. He then asks the piercing question: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?"

The apostle John also gives us valuable counsel in 1 John 3:17 as to how we should be thinking about our worldly possessions: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

As the end of the tax year on 30 June approaches, we can expect another deluge of heart-rending correspondence from organisations seeking funds for various cash-starved causes. Undoubtedly, all of these will be worthy, but we cannot do justice to any of them by supporting them all. How does a Christian discern which are more worthwhile than others?

The Parable of the Unjust Steward which was addressed to Jesus' disciples provides some light on this thorny question. You know the story. A certain rich man carpets his manager for allegedly wasting his goods, fires him and demands final



accounts. The manager, being unwilling to become a common labourer and too proud to beg, decides on a plan to endear himself to his former master's customers. It's a cunning strategy which will enable him to call in favours from them now that he's out of a job. So he invites them to clear their debts, offering varying discounts for immediate settlement – 50% off one hundred measures of oil for one, 80% off a hundred measures of wheat for another, and so on.

These hefty discounts probably relate to interest charges inherent in the debts because Jews were forbidden under the law to charge fellow Jews interest. Thus the master was on the spot. If he attempted to overturn the manager's actions, he would have been seen as mean and dishonorable. He thus commends the man for acting shrewdly and decisively, albeit dishonestly and at his considerable expense.

Having noted that "the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light", Jesus concludes the parable with the words: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home." Leon Morris interprets this as follows: "Jesus' followers must use their money for their spiritual purposes just as wisely as the children of this world do for their material aims. As our goal is "treasure in heaven", we should use money for purposes such as almsgiving. This will gain us friends and it will stand us in good stead when money fails, that is when we die and money is of no

more use."

So, as 30 June fast approaches, Christians should favour those organisations which have evangelism as the reason for their existence. Unfortunately, many of these do not offer tax deductions to donors, but this is a side-issue, with one in five in the world today having never heard the name of Jesus Christ! What could be more exciting than to meet someone in heaven whose salvation was in some way linked to an act of giving or caring on our part!

*Russell Landers is an investment analyst with Dicksons, a Sydney stockbroker, and is a regular contributor to the Bulletin magazine. He worships in Wabroonga, Sydney.* 

## Minister of the Word

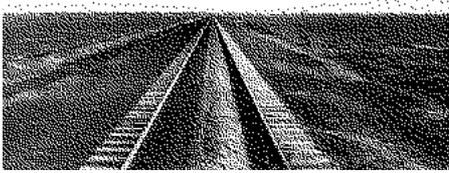
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# across australia



## Newcastle bishop on best-seller list

The Anglican Bishop of Newcastle (NSW), the Rt Rev Roger Herft, has hit the best-seller list with his book *Christ's Battlers*, which has sold 7582 copies since it was published in October. No, the book's not about the people of Newcastle; it's a study of 2 Corinthians. Bishop Herft has been appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to be chaplain to the forthcoming Lambeth Conference in July, the first time a chaplain has been chosen from outside Britain.

## Comings and goings in the PCEA

Our sister denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, recently welcomed one minister and farewelled another. Rev George Ball, his wife Rhoda and their children Philip, Linda and Amy, from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland were welcomed to the PCEA at Narre Warren, on the south-eastern outskirts of Melbourne. At the same time, the Rev Willie and Ena Mackay were farewelled, as Mr Mackay had recently retired as principal of PLC in Burwood, Melbourne, and was returning to Scotland to retire. At the recent Synod of the PCEA held in Armidale (NSW), Rev John Cromarty of Geelong retired as moderator and Rev Ray Murray of Grafton took up the office.

## Ecumenists ruffle NSW Council of Churches

The Board for Social Responsibility of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church

and the NSW Ecumenical Council have claimed the NSW Council of Churches "does not adequately or effectively represent the Christian churches". In submissions to the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Law and Justice, it modestly added that it was itself the appropriate body.

The NSW Council of Churches – pointing out that its membership consists of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed and Salvation Army Churches – said: "This is in anyone's understanding an extremely wide representation of a number of Christian churches ... (and) we feel it more appropriate to support other Christian organisations rather than detract, thereby majoring on that which we have in common, not that which brings division."

## Lance Shilton called home

The Rev Canon Lance Shilton was remembered at a thanksgiving service in St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on 17 March. Best known for his innovative ministry as Dean of the Cathedral from 1973 to 1989, he also had long and effective ministries in Melbourne and Adelaide. He was widely known beyond parish and denominational borders for his outspokenness on social issues, on which he always upheld a faithful Biblical viewpoint.

## Conference keeps banner aloft

The 1998 Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference was held at the Salvation Army's Collaroy Conference Centre, in the northern beaches area of Sydney, with 120 attending, from Presbyterian, Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, Congregational and other independent pastors present. Rev David Secomb, minister of South Toowoomba and moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland reports on the various speakers: Andrew Davies, of Smithfield Baptist Church, Sydney, opened up two topics related to the Gospel. 'The Gospel of Grace and Rewards' showed the relationship between the teaching of salvation by grace alone and the rewards Christians receive in eternity. In 'The Gospel and Perseverance' Mr Davies highlighted a number of ways in which we can be encouraged to keep going in difficult times.

Martin Holdt, a Baptist pastor from South Africa, challenged those present with three searching addresses: 'The Absolute Necessity of Biblical Love in the Ministry,' 'The Nature and Practice of Christian Forgiveness,' and 'The Basis for Christian Fellowship.'

Professor Douglas Milne, of South Yarra Presbyterian Church, Melbourne, and the Presbyterian Theological College, gave two addresses on 'The Church in the Midst of Revival'. His thesis was that the out-pouring of the Spirit and its consequences as reported in the Book of Acts should be taken as a model for what happens whenever God revives His church through similar out-pourings.

Iain Murray, making a welcome visit from Scotland, gave two addresses of a historical nature. In 'Definite Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel,' he showed clearly that holding to the teaching that Christ died specifically for the elect does not place any restriction on our offering salvation through faith in Christ to all mankind. His second talk, 'The Division of Evangelicalism: A Key Issue in 20th Century Church History', dealt with the problem posed by an eagerness by some to win acceptance at the expense of the truth.

Rev Allan Blanch, of Beecroft Anglican Church in Sydney, spoke comprehensively on 'Pastoral Care.'

The next Banner of Truth Conference will be held on 14 to 17 March 2000. Contact the Banner of Truth office, PO Box 29, Sylvania Southgate 2224 for further details.

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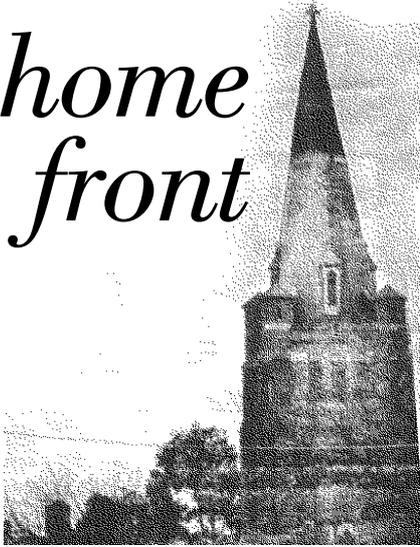
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## Cool idea warmly received

Summers are hot in Lockhart (NSW) at the best of times, but El Nino makes things even worse. One hot summer evening recently the minister of Lockhart, **Rev Peter Greiner**, took his little flock to the local swimming pool where they had church under the shadecloth. With as many as 20 children and 28 adults regularly attending, it was a popular move.

## With Christ

**William Porter-Young** (1904-1998) was born in Edinburgh, the only son of a Bible-believing family. After completing training in journalism and theology Bill migrated to Australia. He worked for the Queensland Department of

**Members of Lockhart Presbyterian have church by the local pool**



Agriculture for 10 years, including as press secretary to the Minister for Agriculture and editor of the *Agricultural Gazette*. He edited a number of country newspapers.

At a time when there were 35 vacant parishes in NSW, Bill became a home missionary, serving in 14 parishes over 20 years, where he prepared the way for settled ministers to follow. Bill is survived by Cherry, his wife of 48 years, who lovingly supported him throughout his ministry and describes Bill as "a man who lived the Bible".

**Harry Francis Rhodes**, who passed on recently, was an elder of Middle Clarence (South Grafton) in NSW. He was actively involved in all aspects of parish life and was a representative elder to the Presbytery of Northern Rivers.

**Margaret Elizabeth Whitney** went to be with her Lord on 24 March 1998, following a short illness. Mrs Whitney, 96, was the wife of the late Dr Harold Whitney, well-known evangelist and principal of the Illawarra and Perth bible colleges, and principal of the Queensland Theological Hall for a number of years following Church Union. She served her Lord tirelessly as a wonderful supporter of her husband, as well as encouraging many people in the Christian faith. She was an evangelist in her own right and a great contender for the righteous cause of Christ.

