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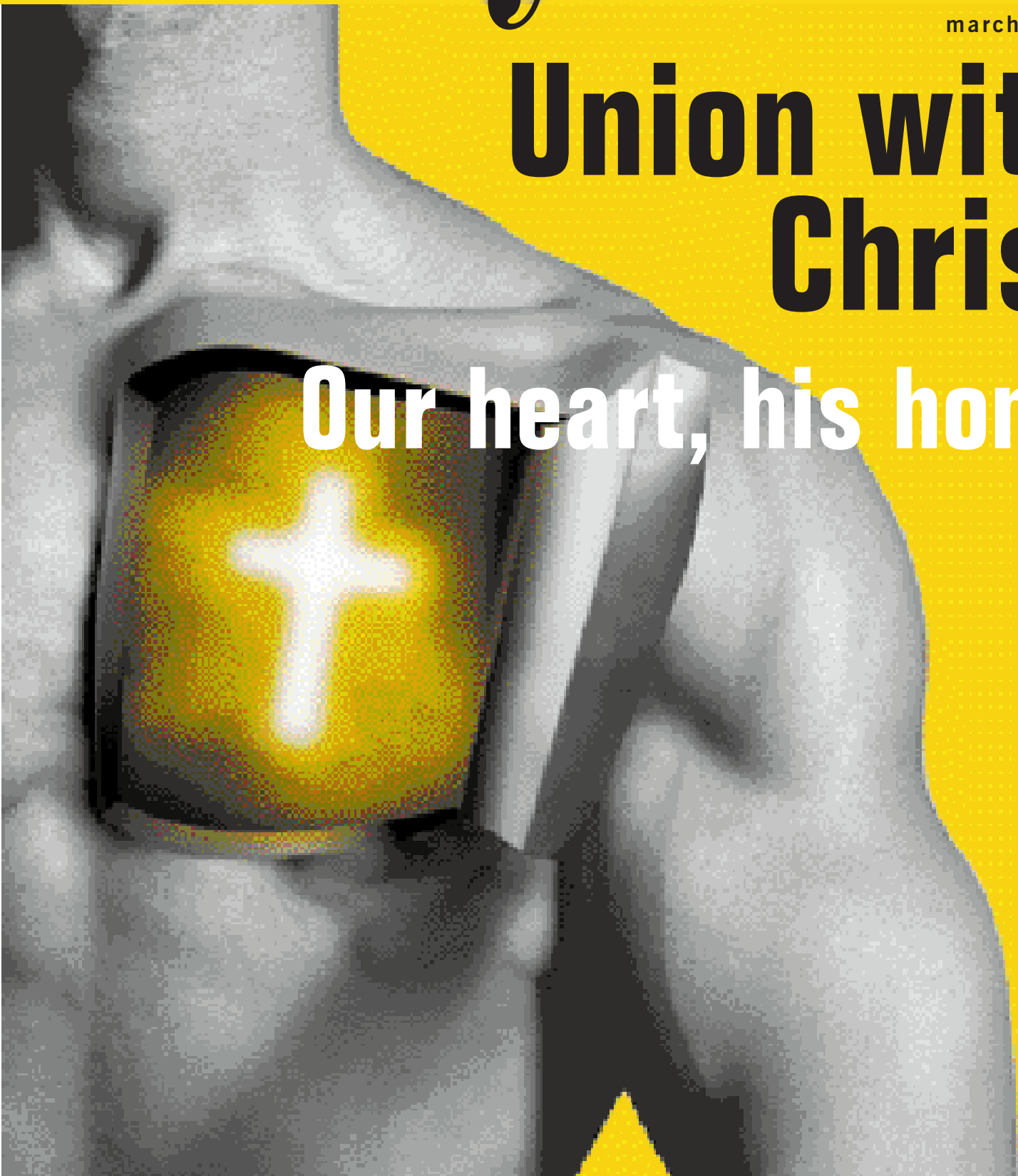
Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

march 2000

Union with Christ

Our heart, his home



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Jews, like all the saved, must be circumcised in the heart.

The Church directory will appear next month.

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The heart of the faith

In this issue of Australian Presbyterian we have decided to explore what John Calvin regarded as perhaps his most significant contribution to theology: the doctrine of union with Christ. In his ninth sermon on the Passion, he declares: "In this sense, then let us know the unity that we have with our Lord Jesus Christ, to wit, that he wills to have a common life with us ... that he even wishes to dwell in us, not in imagination, but in effect, not in earthly fashion but spiritually."

Why should we examine this issue afresh? Because Calvin's words call us back to the heart of the Christian faith, which is friendship with God. Sadly, the atmosphere of the last century has been suffocatingly filled with man and desperately short on God. The emphasis, even in the evangelical Church, has been on frenetic activism and ministry while being correspondingly low on communion with Christ.

Of course, this is not an either-or issue. Ministry finds its energy and impetus when a believer knows, loves and enjoys Christ. Where two persons are deeply in love with each other, their interests merge. And since Christ came to serve, those who love him will be enthusiastic in their service. Nevertheless, they will not forget that fruitful ministry always depends on a deepening friendship with Christ. As Jesus said: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Fellowship with Christ should be the

hallmark of our lives. After all, was this not the supreme goal of Jesus' prayers? "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory ... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them". (John 17:24,26) Here we discover the nature of the fellowship that the Lord seeks with us. It is intensely personal. In some circles today the dignity of Christ's person has received such stress that a proportionate presentation has not been given of the intimacy that he desires with us. This should remind us that it's possible to so focus on the lordship of Jesus that we almost lose sight of his friendship.

For fellowship to take place with Christ, we must be made aware of certain realities. The first is that for fellowship to occur, the person must be real and present to us. Obviously fellowship is impossible if that person is dead or distant. Peter Hastie's article on the Abiding Presence reminds us that the Gospels and the Book of Acts present us with a living Christ who seeks our fellowship.

Again, if we are to enjoy a close relationship with another, we must have free access to them. We must be able to approach them confidently, undeterred by formalities and fears. In his article on union with Christ, Douglas Milne explains what God has done to ensure that we can experi-

ence the indwelling Christ in our hearts.

Finally, if there is to be a real fellowship, it must be a fellowship in truth, where there is no pretence, dissembling or insincerity. Robert Munger's famous article 'My heart - Christ's home' invites us to welcome Christ into our lives by preparing ourselves to live with a holy guest.

Sadly, there are some today who make fellowship with Christ a low priority. Others think that it's almost unattainable and consists solely of mystical or ecstatic experiences enjoyed on spiritual retreats. Were that the case, Paul would never have written to the Corinthians: "God ... has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9). The Corinthians were hardly living unblemished lives when Paul wrote to them. And some of them had notorious reputations before their conversion (1 Cor. 6:9-11). But nevertheless the apostle Paul was moved to say "God ... has called you into fellowship with his Son". He calls us too.

Peter Hastie

From the Convener

Recently our editorial board met in Sydney to discuss the direction of your magazine. We were heartened by the news that in 1999 80 new subscribers joined our ranks. We listened to your positive comments (which were many), and also learnt from your criticism (which was constructive). Our aim is always to make the magazine better so that it enriches you and helps the wider church. Please encourage ministers, elders and members of your churches to subscribe. The more who do so, the better we can make the magazine.

This issue we are publishing a controversial article on discipline by Dr Peter Barnes. At a time when state and federal governments are seeking to interfere in a dangerous way with discipline in our homes and schools, we need to heed Dr Barnes' warnings.

*Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee*



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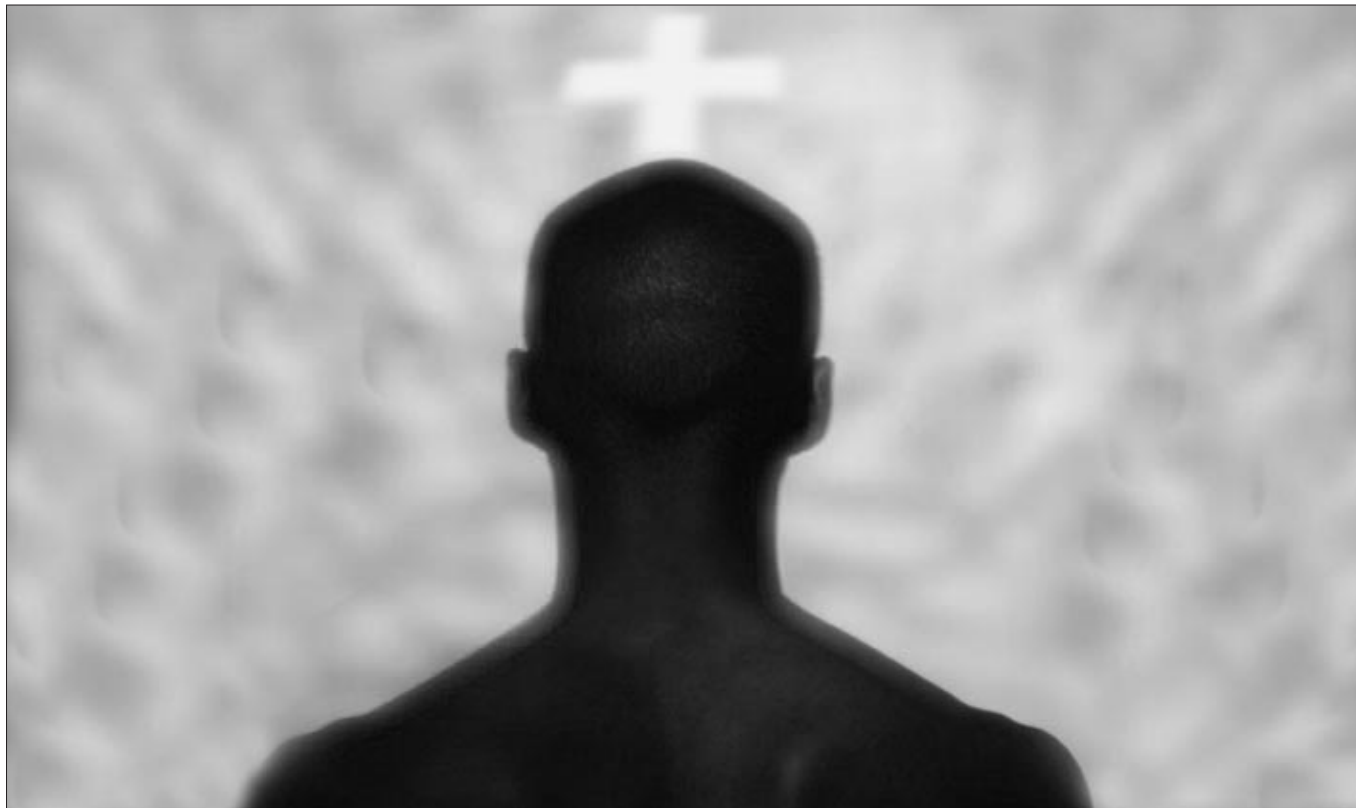
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Hero worship

But Jesus is always present, always the main actor.



