

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
june 1998



# Revival

and the presence of God

Stuart Piggin • Tony Bird • Douglas Milne • David Jones • Essay: The Corporate Cannibals

# prayer

## JUNE

- 21 Stewart and Enid Mawson of Burwood, Sydney (formerly of Tasmania), on-site managers for WEC, Strathfield, Sydney.
- 22 The peace and stability of Indonesia with great economic, racial and political problems, a land of 210 million people – some 80% Muslim, 9.3% Protestant, 3% R.C.
- 23 Pioneer Presbyterian congregation, Cheltenham, Vic; 95 communicants, 15 children and youth, 8 elders; Ian and Heather Touzel.
- 24 Ashfield parish, Sydney; 150 communicants, 85 children and youth, 13 elders; Peter and Sue Hastie.
- 25 Carol Whipp from Somerville, Melbourne, on furlough in Scotland and Australia after three years studying Hindi in Delhi; planning to return to another part of India.
- 26 Presbytery of Sydney South; 14 parishes, 1 home mission, totalling 18 congregations with attendance of 1030, 2 retired ministers.
- 27 Leongatha parish, Gippsland, Vic; 30 communicants, 10 children and youth, 4 elders; Laurie Leighton.
- 28 Ingleburn Samoan home mission, in outer south-western Sydney; Kainano and Angeline Opetai.
- 29 The work among Jewish people by John and Katie Graham and Anna Sutherland of Christian Witness to Israel, based in Bondi church, eastern Sydney.
- 30 Robert Benn and editorial team producing *Australian Presbyterian* and God's guidance in future directions for the national journal.

## JULY

- 1 Ruth Myers and Kath Donovan from Belmont, NSW, in their counselling ministry among missionaries through the Christian Synergy Centre.
- 2 Historic Blayney-Carcoar home mission, near Bathurst, NSW; including 5 congregations, 50 communicants, 7 elders; now vacant.
- 3 The work and health of Alison McWilliam from Epping, NSW, Team Administrator of Pioneers Australia (formerly APCM) after many years in PNG.
- 4 The code committees and law officers of the GAA and State Assemblies as they keep church rules and regulations

- under review.
- 5 Robert and Hazel Looney, Bassandean WA; involved in Wycliffe administration in Auckland, NZ.
- 6 Coolah-Dunedoo home mission, western NSW; 60 communicants, 5 elders; vacant.
- 7 Presbytery of Maroondah, eastern Melbourne; 8 parishes, 3 home missions, totalling 12 congregations with attendance of 690, 3 retired ministers; Warwick Davidson clerk.
- 8 Penrith parish, outer western Sydney; 155 communicants, 30 children and youth, 10 elders; William and Leonie Morrow.
- 9 Broadmeadows-Craigieburn home mission, northern Melbourne; 1 congregation (at Westmeadows), 20 communicants, 30 children and youth, 1 elder; Michael and Yvonne Willsmore.
- 10 Bible Society work in Uganda (18.6 million people, 43 languages), Scripture distribution in the troubled north and effective use of the Kupsapiny New Testament.
- 11 Gwen Gibson from Canterbury, Melbourne; Wycliffe translator (Kanite and Inoke languages, since 1958) and her co-worker, Joy, involved in literacy training at Ukarumpa, PNG.
- 12 Abbotsford-Five Dock parish, Sydney, 1 congregation, 60 communicants, 7 children and youth, 8 elders; Geoff McIntyre.
- 13 John and Pat Warner from Capalaba,

- Brisbane; for 26 years in Africa, now seeking to contact Somalis in Sydney; pray for persistence despite discouragements, and for the Lord to open hearts.
- 14 Guyra home mission, northern NSW; 3 congregations, 45 communicants, 10 children and youth, 12 elders; Jeff and Carolyn Allen.
- 15 Home Hill home mission, north Queensland; 30 communicants, 12 children and youth, 2 elders; Deaconess Mary Moodie.
- 16 Home Mission work in WA – the committee, 6 home missions and the Perth Enquiry Centre offering correspondence courses.
- 17 Tatura regional parish, Vic; including 3 congregations, 80+12+10 communicants, 16 children and youth, 12 elders; David and Isabel Schulz.
- 18 The Tasmanian Board of Investment and Finance, Alfred Crawford convener, G. K. Roberts treasurer.
- 19 Alex and Sybil Shaw of Epping, NSW, working with language recordings, Alex as international secretary of Global Recordings Network and Sybil preparing recordings for the Solomon Islands, PNG, etc.
- 20 Presbytery of Canberra; 7 parishes, 3 home missions in ACT and NSW, totalling 24 congregations with attendance of 790, 3 retired ministers; Peter Davidson clerk.

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# Do we pass the seven test?

*Robert Benn*

**A**s a pastor, I am vitally interested in the spiritual condition of people's hearts and why some Christians are beset with problems of listlessness and failure, while others make steady progress. So, when I browse in a bookshop and come to new commentaries on Romans, there are a few sections that I immediately turn to. One of them is Romans 7. What will the author do with it?

If the section "for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" is not seen as Paul's own experience, then I want to close the book and leave it there. I don't want to waste my hard-earned money!

The person described in Romans 7 is no hypothetical man of straw, set up as a tool for developing an argument. Nor do we have a picture of an unbeliever in his pre-conversion state. This is a real Christian man. Spiritual man. Man in the person of Paul, who lived simultaneously on two planes. He is eager to please his Saviour, but knows acutely the reality of indwelling sin weighing him down.

This is the man who did not find it easy



to "crucify the flesh with its lusts" and to be victorious over a sharp tongue, resentment and pride. This is the man who pressed on towards the goal, but at the same time made it his business to discipline himself sternly so as not to be disqualified in the race of life. He cries out, "Will there ever be victory over this body of flesh?" He can't escape by his own efforts. He only has one option if

victory is to come. He must look steadfastly to Christ, his Saviour and Deliverer.

Paul struggles with the effects of indwelling sin in his relationship with Jesus. He hates the thought of sin mastering him. He longs to live a life of holiness. Romans 7 is, without a doubt, autobiographical!

Very recently I sat with two missionary men. We had talked deep into the night about Paul's struggles with the Corinthian church. One was a senior missionary. The other was just settling in and was still on a very steep learning-curve. As we talked about Paul's inner struggles, we felt again the spiritual anguish of Romans 7 when the younger man dropped his head between his hands and said, "and my problem of not listening ... and lust ... lust!" That led to a moment of silence, as we all took it in. So real. So disappointing for men who desperately wanted to please the Lord and not grieve Him.

Once again, on the frontline of Christian witness I became aware of the reality of spiritual struggle, and the longing for personal revival.

One of the professional hazards of leadership in the church is that what we do becomes almost business-as-usual. We can easily go through the motions of ministry, almost prayerlessly. We can become so experienced in counselling, that while we may throw in a few Scriptural texts to make our counselling kosher, nevertheless our advice is really far more psychological than Scriptural. We can become so preoccupied with the house-keeping issues of the church that we lose our spiritual passion to save souls. Romans 7 reminds us that it is always a struggle to retain it. Like Paul we are always battling our own sinful hearts.

This issue of AP is about spiritual decline and restoring our passion. It looks at revival. As I read around the subject, I am yet to find an instance where revival happened where there were not individuals reaching out in longing prayer for God. Do we have the same hunger and thirst for the presence and power of the Lord?

*Robert Benn,  
Convener of the National Journal  
Committee.*

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# The Big Revival

*Stuart Piggin draws encouragement from events a century ago in Melbourne, Illawarra and Tasmania.*

As a church historian, I have a special interest in the development of the Christian faith over the past two centuries in Australia, particularly that branch known as Evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is that expression of Christianity where the focus is on an intimate, even intense, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship is created when a person believes the Word of God, is renewed by the Holy Spirit, and becomes a witness for Christ through a life of personal holiness in the world.

Evangelicalism, then, is experiential, “biblicist”, and activist. It is concerned with the Spirit, the Word, and the world. It aims to produce right-heartedness (orthokardia), right thinking (orthodoxy), and right action (orthopraxis). It calls for a consecration of heart, head, and hand.

It is my observation that Evangelicals, (which, of course, includes Presbyterians) have had a profound impact on Australian culture where these three concerns have been held in synthesis. What is so sad is that few Christians are aware of this. Secular historians, by and large, ignore spiritual movements, and a generation of Australian Christians has grown up which is unaware of God’s dealings with the church in the past. This is tragic because we have grown accustomed to the “day of small things”.

However a study of Australian church history shows that God can revive the



church, and that when He does, right-heartedness, right thinking and right practice tend to go hand in hand.

When I speak of revival, it is necessary to define what I mean. This is not an easy task. Neither Christians in general, nor theologians or historians in particular, agree on a definition. Revival is such a historical phenomenon that historians seem to be incapable of defining it without also commenting on its cause.

My definition is based on my understanding of its cause.

Revival in the Christian tradition is a sovereign work of God which consists of a powerful intensification of the ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in convicting, converting and regenerating sinners, poured out upon large numbers of people at the

same time, and is therefore a community experience.

It is occasionally preceded by an expectation that God is about to do something exceptional; it is usually preceded by an extraordinary unity and prayerfulness among Christians; and it is always accompanied by the revitalisation of the Church, the conversion of large numbers of unbelievers, and the diminution of sinful practices in the community.

As a Christian I can believe that revival is a work of God. As an evangelical Calvinist I can believe that it is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God which consists of the conviction, conversion, and rebirth of sinners. But as a historian I have to find evidence of those things in the lives of human beings. The phenomenon of revivals throughout history appears to have been generally associated with six forms of human behaviour which the historian can identify from evidence: they are longed for; they draw Christians together in unprecedented unity; they are born of ardent prayerfulness; they renew the Church; they convert many sinners; they restrain sinful social behaviour.

With these phenomena of revival in mind, I want to take you back to the end of the 19th and to the turn of the 20th centuries and look at three significant works of revival in Melbourne, Tasmania and the Illawarra (NSW). I hope this will awaken a desire in your heart to pray that God will revive the church in Australia once again.

The period 1870 to 1913 was the high

*‘Revival in the Christian tradition is a sovereign work of God which consists of a powerful intensification of the ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in convicting, converting and regenerating sinners, poured out upon large numbers of people at the same time.’*

### Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, where thousands were converted in the Big Revival.

noon of Australian Protestantism. About 40 per cent of the population attended church each Sunday, double the percentage of the earliest and the most recent decades of Australia's history since settlement. The English author Anthony Trollope visited Australia in 1871-72 and observed that "wherever there is a community there arises a church, or more commonly churches ... the people are fond of building churches".

They were especially fond of doing that in Adelaide, which was indeed the city of churches. In 1895 there were 908 churches in Adelaide alone, while there were only 770 hotels in the whole of South Australia.

The prosperous years 1860-89 coincided with the new revivalism of Moody and Sankey in the USA. These years saw the emergence of the holiness movement and its English evangelical manifestations. This spiritual floodtide was soon to lap the shores of Australia, which was considered one of the most favourable soils for evangelistic and revivalistic experiments. Many of international evangelicalism's most celebrated evangelists visited Australasia: George Muller (1886), Hudson Taylor (1890), Henry Drummond (1890), R. A. Torrey in 1902, Charles Alexander (1902, 1907, 1909, 1912) and J. Wilbur Chapman (1909 and 1912).

Towering over all the evangelists of the 19th century were Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Dwight L Moody, neither of whom visited Australia, but both of whom influenced it enormously. Moody's impact on Australian evangelicalism was vast. Dwight L Moody (1837-99) is characterised by J. Edwin Orr as "the greatest of world evangelists".

But there was a problem. The gospel according to Moody was less exacting than that of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, and preaching was made more palatable, more entertaining, and simpler. Strongly reasoned, doctrinal sermons and catechising all but disappeared. Moody never visited Australia, although a petition, inviting him to evangelise Australian cities and signed by 15,381 people, was given to him in 1899, the year of his death.