## A Presbyterian centenary

A service to celebrate the centenary of the setting apart of the first deaconesses of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria will be held in Gardiner Uniting Church at 2pm on Sunday 3 May. Enquiries to Rita Stuart, phone (03) 9877 4471.

## Shining for Jesus

The 1998 NSW General Assembly's project charge is going well in East Lismore, on the far north coast, since starting on 1 February. Called 'The Southern Cross Presbyterian Church', it aims to "shine like stars in the universe as (it) holds out the Word of Life" (Philippians 2:15,16). **Rev Stephen Cree** says: "Our greatest need is for prayer."

## On the move

**Rev Grant Vayne** was inducted as minister of Kaniva-Nhill (Vic) on 27 February, and **Rev John Stasse** was inducted as minister of the pastoral charge of Ballarat West on 4 March, both by the Presbytery of Ballarat.

**Rev Donald Geddes**, who has been minister of Albury (NSW) for 11 years, will be inducted as minister of Devonport (Tas) on 7 June. **Rev Chi Woo Jwa** was ordained to the ministry and inducted to the Korean Rainbow Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Sydney on 24 March. **Rev Andrew Macaulay** was inducted into the Parish of Gunnedah (NSW) on 11 February. **Rev Kirk Patston** demitted the charge of Charlestown-Eastlakes (NSW) on 15 March.

## Griffith opportunities for body and spirit

Griffith Presbyterian Church needs people, and **Pastor John Peet** advises that there is ample work in the area for people who might be looking for it. Jobs are available at all levels from casual fruit and vegetable picking to managerial positions. John Peet offers to help interested people find work and accommodation. He may be contacted at 109 Blumer Ave, Griffith NSW 2680. Phone/fax (02) 6962 4827.

## Busy year begins at PTC Sydney

A capacity congregation of some 300 people in Epping Presbyterian Church, Sydney, recently saw 19 students graduate from the Presbyterian Training Centre. Ten are now serving in ministry positions throughout NSW. The **Rt Rev Bruce Christian**, convener of the Theological Education Committee, welcomed 22 new students and the principal, **Rev John Davies**, reported on highlights of the previous year and plans for the present year.

Allan Asher, session clerk of Gungahlin-North Belconnen in Canberra and deputy chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, gave the address on 'The Hardest Job in the World'. Speaking from the congregation's point of view, he stressed the need for ministers properly to feed their people, keep the vision alive, share the work with competent church members and carefully assess their spiritual gifts.

## 50 years an elder

Sid Hayden was ordained to the eldership in North Williamstown (Vic) in May 1948. During the past 50 years his service has included 15 years as session clerk of Newport and 17 years as session clerk of Scots Church, Melbourne. The congratulations and good wishes of the church go to this faithful servant of God.

## 40 Years an Elder

On 14 March 1998, Neil Ferguson celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the eldership. Neil and his wife Laurel both serve on the session of Port Macquarrie (NSW), and Neil has just retired as session clerk after 12 years service. At a special morning tea the Minister, Rev Scott Donellan expressed appreciation for Neil's devotion and service to the Lord, and his model of faithfulness to others.



Elder Neil Ferguson with his wife Laurel

## Brisbane Presbytery focuses on mission

'Dare we send missionaries and not support them?' "The Great Commission involves making disciples – equipping our people for mission work at home and



abroad." "Are we so involved with other things that we are neglecting personal evangelism?" "The idols of this world are causing the church to become complacent and compromising, so that it loses its cutting edge for evangelism and mission." These were the challenges which highlighted Mission Week, arranged by the Presbytery of Brisbane in conjunction with Rev Robert Benn, director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission. The theme, 'As the Pillar Cloud Moves,' was a reminder that all our missionary and evangelism work must be done in accordance with the Lord's leading and direction.

The week brought together a number of missionaries, who shared their joys and disappointments, encouragements and frustrations, and yet testified to the goodness and sovereignty of the Lord at all times. They stressed how important the support of the home church is for serving missionaries. Those who took part were Robert and Mrs Laurel Benn (APWM), Rev Keith Black (Action Partners), Dr Ian Scott (Leprosy Mission), Miss Sue Harris (OMF), Miss Shirley Benn (OMF) and Miss Julie Kettniss (AIM). Pastor Graham Paulson and Mrs Iris Paulson from the Bimbadeen Aboriginal Bible College (Cootamundra, NSW) were present at one session, and Graham spoke of the work being done among Aborigines at Bimbadeen and further afield.

Mission Week consisted of seven segments, each in a different charge. This was done deliberately to involve as many people as possible in organising and arranging

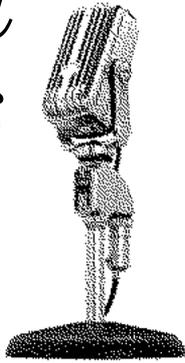
## Participants in Brisbane Presbytery's Mission Week

the week. It was pleasing to see the number of young people who came together to provide music at two of the sessions. The week consisted of a prayer breakfast, various teaching and information sessions, a combined Ladies Rally and a Youth Rally. Each session consisted of Bible study, praise, prayer, missionary speakers and information about what is happening in countries such as Japan, Indonesia, Africa and Vanuatu.

The Presbytery of Brisbane, which met during Mission Week, included a missionary session as part of its agenda. A feature was the commissioning of Julie Kettniss, who will be returning to Namibia to work among the young people at the Evangelical Bible Church in Windhoek. Julie will continue to be an assigned missionary with Africa Inland Mission.

About 60 people attended each of the seven segments, and the week helped to focus the church on the importance of local and overseas mission work. The fellowship among the Lord's people, the time spent in prayer and the teaching from the Bible, also brought about spiritual refreshment and a renewed challenge to be about the Lord's work. Opportunity was given to support Robert and Laurel, as well as Julie Kettniss. Those interested in supporting the Benns or Julie Kettniss, can contact the Clerk of Presbytery, Rev Guido Kettniss  
68 Charlton St Ascot 4007. Phone (07) 3216 4151. Fax (07) 3216 4153.  
E-mail: kettniss@squirrel.com.au

# world news



## US women provide clinic in China

Thanks in part to a donation of \$US20,000 from the 1996 thank offering of Presbyterian women in the United States, a mobile surgical clinic is now operating among 2 million nomadic people living on the vast Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau in western China. This innovative and well-equipped operating theatre on wheels takes doctors from the provincial hospital to perform surgery in remote highland parts. (from *Presbyterians Today*)

## Missionary to be Irish moderator



The next moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland will be **Rev John Dixon**, above, minister of First Antrim congregation. Speaking of the year ahead, he said: "I very much consider myself a

preacher, pastor and missionary, ministering to a local community. As Christians we have a great message to tell but we must be aware of the challenges and difficulties people face, and respond to those issues in a relevant and helpful way." Mr Dixon is convener of the Overseas Board Asia Committee and the Irish chairman of OMF. He has at various times worked alongside ministers and missionaries in Jamaica and Nepal.

## Banner books arm Christian soldiers

The **Frontline Fellowship**, based in South Africa, has recently been able to take more than 22,000 Bibles and Christian books in 10 languages into war-torn Sudan. Books were given to pastors, chaplains and school teachers, and some Banner of Truth books were taken to the battle-front and are being used in Bible study groups led by chaplains in the war zone. The Fellowship is grateful for the "spiritual ammunition" represented by "these most powerful Reformed books".

## A word in season

The **Rev Dr Peter Barnes**, minister of Nambucca River (NSW) and a book reviewer for *Australian Presbyterian*, is a frequent contributor to *The Banner of Truth* magazine. His latest article concludes with these helpful words: "There is little point in the church trying to win the world if she has already capitulated to the world. The church which will be a potent instrument in God's hand will be the church which is not conformed to the world, but transformed by the pure Word of God."

## Fishing for men with the Net

The **Reformed Ecumenical Council**, of which the Presbyterian Church of Australia is a constituent member, has established a web site at [www.recweb.org](http://www.recweb.org). The site describes the structure and work of the REC. Surfers can scroll through many documents from previous publications. Descriptions of all member churches, with direct links where available, are also provided.

## Aid for Malawi

**Presbyterian Disaster Assistance**, an agency of the giant Presbyterian Church in the USA, has sent \$US10,000 to Malawi

to help with reconstruction after disastrous floods in that country during December and January damaged houses, crops and livestock, roads, bridges and other infrastructure, and contaminated water supplies. PDA joined other similar organisations on 24 April to observe a worldwide day of fasting for the hungry and suffering people of North Korea.

## More Bibles please

The **President of Zambia**, Mr **F.T.J. Chiluba**, a practising Christian who declared his nation a Christian nation soon after gaining office, has called for more Bibles for distribution throughout Zambia. "Please ensure the Bibles are distributed in all corners of this country to give every Zambian the opportunity to have the Scriptures in their respective local language," was the challenge he issued to the Bible Society of Zambia at its annual meeting on 7 March. "The Word of God has life and power that can shape families and society. As people search for truth they need to experience the liberating power of the Gospel," he said. President Chiluba said that it was embarrassing for the church in Zambia always to rely on external assistance, and pledged the equivalent of \$US60,000 to the Bible Society for this year. He challenged all Christians in Zambia to contribute generously to the Lord's work.