Can you imagine what it's like being a recently hired employee of a large company like Microsoft? There are thousands of people in the organisation, some of whom have been there with Bill Gates from the very beginning. But not you. You're a new boy on the block. You don't know the boss personally. You'll probably never even get to see him.

From the very first day on the job, you're impressed with the way Microsoft does things. You enjoy the pleasant work environment, the emphasis on teamwork and the energy and creativity that go with computers. In fact, you're so switched on by the company that you go and buy Bill Gates' autobiography and a number of books about him.

You read company manuals that are written by him, you applaud him at company meetings, but sadly you never see him. You never meet him at a lift entrance; he never visits your office. You feel as though you know the guy really well, but there are other days when you wonder whether he exists at all. After all, you've never set eyes on him. And he's never written you a personal letter or spoken to you on the phone.



Peter Hastie

The experience of some who work for very high-profile entrepreneurs like Bill Gates is similar to the spiritual experience of many Christians. We can know a lot about the boss we work for, but actually meeting him and developing a personal friendship with him is something that we write-off as an impossibility. We figure that knowing our hero from a distance is about as good as it gets.

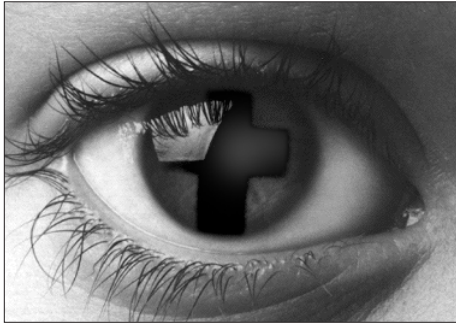
But should it be this way? Recently, I began reading Martin Gilbert's monumental biography of Sir Winston Churchill. Gilbert is a masterful story-teller who is able to recreate scene after scene in Churchill's many-sided life with such reality that you often feel as though you were there. I still have vivid memories of the

defiant and cigar-chomping statesman throwing down the gauntlet to Hitler. I feel that I have a sense of the inner-workings of his mind. But a personal relationship with him? Sadly, no. Even if he were still alive, I could only know him from a distance.

However, this is not the case with Christ. We can know Jesus personally. The Gospels differ from other biographies such as those on Churchill because they are not simply the account of a long-dead hero. Each of them concludes, not with a death-bed scene, but with a resurrection appearance. Matthew's Gospel, for instance, closes with this astounding statement: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20). It's hard, therefore, to speak of the Gospels as Jesus' memoirs or remains. After all, he's still alive and present with us.

In this sense, the Gospels function differently from other biographies. They are not simply a record of what a famous man once did and thought, they are also an invitation and the means by which we can begin a relationship with him.

When I pick up Gilbert's work on Churchill, I feel a sense of sadness that the world has lost such a far-sighted and pene-



trating visionary. Churchill's death spelt the end of his presence and his service to others. None of us, not even his biographer, can maintain a personal and living fellowship with him now.

But with Jesus it's different. I can pick up the Gospels – concluding as they do with the remarkable promise, "I am with you always" – and become immediately aware of his presence. This is the story of one who was "dead but is now alive for ever and ever" (Rev 1:18). He never changes. He is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

In other words, here in the Gospels I am given a personal introduction to the Chief. As I read the Gospels, I am not simply dealing with events which are long past and gone. Christ is with me helping me enter into the experiences that are recorded here so they are no longer dead history for me. Everything becomes alive because Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to remain with me forever. He dwells in me and with me so that I experience Jesus' presence continually (John 14:16,17).

In this sense, being a Christian is far more than believing a creed or following a code. It

goes beyond having "a worldview". Ultimately it's about fellowship with Christ, "to know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (Phil 3:10).

It took me some time to come to grips with this perspective. I suppose that one of the reasons for this was that I am a committed evangelical who believes in the blood atonement of Christ. One of the truths that is precious to me is the doctrine of the finished work of Christ. This is the teaching that Christ's saving work was completed in his death and resurrection. Nothing further can be done to remove my sin (Heb 10:10,12).

In this sense, the phrase "the finished work of Christ" is a useful one to protect an important truth. But it very subtly coloured my thinking to think of Jesus as a hero who has now retired from the scene. And nothing could be further from the truth. He is still alive, still active and still involved in his unfinished business. I learned this from Luke.

Some years ago I was reading the Book of Acts and I tripped over the very first verse: "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven" (1:1). The word *began* started to trouble me. Why did Luke include it? Why didn't he begin with a past tense: "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught –"? Surely Jesus had finished all his work, hadn't he?

I checked up the text. There was no question that Luke intended began to be there. It was emphatic. Obviously Jesus hadn't retired

from the scene at all. The Commander-in-Chief was on the battle-field directing operations. He's still alive.

Slowly it began to dawn on me how utterly different Christianity was to every other world religion. Confucius, Buddha and Mohammed all ceased to take an active role in their religious movements when they died. Luke says that the death-resurrection-ascension of Jesus was only the beginning of his work in rescuing God's lost children. In other words, the promise that Jesus will be present with us is as good today as it was in the first century. He is still actively gathering in his people.

I have a hunch that this view of Acts – that it's the account of the living Christ building his church – explains the relationship of the beginning of the book to its end. At the start Luke announces that Acts is the ongoing story of Jesus' teaching and deeds. When he concludes, he leaves us with a scene of Paul under house arrest in Rome preaching and teaching the gospel. The end seems abrupt, almost as though it's been sawn-off. We are given no details about what happened to Paul. Did he ever reach Spain? How did he die? Luke is silent and deliberately so. Acts is not about the lives of the apostles. Its focus is on the ongoing work of the contemporary Christ. The story is never-ending.

I felt confirmed in my new understanding of the book as I read on. I began to see at every point how Jesus is the principal actor in each episode. Luke seems to refer everything to the living Christ. For instance, when the church is forced to find a replacement for Judas among the apostles, they pray to Jesus: "Lord, show us which of these two you have chosen" (1:24). Of course, "Lord" could refer to God the Father. But it is more likely a reference to Jesus because the words "you have chosen" recall the fact that it was he who chose the Twelve.

Again, when Peter takes the opportunity to explain the strange happenings at Pentecost, he tells the crowd that it was Jesus who was behind the coming of the Spirit: "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (2:33). And as new converts are gathered into the church after the sermon, Luke tells us that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (2:47).

Days later Jesus demonstrates his presence again in the Temple by healing the crippled beggar. Peter disavows any special power or godliness as the cause for the man's recovery. Rather "it is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him" (3:16). Although unseen, Jesus' presence is powerful and active.

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My heart – Christ's home

Robert Boyd Munger shares a dwelling with the Lord.

This is especially so in the account of Stephen, and then of Saul. As Stephen dies, he sees Jesus standing to receive him into heaven and calls out to him (7:55,56,59). Likewise in the story of Saul's conversion on the Damascus road, Jesus confronts him with a personal appearance. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you?" Saul asks. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," he replied (9:4,5). Three days later Jesus appeared to Ananias and gave him specific instructions about caring for Saul (9:10-15).

The list of Jesus' activities goes on and on. He heals Aeneas (9:34) and opens Lydia's heart to the gospel (16:14). There seems to be nothing that he cannot and does not do to advance the gospel. Everywhere in the Book of Acts Jesus appears as the one pulling the strings and making it all happen. He works miracles and confirms his work. The apostles and others are tools in his hands. The Book of Acts underscores the fact that we are dealing with a living Christ and not a dead hero or cult-figure. This ought to be a challenge to our conception of the Christian faith and leads me to reflect on two consequences:

First, it challenges me to examine the nature of my faith. Do I believe that Christianity is essentially a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ? As I have re-read the New Testament, I have been struck by how far removed faith in Jesus is from formal and lifeless religion. Christ's great object is to dwell in the believer's heart. Listen to his repeated statements: "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you" (John 14:18). "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

Indeed, Paul prays for the Ephesians that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). Unless our Christianity consists of a growing relationship and love for Jesus, we have missed the mark. It is not enough to believe a creed and follow a code in order to call yourself a Christian.

Second, we must never be discouraged about the state of the church. Peter and Paul are both dead. So are great churchmen like Athanasius, Augustine, Luther and Calvin. The deaths of great men and their removal from the scene should not trouble us. Why? Because Jesus lives. If the Book of Acts was the history of Peter and Paul it would end on a gloomy note with Paul in prison. But as the story of the continuing work of the risen Christ, it is an inspiration to press on even though we are living in a dark age and a day of small things. For even when the forces of evil surround us, we can lay hold of Christ's promise "Surely I am with you, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

ap

In Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, we find these words: "That [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:16). Or, as another has translated, "That Christ may settle down and be at home in your hearts by faith."

Without question one of the most remarkable Christian doctrines is that Jesus Christ himself through the presence of the Holy Spirit will actually enter a heart, settle down and be at home there. Christ will make the human heart his abode.

The disciples could not understand this. How could it be?

Then came Pentecost. The Spirit of the living Christ was given to the church and they understood. God did not dwell in Herod's temple in Jerusalem! God did not dwell in a temple made with hands; but now, through the miracle of the out-poured Spirit, God would dwell in human hearts. The body of the believer would be the temple of the living God and the human heart would be the home of Jesus Christ.

It is difficult for me to think of a higher privilege than to make for Christ a home in my heart, to welcome, to serve, to please, to fellowship with him there. One evening that I shall never forget, I invited him into my heart.

What an entrance he made! It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but very real. It was at the very centre of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire in the cold hearth and banished the chill.

In the joy of that new-found relationship, I said to him, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. Everything I have belongs to you. Let me show you around."

The first room was the study – the library. Now in my home this room of the mind is a very small room with very thick walls. But it is an important room. He entered with me and looked around

at the books in the bookcase, the magazines upon the table, the pictures on the wall. As I followed his gaze, I became uncomfortable. There were some books there that his eyes were too pure to behold. There was a lot of trash on the table that a Christian had no business reading and as for the pictures on the wall – the imaginations and thoughts of my mind – these were shameful.