The invitation to Moody extended by the Australasian Evangelisation Society, established in 1891, was made the subject of prayer at the Moody Bible Institute. The president of the institute, Reuben A Torrey, was present at that prayer meeting and he was deeply moved by the call to Australia. In April 1902 he arrived in Melbourne, heralding probably the greatest evangelistic campaign in Australia's history before the 1959 Billy Graham crusades.



The Melbourne mission was preceded by prayer, work, and unity on a staggering level. The evangelical churches drew together in support of the committee of 70 which organised for every house in Melbourne to be visited twice. It divided the city suburbs into 50 mission centres with 50 local evangelists preaching in halls and 30 large tents, while in the city, they used the town hall, several theatres, and the 7000-seat Exhibition Building.

A Melbourne doctor, William Warren, reported: "Within a few weeks the Spirit of God laid hold of the Christians, and there was a conscious assurance that the city and its suburbs of nearly 500,000 population was going to be moved as never before ... Whole families were brought to Christ, as well as infidels, publicans, and actresses ... A policeman averred that since the mission opened in his district, he and his fellow constables had had practically nothing to do.

Theatrical managers declared that if the mission continued they would have to close their establishments ... Do you wonder? God's people were in earnest, the Holy Spirit was given His way and sway and believers greeted each other with "the big revival has begun. Glory to God".

Attendances totalled a quarter of a million each week, when the population of the whole of Victoria was only one million. Torrey invited Charles Alexander to accompany him as his singer. Alexander returned to Australia in 1907 and again in 1909 with J. Wilbur Chapman when the four months of meetings were characterised as "a time of Pentecost for the whole Commonwealth". In 1912 Chapman

and Alexander held yet another campaign.

Behind Dr Warren's reference to "the big revival" above is a story of one of the most concerted prayer efforts known in Australian evangelical history, as Reuben Torrey himself explained:

"When Mr Alexander and I reached Australia we found that there was a group of about 10 or 12 men who had been praying for years for a great revival in Australia. They had banded together to pray for 'the big revival,' as they called it in their prayers, to pray for the revival no matter how long it took.

"The group was led by the Rev John McNeil, the author of *The Spirit-Filled Life*, but he had died before we reached Australia. A second member of the group, Rev Allan Webb, died the first week of our meetings in Melbourne. He had come to Melbourne to assist in the meetings, and died on his knees in prayer," Torrey wrote.

"A third member of the group, even before we had been invited to Australia, had been given a vision of great crowds flocking to the Exposition Hall, people hanging on to the loaded street cars wherever they could; and when that vision was fulfilled he came a long distance to Melbourne just to see with his own eyes what God had revealed to him before.

"We also found that a lady in Melbourne had read a book on Prayer and had been very deeply impressed by one short sentence in the book, 'pray through', and that she had organised prayer-meetings all over the city before we reached the place; indeed, we found when we reached Melbourne that there were 1700 neighbourhood prayer meetings being held every



week in Melbourne ... In the four weeks, 8642 persons made a definite profession of having accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour ...

“The report of Melbourne spread not only all over Australia, but to India, and England and Scotland and Ireland, and resulted in a wonderful work of God ... the outcome of the prayer-meetings held in Chicago, and of the prayers of the little group of men in Australia.”

Occasionally the evangelistic missions of this period do appear to have been accompanied by genuine revival. In some cases, these revivals influenced entire communities, shaping the way people viewed their own environment.

In 1873 and 1874 two Brethren missionaries from British assemblies, William Brown and Edward Moyses, began missionary work in northern Tasmania at Circular Head and Scottsdale. Some 450 people professed faith in Christ at their meetings, and several assemblies were started in these areas.

Then the evangelists moved to the Kentish district in the central north of Tasmania. During the day the evangelists visited settlers’ homes, and at night the people came to hear them preach. When the crowds were too large for the settlers’ houses they moved to their barns. Great interest was aroused in the whole district as night after night the people came to hear the evangelists. From the vantage point of Duggan’s barn on the hill could be seen the flickering lights carried by the people walking along bush tracks and across the paddocks, converging on the barn from every

direction. These torches were made from the bark of trees soaked in fat.

So powerful was the preaching that one person, upon seeing a possum on the ridge-cap of a barn, declared it to be the Devil.

When quite a few people began to get converted, the excitement became so great that they couldn’t go about their normal work but went instead to urge others to believe. Many were young married couples in their 20s and 30s, and some were teenagers and children.

The whole community was moved. Nearly half of the 400 pioneer settlers responded to the evangelists, and just under 100 were baptised. These converts expressed their new faith in the names they gave to the surrounding districts: Paradise, Beulah, Garden of Eden, the Promised Land. More than 30 Bible place names are found in the few square kilometres around Mt Roland, which towers over Sheffield.

In 1902-03 a tent meeting crusade in rural New South Wales was paid for by a Methodist philanthropist, the Honourable Ebenezer Vickery, Member of the Legislative Council, who lived in the Sydney suburb of Waverley. He had given the Lyceum Theatre to the Methodist Church, and this became the base of the Sydney Central Methodist Mission. But he was as interested in giving money for ministry as for buildings.

He was a foundation member of the Evangelical Council of New South Wales, formed in 1899, which organised the Simultaneous Mission in Sydney in 1901. Vickery reasoned that if tents could be so effectively used in reaching the unchurched for Christ in Sydney, how much more suc-

cessful would they be in the country towns of New South Wales.

It was a correct calculation. The 1902-03 crusade in rural New South Wales resulted in the professed conversion of 25,000. It was nowhere more clearly a revival than in the coal-mining villages of the Illawarra, when 2735, or some 15 percent of the region’s population, professed conversion.

The fire of the Spirit fell on each coal-mining village in a work described as “gloriously monotonous”. At Mt Kembla there were 131 professed conversions, Mt Keira 214; Balgownie 183; Bulli 292; Helensburg 234 and so on. At Mt Kembla “an intense emotion with an evident assent to the Preacher’s burning words were imprinted on every face and feature”.

The revival made an impact on the moral tone of the community. At Mt Kembla, the Workers’ Club, which was a drinking club, lost many of its members. At Balgownie, the local dancing salon lost its grip on the young. At Mt Keira swearing disappeared and the pit ponies in the mines stopped work as they could no longer understand their instructions, a phenomenon also reported in the Welsh revival three years later.

One account described the evidences of the revival. First, payment of debts, as tradesmen reported the settlement of accounts they had long regarded as bad. Second, a pure language – “it is said that in the Mount Keira pit an oath has scarcely been heard since the Mission”. Third, a fair day’s work. The proprietor of one of the mines said the biggest day’s output of coal they ever had followed the mission. Fourth, attendance at church – all the churches reported greatly increased congregations and increase in the membership.

The great spiritual awakenings at the beginning of this century reveal that there have been some bright spots on the landscape of Australian church history. God has revived the church in the past. A similar renaissance of spiritual vitality came to the fore around the time of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade.

There are lessons here for evangelicals if we have eyes to see: Do we long for spiritual renewal? Do we practise true unity? Is there a widespread prayerfulness in the church? Are we prepared for evangelism and mission? The hour of God’s blessing will not be far away where these things are so.

*Dr Stuart Piggis is the Master of Robert Menzies College and principal of the School of Christian Studies. He is author of the book *Evangelical Christianity in Australia, Spirit, Word and World*, and has a special interest as a church historian in religious revival and world mission in the Australian Church.*

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# Revelations of spiritual growth

*Tony Bird finds some explanations of decline and recovery.*

Since the 1970s, it has been interesting to watch how Australian churches have responded to loss of spiritual power and influence in the community. Some have seen the ecumenical movement as the answer to their dwindling congregations. 1977 was the year in which the slide of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches into obscurity was meant to be halted. But the formation of the Uniting Church did not reverse the trend. All it did was produce a larger denomination which continued to lose numbers at an even faster rate.

In the late 1970s, the Church Growth movement became an influential force on the church scene. Its leading thinkers, Donald MacGavran and Peter Wagner, tried to help the church to grow through understanding sociology of human groups and the psychological forces at work in them. The movement they spawned slowly turned to marketing techniques as the way to take the gospel to a consumer-orientated society. For these church growth gurus, vision statements became more important than creeds and doctrine.

Now, the latest brand of church growth theory comes from the Willow Creek movement. Their solution for church growth lies in better programming, use of drama, contemporary music and “user-friendly” seeker services to reach the unchurched.

These are just some of the approaches that have been tried to reverse the decline in the churches. Of course, the picture wouldn't be complete without reference to the frequent visits from luminaries of the charismatic movements whose most recent offering urges laughter as the key to blessing! Yet despite years of trying from the gurus of growth, the church still declines. None of these methods have really worked.

The Book of Revelation records messages from the living Lord to seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2 and 3). A few were doing well. Most were in decline. The Lord's emphasis to each, however, is on the internals, not externals; on theology, not methodology. His emphasis is not on developing new strategies for growth, or promoting more exciting worship, or developing team ministries or organising user-friendly services. Instead there is command to repentance for loss of love to God as well as an emphasis on getting back to



biblical truth and its application to experience.

So why do churches decline? How do they recover? The letters to the seven churches give us some clues.

**C**hurches decline when:

First, we lose our first love. Ephesus was a tough place to serve the Lord, but the church was active and committed to biblical teaching and ministry. These believers had persevered in the faith (2:2). They also wanted to rid the church of false leaders and teachers (2:2). That was good. In many respects, our own denomination has made a similar stand for orthodoxy in the post-Union period from 1977 onwards. Nevertheless, we must learn from the church at Ephesus that reformation of doctrine is only the first step towards spiritual recovery.

What we discover in Ephesus is that in their enthusiasm to root out falsehood, their relationship to God and with one another had soured. They had lost their first love (2:4). Ephesus had become a graveyard of orthodoxy. It was like a house instead of a warm loving home. Everything was in its place, all neat and tidy, but there was no warmth in it. Commitment to Biblical truth alone, however commendable, does not guarantee spiritual health.

Second, we become afraid of our opponents. A health and wealth gospel would have had a hard time at Smyrna. Stress, poverty and slander were the common experience of Christians who lived there (2:9). There was also spiritual attack by the devil (2:10). In all this they are told to stop being afraid (2:10). Fear is normal and

healthy in some areas of life but, as Christians, we must be prepared to suffer.

Third, we make doctrinal concessions. One of the teachings that had infiltrated the church at Pergamum was that of Balaam the prophet (2:14, Num 22ff). His motto was “have prophecy will travel”. You could pay him to preach whatever you wanted to hear! He should have refused Moab's money (Num. 22:7), but went with him to prophesy against Israel. Balaam became an ass for what he did not say. And eventually his ass had to say what needed to be said. Balaam stands for all teachers of God's word who compromise the truth. And we need to remember we can compromise the truth by what we don't say as much as by what we do say.

Fourth, we tolerate immorality in our midst. Thyatira was a small church with significant leadership problems. Jezebel, another Old Testament figure, stands for those who teach “it's OK to say yes” to immorality (2:20).

Fifth, we have no real spiritual life. Sardis was a large and successful church – it had “a name to live” (3:1). It was the perfect model of successful Christianity. It was a church that was fashionable and one which everyone spoke well of. People really thought it was alive, no doubt influenced by efficient organisation, regular services, fluent prayers and relevant messages. Visitors to this church were impressed. The problem was that it had lost a warm and vital spirituality. Its hunger for a reputation and size had not been matched by a desire for real spiritual life. There is a tension today between success and approval. Some churches in their desire to grow in numbers can forget the importance of practising the presence of God.

Sixth, we have no sense of personal need. It is so unlike Jesus not to find anything to commend, but he cannot find one thing to praise in the church at Laodicea. It is a lukewarm church. There was some commitment to the gospel, some perseverance, some love, some concern for the lost. But it was all rather tepid and it made Jesus sick (3:16). The user-friendly church at Laodicea had an unspoken watchword – “customer satisfaction guaranteed”. The ministry had subtly changed from persuading people to accept something they really needed (the gospel) to seeking to satisfy people's personal and fleshly desires.