## Bibles reach China despite new difficulties

The **Bible League** reports that although the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong on 1 July 1997 has made work difficult for some ministries, including a dramatic drop in Bible couriers willing to work from Hong Kong, the Bible League continues its Scripture placement and training ministries without any negative repercussions. The Bible League provides an average of 3000 Bibles a day in China. Bibles are legally printed within mainland China, and are available mainly to Christians in churches officially registered with the Government. But the supply does not even begin to provide enough Scriptures for the booming "house church" movement. Further enquiries may be made to Mr Bob Cole at the Bible League, phone (02) 9673 3055.

# Mary the Mother of God

*Protestants can honour Mary without worshipping her, suggests Philip Johnson*

Perhaps the most controversial Christian woman is Mary the mother of Jesus. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox believers are known for their passionate devotion to her. Yet Protestants have very little to say, except to object to what they see as idolatry. What does the Bible say about Mary? Is she a model of faith? How can Protestants honour her?

Marian devotion has a long history. Recently, interest in Mary has grown. Her appearances at Medjugorje, Bosnia, attracted worldwide attention. Others, like Annie Kirkwood, claim to be receiving messages from Mary. Kirkwood's books, *Mary's Message to the World*, and *Mary's Message of Hope* are best sellers, even in New Age circles.

Their appeal to New Agers is probably due to two factors. First, some New Age seekers are burned-out former Catholics.

## Madonna & Child



Second, these messages tend to include other faiths as legitimate pathways.

In Catholic charismatic circles, Marian devotion evokes mixed reactions. The late Walter Martin, who pioneered evangelical counter-cult ministry, found Catholic charismatics were divided. Some say their charismatic gifts draw them closer to Mary. A few even claim to receive messages in tongues from her. Others feel Marian devotion is not biblical and detracts from Jesus. These latter Catholic charismatics tend to

share misgivings similar to those of Protestants.

Catholic devotion to Mary: Catholics believe Marian devotion is biblical. The starting point is the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary (Luke 1:28). There she is called highly favoured of all women. Elizabeth's blessing of Mary likewise reinforces her unique status (Luke 1:42, 48). Catholics infer that as Mary is blessed evermore, we must honour her. From Revelation 4:10; 5:8; and 6:9-11 the saints in heaven pray to Jesus. Hebrews 12:22-24 summons the believer to approach God the judge, Jesus the mediator and the angels. In this list in the heavenly Jerusalem are "the spirits of righteous men made perfect".

Catholics argue that Christians must approach the saints in heaven and this includes Mary. Devotion to Mary is not intended as worship, which is reserved for God alone.

Marian devotion has developed in four stages. The first is Mary as the Mother of

God. In early church history, the term 'theotokos' – God-bearer – was applied to Mary. At the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), she was called the Mother of God.

By this the Church did not mean that Mary was the mother of the Holy Trinity. Rather, it was used to emphasize that Jesus, who was born of Mary, was truly God. It was in contrast to Nestorius' teachings about Christ's nature. With respect to Jesus' manhood, Mary was indeed his mother. Here Protestants concur with Catholics. However lay Catholics are sometimes confused by the terminology.

The second stage is perpetual virginity and Immaculate Conception. Tertullian, the church father, repudiated perpetual virginity. Yet, the Second Council of Constantinople (553 AD) deemed Mary to be "ever virgin". Matthew's gospel teaches that Mary did not have sexual intercourse until after Jesus' birth (1:18, 25). Matthew later mentions Jesus' mother, brothers and sisters (13:55-56), and Mark names some of them (6:3).

Catholics argue that by God's grace Mary never sinned. The difficulty with this is that Scripture teaches everyone, except Jesus, is a sinner (Rom.3: 23; 6:23). Pope Leo I said, "The Lord Jesus Christ alone among the sons of men was born without sin". Innocent III stated, "Eve was produced without sin, but she brought forth in

sin. Mary was brought forth in sin, but she brought forth without sin."

The third stage is Mary's assumption into heaven and being crowned Queen of heaven. Catholics interpret Revelation 12, where the woman is clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars, as Mary in her heavenly glory. They also infer that as Enoch and Elijah went directly to heaven, God preserved her from the grave. Even if we grant their interpretation of Revelation 12, it does not logically follow that she went into heaven like Enoch and Elijah.

The Bible is silent about her death. We might agree that as Jesus was of the royal house of David, theoretically Mary was a queen mother. However, the Bible does not teach she is queen of heaven.

The fifth stage is Mary as mediatrix of all graces and co-redemptrix. Here Catholics argue that as Mary cooperated with God's will to bear the Saviour, she became the vessel through which grace came into the world. In this sense, then Mary is deemed to be an associate in the redemption of humanity. Paul teaches there is only one mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5). Hebrews portrays Jesus as our sole High Priest who by his death on the cross once for all dealt with sin. It shows he is our advocate with God, so we do not need anyone else to intercede for us.

What, then, is the biblical perspective on Mary? I see Mary as a great model of faith. She submits to God's word and says, "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Her bold faith in Jesus is clear at Cana. Our confidence in Jesus should parallel Mary's words to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). She is also a witness to Jesus' death and resurrection, and to the giving of the Holy Spirit (John 19:26; Acts 1:14).

Proverbs 31 sets forth the ideal woman. Likewise 1 and 2 Timothy and 1 Peter present a character outline of the Christian woman. In these passages the virtues of the believing woman may very well be modelled upon Mary. God chose her to bear the Saviour, and as a highly blessed woman her godly character and faith serves as a model for us to emulate. In this way, she offers godly teaching we must follow.

As evangelicals, we certainly should honour her by following her example of obedience and faith. Maybe we could even formally give thanks for her life and testimony in church services. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (Heb.12:1), who in heaven praise, pray and worship God (Rev. 6:9-11). Mary is there. We can join her, the other saints and angels in praise and adoration of Jesus Christ.

*Philip Johnson is founder of New Age Mission, and attends Hurstville Presbyterian Church, NSW.*

ap

# Monica, a mother who prayed

*Stuart Bonnington honours one of history's great mothers.*

If a vote was taken for the greatest mum in Christian history, then mine would be cast for Monica, the mother of Augustine of Hippo.

It's widely recognised that her son is one of the all-time greats as a Christian teacher. For example Augustine's teaching was the bedrock built on by Luther and Calvin at the time of the Reformation. But let's not forget that it all began (in a human sense) with a praying Christian mum who committed her little boy to the Lord!

Despite being married to a non-believer, Monica's faith burned strong. She went regularly to church and was known as an outstanding Christian. From his youngest days Augustine was the focus of his mother's prayers and teaching.

Monica sacrificed much to make sure her son gained the best education possible. She had great hopes for him but to her utter dismay, he began to wander into a life of immorality and became a brilliant pagan academic. Then, as if all this was not enough to break poor Monica's heart, Augustine joined a weird religious group!

Most of us would have given up at this point, but grace was

given Monica to keep on praying! She followed her son around and kept going to churches where there was good biblical preaching. Eventually she persuaded Augustine to come and hear the gifted speaker Ambrose of Milan.

The tide began to turn as Augustine came directly into contact with the preached Word of God. His mother's prayers were answered as her son laid aside his paganism and immorality and became a Christian after heeding a child's voice to take up the Bible for himself and read. It's an amazing story of amazing grace!

The Bible says "Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (Lk.18:1). Monica believed the Word of God. The world was changed as God answered the prayers of a faithful mum who loved her son and wanted him to be a Christian!

*Stuart Bonnington is minister at the Bicton Presbyterian Church, WA, and serves on several state and General Assembly committees.*

ap

# The most famous mother of all

*Mairi Girgis considers an inspiring example*

In Australia, May is traditionally the month when we celebrate and remember our mothers. But one mother who should be in our minds far more often is Mary. The picture of Mary we often have in our minds – a young, innocent mother with a delicate infant in her arms – is deceptive because it hides the true nature of a woman who was both deeply spiritual and very human. With great courage Mary faced the crucible of a suffering that was all the more intense because of her high ideals of motherhood.

As I have reflected on her life, I have been drawn to her through several strengths of character which emerge in the midst of her struggles. She was the first person to accept Jesus on his own terms, and in doing so she showed an uncommon vision, passion and commitment.

One of the reasons that I find Mary's life so appealing is that she was dominated by a vision to know the promised Saviour she had heard spoken of all her life. Little did she imagine that she would be the first to see Him. Little did she imagine that to know Him would bring both unspeakable joy and unimaginable pain.