I turned to him and said, "Master, will you help me make this room what it ought to be – to bring every thought into captivity to you?"

"Gladly will I help you," he said. "Take all the things that you are reading and seeing which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Now put on the empty shelves the books of the Bible. As for the pictures on the wall, you will have difficulty controlling these images, but here is an aid." He gave me a full-sized portrait of himself. "Hang this centrally," he said, "on the wall of the mind."

I have discovered through the years that when my thoughts are centred upon Christ himself, his purity and power cause impure imaginations to retreat.

From the study we went into the dining room, the room of appetites and desires. Now this was a very large room. I spent a good deal of time in the dining room and much effort in satisfying my wants.

When the food was placed before him, he said nothing, but he did not eat it. I asked why. He answered, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And there about the table he gave me a taste of doing God's will. What a flavour! There is no food like it in all the world. It alone satisfies.

We walked next into the drawing room. This room was rather intimate and comfortable. I liked it, and he also seemed pleased with it. "Let us come here often. It is secluded and quiet and we can have fellowship together."

Well, naturally, I was thrilled. I could

not think of anything I would rather do than have a few minutes apart with Christ in intimate comradeship.

But little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, this time began to be shortened. One morning as I rushed past, the drawing room door was ajar and I saw the Lord sitting there. In dismay, I thought to myself, "he was my guest. I had invited him into my heart! And yet here I am neglecting him."

I went in. With downcast glance I said, "Blessed Master, forgive me. Have you been here all these mornings?"

"Yes," he said, "I told you I would be

here every morning." I asked his forgiveness and he readily forgave me, as he does when we are truly penitent.

He said, "The trouble with you is this: you have been thinking of the quiet time, of the Bible study and prayer time, as a factor in your own spiritual progress, but you have forgotten that this hour means something to me also. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at a great cost. I desire your fellowship."

I was hoping he would not ask me about the play room. There were certain friendships, activities and amusements that I wanted to keep for myself. But there came an evening when I was leaving to join some companions and he asked to join me. "Oh," I replied rather awkwardly. "I don't think, Lord, that you would really want to go with us. Let's go out tomorrow night." He said, "I thought when I came into your home we were going to do everything together. We were going to be partners. I want you to know that I am willing to go with you."

That evening I felt wretched. What kind of a friend was I to Christ, when I was deliberately leaving him out of my associations, doing things he would not enjoy? When I returned I went up to talk it over with him. I said, "Lord, I have learned my lesson. I cannot have a good time without you. We will do everything together from now on." Then we went down into the rumpus room of the house and he transformed it.

Then a thought came to me. I said to myself, "I have been trying to keep this heart of mine clear for Christ. I start on one room and no sooner have I cleaned that than another room is dirty. I am so

tired and weary trying to maintain a clean heart and an obedient life. I just am not up to it!" So I ventured a question: "Lord, is there any chance that you would take over the responsibility of the whole house? Would you keep my life where it ought to be?"

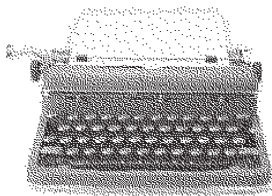
I could see his face light up as he replied, "Certainly, that is what I came to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. Let me do it through you and for you. That is the way. But," he added, "I am not owner of this house. I have no authority to proceed."

Dropping to my knees, I said, "Lord, you have been a guest, and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. You are going to be the Lord." I took the title deed to the house and eagerly signed it over to him alone for time and eternity.

He took my life that day and I can give you my word, there is no better way to live the Christian life. He knows how to keep it in shape and deep peace settles down on the soul. May Christ settle down and be at home in your heart as Lord of all.

Adapted from "My Heart - Christ's Home" by Robert Boyd Munger. ©1986 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com. The full version is available from InterVarsity Press.

Munger has retired from his posts as pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is widely known as the author of My Heart - Christ's Home, with more than 11 million copies in print.



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The most glorious doctrine

Every spiritual blessing comes to us in Christ.

Union with Christ sums up perfectly what it means to be saved. In biblical teaching it looks back into eternity when we were chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4); it includes the historical work of Christ when we died and rose with him (Rom. 6:5); it becomes an actual reality when we believe in Christ and are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13); it inspires and empowers us for daily obedience and works of love (Rom. 7:4); it safeguards us when we come to die (1 Thess. 4:14); and it will ensure that we will be glorified with Christ when he returns (Rom. 8:17).

Truly, "union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation . . . it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and its application. Union with Christ binds all together" (John Murray).

The New Testament uses a number of pictures to help us imagine what this union is really like. It is more than a bond of common interest, as in a social club. It is a bond of being and life that makes us one Spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). It is like the solid oneness between the stones and the foundations of a building (Eph. 2:19-22), the neural communications between the brain and the parts of the body (Eph. 4:15-16), and the organic union between the stem and the branches of a plant (John 15:1-8).

More personally, it is like the intimate, lifelong union between husband and wife (Eph. 5:22-23). Most wonderfully of all, it is like the personal relations between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 17:21-23). There is an outward and an inward side to union with Christ. Outwardly, union with Christ dates from his uniting himself with us in his miraculous human conception. Through his being born into the world he became our human representative in the same way that the first Adam had been (Rom. 5:12-21).

Because Christ lived a wholly obedient human life that ended with the cross (Phil 2:5-8), he has, through his resurrection, ascension, enthronement and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, brought a new creation order into being, to which we now belong as those who are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Inwardly, one writer likens union with Christ to an umbilical cord that ties us



Douglas Milne

to Christ. But the inward union is more than a lifeline, it is Christ himself dwelling in and with us, through and in the Person of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9f). The indwelling Spirit is so closely connected now with the exalted Christ that Paul can virtually identify the two (2 Cor. 3:17). Having the Holy Spirit, which all Christians do, means having the living Christ for our permanent guest.

What difference does and should union with Christ make in everyday living?

First, union with Christ makes the Christian life possible. Christian living is meant to be patterned on Christ's own human life, a hopeless task for us in our own strength. Only Christ can make us Christlike, and he does this by coming in person to live in us and by empowering us from the inside out (Gal. 2:20).

Second, union with Christ is the basis of communion with the separate persons of the Godhead. The goal of salvation is knowing God and living our lives in fellowship with him. Union with Christ brings equal access to the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of a growing friendship of love and closeness between us and the Triune God (John 14:23).

Third, union with Christ is the answer to sin's control. We have been united with Christ at every stage of his redemptive accomplishment. This includes his dying to the controlling power of sin in human nature, and his rising again to a new kind of human life, centred on God and set free for doing God's will. Uniting us with Christ is God's method of grace, so that sin will no longer dominate us (Rom. 6:1-14).

"To the degree that the Christian . . . takes seriously the reality of his Spirit-wrought union with Christ, to that degree he will find his definitive sanctification

coming to actual expression in his experiential or progressive sanctification. The holiness of the Christian's daily walk directly depends upon his union with the Saviour" (Robert Reymond).

Fourth, union with Christ is the way out of physical sins. Our bodies belong to Christ now by right of redemptive purchase. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit, the sphere for glorifying God in this life. There is no need nor excuse for us prostituting our bodies in sinful ways (1 Cor. 6:12-20).

Fifth, union with Christ brings sweet fellowship in suffering. When we suffer we do not suffer alone because Christ is with us and makes our sufferings his own. Our righteous sufferings become the occasion for knowing Christ better, and experiencing more of the power of his resurrection (Phil. 3:10).

Sixth, union with Christ binds all of us together. Being united to Christ means that we are united to one another as his church Body. This is our greatest resource for answering racism, feminism, and classism that create such divisions, even among Christians. It is also the answer to personal rivalries and animosities between Christians. Christ is all and in us all (Col 3:11).

Union with Christ is the bond of the covenant between us and God. It reminds us that every spiritual blessing comes to us in Christ (Eph. 1:3). "There is no more vital, sublime and glorious doctrine than this" (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Douglas Milne is professor of systematic theology at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

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The father figure

Men must be involved for their children to know God.

‘No longer are we going to ask you to do something,’ Bill Cosby told his son one day, “we’re going to tell you that you’d better do it. This is the law of our house: you do what we tell you to do. You’re the one American who isn’t ready for freedom. You don’t function well with it. Do you understand?” “Yes, Dad,” he said.

Entertainers like Bill Cosby were part of a movement in the 1980s that encouraged fathers to be active in rearing their children. Many had grown up in homes where father was the strong, silent provider, while mother did most of the nurturing. The last two decades have seen a serious review of the place of the father in parenting. Many feel that it is not only the child who misses out when the father is a background figure, but the father himself who is deprived.

However, there is a catch! The remedy involves talking, and initiating conversation at home does not come easily to a lot of men. Reading the clever repartee of men like Cosby with his children could be disheartening to some men.

Verbal communication is essential for good relationships. How much or how little we talk to each other is an individual



Marion Andrews

matter. However, more words and better communication do not always go together. The book of Proverbs tells us, “when words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Prov. 27:15). Usually, women and girls find talking easier. Women have traditionally been the talkers in the home, and it may be necessary for us to discipline our tongues in order to make conversation possible for our menfolk.

On the other hand, Proverbs addresses the male reluctance to get involved (Prov. 6). It warns of the dangers of sloth. A father needs to pace himself so that, even after a hard day’s work, he has something left to offer his family. This does not mean he needs to engage in a “deep and meaningful” discussion with each of his children

every night. “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Frequent intrusive attempts to search the thoughts and motives of a child can be like opening the oven every few minutes to see if the cake is cooked.

Moses required fathers to take every opportunity to teach their children godliness. Solomon pleaded with his son to “listen to your father’s instruction” for this reason (Prov. 1:8). Sadly, the generation after Moses “knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Jud. 2:10), and Solomon’s son Rehoboam lost his inheritance through foolishness (1 Kings 12). This should not discourage us from doing the right thing, but remind us that the best parenting in itself is not enough.

Many dads find conversation with their children hard. Children can dominate mealtime conversation with quotes from TV and movie characters like Bart Simpson or Tom Cruise or quips about bodily functions. Our children tried “pig-latin” to keep their parents from hearing what was not good for them.

However, when Dad reaches for the Bibles, and the family open theirs at the right passage, the level of conversation is moved to another plane. At this point, everyone is exposed to the mind of God. For five minutes, the Bible is directed to the heart of man, and takes us to deeper levels of human life. Dad can ask questions that promote discussion. (He may have prepared these earlier.) However, he and his family are all sitting under the search-light of God. A child cannot say, “Dad is having a go at me!” The Holy Spirit can evoke a response that is beyond the best parent.