However, in these letters we also discover that churches recover when:

First, they hold fast to the Word of God and exercise discipline in a biblical manner. Satan will either cause obstinate hardliners to quarrel over petty differences or he intimidates us to playing safe on vital issues. At Ephesus there was no compromise on gospel essentials. They tested the claims of "those who called themselves apostles" (2:2). At Pergamum, however, the constant appeals of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans for tolerance had won many people over. Hence there is a need for firmness and discipline in dealing with evil and impurity (Gal.6:1-5).

One wonders what would have happened to the Presbyterian church in Australia if we had tolerated Dr. Peter Cameron's views on the Bible and the resurrection, and had not taken the action we did in 1993? We cannot tolerate error in the church.

Second, we look to the Lord for help in our difficulties. The letter to the persecuted church in Smyrna tells us that the Lord is victorious (2:8) and sovereign (2:10), and has gone through suffering and death. Our help is in the Lord. What place do prayer meetings and days of fasting have in our denomination? This is a searching question. Do we naturally think of Presbyterians as people of prayer?

Third, the faithful minority in the church work for renewal. No matter how spiritually dead a church may be, there always seems to be a few who truly love the Lord. At Sardis, there were a few names who had "not soiled their garments" (3:4). What is this faithful remnant to do? They are to hold on to the promises of Christ (3:5). They are to walk in holiness of life ("white garments") and not compromise ("soil") their Christian testimony, but pray and work for better days.

At the beginning of this century the Rev. John McNeil, a Presbyterian minister, led a group of about 10 people to pray for a great revival in Australia, no matter how long it took. In April 1902, the revival broke out in Melbourne under Reuben Torrey's preaching at Exhibition Hall. Nearly a quarter of a million people each week, in a city of 500,000, were attending the evangelistic services that were being held in the city. Here was a faithful minority doing its work.

Fourth, Christians realise that size is not limiting. Philadelphia, for example, had few resources (3:8). The temptation with few resources is to hold on to them for yourself. Self preservation is the first law of nature. However, the first law of faith is the opposite; it is self denial. The Lord gave Philadelphia an "open door" for outreach. They were to look away from self and their

inadequate resources to God and his sufficiency. The myth of the mega-church movement today is that somehow the big churches do outreach better. In fact, the real reason why big churches seem to do it better is sociological not theological. Christians playing "musical churches" have been attracted because the mega-church has the physical resources to entertain a wide variety of interests. Most attend because they find a social set with which they feel at home, not because of any real spiritual hunger and thirst. Small churches need to realise that their size is not limiting.

Fifth, Christians repent of self-satisfaction. The biggest killer of the church today is complacency. The text "Behold I stand at the door and knock", is often used in evangelistic meetings to encourage people to invite Jesus into their hearts. But in Revelation 3:20 the door is actually a church one.

What we must learn from Christ's words to the church in Laodicea, as well as to the other churches, is that the cause of the modern decline in the church is not so much due to the secular world around us. The cause is in the church itself. Our attention in the last few decades on external things such as organisational union, programs for outreach, modernising worship etc., misses the vital element. The emphasis in the letters to the seven churches shows that real usefulness in the world is as a result of spiritual health in the church, that is, ongoing reformation and revival. Only when both these factors are present will the church fulfil her calling.

*Tony Bird is lecturer in New Testament and Greek at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne. He holds a PhD in chemistry and was formerly a missionary in Indonesia before pursuing theological studies in Melbourne.* ap

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# Time for the Acts of the Australians

*The key to revival is not worship style or leadership, but the Divine Presence, suggests Douglas Milne.*

At the time of the great Manning River revival of 1876 one observer wrote: "The work began, where all genuine revivals should begin, with the church itself. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the infant Church, then followed the gathering in, under one sermon, of 3000 converts. It has ever been thus."

Christians who have lived through real revivals have nearly always recalled the events of Pentecost and the scenes of divine blessing that Luke describes in the Acts of the Apostles. It is as though the churches have returned to their roots in the days of the apostles.

In fact, Luke has given the whole Church, in Acts, a textbook of religious revivals. As James Stalker has put it: "The book of Acts can hardly be understood by a reader who has never lived through a revival, but every chapter contains notices and expressions which appeal to the experience of one who has."

Revivals began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given in a way that had never been known in the Old Testament. This was because Jesus had come into the world as the Messiah, had given himself a ransom for sin, and had been glorified in God's presence. When Jesus was glorified he received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit from God the Father, and poured him out on the first Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:33).

Luke speaks of the Spirit being "poured out", showing by this way of speaking that the presence of the Holy Spirit is not always the same, but that he can be present among Christians in greater or less measure. When the Spirit is present in his fullness then the churches are strong and grow, but when the Spirit is relatively absent then they decline and have no influence.

Jonathan Edwards, the greatest of all the writers on revival, spoke of revivals as "seasons of special mercy" when the greatest things are done for carrying on the work of God in the world. That is why revivals are much to be desired and prayed for by Christians, especially in times of spiritual and moral darkness like



our own.

A revival consists of two things – Christians have a new enjoyment of God, and many new converts join the churches. Luke records this two-fold pattern of events again and again in Acts. For example, "And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they (i.e. the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria) were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). Again, "so the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

Everything in revival times seems larger than life. Luke speaks of great numbers, great joy, great fear, great power. The preaching of God's Word meets with remarkable success, and there are remarkable conversions, like that of Saul of Tarsus.

Some Christians have objected that Pentecost was a unique occasion when Jesus Christ gave the Holy Spirit once for all, to the whole Church, for all time. So it is wrong, they say, to use Pentecost or Acts as a pattern for religious experience today, or to pray for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But this is only half the truth, and fails to understand the Scripture status of Acts. David Eby writes: "The tension between Acts as descriptive ("Here's what happened") and prescriptive ("Here's what ought to happen today in your church and ministry") is real and requires the

employment of hermeneutic principles that are foundational to understanding and applying all of Scripture. Remedy comes by recognising the unique character of Acts (we'll never have or need another Pentecost or apostolic band to launch the new Covenant church and write Scripture) along with acknowledgement of the timeless principles and practices of ministry displayed in its story." Pentecost signals the first of those seasons of special mercy that Christ has given to the Church from time to time.

In times of religious decline and the greying of the churches, there is a natural tendency on the part of Christian leaders, church planters and youth workers to turn to secular models and methods of leadership, structure and communication, to learn how to get the Christian message across and to make the churches grow. This is the philosophy that lies behind most of the church growth movements, contemporary leadership seminars and other sociological strategies that are being offered as an answer to the alarming decline of Christianity in Australia.

In fact, most of these measures only change the surface of church life, and do not penetrate to the heart of the problem. Writing in *The Presbyterian* in 1872, Rev Colin McCulloch defined the problem like this: "It is not in intellectual power, nor in social influence, nor in political strategem, that the strength of the church is found. Our strength lies in the possession of the Divine Presence, and in that Presence being felt in the conversion of souls and in the nourishment of the faithful. In this lies the source of all prosperity and power. With this Presence we can do everything; without this Presence, nothing."

The first questions Australian Christians should be asking are not about styles of worship, music, or leadership, but about the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their midst – in living the Christian life, in praying and in preaching. McCulloch, in the same article, goes on: "We have abundance of preaching; but where is the power which renders this preaching the wisdom of God for the

salvation of souls? Ministers preach and pray, but where are the fruits? Where are those who pass from death to life, and who become the strength of the church? The Gospel is the same as ever; the Divine promises are still the same as of old; but where are the effects which should attend the preaching of the Gospel?" It is these effects that are largely missing from Australian Christianity today.

Other Christian groups are emphasising miracles, like physical healings and prophecies, as signs of true revival. Certainly, Luke records these sorts of events, but the apostles were usually the ones who performed the miracles, and there were only a few examples of genuine prophecy.

Praying and preaching were at the heart of the apostolic churches, rather than miracles or prophecies. For this reason Luke uses up most of Acts recording the prayers and sermons that shaped the life and work of the first Christians.

The apostles decided on these priorities very early (Acts 6:4), when they delegated diaconal responsibilities to others. As a result, every local church became a centre of spiritual life in its own district, the power points being the praying of the people and the preaching/teaching ministries of its leaders (Acts 2:42; 13:2f).

Luke indicates that before every new movement of the Holy Spirit the Christians met together for prayer, and focused on the spiritual needs of their situation (Acts 1:14; 4:31; 13:2f). As a result, new culture-groups came within the outreach of the Gospel, and new churches sprang up in major urban centres, like Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, and Ephesus. So in the long and varied history of the churches, revivals have been defining moments and movements that have triggered off new missions, outreach, social and humanitarian agencies, lifted the standing of the churches, multiplied their membership and solved their financial woes.

**W**hat can Presbyterian Christians do about revival in Australia today? Here are a few suggestions:

1. They can restore the prayer circle on a weekly basis, specifically to pray for the spiritual needs of the congregation, and to seek initiatives from the Lord;
2. They can read, pray and study much in the Acts of the Apostles, breathing in its rich atmosphere of faith, love, and zeal;
3. Ministers can give priority to their preaching, teaching and praying ministries, treating everything else as secondary, however necessary;
4. Ministers can preach about revivals,

using the book of Acts as their textbook;

5. Elders and people can give a special place in their prayers to their minister, asking that he would know the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit, so as to lead them forward in the Lord's ways;

6. They can offer urgent prayers for a great new work of the Holy Spirit in Australia, to revive the churches, to multiply true Christians, and to cleanse the life of the community.

Luke teaches 21st century Christians about leadership and ministry for every culture, climate and century. Of special importance is the fact that the Holy Spirit can come, over and above his

normal presence in the churches, with unusual power. Luke teaches us to believe in and ask for these special seasons of mercy to the church.

Such times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19) are what Australia needs more than anything else, as the answer to church growth, at the threshold of a new millennium.

*Douglas Milne is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne. He holds a doctorate in New Testament theology and recently spoke on revival at the Banner of Truth Conference in Sydney.* 42

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# Battle-scarred but triumphant

*Elijah made the spiritual journey from victory to despair and back, writes David Jones.*

In a recent editorial in *The Banner of Truth*, Maurice Roberts warns of the danger of becoming "battle-weary". He says: "Christians today are suffering from a kind of spiritual metal fatigue ... In our fellowship iron rarely sharpens iron, much of our preaching, though orthodox, lacks the ring of conviction, a guilty tameness smothers our zeal, our prayers are humdrum and predictable. The apostolic fire has died down and looks like dying away."

Many of us find ourselves overtaken from time to time by "a weariness of the soul". It is probably an occupational hazard for those in Christian ministry. In his little booklet, *Spiritual Dryness*, Walter Trobisch says "no one really knows what desperation is who has never faced another human being craving help when inside he himself feels completely empty and dry".

Elijah was human just like us (James 5:17), and he knew what it was to fall into a hole spiritually. In 1 Kings 19 he shows all the symptoms of a sudden severe spiritual depression. This man who had stood on the mountain top in triumph now slumps into the abyss of desolation and despair.

He loses all motivation. There is no heart left in him for the work. "I've had enough, Lord," he says. "Take my life, I am no better than my ancestors" (1 Kings 19:4). He is feeling useless, and worse than useless. He is in a thoroughly negative and destructive frame of mind. All he wants to do is sleep.

What is interesting is the way God deals with him. He doesn't slap him awake and tell him to pull himself together. Instead, he gives him breakfast in bed and lets him go back to sleep (verses 5 and 6). Then he gives him another feed and sends him off on a six-week vacation (verses 7 and 8). Only then does God begin to question him about the state he is in.

Some people have a temperamental predisposition towards depression but there is little evidence of that in Elijah. His depression seems to be circumstantial rather than constitutional. It is brought on by a combination of circumstances: he is physically and emotionally worn out and badly in need of rest and refreshment.