Picture a young girl, engaged to be married. An angel appears to her, telling her that she will be mother to the promised Messiah. Mary almost certainly anticipated the scenario of being a single mother; the possibility that her fiancé wouldn't marry her; that she would be disgraced. Small towns with conservative values can be cruel to women who carry the lingering scent of scandal. We all know how hard it is to look to the future when a cloud hangs over your reputation.

It is a testimony to her faith that even in the face of these harsh realities Mary said, "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Mary put her full trust in a promise. Just as she had waited for the Messiah to come, now she waited for his birth – expectantly and with great joy.

When Joni Earekson was 17 she prayed that God would use her life for great good. She had no idea that becoming a quadriplegic through a diving accident would enable her to bring the gospel to thousands of people around the world. Like Mary, Joni is an ordinary woman, striving to have a vision of the Gospel's power. Through the obedience of women such as these the Gospel has been brought to countless people.

Both Mary and Joni Earekson show us



that God can bring something beautiful out of the brokenness of our lives if we are open to his power and guidance.

When we have vision like Mary's we are aware of the possibilities. We look out for opportunities – we don't wait for them to come to us. We look around and see suffering people. When we give ourselves we give something far more valuable than a meal or a costly present. Are we willing to bear the hardship and shame associated with Jesus into this broken world?

Mary also speaks to me of a passion for God and for those around her. After finding out that she was pregnant, Mary went to stay with her relative Elizabeth. It was here that Mary lifted up her voice in spontaneous praise to God:

*My soul glorifies the Lord and my soul rejoices in God my Saviour. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the mighty one has done great things for me – holy is His name.*

Mary is overflowing with wonder at God's work in her life. This is genuine, spontaneous joy. This passion consumes her, it is contagious. Is it any wonder that God chose to use this young woman who so delighted to worship Him? It is this kind of passion for God that enabled Mary to stand and watch her son die a torturous death (John 19:25). Mary's passion did not last a few years after the angel had spoken to her... it sustained her into middle age and beyond.

We need to know more of what it means to have this kind of passion for God. We

read the Psalms and we cannot help but be overwhelmed by the open passion which is expressed there. Where is our passion evident? What things move us to tears or great joy? Have we allowed the world to suck the passion from our lives? Mary's passion must move us once again to reconsider our focus.

Mary also speaks to the self-indulgent, couldn't-care-less attitudes that are so common today by her extraordinary commitment. Simeon's words to Mary in the temple when he saw the baby Jesus were to come true many times over: "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:34-35).

Mary's obedience was unshaken even by these words. She knew that her son needed a mother and for 30 years she nurtured Him as any mother would, even though at times she must have lived with incredible uncertainty. She was as committed to her vocation as a mother as any woman should be. Being sinless, Jesus must have stood out as different in many ways from her other children. It can have been no small task juggling fairness between the siblings.

Mary's commitment was characterised by obedience – she knew God's will and as her son began His ministry, she learned to be obedient to Him, even when she didn't understand what He was doing (John 2:3-4). She faced the ridicule of all those who told her that her son was crazy. She stood by the Son of God, her son, through three years of hard ministry. She endured the torment of watching her son hang on the cross as a criminal. She was there when Jesus ascended into heaven. She is found praying with the disciples in the book of Acts (1:14).

Mary's commitment was based on solid convictions about God and His Son, though at times she struggled to maintain her faith in the Messiah. Her faith was tried and tested and not found wanting.

Mary is a woman whose life we can model. As a mother, she should be a continued source of inspiration to us. Her vision, passion and commitment are a challenge to us all.

*Mairi Girgis is a graduate in history from Melbourne University and is pursuing further study in counselling at Newcastle University. In the past, she has played an active role in Presbyterian youth in Victoria. She is married to Bassem, and worships in Gosford, NSW* 

# Indolish or Englonesian

*For Wendy Eyles, Indonesian language school is a cross-cultural experience on its own.*

One common experience of missionaries living in a new foreign country is that life has many surprises. They think they come well prepared, having read all the books available on cultural differences, and believe they are ready to face the strangest kinds of situations. They do not usually expect that language school will be one of those strange situations.

What makes language learning in Indonesia different from similar situations in the home country?

Language trainers come from a large variety of people groups: Javanese, Sundanese, Manadonese, Batak, people from Irian and Ambon, living proof of the cultural diversity and richness of such a large country. With their culture, they also bring their own values and experiences of teaching and learning to the classroom.

Values such as "critical reflection" are suddenly less appreciated than "faithfully following the procedure". The language student expects to hear, "Please understand", but instead is told, "Please repeat"!

Western "goal orientation" and obsession with "efficiency" are suddenly confronted with the reluctance to change their tradition, and with the desire for harmonious relationships that are not burdened by criticism.

They will have to learn how unwise it is to point out the mistakes of the trainers, and how much wiser to overlook shortcomings graciously.

Reading about hierarchical structures before going to Indonesia may be helpful, but it won't keep you from being surprised when you observe the relationship between senior and junior staff. What we call a healthy disrespect for authority is not yet popular in Indonesia; rather, obedience is expected.

Wendy Eyles reflects on her experiences:

Growing up in a monolingual part of Australia, I was intrigued by the idea of learning a foreign language. Brushes with high school French, and later with Spanish, only served to whet my appetite.

This interest combined with a love of reading, writing and words generally meant that I began learning Bahasa Indonesia in a



positive frame of mind. Also, having worked with migrants, I was aware of some of the difficulties of language learning and acculturation in a new land.

Yet I still found this past year to be one of my hardest. I have not lacked encouragement or opportunities to develop my Indonesian, in fact both have been a little overwhelming at times. Why then have I found it so hard?

I didn't know what frustration was until I started to learn Indonesian. Something one normally does effortlessly, i.e. talking, suddenly becomes laboured, painful and unsatisfactory (sometimes useless). Straining for precision in the new language I borrowed heavily from the old and tried to make my meagre Indonesian resources fit a multitude of meanings and situations.

This, combined with a syntax as much a reflex and just as familiar as breathing, means I speak reasonable Indolish or Englonesian. The trouble is, I haven't met too many other people who speak my particular brand of Indolish or Englonesian!

Then there is the knowledge that I've been blunt, abrupt or impolite without even trying. Aduh! (that's an Indonesian expression of despair!) Some days I found myself sinking under the sheer weight of words and retreating from contact with more Bahasa Indonesia. But slowly I begin to see progress. I found I could finally understand some of the lightning fast questions on "Famili 100".

Language-learning has drawn me to my

knees in more ways than one. I am convinced that prayer covers a "multitude" of missing natural ability. What's more, I know now, when I teach folk straining with the peculiarities of English, I can look them in the eye and say, "Yes, I *know* how you feel".

Please pray:

That I will make good use of the time remaining in Bandung.

Give thanks:

For many new friends in Bandung and the great help and encouragement they have been to me.

*Wendy Eyles is from Camp Hill, Brisbane. She is serving with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.*

ap

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# Musing on Amusement

*Phil Campbell warns that our minds should be in gear – especially when we relax.*

Why is it that so many of us love to lounge back in front of a good movie at the end of a hard week? In my case, at least, it's because I love the chance to simply switch off, to stop thinking, and be entertained. That's not necessarily a bad thing – but as Christians, there are some basic issues that are worth thinking through.

Recently, a friend pointed out to me the significance of the words "muse" and "amuse." In their original form, they were direct opposites. To "muse" is to ponder, to think deeply. And to "a-muse" is to do the opposite. When we amuse ourselves, we're literally switching off the thinking machine, and suspending critical thought. That's why it's relaxing.

And that's the danger. Because under the guise of "amusement," we often take on values and ideas that are unhelpful. If we're not careful, we can become "value-neutral" as we watch movies that are subtly "value-packed" – and so, for example, we find ourselves cheering at the consummation of a biblically-illicit romance in *Titanic*, or urging the "good guys" to take revenge into their own hands in an action movie like *Bad Boys*. That's how movies work.

At the very least, as Christians we need to keep our minds always engaged; always filtering the effect of what we're watching; always aware that to be uncritically "amused" is to be less than faithful to the call to be "transformed by the renewal of our minds".

## TV Watch

### SOUTH PARK (SBS)

What's small, cute, and more dangerous than a koala with a chainsaw? Answer: any of the characters in *South Park*, an animated cartoon series that has just finished its first season on SBS Television.

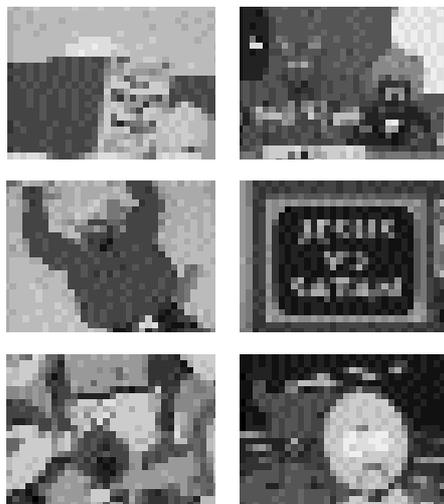
Running in the Saturday 8pm timeslot, the show has developed a cult following, especially among teenagers. Videotapes of classic episodes are swapped around high-school playgrounds with the enthusiasm once reserved for footie cards.