Many people cannot see the value of family Bible discussion, but it is one way God uses to bring about deep and lasting change within the home. As children grow, it is the joy of the Christian parent to watch them form their own bond with the Lord Jesus.

Parents cement family relationships by being ready to talk with and listen to their children. They nurture their children by reading and explaining God’s word to them. They present their children with the claims of Christ crucified and risen again.

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Faith of our fathers

Bob Mendelsohn tells Peter Hastie about being a fulfilled Jew.

What is a Jew?

A Jew is a descendant of the people with whom God made the covenants in the Old Testament, that is, Abraham, Moses and David. People in Israel today are still scratching their heads trying to figure out who is and who isn't a Jew. When the Russian Jews arrived in Israel in 1986-89, they looked like Eastern European Jews. But they had no Jewishness in them. Nevertheless they were welcomed into the Jewish world without conversion. But when Ethiopian Jews came to Israel in 1994, they had problems. They were black, they had different dietary habits, and they were required to undergo a conversion. So Israel continues to struggle with this question. Most people say a Jew is a person whose mother is Jewish, so it's biological rather than religious lineage that counts. But not every Jew agrees with this. The best definition is: a member of the people descended through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

What is a Christian Jew?

A Christian Jew is a Jewish person like me who has come to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Believing in Jesus is the most Jewish thing a Jew can do.

How many Jews are there?

There are 13.5 million Jewish people around the globe at the moment. There are approximately 5 to 6 million in the USA, 4 million in Israel, about 102,000 here in Australia, and the rest are scattered everywhere. In recent years, we have had an influx of South African and Russian Jews in Australia.

As well, there are parents who have concentration camp numbers on their arms and whose children have had bar-mitzvahs, but who will not confess to being Jewish. For them, the pain of association with Judaism is too great. It brings back memories of the Holocaust. It's easier for some Jews to say: "No, I'm not Jewish. I'm an Aussie."

How has Holocaust affected Jews?

It has left a mark on every Jew in the world. I don't know of one person it hasn't affected. Those who survived the Holocaust fell into one of two groups: the first group are full-on in their faith that



Bob Mendelsohn

God saved them; the other group are committed atheists who are always asking "how could God have left us in the lurch?" People like Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Laureate, fall into this group. So this kind of either-or mentality is present in the survivors.

Children of survivors, or people like me who have had no immediate relatives who were killed, learned a lot about the ghettos and the concentration camps. It's a very big deal here in Australia. There are more Holocaust survivors per capita in Australia than any other country in the world outside Israel. So here in Australia there's a great interest in the Holocaust, and theology is being redone. "What are we going to think about God in the light of the Holocaust? How can we forgive God for what happened?" Interestingly, the focus for many Jews has shifted from the God who forgives to having to actually forgive God himself. That's really bad theology, but this is how many Jews have reacted to their suffering.

Why should Christians be interested in Jews?

Christians read the Bible; the Bible is a Jewish book. If you are interested in Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Paul, you are interested in Jewish people. You have to go a long way into the Bible before you start seeing Gentiles. I think it's only natural that a Christian who reads the Bible is going to absorb its Jewish context. Still, we live 2000 years away from the destruction of the Jewish temple. In our context, the gospel requires us to be interested in all peoples. Jesus said: "Go into all the world and preach to all peoples." That must certainly include the Jews. Christians must be interested in Jewish evangelism.

Did God finish with the Jews after their dispersal in AD 70?

No. While many Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, we mustn't forget that many received him as well. The Jews who wrote the New Testament received the Messiah. There were many thousands of Jews in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria who, according to the Book of Acts, did the same. As John says: "Jesus came to his own." Certainly some of them "received him not". But many did receive him. And it's the same today. Some do; some don't.

So those who would dismiss the whole Jewish people on the basis of what some of their leaders did in AD30 miss the point. God has not finished with the Jewish people.

Do Jews have special spiritual needs?

In one sense, no. All people need the forgiveness of their sins, everyone of us needs the reality of a true relationship with God.

Unfortunately many Christians think of mission in terms of helping the poor and downtrodden. We might think in terms of running a language programme for new English-speakers, or food and shelter programmes for those who are down-and-out. However, Jewish people are not usually poor or downtrodden. That's why some Christians think "What can I offer them?" But we must reach out to the "up and outers" as well as to the "down-and-outers". And when the gospel has its full impact in our lives, it brings us into a full relationship with God by taking away the hindrance of sin. So spiritual need is the pre-eminent issue when dealing with Jewish people.

Are Jews seeking to satisfy their spiritual needs today?

There's a renewed interest in spirituality today among Jews but it's a rather New Age thing. It is not religious devotion to Almighty God as laid out in the Scriptures. It's about personal satisfaction and "feel-goodism". People aren't too worried about how you experience it. They don't mind if you get it at a seance or by chanting an Eastern mantra. Jewish people are at the forefront of those who are searching for spirituality. They are trying to fill the hole in their lives which can only be filled by a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Did Judaism meet any of your needs?

Oh, definitely. As a young person it gave me a sense of community. I had wonderful Jewish friends. We played sport together, chess, goofed off with one another, and had a great time at school and in the synagogue. But all my relationships were horizontal. I had no vertical relationship with God. Judaism is a very social religion that cares for its own, but that's as far as it goes. I really enjoyed my time as a young Jew. I had my bar-mitzvah, kept learning with rabbis and went on Jewish youth camps. Being a Jew was a rich social experience.

So why did you gradually become disillusioned?

It happened around the late '60s, early '70s. I was at university at the time, and it was an age of open-mindedness. I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do, but I was intent on finding meaning for myself. In the USA the hippies were happening, and I became one. Gradually I became disillusioned with Judaism because it couldn't give me what I was really looking for. It didn't satisfy the hunger of my soul.

In the course of my search for truth and meaning, I encountered all sorts of ideologies and theologies. But I found them all wanting. Then in 1971 I met some "Jesus freaks" in Atlanta, Georgia, and they confronted me with the claims of Jesus. I laughed at them at first. They told me to "turn or burn" — a ruinous expression in interacting with non-Christian people. However, this encounter deeply troubled me because I got so angry with them. "What was wrong with me," I wondered, "that I should be so angry?"

Then in May 1971 I met some more Jesus people in Kansas City. They explained the gospel to me in a way that showed me how Jesus could meet my deepest needs. I found that very appealing. It helped me to come to faith in him.

Do Jews have any sense of a personal relationship with God?

No, and that's the point. Some may have a very vague idea about it, but by and large it doesn't figure in Judaism. The rabbis don't talk about a personal relationship with God. It certainly doesn't figure in a boy's religious preparation for his bar-mitzvah. All that's expected of you is that you'll do your duty and be a good Jew.

But don't Jews sing the Psalter and express strong personal longings for God?

Yes, but we do it in Hebrew. Now if Jews knew Hebrew and could enter into the meaning of the words, that would be fine. But most Jews don't know Hebrew.

Then to complicate things even more, we try to say the Psalms and prayers in synagogue as fast as we can. The faster you can say them, the more you show your capacity, knowledge and command of things. So, if you can do a 30-minute service in 15 minutes, you're really good. But there's no thought of personal connection. It's all horizontal. I guess that's why I was longing for a personal relationship with God. That's why the Jesus people were so helpful. They showed me how I could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus.

because I knew Christians could do that. I also bowed my head and folded my hands to pray because Christians did that too. I found it very uncomfortable at the start to change cultures as well as to change my theology. But that's what I thought I'd done. I believed I'd become a Gentile at my conversion. It wasn't until about a year later that I realised that I could still be a Jewish Christian. So for the next eight years I struggled with the issue of how Jewish I could be and how much law I needed to observe. Finally, I got that sorted out.

Some Jews go through terrible struggles here. I know one rabbi in Melbourne who became a Christian three years ago. It has cost him his wife, his children and his synagogue. Some Jews pay a tremendous price when they acknowledge Jesus.

Are many rabbis interested in finding out about Christianity?

I don't see many at the moment. But I was encouraged last March when two rabbis came to a Passover demonstration that I gave around Easter. They weren't hostile. However, they didn't identify themselves either. One did chat with me in a friendly way at the end of the meeting. He was extremely kind.

Is it costly for a Jew to become a Christian?

It can be. In my case, my parents asked me to leave home. I was only 19 at the time. I told them one evening and they asked me to be gone by the next morning. I've really worked on my relationship with them since then. For the last 15 years it has been very healthy. My mum and dad are not yet believers, but both are enquiring. My mum first heard me preach 27 years after I became a Christian. It was in June in Kansas City. I'd invited her to come.

She said to me afterwards (as only a mum can say): "Oh honey, you were marvellous. You done great." I said: "But Mum, did you listen to what I said?" She said: "Yes, yes, but I wish that you and the rabbi could have had a debate together and then somebody at the end would tell me who won." I said: "Mum, that's your job. You've heard both sides. It's now up to you to decide."



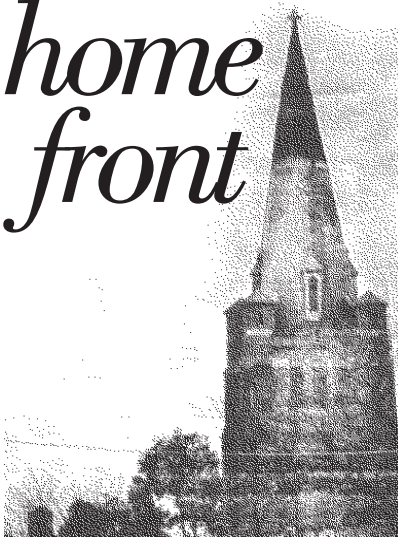
Bob at his son's Bar Mitzvah (above), and handing out tracts in Sydney.

What difference did it make to you when you became a Christian?

Well, immediately I took off my yarmulka (skull cap). I mean that in a figurative way. I realised that I was no longer bound to all the little rules that were so important in Judaism. I remember that one of the first things that I did was to go to McDonalds and buy a cheeseburger

Bob Mendelsohn represents Jews for Jesus in Australia, where he has served for the last two years. He holds a Masters degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in USA. He has served as a pastor and as an evangelist to Jewish people in several US cities, including New York and San Francisco. His internet address is: bobmendo@aol.com; or telephone (02) 9420 1991.

home front



Mobile Mission Workshop

David and Margaret Stephens with their Mobile Mission Workshop have spent a number of years in Europe and Africa helping various mission organisations with various projects.