Many of our spiritual problems have a physical cause. We are psychosomatic beings, body and soul intimately and inex-



trically bound together. If we neglect our sleep and diet and expend all our nervous energy without replenishment, we too will crash spiritually.

We mustn't forget that God is our Creator as well as our Redeemer. He has made us to work by day and to sleep at night. If you want to avoid a spiritual breakdown you need to observe God's rhythm of rest and work. There must be "margins" in your life, time to unwind and reflect. Jesus invited his disciples to come apart with him for a while.

Elijah was also vulnerable psychologically. Twice he complained to God: "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me" (verses 10 and 14), but Elijah's loneliness was self-imposed, not god-ordained. There were "seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal".

The Bible says "it is not good for man to be alone". For three and a half years Elijah had been very much on his own. He was a man without a friend, the one everyone loves to hate, the "troubler of Israel". It's surely very significant later on as part of God's rehabilitation of Elijah (v21) that he is given a colleague in Elisha, someone with whom to have fellowship.

If you want to avoid a spiritual collapse, don't be a loner in the Lord's work. Seek out fellowship, make friends, not just casual acquaintances, but good close friends. Even Jesus did.

However, the main cause of Elijah's breakdown was spiritual. There seems to be a blurring of his spiritual vision and a loss of

perspective. His hopes have been cruelly dashed. The reforms he had prayed for seem to have come to nothing. There may even have been the feeling that God had let him down. Most Christians don't dare to give voice to that, but often it is there.

Certainly Elijah felt that he had let God down. "I haven't accomplished anything. I haven't brought this nation one step nearer God than any previous prophet or preacher," he feels. Sometimes it can be quite demoralising to read the romanticised biographies of past worthies, or to compare yourself with other Christians.

To a large extent depression is rooted in our aspirations to grandeur. We must all learn to live with our own mediocrity. None of us is as successful as we should like to be, and none of us possesses all the gifts we think desirable. We must learn to see ourselves through God's eyes.

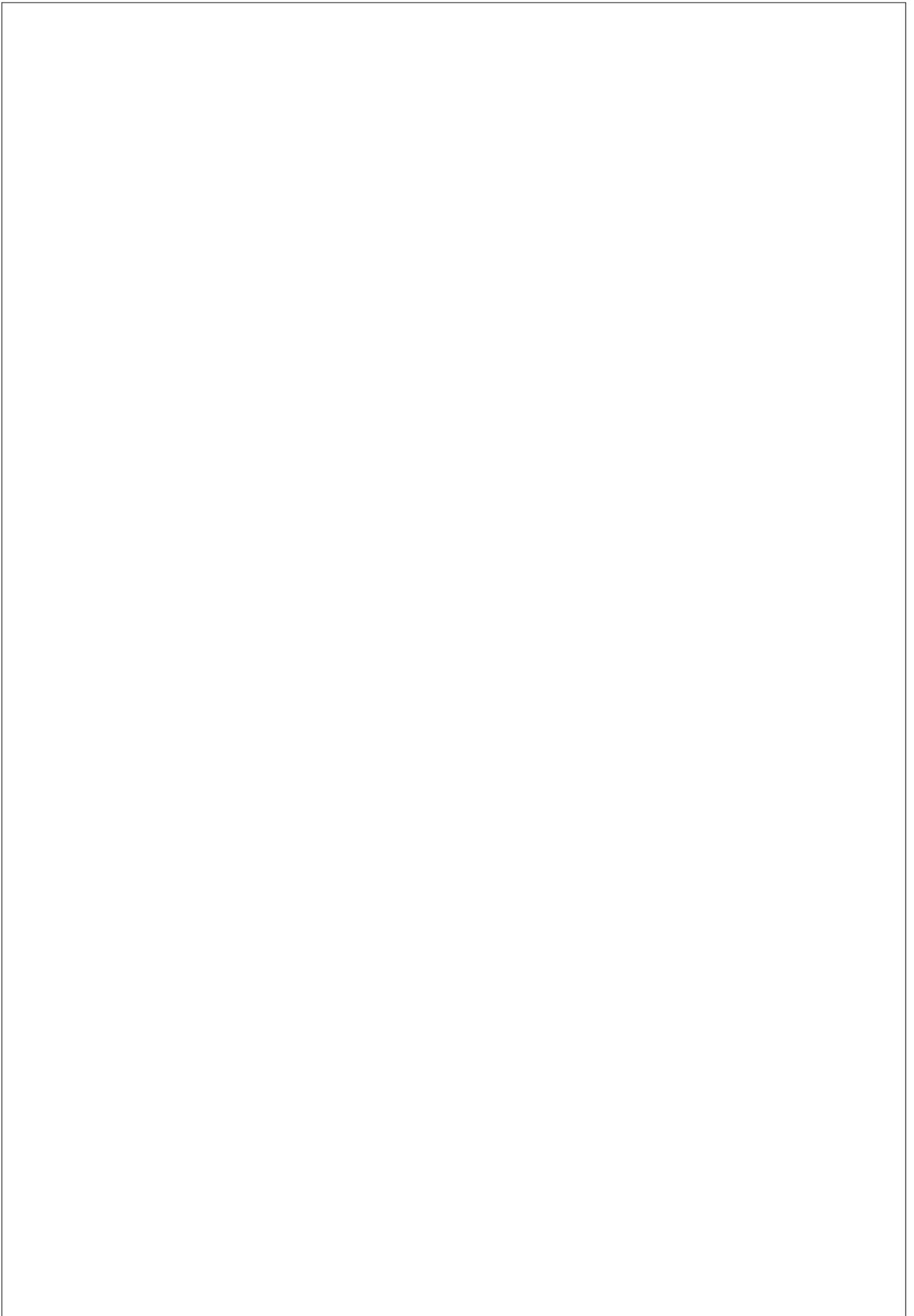
God addresses this in his question: "What are you doing here, Elijah? Why do you think I have brought you here to Mt Horeb?" God had brought him on a journey that need only have taken three days but actually took six weeks (verses 7 and 9).

Why? It was not just a holiday; it was a spiritual refresher course. The route God sent him along would have taken in all the major landmarks of redemptive history. Four hundred years before, in a cave on Mount Horeb, God had drawn near to Moses. Now he is going to do the same for Elijah.

Elijah had lost touch with God. It's easy to do that, even when you are busy serving him. Fred Mitchell, a former leader of O.M.F., had a plaque on his office wall: "Beware the barrenness of a busy life." It seems that Elijah was looking for God in all the wrong places, like many today, in the spectacular and dramatic, in the tornado and the earthquake, instead of in the still small voice of the Word.

How gracious God is with us, and how patient. When Elijah is bruised and broken and burnt out God restores him. As one American preacher has put it: "When Elijah ran out of gas, he ran straight into grace."

*David Jones is the minister of St. John's Presbyterian Church, Hobart, where he conducts a vital ministry in the heart of the city. David speaks occasionally at Conferences on the Spiritual Life.*

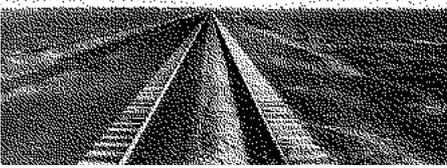






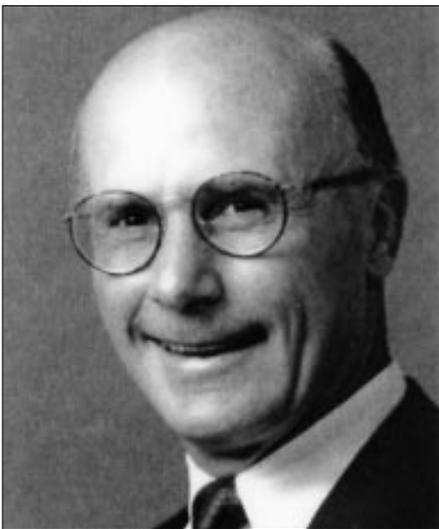


# across australia



## Liberal MP becomes Christian Democrat

**John Bradford** (below), MHR for McPherson on Queensland's Gold Coast, has left the Liberal Party to become federal Parliamentary leader of **Fred Nile's** Christian Democratic Party. He will stand for a seat in the Senate at the next election. A man of strong Christian conviction, he wants to see family values placed above politics and hopes that not only Christians, but other Australians who support traditional family values will vote for CDP candidates, who will contest Senate seats in all states and selected seats in the House of Representatives.



## Churches train for Olympic ministry

**Quest Australia - More Than Gold** is an inter-church ministry which will reach out with the Gospel to the large numbers of competitors, officials and spectators who will come to Sydney in 2000 for the

Olympic Games. Headed by **Bishop Brian King**, of Parramatta, it will offer hospitality, accommodation, counselling, entertainment and literature (including special Olympic-edition New Testaments), to all comers, and make arrangements for worship in the Olympic Village.

## Bible Society has new NSW chairman

**Rev Roger Chilton**, rector of St Swithun's Anglican Church, Pymble, has been elected chairman of the NSW Branch of the Bible Society in Australia.

## Pub with no patrons

The following story comes from a New Zealand Christian newspaper, *Challenge Weekly*, via the South African *Pretoria News*: "The Conglomerate Hotel at Nullagine, in the remote outback of Western Australia isn't counting its blessings. It's not counting anything else either, because it has gone broke as the result of a religious revival which has converted most of the 150 inhabitants. About two thirds of the population are Aborigines who were the mainstay of the trade until a Gospel group arrived and turned them into born-again Christians. Now, instead of spending their evenings drinking at the pub, they remain in the community reading the Bible and singing hymns. Said manager Gary Marshall as he shut the hotel doors: "We're empty, but so is the gaol, so perhaps we shouldn't complain too much."

## Russians enjoy Bible Society fruit

Sydney Town Hall was packed out by a multinational congregation for the Bible Society's annual "Celebration of Word and Song" on Easter Saturday night, which was broadcast to many thousands more through 2CBA-Fm's live broadcast. The Easter story came alive as it was read from the Bible by professional presenters **Roger Climpson**, **Ron Haddrick** and **Myrna Dodd**. The power of God's Word was interspersed with beautiful music provided by soloists **Clive Way** and **Vanessa Webb**, organist **Philip Fraser**, a 200-voice choir and the Salvation Army Congress Hall Band. NSW state director **Tom Treseder** shared with the audience his burden to see Bibles readily available to all Russians following the long years of atheistic government in the former Soviet Union. Enough funds were raised to provide about 2000 Bibles for Russia. Costs for

the evening were covered by the Wollongong Surf and Leisure Resort.

## Church-planting conference flourishes

Five hundred people from around Australia, including 40 Presbyterian ministers, gathered in the Salvation Army Congress Hall, Sydney, from 4 to 7 May 1998 for the Evangelising Australia through Church Planting conference organised by the United Evangelistic Council of NSW. Three gifted speakers brought biblical principles to bear on a subject which is often dominated by pragmatism, while 40 others led workshops on a wide range of topics related to this all-important subject. **Rev David Jackman** of London led Bible studies on Ephesians, 'A Handbook for Church Planters'. He drew remarkable parallels between the culture and society of first-century Ephesus and the culture and society of the 20th century West. **Frank Retief** from South Africa has been involved in church planting for 30 years. This man is full of love for Christ and zeal for the salvation of souls. He has a clear view of what awaits men and women at death - heaven for believers and hell for unbelievers - and the love of Christ constrains him to implore them to be reconciled to God. **Phillip Jensen**, chairman of the United Evangelistic Council, has planted a diversity of congregations within one parish and has been the driving force behind the planting of evangelical churches in various country towns throughout NSW. He was the anchor of the conference, driving it, steering it and drawing it together. His main thesis was that church planting leads to church growth, citing the Baptists as a particular example of a denomination which had set out to plant scores of churches around Australia and in consequence was growing while others, less committed to church planting, were declining.