The sharp teeth of the program aren't immediately obvious, especially to the casual viewer. If anything, as you brush past the telly on a Saturday night, you'll be wondering why a cartoon show featuring such

childish storybook style characters has so much appeal to teens. Stop and listen, and you'll pick it in minutes.

For starters, the no-holds-barred street-language is enough to make even a seasoned trooper blush. You'll hear every four letter word in the dictionary, and then some. Much of the comedic impact of the show is generated by the dissonance between the visually cute characters, and the foul stream that pours out of their mouths.

But there's more. *South Park* has an underlying undertone of sheer spite that makes *The Simpsons* look like a Sunday School class. For example, in one running gag, little Kenny is killed in the schoolyard



in every episode – not so funny in the light of the recent Arkansas schoolyard shootings. Unlike the real-life casualties, Kenny somehow manages to bounce back in time for each new episode.

Mentioning specific episode titles, like *Big Gay Al and his gay Dog* is enough to give you an idea of some of the other themes the show covers. But the single most significant issue from a Christian perspective is the fact that *South Park* features "Jesus" as a regular member of the cartoon cast. This really is a show that sets out to offend in every way it can.

It's worth analysing *South Park* a little before you hit the off button, if only because it's reflecting so accurately the way our culture views Jesus when you strip off the polite veneer. The Jesus of *South Park* is a weedy little guy with a classic robe, beard and halo – regularly the butt of sarcasm and profanity, and sometimes (interestingly)

hypocritical approval.

Consider the popular episode *Damien*. The devil's son is the new kid in school, because his dad has come to slug it out with Jesus in a pay-per-view TV boxing spectacular. Everyone in town places their bets... paying lip service to Jesus, but secretly putting money on the devil. After all, he's twice the size of Jesus, he's mean-looking, and he has huge muscles.

In the end, there's only one bet placed on Jesus – everyone else is backing the Prince of Darkness. The fight begins. Jesus is being beaten to a pulp, when suddenly, he lands a half-hearted punch, and the Devil goes down for the count.

And the "punch line"? The Devil gets up with a grin. He was the one who secretly put his money on Jesus – the whole thing was an elaborate scam, and he leaves town gloating over his winnings.

It's an ironic reversal of the picture painted by the New Testament. The *South Park* Jesus is ineffectual, and their Devil is in control at every turn.

It's a long way from the biblical account of the true Jesus, who confronted demons with such authority that they cringed at his feet. The real Jesus came to "bind the strong man" – something he demonstrates convincingly in Mark 5:1-20, where he drives out a legion of evil spirits from the man who no-one could bind, even with chains. Jesus is the one who, at the cross, cast down Satan once and for all (John 12:31-32). The real Jesus has won the victory – through seeming defeat – as he takes the penalty of sin on himself.

So what should we be doing in the face of the *South Park* phenomenon? First, be aware of what the kids in your family are watching. It may not be as innocent as it looks.

Second, maybe we should write letters of protest to SBS. But the best option of all is to be alert, and use *South Park* as an opportunity to talk about Jesus; to contrast the Jesus they show, with the Jesus you know. It's a golden opportunity for the gospel.

Maybe you could even use *South Park* as a discussion starter for your youth group, contrasting the South Park Jesus with the real thing? Such obvious opposition to the gospel is too good an opportunity to miss!

Phil Campbell

AP

# Dealing with prejudice

*God, like Australians, wants people to get a fair go, suggests Jeff Allen.*

Recently, a friend told me about an article he'd been reading from a booklet called *One Up*, which discussed how a visiting group of aliens would see teenagers after coming to earth and looking at newspapers, television, school reports and visiting Hollywood. From an alien's perspective the average teenager would be on drugs, a petty criminal, earn \$500,000 to star in movies such as *Home Alone*, and live at Ramsey Street or Summer Bay.

Is this how you see yourself? How do the older members of your church view you and the others in your youth group? Do they know any better than what they read in the papers or see on TV? Is it possible that headlines such as 'Drugs and violence run wild in our schools', 'Australia leading the world in youth suicide', 'Youth unemployment soars to new highs' might cause some to group all young people in the social "too-hard basket"?

Is it fair to assume that just because you are young you should be condemned for the wrongs of others of your age group? If aliens were to understand what you're really like they would need to spend time with you and find out about you as an individual. The person they meet might be similar in age to those they have seen and heard about, but the way that you treat life might

be worlds apart.

This form of generalisation is called prejudice. Prejudice is when we take sides and we don't have enough information to make a sensible decision. It is also when we judge people based on what they look like, sound like, where they live, what they believe, what they eat and not bother with the facts because we've made up our minds about them already. It isn't fair to lump people into categories just because of these things, and the Bible is very critical about prejudice.

So who cares about prejudice, anyway? Why is it so harmful? The trouble with prejudice is that it makes us see people as stereotypes and not individuals. It disagrees with the Bible's teaching that each person is of equal value to God because we are all made in His image and He loves us.

Have you ever been prejudiced? Have you found yourself or a friend completing sentences such as "Girls are all ...", "Aborigines are all ...", "Asians are all ..."? You might see it in your youth group or at school. Instead of getting to know a person, you judge that person instead.

You might even judge a new person who comes to youth group or church for the first time. Did you make the effort to say hello and find out about him or her, or did you stay within the security of your own

friends, hoping that someone else would involve the outsider?

It does not matter how small the prejudice is – the issue is that God calls us to be holy as He is. He calls us not to make judgments on others by what we think we know, but to see them as He sees them, as an individual created in His image.

The time has come to make a noise about prejudice. You shouldn't stand by or say nothing while other people get treated unfairly because of someone else's prejudice or pride. God commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

If you have been prejudiced towards another person at school, your youth group or church, admit it to God. Ask Him for forgiveness and try to love that person even if it is hard and others make fun of you for doing it. Christ commands us to take up our cross daily.

Start praying on your own or in groups. Pray for yourself, your youth group, your church and your school. One of the quickest ways to show Christ's love to others is to accept them without prejudice. It is a very powerful form of Christian witness.

*Jeff Allen is home missionary at Guyra, and a former youth pastor at St Paul's, Armidale NSW.*

## Introducing Murray Norman

Do you like Maccas, know who Michael Jordan is and want to know how Jesus Christ is relevant to you and your friends in the '90s? Then read on.

Hi, I'm Murray Norman. I have been given the job of heading up a team committed to providing a youth page for Australian Presbyterian. The team's aim is to present each month what the Bible is saying to young people today. The page will be written by gurus of the gospel from all over Australia.

Our aim is to provide articles from people at the coalface of dealing with the real issues. Through this page the team hopes to challenge the way you live, and provide you and your friends with a real perspective of what being a Christian is all about.

We need your help if this page is to be a success – we need to know what issues you want to discuss on this page. This page is for youth. We want to challenge you with the truth of Bible and present Jesus Christ as the only way to find meaning and fulfillment for your life.

### The Youth Page Needs YOU!

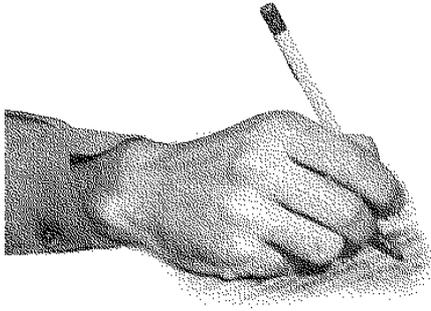
The team hopes to make the youth page interactive. Suggestions include:

- Putting in the email addresses for each writer so that you can talk out the issue with them on the Net if you want to.
- Adding a basic bible study that goes with the article so that you can go through it with your youth group or friends.
- Listing some resources that might help you or your youth leaders to learn more about the issue in the article.

We need your help! We want to know what you think of these suggestions, or if you have any particular issues which you want to read about. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

*Please send you comments to me (Murray), by email to [pyprojm@ozemail.com.au](mailto:pyprojm@ozemail.com.au) or by post to 3/50 Noble St Allawah NSW 2218.*

# letters



## Presbyterian schools

Graeme Watson's excellent article, entitled *Ten Commandments for Parents*, in your February edition was of great encouragement to me as a parent.

The Bible instructs us clearly that the Lord's commandments "are to be kept in your heart; you shall repeat them to your children, and speak of them indoors and out of doors, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

Parents have the prime responsibility to educate our children in the things of God and must not abdicate that responsibility either to schools or to anyone else. However, to have schools where parents can be confident that the approach to education will complement and be consistent with our family-based and church-based Christian education is vital. Further, we as Presbyterians are answerable to the Lord God for the witness and service we provide to the community through our Presbyterian schools.