Their work has included well-digging, mechanics, church building, agriculture, training national workers in mechanics and maintenance, building radio communications and a large water project for a 200-bed hospital belonging to the **Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ** in Nigeria.

They returned to Australia from Nigeria three years ago with David seriously ill with malaria and lead poisoning, settled in Mildura and became members of the **Sunraysia Presbyterian Church**.

Their latest project has been the restoration of the Sunraysia Church and building the new manse, which prompted them to return to full-time ministry. They will take this up as a ministry of the Sunraysia Presbyterian Church from 3 April. A commissioning service will be conducted by **Pastor Ron Williamson** at Sunraysia Presbyterian Church on 26 March at 10am. For more information, contact contact: David and Margaret on (03) 5024 7121 or Ron Williamson on (03) 5021 3456.



Appointments

In February, **Rev. Grant Thorp** was inducted into the pastoral charge of Randwick, Sydney, **Rev. Peter Barnes** to

the charge of Revesby, Sydney, and **Rev. Richard O'Brien** to the charge of Armidale, NSW.

Home missionary **Bill Miller** was appointed to Oakey congregation and hospital chaplaincy work in Toowoomba, Qld, and **Daryl Spink** was appointed administrator to the Reformed College of Ministries, Qld.

Rev. John Britton of St Andrew's in Chatswood (Tas) is now Emeritus Minister in the Presbytery of Tasmania.

Rev. Dr Noel Wallis has retired from Mowbraytown/Norman Park (Qld).

Home missionary **Allan Grant** was inducted as an elder to the Charleville/Blackall session, Qld, in November.

Church union

Rev. Graeme Weber and **Rev. Cliff Letcher** together conducted the marriage service of their children, **Fleur** and **Andrew**, at St George's Presbyterian Church, Geelong (Vic), on 29 January. The new postal address for Andrew and Fleur will be PO Box 163, Bentleigh, Vic 3204.

Rev. Duncan Lloyd Blakey

1942-1999

Rev. Duncan Lloyd Blakey was born in Whyalla, South Australia on 23 April 1942. The family later moved to Eastwood, Sydney, where Duncan attended North Newton Intermediate High School, Enmore Boys and Homebush High Schools before starting work at a leading food market where he became a supermarket manager. For a short time Duncan worked for the Smith Family before entering the ministry.

His family attended St Andrew's Church, Eastwood. Duncan was always involved in the PFA, and for many years led it.

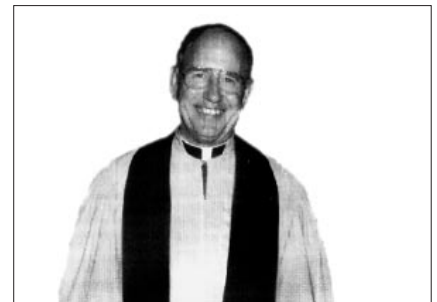
Duncan's first appointment was in 1964 to Lismore as assistant minister, and he served in Beresfield, Raymond Terrace and Clarencetown from 1965 to 1969.

In 1969 he became assistant to the late Rev. Alan Hewitt at Guildford-Merrylands. While serving in this parish he completed his theological training at the United Faculty of Theology in Sydney, graduating in November 1971.

In 1972 Duncan accepted an exit appointment to the parish of Trundle, then in 1976 he accepted a call to the Middle Clarence parish, where he stayed until 1996. For most of this 20 years he was Presbytery moderator.

Duncan accepted a call to serve at St Andrew's in Newcastle and died still carrying on his ministry on 9 December 1999.

Duncan served as chaplain to the Clarence River District Scouting Association, and at one World and two Australian Jamborees. For 17 years he



served with the North Coast Christian Media, and was treasurer of the Australian Churches Media Association.

He was the first chairman on the Christian Education Board and a Presbytery representative to the assembly over many years. An honorary member of the South Grafton Rotary Club, he was named citizen of the year in 1987 by the Grafton City Council. Duncan was also supervisor of external studies for the University of New England.

His greatest supporter throughout this time has been his wife Pam, whom Duncan married in Lismore in 1965. They were blessed with two children, Andrew and Jain.

Duncan Blakey made an enormous contribution to the Church, and exhibited enormous courage, dedication and commitment to his ministry. Although he has been called to higher service with what he would consider some of his tasks incomplete, the above outline documents his significant achievements, which will remain his greatest memorials.

Walter Bruining

Needs in East Timor

Presbyterian Army Chaplain Rod McAuliffe writes from East Timor that the greatest needs for Presbyterian help are biblical English teaching and in-country theological education. National mission director **Robert Benn** visited East Timor in February, and will report back to the church in the next issue.

Supporting singles

Concern for the needs of over-25 singles led to a meeting of interested people at the **Bald Hills Presbyterian Church** hall (Qld). Eighteen people from various church groups attended. For details, contact Sean, 07 3881 2549; Bill, 07 4681 2832; or Beth, 07 3205 2040



PLC's historic journey

Presbyterian Ladies College, Melbourne (PLC), a pioneer of girls' education, celebrated its 125th anniversary on 15 February with a tram journey from Burwood to the original school site in East Melbourne, now Dallas Brooks Hall. The 1300 staff and students filled a convoy of trams, and also enjoyed a thanksgiving service in the Scots' Church, Melbourne.

The school's principal, **Mrs Elizabeth Ward**, said: "PLC pioneered secondary education for girls in Victoria. Its 125 year history embodies the history of academic education for women in Australia."

PLC opened on 15 February 1875 with 60 students. The building was designed by eminent Melbourne architect **JosEph. Reed** (who also designed Melbourne Town Hall, the Exhibition Building and the Scots' Church) and was built by **Mr David Mitchell**, father of **Dame Nellie Melba**, one of PLC's first students.

Important Announcement

All Presbytery & Session Clerks, Parish Secretaries and Church Workers please note that all news for the national journal should be sent to the journal's office at 3 Durham Road Kilsyth VIC. 3137.

across australia



GST workshops

Overflow attendances are expected at special GST workshops for church treasurers and administrators during March and April. The workshops are being funded by the Federal Government's GST Start-Up Assistance Office and will be held in most of the larger cities and country towns throughout Australia.

Many of the free workshops are being organised by inter-church bodies such as the Victorian and Western Australian councils of churches. Hands-on tips and suggestions on how churches should prepare for the GST will be featured at these workshops. A GST Guide for Church Treasurers containing detailed technical GST information will be provided to registered participants. Some larger denominations (Anglican, Catholic, Uniting, SDA and Salvation Army) are planning to hold denomination-specific seminars under the same program.

Melbourne accountant **Kimberly Smith** said that his company was involved in mailing out 11,000 invitations to the "non-big five" churches and religious bodies throughout Australia. "I was surprised to find that we have more than 100 different Christian denominations in this country" he said.

GST developments can be monitored weekly at www.churchweb.com.au; send registration enquiries for treasurer workshops to the inter-church project's national office at 104 Auburn Road, Hawthorn, VIC 3122 or gst@kimberlysmith.com.au.

Special Olympics reading

British-based **Soon Gospel Literature** is producing a special evangelical magazine for the Olympic Games. Designed mainly for people for whom English is a second language, the magazine will feature interviews with **Kriss Akabusi**, **Evelyn Ashford** and **Jonathan Edwards**. It is available free to evangelistic ministers. Contact tony@soon.org.uk

Cathedral reopened

The Archbishop of Sydney, the **Most Rev. Harry Goodhew**, led the dedication service reopening the renovated St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral. The cathedral first opened in 1868.

New director for SU

David Tolputt, formerly a captain in the Salvation Army based in Bendigo, has been appointed the new national director of Scripture Union Australia, Inc. David completed his Advanced Diploma of Salvation Army Ministry in 1987 and is studying for a Bachelor of Ministry with the Australian College of Theology and Uniting Faculty of Theology. David joined SU staff, based in Coburg North, Melbourne, in February.

New Anglican leader

The **Most Rev. Peter Carnley**, Archbishop of Perth, has been elected Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. The Primate chairs the three-yearly General Synod and its attendant boards and committees. He represents the Anglican Church of Australia in Anglican Communion affairs and speaks for and represents the church when necessary in Australia.

NSW brothels

The NSW Government has established a task force to examine the operation of the sex industry after problems associated with legalising brothels in 1995.

Coptic Protest in Sydney

Coptic Christians took to Sydney streets in January to protest against the killing of Christians in upper Egypt in December and January. Mobs of Egyptian Muslims went on a shooting spree that left 26 unarmed Christians dead and more than 36 gravely wounded.

The Sydney protesters carried banners saying "stop ethnic cleansing", "human rights in Egypt" and "stop killing innocent Christians and children". **Rev. Fred Nile** MLC and **David Wauchope** of Christian Solidarity addressed the rally.

Future leadership

Missions Interlink hosted a Forum 2000 on "the shape of future leadership" at the Victorian Bible College from 25 to 27 January. The speakers were **Tony Cupit** from Baptist World Alliance and **Max Meyers**, well-known in Mission Aviation

Fellowship circles. During the Forum **Ros Gooden** of the ABMS was elected as the new chairman of Missions Interlink for the next 12 months. **Ken Martin** of Interserve was added to the national committee. **John Freeman** of SIM was elected as deputy chairman. **Jim Charlesworth** of MAF remains secretary and **Roger Rice** of Asian Outreach continues as treasurer.

world news



Filipino children persecuted

Donnie Lama, a former prisoner in Saudi Arabia, has called for urgent prayer for five Filipino children arrested at a worship service in January in Riyadh, along with 10 adults. According to **Open Doors with Brother Andrew**, Saudi interrogators may be using the children to force their parents to reveal details about the network of expatriate Christian fellowships meeting for worship in Saudi Arabia. Open Doors says Islamic Saudi Arabia still has the world's worst record of persecuting Christians. Afghanistan, China, Chechnya, Sudan, Yemen, Comoro Islands, Maldives, Iran and Morocco closely follow in this top 10 "hall of shame".

Call for arms ban

Amnesty International has called on the European Union to maintain its ban on sales to Indonesia of arms or equipment to be used to commit human rights violations. It says patterns of killing and intimidation seen in East Timor are being repeated elsewhere in Indonesia. European countries had supplied water cannon, sub-machine guns, ammunition and armoured personnel carriers, some of which is known to have been used against civilians.