## Submissions Welcome

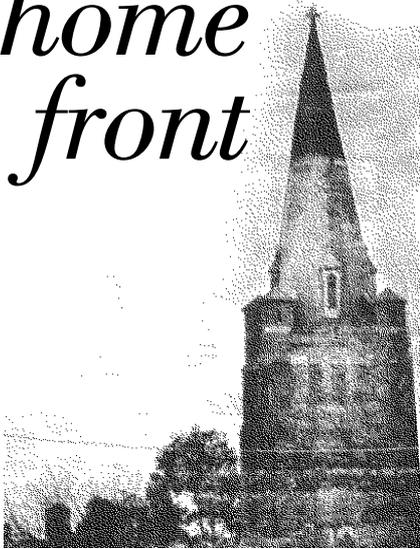
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# home front



## Souvenirs available of historic church

Many Presbyterians visiting Tasmania will have been interested to see the historic **Auld Kirk at Sidmouth**, north of Launceston, situated on the west bank of the Tamar River just near the Batman Bridge. Souvenir teaspoons (\$3), tea towels (\$6), cards (\$2) and a history book of the Auld Kirk (\$15) are available from Dianna Lockhart, Sidmouth, West Tamar 7270, phone (03) 6394 729.

## News from SA

**Presbyterian News**, coordinated by **Stuart McLean** and compiled by **Pat Leach**, brings together news of the South Australian church every six months. A number of Presbyterians from various parishes participated in the Awakening March in Adelaide, which culminated in a rally on the steps of Parliament House, where **Rev Wally Zurrer** represented the PCSA.

Youth work is alive and well in **Mt Gambier**, with vacation Bible school, combined south-east youth nights every term, fortnightly youth services and a Sunday school teachers seminar planned for Saturday 25 July. Held from 11am until 4pm, it will be led by **Brian Stark**, the Adelaide-based field worker for Child Evangelism Fellowship. The new Mt Gambier manse was opened and dedicated by the Presbytery of Penola led by its moderator, **Rev Andrew Slater**, on a recent Sunday afternoon.

Dunbar Homes for the Aged are building three independent living units on land owned by the **Naracoorte Presbyterian Church**. Work should be completed by June.

## New elders

**Mt Barker (SA):** Pastor **Rupert Hanna**, **Rod Fisher** and **Tom Haig** (of Murray Bridge).

**Montrose (Tas):** **Stephen Warwick**.

## With Christ

**Mrs Winifred Murray**, a member of St Andrew's, Launceston, who was born on the same day as the Queen Mother (4 August 1900) passed to her reward on 2 February, aged 97. In 1956 she was one of the founding members of St Andrew's PWMU Evening branch and served a number of terms as president. She was faithful in church attendance until the final year of her life.

**Mrs Doris Jones-Roberts**, widow of the late Rev Evan Jones-Roberts, died at the Hillview Nursing Home, Surrey Hills (Vic) on 5 April, aged 94. She had formerly lived in Vermont and regularly worshipped at Vermont Uniting Church.

## Please pray

Prayer is asked for **Rev Greg Smith**, minister of Ku-ring-gai Presbyterian Church on Sydney's North Shore, who has been diagnosed with cancer.

## Tamworth plans to get them young

The dreams and prayers of Tamworth (NSW) Presbyterians were fulfilled on 4 April when the St Mark's Pre-School and Long Day Care Centre was opened as an



outreach of **St Stephen's Presbyterian Church**. The well-planned and beautifully constructed building had taken four months to complete. The minister of Tamworth, **Rev Stuart Andrews**, conducted the brief opening ceremony and the associate minister, **Rev Doug McPherson** gave a short message on KFC ('kids for Christ').

## Ministerial moves

**Rev Conrad Hor-Kwong** was ordained to the ministry and inducted to the pastoral charge of Randwick in Sydney's eastern suburbs on Friday 8 May by the Presbytery of Sydney. **Rev Neil McKinlay** was ordained to the ministry and inducted to the pastoral charge of North Pine by North Brisbane Presbytery on 14 April. **Rev Andrew Clarke** was inducted to the charge of Bendigo (Vic) by the Presbytery of Bendigo on Friday 1 May.

## Notice board

Presbyterian youth in Victoria are holding 'The Event' on a regular basis in St Kilda Church, on the corner of Alma Road and Barkly Street. The next Event will be held at the new time of 5.30pm on Saturday 18 July. A bright and varied program for the whole family will entertain and instruct as musicians **Rod Gear**, **Jason Coghill** and **Matthew Jacobi** ('The Sons of Korah') sing the Psalms in modern musical forms, while **Adrian Kebbe** brings a challenging message. For more information call Dave Assender on (03) 9509 1494. A Thanksgiving Service will be held in **Taylor Memorial Church, Greenwich** (North Sydney) on 9 August to commemorate the extensive refurbishment

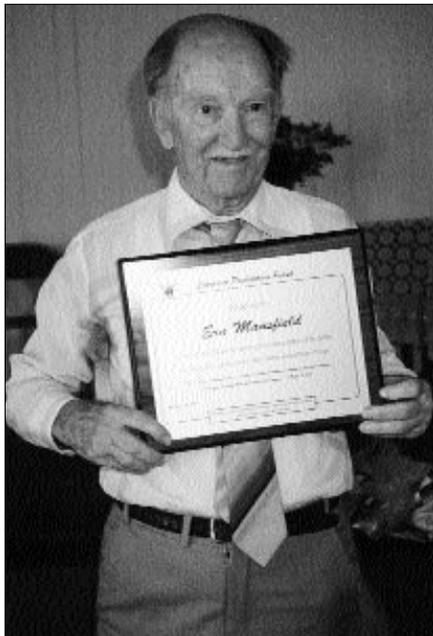
**Committee members are still young at heart.**

**The youngsters settle down to business.**

of the church. Anyone who has been associated with the church over the years is invited to contact the church secretary, Isabelle Clark, at PO Box 1134 Meadowbank 2114, phone (02) 9638 7471.

## Well done!

**J**ohn Neve has resigned from active eldership on the session of St Luke's, Roseville (NSW), and been granted the status of elder emeritus. Confirmed as a high school student in Temora, he studied at Sydney University before seeing war service with the AIF in Papua New Guinea. After the war he returned to PNG, working in the Sepik and West Highlands Districts. He has lived in retirement in Roseville and represented the parish in the NSW assembly and the presbytery.



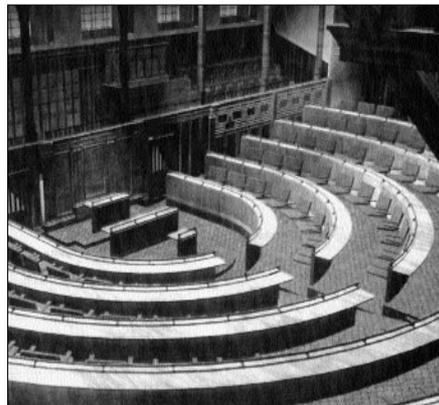
**Ern Mansfield** (above) has completed 50 years' service as an elder at Coorparoo in Brisbane, where he worked with many ministers over the years, including during two periods as session clerk. He has always been a source of wise counsel, encouraging the brethren to commend matters to the Lord. He has been a diligent visitor in his elder's district and has been an active member of the men's group and the indoor bowls group. A lunch after a recent communion service gave his family and friends the opportunity to say thanks.

**Rev John Wilson**, who was appointed full-time lecturer in Practical Theology at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne, from the beginning of this year, has been awarded the Master of Ministry degree by the Melbourne College of Divinity for his thesis identifying the strengths and weaknesses in a review of practical training for the ministry.

# world news



## Scottish Parliament to use kirk hall



**L**ife and Work, the national journal of the Church of Scotland, reports that Scotland's Parliament will start its life in the **Church of Scotland's Assembly Hall** on The Mound in Edinburgh. The Assembly Hall, built in 1859, will be extensively refurbished.

## Canadian award for Cuban Presbyterian

**R**ev Hector Mendez, pastor of First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana, Cuba, has been awarded the E.H. Johnson Memorial Prize by the Presbyterian Church in Canada for his contribution to "the cutting edge of mission".

## US Presbyterians evangelise cyberspace

**U**se of the Internet will figure prominently in the ministry and witness of a new Presbyterian Church being built in a high-tech community called 'Celebration' next to Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Costing \$US7 million, the church plans to model new ways of being the church in an increasingly high-tech world. The minister, **Rev**

**Patrick Wisley**, is planning to use his computer to contact every home and business to transmit sermons and pastoral letters, conduct Bible studies and include in worship people who are shut-in. *Presbyterians Today* reports that he envisages beaming satellite footage from mission projects back to church members.

## Teachers honour Guyanese moderator

**T**he Rt Rev Wilfred Ledra, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Guyana was honoured by the Guyana Teachers Union for service to teaching and his country by having his portrait hung in the GTU building.

## Australian missionary in Indian marathon

**R**ev Greg Braid, a PCA missionary working with Wycliffe Bible Translators in India, was invited to preach at the recent General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of India as a representative of the Victorian moderator, **Rt Rev Keith Bell**. He was advised that he "would need to preach for at least two hours because hundreds of thousands would be gathering".

## Hawaiian pastors unite to pray

**H**undreds of Hawaiian pastors were involved in prayer for their state from 12 to 16 March. Ministers from many denominations fasted and prayed for forgiveness of sins and a recovery of righteous living. Pastors on every island publicly prayed to ask God for forgiveness of sins, particularly the killing of innocent people, noting that in the past thousands were killed by human sacrifice but in the present thousands are killed by abortion.

## Common date for Easter?

**A**n ecumenical proposal to establish a common date for Easter throughout all Christendom has won strong support from some prominent church leaders. Easter is usually celebrated on two different dates by most Protestants and Roman Catholics (12 April this year) and Orthodox Christians (19 April this year.) The division, known as "the Paschal controversies", developed after the reformation of the calendar by Pope Gregory XIII some 400 years ago. At a meeting in Aleppo, Syria, last year under the auspices of the WCC, a proposal was developed which would set the first common date for Easter as 15 April 2001.

# Day by day

*Marian Andrews endorses a plan to help sustain the faith across the generations.*

Jack holds his breath and waits for a suitable lull in the dinner conversation. He knows this will be difficult, so he has to make few words count.

"I've got to go to footy on Sunday. It's the grand final, and the team really needs ... " Before he can mention how much this means to him, and how important it is to have Christians on the team, Dad clears his throat, and Mum looks troubled.

Meanwhile, Jack's little sister chimes in, "Yeah, but what about that runner we saw on the film, Dad? You know that guy, Eric Liddell? He wouldn't go in the Olympics on Sunday, would he?"

I must confess to a secret joy when God chose unholy Hollywood to be His messenger in "Chariots of Fire". Do you remember that poignant moment when the American sprinter walked over to Eric Liddell at the starting blocks and handed him the text: "Them that honour me, I will honour". Millions of people heard that message through the film. Now, Satan is attacking God's people on this very issue.

Of all the Ten Commandments, this one involving the Sabbath principle can be broken and the results are not evident straight away. There is no visible idol or dead body to view. It usually happens gradually by moving the boundaries. If you knock the surveyor's peg a fraction a day, after many days it's no longer where the surveyor put it.

Every generation and every community is tested differently. In one congregation, farmers debate how much farm work must be done on Sunday. Of course, stock must be cared for, but what if the saleyards operate only on Monday, and your cattle must be in the yards by Sunday night?

The beach-house weekender pushed the limit for the baby-boomer generation. Was it enough to rush back in time for the evening service?

Experience would say no! For most city families today, sport and other school-related activities test the resolve of those who want to honour the Lord's day. Christian schools sow the seeds of destruction when they make Christian families choose between the house of God and school. Why can't sport and extra-curricular activities be kept for Saturday, where they belong?

The Christian family suffers most when the Lord's Day is not honoured. God has



16:2, Rev 1:10.)

Christians need to guard this day against the onslaught of the world, the flesh and the devil, and maintain it as a precious day for families to celebrate God in Creation, especially the new creation heralded by Christ's Resurrection.