I had the privilege of participating in the recent conference organised by the NSW Trustees in respect of The Scots College Sydney, The Scots School Bathurst, PLC Sydney and PLC Armidale. These and other schools belonging to our denomination face tremendous challenges in present day Australia. I have been delighted with the education my son is receiving at Scots in Sydney under the supervision of Mr Watson and the Principal, Dr Robert Iles. Talented and committed Christians such as these in our denomination's schools deserve our prayerful support.

*Philip Mitchell  
Session Clerk,  
Rose Bay, NSW*

## 4000 tongues to sing

On Friday and Saturday 27 and 28 February, the Katoomba Men's Convention took place. This was a gathering of Christian men meeting to discuss "Building Real Men". The convention had fewer people than saw the unholy spectacle of the homosexual Mardi Gras parade on the Saturday evening. But, the report of this smaller meeting hardly rated a mention in the

media.

The convention was an interdenominational event for men from throughout New South Wales and Victoria, with at least one Northern Territorian.

I understand there were other "foreigners" as well. Eight men from the Rutherford-Heddon parish attended, and several other Presbyterians from across NSW were seen.

We listened to Don Carson, David Mansfield and Ian Powell discussing various aspects of the theme.

The organisers told us there were thousands of men there. Such a great number did create problems when it came to moving out of the auditorium and into and out of the car park. All things considered, the organizers did a fantastic job in catering to all our needs.

Why did I go? I believe in God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The convention was a moving Christian experience. Will I go next year? I hope so.

Finally, Charles Wesley's wish came true – not once – but four times over. There were not a thousand tongues singing, but four thousand tongues singing "My great Redeemer's praise".

*Bruce McIntyre,  
Rutherford-Heddon Presbyterian Church  
NSW*

## A MacChuckle

My thanks for the MacWorship article in the March issue of AP.

It made me laugh – and it made me think of 2 Tim. 4:3,4, verse 2 as well, for without the Word – the living Word, Christ Jesus bringing us into a close relationship with our God – worship can indeed be empty.

My thanks again for a heart-lifting read!

*Renie Humphreys  
Swansea, NSW*

## Agreed, in principle

"Regulative principle"? I think my good friend John Langbridge, in his article in the March Australian Presbyterian, is really talking about a "regulative procedure of worship". A "regulative procedure" is just what is described in the article – the traditional four hymns interspersed amongst Scripture readings, prayers, sermon, offering and children's talk, together with the Lord's prayer and doxology. While agreeing with much of John's article, I feel I must point out that the Regulative Principle is just a *principle*! It is not a *set procedure* or format.

This guiding principle gives us fences in worship with what God has commanded. For example, prayer. The Regulative Principle does not stipulate prayer by a minister, group prayer, prayer by an elder, silent prayer by all the members of the congregation, open prayer, read

prayers, extempore prayer. It stipulates *prayer*! Any of the above, or any other form of prayer is within the bounds of the Regulative Principle – i.e. if with the approval of those given guardians of worship, the minister and elders.

The same is true of music – many musical instruments are mentioned in the Bible. Praise in song is commanded in Scripture – the musical instruments are not. Any musical instrument, if approved by the minister or elders, is within the bounds of the Regulative Principle.

Our congregation has a traditional morning service followed by a family service. The traditional service follows the traditional format or procedure. Our family service starts with a praise session with overheads (no hymn books). Later in the service we have a children's song segment – with appropriate actions. The first service is formal, the second is relaxed. The first has the organ for musical accompaniment, the second a piano and any other musical instruments available. The Regulative Principle informs and bounds both types of services. There is no right, true, pure reformed way or format of worship. There is a right, true, pure reformed *principle* of worship. We are to be wise and godly in our application of this principle.

*Rev Stuart Andrews  
Tamworth Presbyterian Church  
NSW*

## The Vatican and Hitler

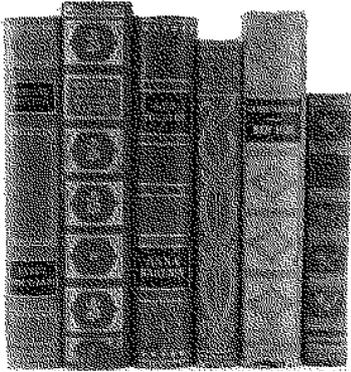
The recent Vatican declaration on the Holocaust by Cardinal Cassidy (reported in *The Australian* 18/3/98, page 1), "recognised that some Christians were guilty of ignoring the Holocaust" but insisted that the Roman Catholic Church was not responsible.

Since it draws a distinction between "Christians" and the Roman Catholic Church, one wonders whether the "Christians" whom he blames are meant to be Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Salvation Army, Lutherans etc....that is, Protestants? Or does he number Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, Hans Frank, von Neurath, von Papen etc among "Christians" (all of whom belonged to the Catholic Church)?

Is this further confirmed by the statement in the Vatican document which stressed that the Holocaust was rooted "outside of Christianity"? (that is, outside of the Protestant churches, as we always knew?) For it was the Roman Catholic Centre Party that presented Hitler with a two thirds majority in the Reichstag and with dictatorial powers; and it was the Vatican that negotiated a Concordat with Hitler through Cardinal Pacelli who later became Pope Pius XII, and with all the Fascist dictators of Europe at the time.

*Tom Aldons  
East Makvern, Vic*

# books



## The Theology of John Calvin

By Karl Barth  
Eerdmans 1995  
Reviewed by Ray Zorn

When Barth accepted the call to the chair of Reformed Theology at Gottingen University in 1921, he soon began his lectures on Calvin for four hours a week from April to July 1922. These lectures provide the material for the book under review.

At the beginning, before dealing with Calvin in greater detail, Barth devoted more than 50 pages to a survey of the Middle Ages and the Reformation, following this with another 60 pages of biographical sketches of Luther and Zwingli, together with their theological relationship with Calvin.

The necessity of Barth's developing a course of lectures while giving them week by week betrays a pressure that resulted in an unbalanced development of the original outline. Barth does a masterful job in his presentation of the early Calvin, his first writings, together with his first stay in Geneva (1536-1538). But it is apparent that he runs short of lecture time as he gets to the Strassbourg years (1538-1541), to which he devotes a final lecture. Nothing further is given about Calvin and his work from his return to Geneva in 1541 until the time of his death in 1564. This unfortunately missing material means that, as the translator admits, "if readers want a full-scale introduction to Calvin, this is not the work for them".

The value of the book, however, lies in the detailed treatment which Barth devotes

to his subject, together with his own analysis, interactions and evaluations, which reflect painstaking research and an enviable access to sources not readily available to the English speaking public. So for example, the reader learns in great detail about the complex developments which led to the ousting of Calvin and Farel from Geneva in 1536.

While Calvin's reformation programme (the church order, catechism and confession imposed upon the Genevans) would have been a large dose of medicine to swallow for any society in a newly formed process of reformation, Calvin's impetuosity and precipitousness (he was only 27 at the time) were obviously exacerbating factors, not to mention the unsympathetic way by which he used his exceptional skill and ability to cut his enemies off at the knees. Surprising is Bern's rather detailed involvement in the matter, so much so, that there was little love lost thereafter between Calvin and the leaders of the influential Swiss canton.

While the treatment of Calvin's stay in Strassbourg is disappointingly brief, Barth does tell the reader of three important things that happened there. First is Calvin's publication of his commentary on Romans (which established him as a biblical commentator in addition to the Institutes having firmly established him as a dogmatist); second, his participation in German colloquies (which confirmed his views of the futility of compromise with the church of Rome); and third, his answer to Cardinal Sadolet's letter to the Genevans (which was an important factor towards paving the way for his return to Geneva).

Readers of this book will also find riches which Barth scholarship uncovers for their benefit. Two examples must suffice.

In the first place, the Reformation was far from being a precipitous accident of history fortuitously triggered by a German monk; rather, at least six factors which prepared the way must be recognised: 1) monasticism and its early reforms; 2) Augustinianism; 3) Nominalism; 4) mysticism; 5) the Renaissance; and 6) the Reformers (Wycliffe and Hus).

Second, Calvin's synthesis of Luther's and Zwingli's views of the Lord's Supper was masterful: namely, life in Christ is derived from the whole Christ (Luther), though this benefit is given by means of the Spirit who unites the body on earth with the head in heaven (Zwingli), and nourishes us with Christ's body and blood, the symbols of the bread and wine (Calvin).

Only a few of Barth's Neo-Orthodox views creep into the text here and there. Barth, in Neo-Orthodox fashion, interprets Calvin as "establishing the Word of God in the Bible", whereas in fact Calvin's interest was in establishing the Bible as the

Word of God.

Helpful indices of subjects, names, and Scripture references are listed in the back of the book. All in all, this work on Calvin by Barth is an important contribution to modern Calvin studies.

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Ray Zorn is former principal and Professor of Systematic Theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Vic.