WBT director missing

It has been confirmed that the Africa area director of **Wycliffe Bible Translators**, **Robert Chapman**, and his wife **Ruth** were

on board Kenya Airways Flight 431 from Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to Nairobi, Kenya, when it crashed into the Atlantic Ocean just after take off. The Chapmans are among the missing. Originally from Hamilton, Canada, the Chapmans have served with Wycliffe since 1983. Their work has primarily been with SIL International, in Cameroon, Africa. In June 1999 they moved to Nairobi when Mr Chapman became director of the work in sub-Saharan Africa.

Islamic push in Nigeria

Shar'ia (Muslim religion) law has been introduced in northern Nigeria, in a move thought to be designed to test the new civilian President Obasanjo, a committed Christian and the first democratically elected president in more than 15 years. Two northern bishops, **Josiah Fearon** of Kaduna and **Emmanuel Mani** of Borno, fear northern Muslims are stirring trouble to bring the military back to power. "We have lived with suffering," said Bishop Fearon. "Converts mysteriously disappear, are poisoned or are imprisoned on trumped up charges. With the introduction of Shar'ia it will all be open, converts will be murdered openly with impunity. We must pray for our President, who is doing a good job."

Indonesian Troubles

The Christian Church in Indonesia has grown remarkably in recent years, but this has aroused much Muslim hostility. The pastor of a large church had to decentralise to reduce the target after one of the church's staff workers was decapitated.

Rev. J. Tselatu, chairman at the Protestant church **Klassis** in northern Buru Island, reports that 17 of the 23 churches were destroyed by Muslim mobs from 21 to 25 December. The churches were looted first, and the whereabouts of two pastors who fled the conflict is still not known.

And overtures for peace

Christian and Muslim leaders met recently at a large public rally in Sydney, to appeal for peace in the Indonesian region of Maluku. Leaders of the two faiths spoke, prayed and sang together.

Mr Abbas Ahmed, the president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, said: "We say to the perpetrators of this violence, both Muslim and Christian, stop carrying out their senseless acts of destruction."

National Council of Churches in Australia spokesman **Rev. Prof. Hames**

Haire, who spent 17 years working in Halmahera, said the death of any person, Muslim or Christian, in the Maluku damaged wider community too. Thousands of Christians and Muslims have died in the violence in Ambon, Halmahera and other Maluku islands in the past year.

Blessings in Turkey

Fourteen weeks after Izmir security police sealed the doors of a Turkish Protestant church and arrested 40 members, the **Izmir Fellowship of Jesus Christ** resumed legal meetings for public worship in December. Local Izmir authorities openly encouraged the dramatic turnaround. In an almost unheard-of gesture, the governor of Izmir sent the church his Christmas congratulations. Earlier that week, President Suleyman Demirel made Turkish history as the first head of State to issue formal Christmas greetings to the Christmas community of Turkey. His Christmas message was heard on national TV and radio and reprinted in almost every newspaper.

Lutheran growth

The number of Lutherans worldwide grew by 1.6 million last year to total 63.1 million people, according to the **Lutheran World Federation**. The biggest growth was in Asia, where numbers rose from 4.5 million to 6.5 million. Africa has 9.6 million, Europe 37.1 million and North America 8.6 million.

Murdoch supports gospel

Four million copies of the Archbishop of Canterbury's book *Jesus 2000* were distributed free at the start of the New Year inside the biggest-selling English newspaper, the *News of the World*. The archbishop, **Dr George Carey**, wrote to Australian media magnate **Rupert Murdoch** to suggest the idea. The cost was met by News Corp.

March for Jesus

The organisers of **March for Jesus USA** have targeted Saturday 10 June 2000 as Jesus Day. Unlike previous rallies, Jesus Day will bring churches of all denominations together for more than the annual march. Churches in more than 600 US cities will cooperate to create a day on earth as it is in heaven. The scope of each coalition of local congregations will include feeding the hungry, serving the homeless, touching AIDS patients, befriending the fatherless as well as a mass choir performance.

Radio listeners arrested

Far East Broadcasting's Hmong director says there has been a substantial increase of arrests in recent months in Laos of Hmong people who listen to FEB programmes. In fact, the arrests have become such a serious problem that the central **Evangelical Church of Laos** has sent a notice out to most Hmong churches that believers should stop listening to FEB to avoid arrest.

Martyrs' Day in India

Christians celebrated Martyrs' Day throughout India on 23 January. On the same day in 1999 the Australian Baptist missionary **Graham Staines** and his two sons were burned to death by Hindu fanatics.

Textbook bias in India

History teachers in India are launching a protest against creeping bias in their curriculum. They say India's increasingly nationalistic government is rewriting school textbooks to depict Muslims and Christians as alien villains.

Wurmbrands honoured

On 15 January the Pro Fide Award, given each year by the Finnish organisation **Friends of the Martyred Church**, was presented to **Pastor Richard Wurmbrand** and his wife **Sabina** at their home in California. Wurmbrand, now aged 90, spent 14 years in a Romanian prison under the communists.

Battle-lines drawn

A storm brewing in the Presbyterian Church (USA) will break in July 2000 at the General Assembly in California. Members will be asked to consider two contentious overtures arising from the debate over the suitability of homosexuals for Christian ministry. The first asks the assembly to declare that an "irreconcilable impasse" has developed in the PCUSA between "two mutually exclusive theologies", notably over the question of ordaining male and female homosexual candidates for the ministry.

The second overture asks the assembly moderator to name a taskforce to explore how to let theological liberals leave the Presbyterian Church and take their property with them. It aims to promote peace, as normally, when a church disbands or leaves the Presbyterian Church(USA), its property reverts to the denomination.

Telling stories

The Network of Biblical Storytellers is holding its first national biblical story telling gathering from 26 to 28 May at Mt Macedon, Victoria. Its theme is "Spirit Stories for a New Millennium". **Tracy Radosevic**, a biblical storyteller from Baltimore, is coming as guest speaker and teller, and will support a programme of workshops, performances, worship, a group telling of 'Acts' and a range of other storytelling activities. Another presenter will be **Alan Bailey**, director of OAC Ministries in SA. Brochures and further information are available from **Rev. Philip Liebelt, NOBS (Aust)**, PO Box 495, Niddrie, Vic. 3042 (03) 9336 3132, email philip@alphalink.com.au

Youth boom in China

The younger generation is suddenly filling Chinese churches, radically changing the composition of many congregations from mainly elderly to more than 50 per cent young people. The surge in youth attendance has occurred over the past five years. Observers attribute this growth to several factors. It is a combination of a "more relaxed religious policy, empty hearts seeking a religious solution, the determination of all Chinese Christians to witness for Christ, and the fact that in the culture at large, Christians are becoming more popular," says **Enoch Wang**, a lecturer at the Hangzhou Theological Seminary.

Mexicans elect leader

Mexican-born missionary **Dr David Tamez** has been appointed president of the Mexican National Association of Evangelicals. The group represents 25,000 mainline churches in Mexico, plus many more small local missions and Christian agencies.

News in Brief

In Mexico the explosive growth of the Evangelical Church continues to create tensions with Catholics and local authorities.

In Greece, the Orthodox Church turned out to be behind the arrest of three Protestant pastors and the closure of a Christian radio station.

The Vietnamese Government continues its attacks against house churches. Despite persecutions, reports about church growth continue to reach the west.

When minister Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate everyone was expecting the usual polite formalities, but what they heard was a stirring prayer passionately calling for repentance and righteousness. The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In six short weeks, the Central Christian church had logged more than 5000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively.

The prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You today, to ask Your forgiveness and to seek Your direction and guidance.

We know your Word says "Woe unto those who call evil good", but that's exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it pluralism.

We have worshiped other gods and called it multiculturalism.

We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn children and called it a choice.

We have shot our abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have coveted our neighbour's possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honoured values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, O God and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free,

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent to direct us to the centre of Your will.

I ask it in the name of Your Son, the living Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Net cost

Christians are being trapped in the Web. Gregory H. Spencer reports.

Behind a closed door, Ryan clicks on yet another seductive image. Just this last picture, Ryan thinks, then I'll quit. Before the download is complete, there is one loud knock. The door opens, and his father rushes in.

Ryan tries to block the image on his screen while he fumbles to click off the Internet. It's too late. His father has seen enough, and he confronts Ryan about viewing pornography on the Internet.

Stung by the discovery, Ryan mixes remorse with a defence that he's not hurting anyone, it's just entertainment, and that all his friends do it.

"Cruising Internet nudity may seem like harmless fun, but it's not," Ryan's father tells him. "I know. I've been struggling with Internet pornography for years."

Like Ryan and his father, many Christians, especially men, regularly visit pornographic Internet sites. Several sources report that 15 to 20 per cent of all web site hits at work and on university campuses (including Christian institutions) are for pornographic material. In the late evening, pornography accounts for half collegiate Internet usage.

The consequences can be serious: damaged reputation, spiritual guilt, expulsion from school, loss of job, or even eventual divorce. It's no wonder that the number of businesses that monitor employee Internet use is growing rapidly.

Among men in the church, secret habits about Internet pornography may be creating an oppressive sense of failure. To complicate matters, notes author and researcher Archibald Hart, a religious upbringing in itself does not necessarily lead to a healthier sexual life; it may just contribute to a greater sense of guilt. When it comes to fantasy sex, men in the church may well earn the accusation "pious hypocrites".

At least two factors contribute to this situation: accommodation to destructive cultural trends and inadequate disciplining that would equip the saints to follow Christ faithfully in the area of their sexuality.

While some issues regarding sexuality are the same for every generation, the Internet has created opportunities that compound the problem. The increase in pornography-viewing is fuelled by five elements related to Internet technology: access, anonymity, privacy, speed, and independence.



Access: Fifty years ago, pornography was available mainly to adults in seedy stores. Now, any Internet user can find nearly endless pornographic resources of spirit-numbing variety and depravity – and much of it is free.

Web addresses for pornographic sites often appear in searches for non-pornographic material. While doing research for a paper on inter-racial adoption, my sixth-grade daughter discovered that a third of the listed sites were for inter-racial sex. This is a hazard parents can't ignore.

Anonymity: Instead of risking being recognised entering an XXX theatre, users can usually keep their identity unknown to the supplier. Technically, a user's computer can be discovered by Internet servers that record all hits, by blocking software that registers violations, and by digital "cookies" that provide access information to advertisers. Yet even when purchases or emails do betray their identity, users still feel anonymous, and this illusion keeps them accessing sites.

Privacy: Because computers are often operated behind closed doors, users can view pornography with little fear of exposure. Most users are savvy enough to know how to exit quickly and destroy the evidence of their activity.