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

## The Lord's Day

By Joseph A. Pipa  
Christian Focus Publications,  
Great Britain, 1997

*Reviewed by Marian Andrews*

Joseph Pipa gives a compelling defence of a Biblical view of the Sabbath. I recommend this book to those who want to use this day rightly. Key passages of Scripture are investigated from a theological viewpoint; present and past attacks on the Lord's Day are described and countered; a bird's eye view through history is given; and all in the context of a parable about a king who designed a beautiful park for the delight of his subjects. Making the Lord's Day a delight is the theme of the book, and the message comes through clearly. However, where practical suggestions are concerned, some adaptations need to be made for the Australian scene.

Pipa wants children to be taught to turn from their own pleasure on this day. He could have added that a father's example is powerful in this. Children will be saved from bitterness by seeing their fathers putting aside their pleasure, no matter how spiritual, and spending time with them.

Pipa gives an important principal for the use of the Lord's Day – enjoy the purposes of God's holy day. His rule for difficult choices is, "does this promote the purpose of the day?" This book will help you find out what this means today.

given this day as a means of grace for the family and church. We are to cherish and enjoy it, and continue to seek ways of making this day a delight. Those who honour the Lord on His day teach their children to honour the Lord and His day.

We must use this day to pass on the baton of faith in Christ to the next generation. It is God's check against over-work and selfishness. Do you wish to have your grandchildren sitting willingly with you in worship one day? Then protect the Lord's Day at all costs.

If you despise the means of grace, why should your children value them? Why would they think that Church is important if you skip it to lie in bed or play golf?

Jesus taught us to walk the straight and narrow road that opens out to abundant life. This means knowing where the detours are to be found that may lead us to destruction. In family life, children start to find the way constricting in their pre-teen years. Parents must be firm in keeping the family on track.

It has made my heart ache to see some of our children's school friends fall into every trap Satan has set for them, because their parents made short-sighted choices about the Lord's Day. Left to their own devices, they are now a long way from Christ.

Jesus never once broke the Sabbath, as it was ordained by God. In all His debate with the Pharisees, His purpose was to peel back layers of extra demands these sincere religious people had added to what His Father intended. He loosed the heavy burden they had made of God's day. His apostles maintained the Lord's Day, but changed it to celebrate the new creation brought by Christ in His resurrection. (See Acts 20:7, 1 Cor

# A cheerful giver

*Russell Lander has suggestions on funding church buildings*

Last September our congregation was challenged to beef our building fund up from \$100,000 to \$515,000 for improvements to our church and hall. They responded magnificently and the total has now been reached. Remarkably nobody was asked by name to give. How then was it done? Certainly, not by employing standard fund-raising techniques.

If you've ever been on a school fund-raising, you will know the general approach of the consultants who orchestrate these daunting appeals. First, form a committee and get each member to give generously, preferably very generously. Offer titles to big donors such as "Life Governor of the Foundation" and let them know that their generosity will be formally acknowledged, even carved in a marble plaque! Throw a big dinner and especially ask those along who are known to be well-heeled. Then, divide up the parent roll among the committee members who visit them in their homes and eye-ball them to give. It seems to work for the schools, but is this the way forward for a church?

Our fund-raising committee did talk about visiting parishioners in their homes to ask for their support, but this was dismissed early in the piece. People move around the churches these days and some may find it easier to change their place of worship than to have to say no to a direct appeal! What about a series of big events such as concerts, garage sales, fun runs, chocolate drives etc.? Yes, all good ideas but who will run them and how much will they raise? Marginal dollars, but not the core funds.

Why not write personalised letters to parishioners, seeking their financial support? In the end, we sent out two letters. One was from the pastor detailing the project, explaining its advantages from the viewpoint of Christian ministry. The other was from the chairman of the appeal fund essentially looking at the biblical principles involved in funding two major Old Testament building projects – the tabernacle and the first temple.

In Exodus 35 Moses asks the Israelites to provide materials for the building of the Tabernacle, nominating some of these such as gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and scarlet thread, linen, goats hair, ram skins dyed red, badger skins and acacia wood etc. He doesn't ask anyone by name to give but



simply puts it to the people in Verse 5: "Take from among you an offering to the Lord. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the Lord."

He also asks all gifted artisans to roll up their sleeves. Those whose hearts were stirred gave in kind or of their services such that there were more than enough resources to complete the work and Moses had to ask them to stop giving!

Having been precluded from building the temple himself, King David sets about helping the young Solomon to undertake the massive project. He throws in a cool 2.7 million ounces of gold, worth \$1.3 billion on today's values, plus 6.3 million ounces of silver (\$62 million) and asks: "Who, then, is willing to consecrate himself to the Lord?"

Again, he doesn't ask anyone specifically what they will give; he just leaves it to the Lord's moving. As with the tabernacle, the people respond generously and the work gets underway. David acknowledges God's hand in 1 Chronicles 29:16: "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own."

Our parishioners were asked to pray regularly that the Lord would likewise supply our funding needs by moving in peoples' hearts and were reminded that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

Early in the appeal an anonymous donor came forward offering to pledge \$100,000 provided another donor could be found who would pledge the same. It was agreed with the donor that this condition would be met if 10 people were to give or pledge \$10,000 each and this was explained to the

parish. One gave/pledged \$20,000, one \$16,000, one \$15,000 and eight \$10,000. These generous responses put beyond doubt that the fund was now airborne and the target was reached in April, with a garage sale topping it off.

Fundraising in a church setting is an exercise in faith rather than something best done by professionals employing the latest techniques. Keeping the parish well informed on the progress of the fundraising is essential but prayer is the key which opens the door of people's hearts! In the Master's words: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened." (Luke 11:9)

Is there a lesson here too for church schools?

*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.* 

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# Back to basics

*Nello Barbieri offers three principles for effective youth groups.*

“Another day, another pound of flesh.” Bill slowly planted his feet on the floor. He hadn’t always had this attitude about his youth group. In recent days, the problems had piled up. Bill stared numbly in the darkness at the clock blinking 6:30pm. “These Bible studies are getting to be a real drag”, he thought. “Nobody cares what I teach. How am I supposed to know what to teach, anyway?”

Bill began his ministry at First AngliPresterian in a burst of enthusiasm. He had expected the kids to huddle around his teaching, the parents to deeply appreciate his interest in their kids. He was amazed when students began to complain that youth group wasn’t any fun any more. Parents were complaining that their kids were spending a lot of time away from home.

Bill desperately searched for a program that would somehow satisfy everyone. He tried youth bands, Bible studies, discipleship groups, contemporary Christian rock concerts and more, but they never quite worked. Slowly but surely, confusion and doubt captured his mind. As each new program failed, his distress deepened.

What Bill needs is a basis for his youth group. By ‘basis’ I mean a collection of principles that keep our minds focused. A basis for youth group helps us answer the question “why am I doing what I’m doing?” And “why is what I’m doing so important?”

Think about this statement: “Without a knowledge of why we’re doing things, we are left to guess the reason and use of the activity.” We can shoot a shotgun at our students – an array of gospel message pellets, of Bible study pellets, of activity pellets – then hope that a few reach the mark. On the other hand, by focusing on biblically based principles we can create a clear understanding of why we do what we do. Biblical principles are much like the edge pieces in a puzzle- they provide a setting for thinking through each part of our ministry.

I want to suggest three principles:

1. Youth group exists to minister to youth.
2. Each youth group, like a fingerprint, requires a unique application of ministry principles.
3. It is not what you do, but how you use



what you do.

1. Youth group exists to minister to youth.

You are probably thinking that this sounds very basic. I am sad to say that many youth groups are preoccupied with events and activities. These things focus on nearly anything and everything but the students. The cold fact is that youth group does not exist to provide a career for anyone. It has only one focus: youth and the Gospel. It exists to make a life-changing impact on students. They are the reason and focus of everything we do. They are more important than programs, plans, and strategies. In fact, Jesus, Peter, and Paul place the highest value on servanthood.

2. Each church requires a unique application of ministry principles and programs. When we understand this important second principle, we can save a ton of misspent energy. Unfortunately, a catch cry of youth groups today seems to be: “Here’s how I do it. If you do it my way you’ll be successful like I am.” There are heaps of programs floating around, each making a similar claim.

But each youth group is different. The students being served are unique. The movement of God’s Spirit in that church is unique. In fact, I’m convinced there are no two churches precisely alike anywhere in the world. Each has its own fingerprint.

Model ministries are important. But the value in these models is not what they do, but the reasons or principle behind what they do. When we realise that our individual youth groups are unique, like fingerprints, we stop seeking the perfect program

– the program that will bail us out. We begin to look to the Lord and ask Him, “Father, what do you want done in this group, with its “one of a kind” character?”

A couple of years ago a youth leader in a small church in northern Tasmania phoned me. He was struggling to figure out what to do. After lengthy sad stories, he confessed that his kids had little interest in anything he wanted them to do. Every program and activity he could think of was met with “this is boring”. His kids would no longer come to youth activities, not even miniature golf.

We made a list of the activities he had organised during the year. I asked him to consider each activity and explain. “Who is this activity for? Is it for the kids, or for you?” He quickly answered, “the kids.” “Then how did you intend them to benefit?” I said. “I don’t know.” was his frequent response.

Our next principle shows us this youth leader’s problem:

3. It’s not what you do that is important but how you use what you do.

It’s frightening to realise that our ministry skills or programs are not the focus or even the cause of God’s blessing. We are instruments that God uses in the spread of the Gospel. The importance of any activity is not the activity itself but how the youth leader uses it to facilitate the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the growth and development of students.

Have you ever heard a great speaker who held you spellbound? Can you remember what they said? Unfortunately, most of what they said has been forgotten. The problem is I do not know how to apply what I have heard to my daily life. Sometimes the clearest talk creates only hunger without an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to help bring about change. Even excellent speaking can be activity for activity’s sake and not lead to changed lives.

These three principles provide a foundation to build on. As you strive to custom-design a youth group for your church, they can be used to influence every commitment, principle, and objective for that group.

*Nello Barbieri is a theological student at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, NSW*

# You are what you watch

*Phil Campbell*

Someone once said, "What you eat today, walks and talks tomorrow." It's just as true of what you watch. The only trouble is, it's a whole lot more subtle. That's why, in our house at least, there are some rules about who watches what.

For starters – and it sounds pretty obvious – if you're under 15, there's no way you watch an MA15+ movie. When you're over 15, we'll talk about it.

The funny thing is, even in lots of Christian families, such basic rules are often treated with scorn. After all, watching the occasional M or MA rated movie won't do any harm, will it? The answer is, probably not. A single movie will rarely have the power to change your values and perceptions.

But movies work like advertisements. A single showing of an ad rarely has results ... but repetition does. And even when an advertisement – say for a luxury car – doesn't actually sell the product to everyone who sees it, powerful perceptions can be created that spread far further. Even people who don't *buy* the Mercedes will *want* the Mercedes.

Likewise, as Tracey Piggott points out in this month's video review, movies that show infidelity, homosexuality, deception, violence, or vengeance in a positive light won't necessarily have an immediate effect. But eventually, they'll create a mindset. And what we watch today ... walks and talks tomorrow.

# The 'beautiful' side of adultery

*Tracey Piggott*

## Video Watch

### The Bridges of Madison County

**T**he *Bridges of Madison County* is a beautifully crafted movie that takes us into the home of Francesca, a hard-working and dutiful wife who lives on an Iowan farm. Played by Meryl Streep, Francesca is the mother of two teenagers, and a woman of unfulfilled dreams.

When her husband takes the kids to the State Fair, she is left alone for four days of dull routine – until the unexpected arrival of Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood), a rugged and unpretentious National Geographic photographer on assignment filming the famous bridges of Madison county.

The scene is set. Kincaid opens up another world – a world of variety, freedom, and choices. They talk, they laugh; he listens and appreciates; they dance. Francesca's hunger for intimacy leaves her open to respond with great passion, and they both experience the greatest four days of their lives. And thus comes the choice. Go or stay? Should Francesca stay with her passionless husband, or leave with Kincaid?