## The Shark's Secret

By R. Cameron-Smith  
Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1996  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Great teachers like Blaise Pascal and Martyn Lloyd-Jones always maintained that those who really understood their subject could simplify it enough to teach it to children. Where the teacher indulges in jargon and what 'Rabbi' Duncan called "cloudification", we may be sure we are in the presence of a second-rate mind. So this reviewer is always glad to obtain all the help he can in giving children's addresses.

Thankfully, there is plenty of help available in this little volume. There are 51 stories taken from the Bible and from church history. Each one is faithful to the Word, and is presented simply and clearly. I am not altogether sure why Galileo was included (No.19) nor was Sir Isaac Newton an orthodox Christian (No.20). But this volume deserves to be commended to parents and teachers alike, and I trust it is widely used.

*(The Shark's Secret is obtainable from the SPCA, 48 Abbot Street, Launceston, Tasmania, 7250)*

Peter Barnes is minister at Nambucca River, NSW

## The Power of Integrity

By John F. MacArthur  
Illinois: Crossway, 1997  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

We have become used to complaints that people do not keep their word as they

used to, and that expediency has triumphed over principle in so many areas of life. The capacity to compromise used to be regarded as a vice; now it is usually portrayed as a virtue. Hence there is a need for John MacArthur's work, which deals with the essentials of integrity, some examples of integrity (Daniel and Paul), and the ethics of integrity.

It was said of William Arnot in the 19th century: "His preaching is good. His writing is better. His living is best of all." It is a good thing to be said of anybody, and MacArthur's book should help many Christians to see the necessity of walking with biblical integrity.

As always, MacArthur writes powerfully yet simply.

## A Sting in the Tale

By Roy Clements  
Leicester, IVP, 1995

Reviewed by Philip Allaloch

**T**ired preachers, take heart! Here are eight excellent sermons on parables in Luke's Gospel, recovering some of Jesus' original impact now lost on us through familiarity. I do not mean you can lift them verbatim for next Sunday: unless you already preach this well, the congregation will notice! Rather, you will instinctively look at your own efforts and see where you could improve.

Here is a taste of Clements' fresh and imaginative writing: "On the surface, such stories seem innocuous; charming little narratives full of familiar images that easily capture your attention. In reality, they are a kind of Stealth bomber, specially designed to evade our psychological defences, insinuating themselves inside our mind in spite of every barricade we may seek to erect, and then dropping a highly explosive charge targeted at the most vulnerable point in our spiritual complacency."

Each chapter begins with the NIV text. Clements gives just enough of the "there and then" background of first-century Israel to show the impact Christ's words must originally have had. He liberally links the stories to the "here and now", drawing us into the encounters with Jesus which so often trigger a parable. Indeed, "That Monday morning feeling" (ch 7) begins with six pages of analysis on the hopelessness of the human condition without God, before delving into the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-27.

He begins with "the seed of change"

(Luke 8:1-15), explaining the Isaiah reference (though seeing, they may not see ... ) as a kind of filter to identify true disciples from the crowds.

The other texts are Luke 10:25-37; 14:1,7-24; 15: 1,2,11-32; 16:19-31; 18:9-14; and 20:9-19.

Church libraries should snap up a book like this – accessible writing with ample food for thought, which can be digested in small doses. But be warned: Roy Clements' sermons, like Christ's parables, have "a sting in the tale".

Reprinted with permission from *Rutherford House Journal*, Edinburgh.

## Eastern Orthodox Christianity:

### A Western Perspective

## Eastern Orthodox Christianity:

### A Contemporary Reader

By Daniel B. Clendenin  
Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994, 1995.

Reviewed by Robert A. Peterson

**C**lendenin, an evangelical Christian, taught Christian studies at Moscow State University for three years in what formerly had been the Department of Scientific Atheism! Two of the fruits of his ministry are these books, written to help western Christians, especially evangelicals, better understand Eastern Orthodoxy.

In *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, Clendenin acquaints western readers with the strange, even exotic, world of Orthodoxy. After recounting the recent pilgrimages to Orthodoxy of American Protestants and Roman Catholics, the writer offers reasons why evangelicals should learn more about Orthodoxy. Next, he briefly describes the history of the Orthodox churches.

He devotes the heart of the book to four key theological themes: the mystery of God, icons, Scripture and tradition, and salvation understood as deification. Whereas western theologians emphasize reasoned discourse in their thinking about God, eastern ones hold that because God is unknow-

able, the best theology is "apophatic," that is a theology of negation. But to speak in this way is to put matters in a western perspective. Eastern Orthodox theologians would say the best theology is worship of the transcendent triune God.

Although westerners regard icons as idolatrous, the Orthodox regard the rejection of icons as a practical denial of the incarnation of the Son of God, and point out that the Seventh Ecumenical Council anathematizes iconoclasts. Rejecting the Roman Catholic dogma of papal authority and the Protestant principle of sola scriptura, Orthodoxy appeals to the living presence of God in the Church through Scripture and Holy Tradition, which is deemed necessary. The most important elements of Tradition are the seven ecumenical councils, which are considered infallible (Orthodoxy describes itself as the Church of the Seven Councils) and the consensus of the church fathers' opinions.

Because Orthodoxy understands our need for salvation as death, mortality, and corruption, in contrast to the western emphasis on guilt, it sees salvation as theosis, the divinisation of believers. Putting much weight on 2 Peter 1:4 ("God has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature"), Orthodox thinkers, carefully distancing themselves from pantheism, teach that our ultimate goal is transformation into incorruption and immortality. In his concluding

chapter, Clendenin offers a positive assessment of Orthodoxy, but also makes criticisms. Among these are the danger of rote ritualism, insisting that the use of icons in worship is mandatory, the uncritical use of fathers and councils, an overemphasis on deification in light of the scant biblical witness to it, and an accompanying general neglect of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. By producing this readable volume Clendenin has rendered a valuable service.

He has done the same in devising the anthology of doctrinal readings, *Eastern Orthodox Theology*. Here he presents carefully selected essays by representative Orthodox theologians on liturgy and sacraments, councils and fathers, God, Christ and humanity, and the relation of Orthodoxy to the West. Key contributors include Sergius Bulgakov, George Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, Alexander Schmemmann, and Kallistos Ware.

Reprinted with permission from *Presbyterion*.

Robert A. Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Seminary, St Louis, Missouri.

# Triumph amid the turmoil

*Keith Black gives thanks for 25 years of remarkable ministry.*

In early 1972, after almost 16 years of civil war, Sudan, Africa's biggest country, called for help. The war had destroyed schools, churches, medical facilities, and had cost countless lives. Hundreds of thousands had become refugees.

Responding to the call, the four interdenominational missions which had previously worked in Sudan – Sudan United Mission (now Action Partners), Sudan Interior Mission, African Inland Mission and Missionary Aviation Fellowship joined in a ministry of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Soon other Christian organisations from around the world joined the new ministry.

The ministry was to be short term but because of the ongoing need, and with the encouragement of the Sudanese churches, ACROSS (Association of Christian Resource Organisations Serving Sudan) as it is now called, has continued to minister to Sudanese people.

In November 1997 25 years of service were celebrated at special meetings in Nairobi, Kenya.

In the beginning emphasis was on relief and rehabilitation. Activities were centred on health, building and self-help projects. The emphasis gradually changed to development.

A good relationship with the churches was always a high priority and many projects were designed to help them directly.

In 1980 ACROSS had 20 projects. There were non-African workers from 18 agencies and eight nationalities, 250 Sudanese and five Kenyans working in 14 locations. Forty organisations were supporting ACROSS.

Often staff had to rough it, living in tents until some buildings could be erected. Diets were meagre and varied. Breakfast at Yei, for example, was normally honeycomb and bush rat.

Despite difficult communications and the limited supplies and equipment, there were many miracles.

In 1980 a lady came to Pibor with a bowel obstruction, her stomach badly swollen. After 10 days she was still alive and the elders of the local Presbyterian Church anointed and prayed for her healing. Three days later she was getting weaker. That night the doctor and his wife asked God for

a sign as to whether he should operate despite having no proper instruments and anaesthetic. In the morning the woman's distortion was gone and the bowel cleared.

As Sudanese staff were trained, medical clinics and other programmes were handed over to the Sudanese Government.

In the early '80s ACROSS helped care for 60,000 Ugandan and 23,000 Tchadian refugees.

The United Nations highly praised ACROSS work, both with Ugandans and Tchadians. Nevertheless the Christian testimony of ACROSS was too much for the Islamic Sudanese Government. At the end of 1987, along with three other Christian agencies, ACROSS was expelled from Sudan. Evacuation was completed by April 1988. Wherever possible projects were left in the hands of the churches and people who had been trained.

Was this the end? God said No!

Within several months 11 new projects were approved, all but one church-related.

In November 1988 the Board decided to begin operation in areas of the South held by anti-Government groups.

Using Nairobi as a base, ACROSS initiated programmes to help the churches. These included training medical workers and teachers inside Sudan and a veterinary project.