Speed: Images can be downloaded or

erased within seconds, encouraging more activity and diminishing the possibility of discovery. Viewing an Internet site is nearly as fast as picking up a magazine, without the problem of keeping the magazine hidden.

Independence: Unlike other conduits for pornography, the Internet cannot be effectively controlled or utterly safeguarded. Even the best pornography-blocking software can't deny access to all the growing numbers of the sexually-oriented sites. In addition, purveyors of illegal web sites are rarely prosecuted. These aspects of the Internet are insidious because they make harmful choices easier. Sometimes we choose to do the right thing not because we genuinely desire to do so, but because we don't want to be seen to be making bad choices.

Because the Internet has largely removed the difficulty of acquiring pornographic materials and minimised the possibility of discovery, many Internet users face the arduous task of greater self-discipline. It's a bit like constantly offering chocolate to a dieter and then saying "don't eat", or like Joseph inviting Potipher's wife to be always available, but to keep his coat handy. Now that pornography is just a click away, greater temptations face anyone drawn to these images.

Ultimately, Christians wish not only to think God's thoughts after Him, but to see with God's eyes, viewing the opposite sex as human beings made in God's image. When we follow Christ in the realm of our sexual desires, we enhance faithfulness in marriage and strengthen friendship outside of marriage. Like all pleasure, sex can be a source of joy, frustration, or tragedy. Believing in God's good intent, we commit ourselves to honour God's boundaries – even though these limits are usually transgressed by our image-saturated, body-glorifying, sex-obsessed culture.

The answer to today's cultural trends is not to try to return to the 1950s. Parents now tend to talk more openly with their children, and that is a significant improvement over times when boys and girls received their sex education in the street. Still, we must face our current problems.

Christians should follow Paul's advice to develop God's sight by choosing to view whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, or admirable (Phil. 4: 8).

Reasons to avoid porn: Most arguments against pornography have to do with consequences. If we accept that God's good gifts of sex and marriage are to be valued and protected, we will be concerned about choices that destroy sexual virtue. Here are four reasons to be concerned:

1. Pornography obscures the sin of mistreating our neighbour.

Because all women are the "neighbours" of men (and men of women), they should be treated respectfully, not as objects for personal pleasure. If we are to "avoid sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4: 3), what are we to make of any medium that portrays human bodies as mere objects? These "objects of lust" are real people. To reduce them to body parts and sexual performance tools dehumanises them.

Some would argue that these images are not people, and therefore cannot be violated. But can we so easily separate our treatment of photographic images and people made in God's image?

Others are also mistreated by pornography, including those who feel shame and disgust when they happen to see degrading images, and those who feel betrayed and victimised when a spouse or friend accesses scenes that should be restricted to spousal intimacy. When the biblical virtues of love, modesty, purity, and chastity are suppressed by lust, exhibitionism, decadence, and promiscuity, all those involved are hurt.

If, before marriage, we see each other only as sexual objects, how will we stop doing so once we are married? What will happen in relationships with people other than one's spouse? A life free of pornography predisposes us to love our neighbours better as thinking and feeling human beings.

2. Pornography normalises and invites sexual immorality.

In the digitally manipulated world of centrefolds, the human body is smoothed to "perfection" defined in limited (often surgically enhanced) shapes, and displayed in ways that encourage fantasy "relationships". Premarital intercourse, adultery, multiple-partner sex, homosexuality, and bi-sexuality are graphically displayed and promoted, dulling the viewer's conscience.

Many viewers say that after indulging in pornography, they think of the opposite sex almost exclusively in sexual terms, judging them physically and fantasising about sex acts. If we think promiscuously, when will these thoughts lead to actions?

3. Pornography that contains violence stimulates aggressive behaviour.

Decades of research show that viewers of violent pornography become more aggressive towards females who anger them. Many viewers who could not imagine themselves stooping to sexual violence find themselves gradually accepting what they watch, and believing the participants deserve what they get. While few viewers become sexual criminals, many suffer losses in gentleness and sensitivity, self-control and patience. In addition, the consumer of pornography supports an industry that habitually uses violence against those who pose.

4. Pornography can injure fidelity and intimacy in marriage.

Several studies show that exposure to non-violent sexually explicit materials results in higher expectations for sexual activity, higher tolerance for deviant forms of sexual experience, lower esteem for women rated as "average" in attractiveness, and less satisfaction in the level of love for one's spouse. Young people may falsely assume they are "getting sexual experimentation out of their system" when they are actually building patterns that can significantly hamper their future.

According to researcher Patrick Carnes, pornography-viewing often becomes a habit, even an addiction. What if one's spouse is deeply hurt by this focus on others' bodies? How can any relationship live up to a fantasy, since by definition a fantasy is about one person exercising absolute control?

In many ways, pornography challenges the marriage covenant. Faithfulness includes the mind, a perspective Jesus addressed when he observed that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5: 28).

Building a community: An individualistic drive for sensual happiness overrides community values. A community, notes author Wendell Berry, "lives and acts by common virtues of trust, goodwill, forbearance, self-restraint, compassion, and forgiveness." These are not the values that motivate pornography-viewing.

Berry adds that the most critically damaged aspect of modern life is sexual love, for "sexual love is the heart of community life". How so? A healthy sexual love teaches that even intense personal pleasures must include sensitivity to others' needs; sexual discipline provides a liberating security for all members of a community; and children are enriched when their parents show genuine affection for each other.

Pornography, however, promotes immediate gratification, sexual conquest, and perhaps most importantly, fantasy that competes with the truth. Instead of "harmless fun", viewing pornography is a choice toward illusion and a neglect of the troubling negotiations of real intimacy.

We may forget that turning toward something also means turning away from something else. When a husband gives his sexual imagination to a pornographic image, he subtly moves away from loving his wife. Eventually, those in "fantasy relationships"

Print resources

Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community, by Wendell Berry (Pantheon, 1993). Berry reasons wisely about sex, especially how the media's treatment of sex influences community.

Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction, by Patrick Carnes (Hazelden Foundation, 1992).

Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict, by Patrick Carnes (Hazelden Foundation, 1989). While not written from a Christian perspective, these books on sexual addiction come recommended by many counsellors.

The War Within, by Robert Daniels (Crossway, 1997). The author, a former US Navy officer, disciples men who have been defeated by sexual impurity. He relates his

25 years of battling temptations and his discovery of spiritual warfare principles to help overcome them.

An Affair of the Mind, by Laurie Hall (Focus on the Family, 1996). Hall writes about her husband's serious pornography addiction.

The Sexual Man, by Archibald Hart (Word, 1994).

Secrets of Eve: Understanding the Mystery of Female Sexuality, by Archibald Hart, Catherine Hart Weber, and Debra Taylor (Word, 1998). These books present frank discussions about male and female sexual behaviours in the light of biblical teaching.

Eros Defiled, by John White (InterVarsity, 1977). *Eros Redeemed: Breaking the Stranglehold of Sexual Sin*, by

John White (InterVarsity, 1993). Excellent studies on human sexuality and how to deal with problems in the context of the church.

Pure Sex, by Ed Young (Multnomah, 1997). Discusses God's design for sex, achieving true marital intimacy, and finding forgiveness for sexual sin and healing for sexual addiction.

Internet resources

American Family Association: www.afa.net
 Family Research Council: www.frc.org
 Enough is Enough: www.enough.org
 These three sites offer everything from arguments against pornography to political strategies for social change.

may prefer a self-absorbed erotic life over the intimacies of a spouse who is not controllable. Perhaps we are all "strong enough" to have hundreds of imaginary affairs and maintain sexual faithfulness. But the testimonies of those in broken marriages attest otherwise. Many relationships have enough trouble without the influence of pornography. The ease of accessing Internet images is not likely to improve things.

All our intellect, all our imagination, all our physical attributes and actions, are under the pre-eminence of Christ. To be a disciple is to love one's neighbours as they should be loved, within the boundaries God has set for us.

With that goal in mind, all Christians would be wiser not to take Internet pornography lightly. Certainly all Internet users should know what they believe is acceptable and unacceptable.

For followers of Christ, the Internet is an opportunity to exercise faith – which includes trusting the admonitions of Scripture, believing that God's love is greater than the empty embrace of a photographic image, and committing to consistent repentance and acceptance of forgiveness.

In a community of believers, choosing reality over illusion may mean cutting off access to the Internet, installing porn-blocking software, or intentionally holding each other accountable through confession and prayer. Good books and counselling can help. The Internet itself offers sites to assist those struggling with pornography.

Managing temptation: Ryan's dad referred to managing his temptation as a "long and difficult road". As the metaphor plays itself out, two important implications are clear.

First, staying on the right road means staying off the wrong roads – the ones that look attractive but hide potholes, predators, or a drop-off to certain destruction. Some of us need to be honest and admit we are already travelling these wrong roads.

Second, staying on the right road requires focusing on our destination. When we are approaching home after a long trip away, the side streets aren't very tempting.

For Christians, that's ultimately where we are headed: home. The same Jesus who promised us a room in his Father's house said that he would be with us until we arrive safely.

Our goal in life is not to "avoid looking at pornography" but to be so involved in our journey with Jesus that the streets of heaven are more attractive than anything else. Maybe the confession of Ryan's father is the best first step on that journey.

Dr Gregory Spencer is Professor of Communication Studies at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California, and the author of A Heart for Truth: Taking Your Faith to College (Baker). Reprinted from Moody Family Monthly, 1999.

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Acts in Bangladesh

How the Australian church received a Macedonian call

Monirul Islam Nanok became involved with the Presbyterian Church in Australia 15 months ago when he met national world mission director Robert Benn.

The young Bangladeshi had a theological degree from Korea, and had come to Australia in hope. The mission committee saw his plight and the possibilities and decided to support him in Bangladesh.

Thus, like Paul's call to Macedonia in Acts 16, the mission committee in NSW at the end of the 20th century became increasingly conscious of a call to help with gospel outreach in Bangladesh.

Circumstances brought a jigsaw of people and resources together to open a door wide for the church in Bangladesh, one of the poorest nations of the world. Of its 140 million people, less than 1 per cent are professing Christians, and there is tragic evidence of nominalism, corruption, and poor biblical understanding. But, side by side with that, there is also evidence of new life and commitment to preach the gospel to others. Monirul Nanok lived in Australia for two years in 1997-98. He had completed his degree at a Korean theological seminary, and worked in another church in Khulna, a city of 2 million in southern Bangladesh. Through 1999 tentative steps to help by people in the NSW church became firmer. He had linked into Burwood Presbyterian Church where Jim Elliott is the pastor, and the congregation came to know him.