More significantly, what about the choice going on in my own mind as a Christian viewer? Would I blame her for choosing passion over duty? She was "dead," and she has "come alive". It's hard to hang on to the ideal that commitment to family is best. Francesca's choice is paramount – but what would I do, if I were her?

Consistently the viewer is encouraged to have a soft view on adultery – a response cleverly engineered as we see the public humiliation of another woman caught in adultery in the nearby Iowan township. As we watch, we identify with the helpless victim, and give her our sup-

port. No viewer would want to side with the hypocritical self-righteousness of the townsfolk.

And finally, our sympathy is roused as we share Francesca's own analysis of her extra-marital relationship. How can it be anything but a good thing – through her four days of passion, she regained her sense of self, something for which she has no regrets.

It is so much harder to hold on to a moral point of view when you know and like the one who is sinning, and when you understand why she made that choice. But we must never let our empathy for the person push us into changing our mind on what God says is right. Somehow we have to keep looking for that delicate balance found by Jesus, when he said to the self-righteous, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone"... and to the woman caught in adultery, "Go... and sin no more."

*Tracey Piggott ministers with her husband Geoff, pastor at Laurieton, NSW.* 

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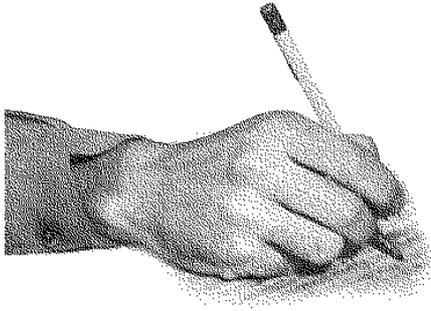
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# Letters



## Where are the deacons?

It would be great to be able to take Paul Cooper's article "Should Christians Worry About Social Justice?" a step further, and place it into the arena of the deacons' court. That, however, cannot be done in most Presbyterian Churches in Australia, because it has now become the accepted thing to have the committee of management deal with all these issues.

I suspect that church finances, followed by building maintenance and grounds management, have become top priority on our agenda. Occasionally we may talk about missionary giving, and providing advertising funds for the Holiday Bible Club. But how about looking after the poor, the sick, and the homeless? What has happened to the church as their advocate?

Would not our Lord be honoured, and our communities (church and society at large) be better served if we allowed our committees of management to concentrate their efforts (& gifts) on financial and property matters, and placed the office and work of the diaconate back in the hands of godly deacons? Then Christians might have a better chance of addressing issues of social need and justice in their local areas.

*Pastor Doug  
Duncanson, Queensland*

## Lofty vision

I have had the privilege of meeting and working with World Vision staff and I am deeply impressed with their commitment to Christ and to seeking His Kingdom of love and justice extended here on earth.

World Vision is a tremendous Christian organisation which seeks to put into practice the words of Jesus about loving our neighbours as ourselves in a broken and

suffering world. Its ministry in such desperately needy places as Lebanon, Cambodia, Rwanda and Sudan has my wholehearted support.

My daughters and I have participated in the 40 Hour Famine by either going without food for the 40 hours, or sponsoring others to do so. This is a practical way of experiencing some deprivation for a short while and, more importantly, providing much needed funding for World Vision's strategic work amongst the world's poor.

*Michael Frost  
Baptist Theological College, NSW*

## Uneasy the head...

The Victorian government has a duty to maintain all the original provisions of Crown Casino's licence. Crown should be treated like any business. Having made undertakings, they must fulfil them.

Nobody forced Crown to apply for the licence. They willingly agreed to the conditions: generous conditions, including a government-guaranteed monopoly.

Given such an armchair ride, they could hardly fail to prosper. But fail they did. They must live with the consequences.

Now is a good time to reconsider the philosophical question of having a casino at all. Casinos seem to exacerbate unhealthy greed-is-good, money-for-nothing, me-first mentalities in the community – a terrible example to our young generation. If I had my way there would be no casino.

*Arnold Jago  
Mildura, Vic*

## Harmonious heresy

I am writing to you in response to your editorial in AP (March issue), concerning the bewilderment and hurt in the Presbyterian Church caused by the changes introduced into our form of worship, among other things. I would like to thank you for so frankly confronting this very vexing problem and I hope that some very positive outcome will result.

As a member of the Presbyterian Church, I have taken great comfort from the fact that we are a confessional church, that our authority for everything is the infallible Word of God, and that as a fellowship of believers we come before God on His day to worship Him and bow down before Him, acknowledging His greatness and goodness.

I know that change is inevitable, but the

basis of our denomination and of our faith does not change and cannot change, based as it is on the teachings and promises of God through His book, the Bible.

I also realise that much of the division comes from the introduction of new music. I agree that all music was new some time, but when it comes to music used in a worship service, it must be carefully scrutinised to make sure that it is not frivolous, unbiblical or hard to sing. Ministers would be horrified if asked to preach heresy but innocently allow near-heresy to be sung.

The plight of our denomination is critical. Unless we address and remedy the ills afflicting us, we will surely pass into insignificance or worse. Pray God that we, His servants, wake up soon and get down to the great task we were given by Jesus to proclaim His word and not to be sidetracked by innovations.

*Mrs Dorothy Posthuma  
Toowoomba, Qld*

## New age, old weakness

It is often said that when you drive through the main street of Woop Woop don't blink or you'll miss it. In my journey through life I must have blinked, for on 28 to 30 July a conference called the Religion and Cultural Diversity Conference was held in Parliament House, Melbourne.

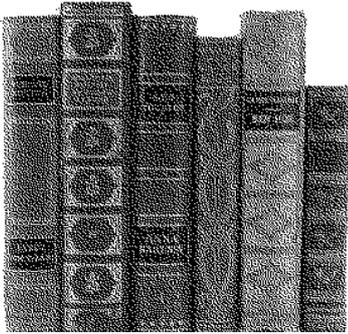
The conference was attended by such church dignitaries as Cardinal Francis Arinze, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth, and the Assistant Bishop of Perth, David Murray. Also in attendance were prominent politicians, among them John Howard and Kim Beazley. The New Age movement was prominent. These speakers concurred that no one knows God – that God is unknowable. The conference agreed that no religion has a monopoly on truth. Obviously, the Christianity I have known is being watered down.

The conference concluded that we must accept that Jesus Christ is just another version of the unknowable God. We must all undergo inter-faith dialogue and education. (for "education" read "brainwashing").

Christ is again being betrayed by his friends. There were many Judases at that conference. Why are we ashamed to proclaim that Jesus is the one and only way to God? We must be alert to the spirit of betrayal.

*Ron Fischer  
Talbot, Victoria*

# books



## The Complete Who's Who in the Bible

Paul Gardner ed  
London: Marshall Pickering 1995  
*Reviewed by David Streater*

The subtitle on the jacket claims that the book is an "exhaustive listing of all the characters in the Bible". The reviewer's reaction was to take the biblical name of one of his forefathers, Ragau, and check to see whether this appeared in the alphabetical order in which the work has been arranged; it did not. Whatever happened to Ragau? According to Young's Analytical Concordance of the Bible Ragau was the "father of Saruch an ancestor of Jesus" (Luke 3:35).

However, this minor point really draws attention to the strengths of the book. It is much more than an exhaustive list of names minus Ragau. There are articles on various subjects which raise this book from an easy man's guide to names in the Bible to a condensed Biblical theology, and therein lies its usefulness.

The book is easy to handle and to store, which Young's Analytical Concordance is certainly not. It is an aid to the stressed student, the plodding preacher and the interested lay person. As it is in alphabetical order, there is no difficulty in turning up the relevant name or subject and extracting the information which is clearly and concisely set out. Paul Gardner has assembled a team of experts, both pastoral and academic, who are able to convey biblical facts and theology in a clear way.

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## The Roaring of the Lion

### A Commentary on Amos

By Ray Beeley  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

This is a vigorous little work which first saw the light of day in 1970. The relevance of these studies is, if anything, even greater now than when they were first published. Each chapter has helpful comments on the biblical verses, then a series of meditations. Amos was an uncompromising prophet who stood against the spiritual complacency of his own times. Ray Beeley has captured his spirit well, and produced a work which is ideal for both personal and group Bible study. It is heartily recommended.

## The Church

By Edmund Clowney  
Leicester: IVP, 1995.  
*Reviewed by Dr D. Eryl Davies*

Here is a book you should read – immediately! It is a thoroughly biblical, stimulating, contemporary and helpful study of the Church. It is certainly contemporary, for the author pursues his subject in the context of pluralism, secularism, ecumenism, Vatican II, evangelical resurgence, the charismatic movement which "all compel us to consider the doctrine of the Church".

The author's reformed emphasis is immediately apparent in chapter 2 where he adopts a "full Trinitarian approach" and considers the Church as the people of God with a strong Old Testament background and continuity. The principal New Testament term for Church, *ekklesia*, looks back to the covenant event of Sinai; the Church is further described as "God's assembly", not congregation, "God's dwelling" and "God's chosen".

Chapter 3 discusses the way we are to understand the "dramatic changes" from the Old to the New, and chapters 4 and 5 deal with the fellowship and gift of the Spirit.

From chapter 6, the author begins to look at the characteristics of the Church, emphasising its apostolicity, unity, holiness and catholicity. Clowney endorses the Reformers' position regarding the marks of the Church but has a welcome emphasis on

the community of believers and the importance of church membership.

In chapters 10 to 12, Clowney reminds us that the Church is called to serve God in three ways: "to serve Him directly in worship, to serve the saints in nurture and to serve the world in witness". The elements of worship "are simple ... neither sterile nor dull", and include preaching the Word, prayer and song – "dancing is nowhere mentioned in connection with New Testament worship".

Chapter 14 should be compulsory reading for all church leaders as the author discusses the structure of Christ's Church for looking at its authority and offices. Clowney has a high view of elders but officers are "servant-managers".

The final two chapters discuss the issue of signs and wonders, and sacraments. We are reminded that "historic controversies about the sacraments are still with us". Yes, the book is worth buying; reading.

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## In the Faithful Hands of Another

By John Mercer  
Melbourne: Onesimus Press, 1998  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

I first came across the name of John Searle in Vanuatu when I discovered his commentary on John's Gospel, entitled *Light, Life and Life*, edited by the late Rev E.L. Sykes. John Searle was the second principal of Melbourne Bible Institute (now the Bible College of Victoria), having succeeded the Rev C.H. Nash who retired at the end of 1942.

John Searle's ministry (he was a Presbyterian minister) was characterised by integrity, prayerfulness, evangelical concern, an earnest commitment to biblical truth, and devotion to his Divine Master.

Rev John Mercer, who was a student at MBI under John Searle and maintained links with him and his family, is well-placed to write this biography. He tells the story of John Searle's life with a deft touch, although at times he seems to hint at more than he reveals. The result is an illustration of Alexander MacLaren's comment that "the only life worth looking back upon is a life of Christian devotion and effort". John Searle exemplified that principle, and his biography deserves to be well-known and widely read.

The book is available from Onesimus Press, PO Box 6456, St Kilda Road Central, Vic 3004 

# Home advantage

*John Oakley outlines a common but profoundly difficult problem for missionaries.*

*Robert Benn, national director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission, recently visited Dr John and Jo Oakley and family at the Rumginae Hospital in the Western Province of Papua-New Guinea. They are members of the Gosford congregation in NSW and are struggling with a very normal missionary issue which John describes.*

**O**ur present term will be complete in July, but we are hoping to stay until the end of the year. Should we conclude our service at that time or come back for more? We are not finding it easy to decide. I will share with you some of the issues.

The need here is so great that it is hard to ignore it, but I am getting very tired of the heat and the many frustrations I experience in the work.

When I am back in Australia people say to me things like "you must really enjoy living in PNG" (read between the lines, "...to keep working in such a place"). I am usually lost for words at that point because they expect a simple "yes" answer.