Churches were growing and continue to do so, despite great hardships and suffering. On Easter Sunday 1992, 8000 people attended the Presbyterian Church in war-devastated Akobo. Fifteen people died before the service was over. One Presbyterian pastor told of baptising 3004 people in three days. An Anglican bishop

confirmed 4000 in one day.

One of the new projects started in 1988 was Sudan Literature Centre in Nairobi. Over the years SLC has published school books and Christian materials. Hundreds of thousands have been printed and distributed.

Renewed civil war after the declaration of Islamic Law in 1983 has continued to worsen, after the coup of 1989 which brought to power the present government, dominated by the fundamentalist National Islamic Front. Government policy has been genocide in the Nuba Mountains and clearing southerners from the south. One and half million who were living in Khartoum have seen their homes bulldozed and have been moved into the desert. Church leaders have been targeted. In the south, 1.3 million people have died. Slavery abounds.

God has accomplished much over 25 years through this unique organisation. Today there are many constraints, but the future is bright.

The 25th anniversary celebrations featured a staff retreat, attended also by church leaders and ACROSS board members, who include five Sudanese. All were reminded that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever". (Heb 13:8)

ACROSS executive director Mike Wall presented the "Jericho Plan", providing for new locations, including a base in Sudan; new projects, including theological education; and new methods, including the use of radio.

ACROSS praises God for the past and trusts Him for the future.

*Keith Black is director emeritus of ACROSS*

ap



**A growing Sudanese church**

# Should Christians worry about social justice?

*Paul Cooper*

As a youth in the pre-union Presbyterian Church, I became very disenchanted with the politicising of the pulpit. It seemed to me that the Presbyterian Church was consumed with social justice issues. Those who were most socially active seemed to be the most biblically strange. In order to get to their preferred political position they seemed to twist, distort and usually discount what the Bible had to say.

At that time many of us longed to know and understand God. We wanted to know what was real and what was false in the spiritual realm. Who was God and what did this God require of us? Was there anything that was true and certain in the world or were we cosmic orphans left to work it out for ourselves?

In response to my searching and questioning, I was fed a diet of political consciousness and the need to seek justice for the oppressed. Rhodesia was talked of more than Romans and social justice more than justification. The Presbyterian Church of my youth was of little help to me. It seemed to be so consumed with concern for others that it was not able to help its own.

God, in his grace, introduced me to Christians who were not as unhelpful as my own church had been. I was encouraged to read the scriptures, to recognise my own sinfulness and to seek forgiveness from a gracious saviour. Salvation was possible through faith in the work of another - Jesus.

As a Christian, I was called upon to respond to this grace by living a life of gratitude to him in obedience. God's mind had been revealed in his written word and I needed to study it to know his will. My gratitude for my salvation was to overflow so that I shared the "good news" of a gracious saviour with others.

With the zeal of the youth who has been forced to eat spinach, I resolved as an adult to never touch spinach again. I left that section of the church with its emphasis on social justice and politics far behind.

As someone who is now no longer a 'babe in Christ' I'm beginning to think that there is some value in spinach after all.



Perhaps, in my understandable youthful frustration with the social justice agenda of the pre-union church, I have rejected something that vitally concerns God.

I look around and am saddened at the increasing social and economic divide developing in Australian society, the unemployment problem, the onslaught of economic rationalism, the continued degradation of our environment in pursuit of wealth, the appalling social disparities between rich and poor in many nations, starvation and war in Sudan. The list is endless. And so I ask myself, "What, O God, would you have me do in times such as these?"

As a Church, is the PCA to be interested only in personal salvation and the not unimportant issues of social morality such as abortion, homosexuality and the family? What are our attitudes to issues which affect the structure of our society and the distribution of wealth, privilege and power? Have we, as a denomination, become chaplain to the social status quo?

When I was young the church did not hear my cry for help because it was consumed with social justice and had forgotten evangelism. I turned elsewhere for help. I wonder if I am now a member of a church that is so consumed with evangelism that it does not hear the cry for help from our society. Are we so content in our middle class comfort and privilege that we cannot

see and hear the pain of others?

Make no mistake, all around us people need to hear the message of the gospel of grace and they will go to hell if they are not rescued. But perhaps they cannot hear us for we have become so concerned with the message that we have forgotten the people to whom we seek to witness. Is it that they cannot understand the love of God when they do not see that love in us for we ignore their suffering?

Biblical balance is always difficult. Polarisation is always easier. A balance between evangelism and social justice is difficult to maintain but perhaps the tension of that difficult balance will require us to depend more upon the God who so loved the world.

*Paul Cooper teaches at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, NSW. Email: pcooper@ptcsyd.wow.aust.com*

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# Belong: God enjoins you

*Many modern Christians, like Cain, wander the earth alone. Peter Hastie has the answer.*

**W**hy should I join the church? I mean, what's the point of becoming an official member? I come to church regularly, and I'm actively involved in a small group. Is there really any need for me to put my name on a membership roll?"

That's a good question. In a country where nearly 20 per cent of the population moves every year, the idea of putting your roots down in any one place seems a little old-fashioned. And now that people in the new generation think of themselves primarily as consumers – whether of food, clothes, cars or religion – the belief that you stick loyally with the same brand has gone out the window.

Everything, including the Christian faith, is now marketed as a product to satisfy some unfulfilled need. We are encouraged to see others as service-providers who are meant to satisfy our desires and fill our emptiness. The result is that we are learning to treat relationships in much the same way as transactions in a shopping mall – convenient and impersonal. The idea of sticking with other people through thick and thin seems a weird notion. We live in a changing world, so the theory goes, and you don't tie yourself down anywhere.

So much for the theory. The question is: is it biblical? Or does the Scripture require us to take on a formal commitment to the local church?

I want to suggest to you that there are several good reasons why, as Christians, we should consider becoming formal members of a congregation.

First, the very nature of Christian fellowship calls for a promise of commitment. God's plan for each one of us is that we will enter into a never-ending fellowship with Him and other believers. That's why the apostles preached the Gospel (1 John 1:3). God wants a fellowship between us that's eternal.

The interesting thing about this is that God, for His part, underwrites this fellowship with promises. And these promises are promises to remain faithful and committed to us. "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). In other words, God's fellowship with us is always secured by a promise of commitment. He is always making promises to those He loves.

The same should be true of God's children. If God has saved us for a life of fel-



lowship with Himself and one another, then we should be as committed as God is to love and serve our fellow Christians. And that commitment requires a promise – in the same way that God gives one. It's a promise to be faithful to each other and to protect the fellowship that exists between us. That's what we do when we become formal church members. This means being committed to our church in both the good times and the bad. We should only leave reluctantly, and when all else fails.

Second, the New Testament assumes that believers enter into in-depth relationships with one another.

The Christian faith is not a private religion. It is relational and community-minded. The apostle Peter urges us to "love one another deeply" (1 Pet 4:8). Elsewhere, Paul tells us to "serve each other" (Gal 5:13), "bear each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2), "submit to one another" (Eph 5:21) and "encourage each other" (1Thess 4:18).

We do all these things because "we are members of one another" (this is how the Greek reads in Ephesians 4:25). Clearly, true Christian faith requires us to be loyal, caring and devoted to other believers.

Doesn't this mean that we should formally commit ourselves to the other Christians who are part of our fellowship? What message are we sending out if we don't commit ourselves to others who are part of the same body?

Third, when the New Testament speaks about the church, it often uses images that imply that Christians ought to be members of a congregation.

One of these images is of a family. The idea that Christians have family relationships with one another is a prominent

theme in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul often compares the relationships within a church to a family in order to help Timothy understand the obligations that believers have towards one another. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15 he says: "I am writing you these instructions so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household."

Clearly, in Paul's mind, the Church was a family. And the members of the Church family were to treat one another as they would treat members of their natural families (1 Timothy 5:1,2). The obligations that they had to their own flesh and blood were similar to the obligations that they had to members of their own church family. Do ordinary family members need to treat one another with respect, honour, and sensitivity? Then church members, as part of God's family, need to do the same (1 Timothy 5:1-6:2).

**I**mplicit in this idea of Christians being part of God's family is the notion that believers must be committed to one another (1 Tim 5:8). For Paul, the thought of Christians treating one another as simply quarries from whom we mine whatever satisfies our needs, and then moving on, is unthinkable.

In the Bible, the only person who is emancipated from community obligations and wanders the earth as a rootless vagrant, is Cain. Christians who crave anonymity, and for personal convenience shun the psychological and social connections that link them to a church, have not yet realised the family implications of the Gospel. They are behaving like Cain.

The image of the Church as a household reminds us that we are either members of the church or we are not. If I am a child in a family, I am committed to my family, and my family is committed to me. The same principle operates in church life.

In short, it would have been inconceivable to Christians in the early church not to have joined a congregation. The Gospel called them to it (Acts 5:13). And just as it called them to a life of deep fellowship and loyalty to each other, so it calls us. The question is: will we take the step?

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