But my internal response is a little different. "Actually I don't 'enjoy' living here. I would much rather live in Australia." Working here, I face constant frustrations with a different approach to life and time which does not fit well with medical care and running a hospital. We are constantly banging our heads against a wall in dealing with bureaucracy. We are constantly facing breakdown of equipment, problems with getting essential supplies, problems with our personnel, etc. Then there are the hot afternoons when it is an effort to drag oneself around in the heat and humidity. There are the deep disappointments of losing patients because of lack of diagnostic and therapeutic facilities. (Our budget for health care comes to about \$A5 a year per head of population!)

Yet, on the other hand, the ministry satisfaction can be unparalleled. When I see a mother and baby saved from death in childbirth; when I see a young child recover from TB, meningitis, or a young father recover from a potentially fatal mauling by a wild pig; when I see people come to Christ or recommit themselves to his service, it is pure joy. I get so excited when I see a young Christian health worker whom we have trained and disciplined go out as a



medical missionary into a remote place.

All life has ups and downs, but in the life of the missionary I think the troughs are lower and the peaks higher, or so it seems in my limited experience.

So, do I enjoy being here? I wouldn't have swapped it for anything, but I don't know how much more I can take! I have been understanding a little of what Paul has to say about the heights and depths of apostolic ministry in 2 Corinthians, though his experience and calling were a bit out of our league!

Jo and I have struggled with health problems made worse by the climate and high level of infectious diseases in the area, such as malaria. We know the Christian walk was never meant to be a trouble-free holiday, and we cannot expect perfect health here or in Australia, but we are struggling with knowing how long we should stick it out and how wise we are to be compromising our health by being here.

As a doctor, if someone came to me and asked my professional advice about a situation like ours, I would advise them not to return to the field.

"If God has a job for you to do he will give you the strength." It sounds good advice, but if Paul had followed it he would have never left Antioch. Rather, he gloried in his weakness and found God used it to show His strength in his life. Yes, I've experienced that too. Against my medical advisers' instructions I have stayed up all night struggling, with all the strength that God gives, to save the lives of mother and child. But I've been left flat for weeks after-

wards as a result.

I've just been challenged by a biography of Henry Martin. What an example he was of persistence despite poor health! But he pushed himself too hard in the end and failed to win the goal of publishing the Arabic NT in Arabia (having already done the Urdu/Hindustani in India and the Persian in Persia). Even so, I'm sure he is enjoying his reward in Heaven.

However, in one sense I think I cannot be guided only by examples like Paul and Henry Martin, since I have a family to care for. Should they come into consideration? Of course! The girls are not suffering from being here – quite the opposite. Frances and Heather are very happy here and not disadvantaged. Heather has just told me that we shouldn't even have a furlough, because the people here need me too much.

I have no clear vision or sense of call for any particular work in Australia, though I want to be available for ministry in the Church in some way. As far as the work here is concerned, I am really keen to see it continue. What I really want is for someone to take my place. It is hard to walk away from a good work done to Christ's glory when it looks like it will fall down without you. Yes, I know, that is worldly thinking. God is not dependent on me to do His work.

*So, that's the struggle. We thank John for sharing it with us. It will help us in supportive prayer.*

Robert Benn.



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# Why plant churches?

*Ian Smith*

**A**t the beginning of this year, while on holidays, my wife and I decided that 1998 was going to be a year when things would happen. We were concerned at the apparent decline in membership of the Presbyterian Church in Australia. We therefore decided that our theme word for 1998 would be “grunt”.

Though we knew it would upset people, we renewed our vision for evangelism and church planting. We are committed to the fact that where the people of God are actively engaged in evangelism, churches will be planted; and if churches are planted, the people of God will be engaged in evangelism. Instead of just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, so the people of God can be comfortably seated each Sunday morning, it is time to do something new. It was time to show some “grunt”.

You may ask, Why do we need to be active in church planting when most of our churches are only half-full (or half-empty)? It's not as though we have an over-crowding problem! Good question – let me answer metaphorically. What do you do if you find that termites have attacked the rafters under the floor of your house? The first thing you do is eradicate the termites before they do any further damage.

The sad history of the Presbyterian Church in Australia is that for many years we have had the foundations eaten away by liberal teaching. Before church union in 1977, a significant percentage of people in leadership positions in our denomination were denying some of the central tenets of the faith: doctrines such as the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ, justification by grace alone through faith alone, and the reality of judgment and hell for those who do not know Christ.

Since Church Union we have been redefining our theological position. If you like, we have been sharpening our theological pencil. The way I see it, we have been stopping the termites, and 20 years later we have largely arrested their spread.

So what do we do now with the half-eaten rafter under our house? We need to get a strong healthy piece of wood and fasten it next to the half-eaten rafter – not to weaken the original rafter but to strengthen



it. Church planting should never be done in such a way that it saps the established church of vitality.

As I read the book of Acts, I see that the apostle Paul needed a pretty high level of “grunt” as he was involved in his missionary tours. He was rejected by the establishment for trying to have a church that was attractive to outsiders. The Jewish establishment was more concerned with keeping their distinctives of food laws and circumcision. Gentiles were allowed in if they became Jews, but the comfort of the establishment was paramount.

The genius of Paul is that he understood that the Church was not to define itself against the outsider, but to serve the outsider. Paul was not going to make the same mistake as the people of the Old Testament, who forgot that at the very centre of the covenant was the fact that the people of God are to be a light to the nations. And if this required a bit of grunt, so be it.

It required rebuking the Apostle Peter in public (Gal 2:11-14); it required Paul taking the issue of Gentile inclusion in the Church to the General Assembly (Acts 15); it required setting up church services in a community hall after he was thrown out of the synagogue (Acts 19:1-10). For Paul, the primary issue was not keeping the status quo but being obedient to the commission of Christ by taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). And the end result of this was that the mother congregation in Jerusalem benefited from the church plants, especially as the

daughter churches in far away Macedonia supported the mother church at a time of famine. A healthy rafter should strengthen an existing rafter.

And so Paul encouraged others to join him in this important venture of planting churches: men like Silas, Timothy, Epaphras and Titus. Together they established churches in prominent centres like Ephesus, Colossae and Corinth. They preached in market places, public halls – even at a river-side prayer meeting. They were not bound to religious buildings, they were happy to think outside the traditional box. Paul was keen to live as a Gentile among Gentiles in order to bring them to Christ (1 Cor 9). And in all of this, he did not compromise the truth of the Gospel.

Are we prepared to follow in the example of Paul? If we are, then evangelism will inevitably lead to church planting, and church planting will lead to evangelism. It will upset people, especially those who are very comfortable with their current deck chair. But the ultimate question is not whether we are making our people feel comfortable, but whether we are seeing people converted and incorporated into the people of God.

We need to look at what we are currently doing at church and evaluate whether we are a group that defines itself against the outsider or a group that seeks to reach those who do not know Christ. Is your Bible study group closed to the outsider or have you thought about using this group as a vehicle for evangelism? What about Sunday school and youth work, are they there only for the children of church families? Have you thought about having a guest service at your church, where everyone is asked to bring a non-Christian friend to hear an evangelistic talk? After all, if everyone brought just one friend, the church would double! And if our churches continued to grow, we would have to think seriously about planting new churches!

It's time to start thinking strategically, it's time to show some “grunt”.

*Ian Smith is lecturer in New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, NSW. He recently toured South Africa and the USA as an observer of church planting and evangelistic outreach in Atlanta, New York and Capetown.* 

# The corporate cannibals

*Something is rotten when the only sin is not to maximise profit, writes Barney Zwartz.*

‘A young healthy Child well Nursed is at a year Old a most delicious nourishing and wholesome Food, whether Stewed, Roasted, Baked or Boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a Fricasie, or a Ragoust.’

So wrote Jonathan Swift in his 1729 satire *A Modest Proposal*, in which he suggested the appalling poverty obvious on Dublin’s streets could be ended by harvest

The benefits would be manifold. Not only would it be a novel delicacy for those who could afford it – “the Carcass of a good fat Child will make four Dishes of excellent Nutritive Meat,” noted Swift – but the skin could be used for such luxuries as ladies’ gloves and gentlemen’s boots.

Parents would be given means and motive to support their families, while the streets would be rid of the eyesore of starving women and children. In time, the number of Catholics (“the principal Breeders”) would be greatly reduced. It would be an inducement to marriage and even to more tender domestic relationships, for – as a source of income – wives and children would be cherished rather than abused.

Not least – and of particular interest to today’s economic theorists – it would greatly increase the national wealth by assigning a book value to children; it would put more money into circulation; and, by weeding out those most likely to need it, dramatically reduce the sum spent on social welfare.

Swift intended it as a savage irony about the rape of Ireland by absentee English landlords, who saw but one purpose for that benighted nation: revenue. In fact, as an exercise of logical rationality guided by the sole consideration of efficiency, it is a wonderful model of economic rationalism in action. Australia is governed by the corporate cannibals.

Big businesses are often as ruthless as the law will allow. To leave undone anything that could increase profit, regardless of social cost, is seen as irresponsible. Worse, it is immoral, in a world in which failure to maximise profit is almost the only sin to qualify as immoral.

That is why Australia’s banks have closed hundreds of branches and shed tens of thousands of jobs in the past few years, at enormous cost to families and rural towns and despite record profits. The tri-



partite responsibility they once recognised to staff, community and shareholders has shrunk to just the latter.

Education is conceived purely in terms of function. The people enrolled at university are no longer students, according to one Sydney vice-chancellor, but customers. This is an entirely different relationship – and, the customer is never wrong.

It’s the same story in health, where the “consumers” are no longer patients but procedures. Case-mix dictates that they be processed as fast and cheaply as possible.

Economic rationalism demands a religious fervor. Profit is God, and efficiency is his prophet. It has to reduce people to units, and values to the bottom line. It demands the ruthless subordination of moral and social considerations to those of the accountant. As its failures mount – for example, huge profits have led to fewer jobs, not more – its advocates claim that this is because we haven’t gone far enough.

But economic rationalism is unsatisfactory because it has an atrophied, unbiblical view of what it means to be human. It supposes that we are purely rational beings who find deepest satisfaction in competing. Take this line far enough, and we’re back in Thomas Hobbes’ war of every man against every man, where life is “nasty, brutish and short” – but even the strongest must sleep!

In fact, we are not like that, and never were.

Christians know that we are made in the image of God, a rich concept that has an impact on every area of life. It means that we are rational agents and moral ones – and that our moral side is as central as our thinking side. It means that we are made to enjoy fellowship with God and with each other, to whom we are mutually responsi-

ble and accountable. It means that we plan and make goals, that we appreciate duty and beauty. We value, and will, and love, and imagine, and are deeply moved. All these factors separate us from the animals – but the energetic pursuit of self-interest does not. All the beasts that God made do that.

In fact, even the rational part of us is something the economic rationalists have misunderstood. Reason is a much fuller faculty than they admit. Paul says we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and by that he doesn’t mean simply thinking more clearly about how to realise economic goal

Reason is our central tool for understanding the world, and our place in it under God. Reason helps us shape our values, and pursue them. We use reason to produce our economic theories, but we don’t use reason when we let these theories rule us.

What ardent economic rationalists (among others) forget is that economic theory is the servant of the society that holds it; the community is not hostage to the theory. An economic theory is only a means, not the end.

The Bible does not endorse any particular economic theory, but it has much to say about the responsibilities of those who have to those who do not. The law of Jubilee (Lev 25) in particular limits any right of economic exploitation. The Bible also condemns lending money at interest (Ps 15:5, Prv 28:8, Ezek 18:8, 13, 17, 22:12), in a context of opposing oppression.

We need to listen again to Amos: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed” (2:6,7).

What Swift proposed is perfectly economically rational, but it’s appalling. And that this is true – that there is still a gulf between what is logical and what we accept – shows that reason does recognise its limits.

That is why the economic rationalist agenda will ultimately devour itself. Australia’s cannibals – so far – are only corporate.

*Barney Zwartz is a journalist with The Age in Melbourne, and is doing his PhD in moral philosophy.*