Peter Mentiplay, an Australian businessman had brought him to the church. It had cost him \$200 for a car parking fine to meet Monirul! Peter became stirred to help. In March 1999 he went for a month to Khulna, where Monirul had begun in earnest to plant a new church in this nominal Christian community. Peter thrived on the opportunity to help. He saw much poverty, but also a people who were warm-hearted and hospitable. Back in Australia, Peter organised a container of clothes to be sent to Bangladesh. He kept telephones in Bangladesh busy, and the phone bill mounting in Australia.

Derek Keating, an elder from Burwood, had planned long-service leave to England to visit relatives. Two free stops! Why not Bangladesh? Derek and his wife Maureen flew to Dacca, then to Jessor 25 minutes



Ewen Brown

away, then travelled overland to Khulna. Rickshaws, people, green slimy ponds, ducks, geese, five-story buildings, compounds and the people dominated their impressions — above all, meeting people who would eventually become part of a Presbyterian church.

Nominalism is rife in some parts of the Christian community whose origins go back to the early 19th century — the days of William Carey. Yet here in the south there were others from Islamic backgrounds who had been converted, as well as people quickened by the Holy Spirit from within the Christian community.

As convener of the NSW-APWM committee, together with my children Justin and Corinne, I visited South-East Asia in November and December. The last coun-



Corinne Brown with friends in Bangladesh.

try we visited was Bangladesh, entering overland from Calcutta. As a servant of Christ, I wanted to obey what the leaders in the church expected.

Since August the seeds had grown and a Presbyterian congregation in Khulna was now meeting, with about 40 adults, 50 teenagers and a deacon's court of seven. There were so many tentative plans. But, God was strong and gracious in our midst, and worked far more than we could have anticipated.

When Paul visited Ephesus (Acts 14:23), he ordained elders. It was in our mind to do likewise, and so it was a privilege to ordain Monirul Nanok and Saidar Rahman to the work of the gospel in the newly formed Presbyterian church. I also had the privilege of preaching, aided by an interpreter, at revival meetings on three nights, spoke at a young people's conference for 50 young folk, and preached on five other nights and twice during the day. This program made us wonder how Calvin was able to preach every day!

This meagre amount of information does not tell the story for there were such amazing responses and wonderful conversations about matters of eternity. Where now? The Presbyterian Church of Bangladesh is now registered with the government and a Bible School begins on 1 March. Orchard Road Presbyterian Church in Singapore, where David Burke is the senior pastor, is keen to help. The opportunity exists for people to do block teaching.

Are there any Australians who would be willing to give a scholarship for a student to study for one year — \$1200? Many people give aid to underdeveloped countries. This is good, but the best investment is to train nationals for the work of the gospel in that land. Most young people in Bangladesh have no savings. Therefore to go to theological college needs a scholarship for food and tuition.

A wide open door to ministry has been thrust open for us right now. This is a true Macedonian call. Is it possible that we as a church be like Paul — going, that his kingdom may be extended?"

Ewen Brown is convener of the NSW APWM Committee.

Movie Watch

American Beauty

Reviewed by Matthew Hodge

Rated MA (adult themes, medium-level violence, drug use)



American Beauty has taken the Golden Globe for best film, and seems likely to take a few Oscars in the upcoming Academy Awards. It's already received rave reviews from critics all around the world. So what's all the fuss about?

I went to the first public screening of this film in Australia in Sydney in January, where first-time director Sam Mendes was present to answer questions and talk about his film.

Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) has one year to live. This is not giving away any secrets, as it's announced in a voice-over at the beginning. (The voice-over is by the dead man himself, which gives the film an interesting spin right from the start.)

Lester does not have a good life. As he tells us at the beginning of the film, his wife (played by Annette Bening) and daughter both think he's a complete loser. He's about to get axed from his job, he's obsessed with a 17-year-old cheerleader friend of his daughter, and his wife is cheating on him.

Meanwhile, Lester's daughter Jane, her cheerleader friend Angela and boy-next-door Ricky feature in a sub-plot. Ricky is constantly filming people in secret on a video camera. His dad, a bigoted ex-Marine, wants to protect his family from a world that's "going straight to hell" but does this harshly – for instance, he makes Ricky have a urine test every six months to make sure he's not on drugs. Despite this, Ricky makes a fortune selling marijuana.

But if you only watched the first hour of this film, you'd be misled as to what kind of film it is. Subtly, the film develops new layers. You start to re-evaluate characters. Your loyalties shift. As Lester's death approaches you suspect what will happen.

The surprise is that in his final minutes Lester comes to realise that his life, messed-up as it was, was actually wonderful. And that's the bottom line of the film: that life, no matter how much of a mess it is, is really beautiful if you look at it closely.

As the credits rolled, director Sam Mendes came on to the stage for an hour of questions and answers. Audience members repeatedly spoke of how wonderful, beautiful, profound and even spiritual they had found the whole experience. I would have liked to agree with them – but the more I thought about it, the less I could buy the philosophy.

The idea of contentment with life is biblical. Paul talks about his hardships: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation . . . I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:12-13).

But there's a difference between Paul's contentment with life and the contentment Lester Burnham finds. Paul found contentment because he was doing God's will. Because Paul had dedicated his life to this, the things of the world meant much less to him. In contrast, the beauty and contentment portrayed in *American Beauty* doesn't really exist.

Lester and his friends are leading shallow, immoral lives, and nearly all their personal problems relate to their sinful behaviour. In real life, these would be some of the unhappiest people you've met.

However, in two key scenes we are tempted to believe we can find contentment in this life if we just look hard enough to see the hidden beauty. The first scene shows footage from one of Ricky's home videos – a plastic bag wafting in an autumn wind. Ricky describes it as "the most beautiful thing he's ever filmed".

The second key moment comes in Lester's last five minutes on earth. When he's asked to describe what his life is really like, this man, whose wife and daughter despise him, who's lost his job, who has

made a complete mess of everything he's ever done, stops and thinks for a minute . . . and then says, "Great. My life is great." Two minutes later, he's dead.

Then we hear Lester's voice-over again, giving us almost word-for-word Ricky's spiel about beauty. We see shots of Lester's childhood, his wife, his daughter. And then back to the old plastic bag. His last words are, "I look back and I see so much beauty that I can't help but feel anything but gratitude for my worthless, pathetic little life. I don't suppose you understand what I mean, do you? Don't worry. You will one day." The film ends and the illusion is completed.

American Beauty deserves its critical praise for its brilliant acting and storytelling. But it strikes a chord with audiences because it attempts to offer a philosophy that deals with the mess our lives can be. Lester has an exaggeratedly messed-up life because it makes for good black comedy, but the characters are three-dimensional and easy to identify with. And because the audience can, in some way, understand the character's problems, they'll want to buy the idea that life can be beautiful and contentment can be achieved.

Sadly, it's an illusion. You can watch a plastic bag floating around as much as you like, but it's still only a plastic bag. Real-life Lesters won't ever find contentment and happiness, because that's something that comes from knowing Jesus.

It will continue to be well-reviewed and watched by many people, many of whom will find it beautiful and spiritual because they're conned into thinking it shows them the answers to life's problems. But I don't think Christians will be among that audience. Even if Christians can get past the subject matter (the MA rating is well deserved), the philosophy should certainly be of concern.

On the positive side, the fact that this kind of movie is doing well could indicate that people *are* interested in looking deeper than just the events of life, and are looking for meaning. We Christians should keep that in mind as we minister.

Matt Hodge is a member of Mitchelton Presbyterian Church. ap

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No cane do?

How should we discipline our children?

John Button began life as the son of a Presbyterian minister in Victoria, but grew up to enter the Senate and become Industry Minister in the Federal Labor Government from 1983 to 1993. In his autobiography *As It Happened*, he recalled life in the Ballarat manse in the 1930s.

Button's father, C. N. Button, was an ardent admirer of the arch-liberal and fascist-leaning Samuel Angus, Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Historical Theology in Sydney from 1915 to 1943. The elder Button apparently took no interest at all in young John's boyhood activities, and the Senator wrote: "We lived in the same house but in different worlds. I came to believe that the role of a father was to administer discipline." Indeed, "my relationship with my father seemed dominated by beatings", and the reader is treated to some descriptions of these, in somewhat graphic detail.

Whether Button's record is accurate –



Peter Barnes

and children and politicians are both noted for their ability to embellish the truth – it is the kind of biographical writing designed to delight the heart of any social engineer.

In recent times there has been no shortage of luminaries to tell us that corporal discipline is an evil which is unworthy of our enlightened times. So speaks the European Court of Human Rights, the vaguely-worded Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and Alan Corbett, the child-rearing expert who sits

in the NSW Legislative Council. It is Corbett who has seriously moved that a two-year jail term be meted out to parents who use the wooden spoon on their children.

It is, of course, quite possible for parents to administer the wrong kind of discipline. The apostle Paul warns us about this in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Fathers can provoke their children to wrath by administering harsh or inconsistent discipline, or a discipline which lacks any reasonable moral basis.

John Button writes revealingly on this: "The prospect of the strap was a cause of constant apprehension, because I never understood what the rules were. It all seemed to depend on my father's mood rather than the nature of the offence." We can all imagine the kind of scenario: meet dad when he has won at golf, and you could almost get away with burning the house down; meet him when the GST has raised the price of beer, and he is a walking time-bomb.

Discipline which is cold and unloving is a travesty of biblical discipline. As Charles Bridges put it in 1846: "The rod without affection is revolting tyranny." The Christian position is not that corporal discipline is an abuse, but that it can be abused.

The Christian can sympathise with John Button, but the fact that there is bad discipline does not prove that there should be no discipline, and the fact that a Presbyterian clergyman beat his son does not prove that Christ did not rise from the dead (not that the former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, Right Reverend C. N. Button, believed that anyway).

God gives parents the right and the obligation to administer "the rod of discipline" to their children. He does this because "folly is bound up in the heart of a child" (Prov. 22:15). Rousseau and other naive utopians have advocated not coercing the child in any way, but the Christian knows that there has been a Fall which has had devastating effects on this world.

Hence, a child left to himself will take the rebellious road to death (Prov. 19:18; 29:15); the effects of the Fall are too pro-

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nounced for it to be otherwise. At the cross God reveals both his love for sinners and his hatred for sin.

So too the Christian parent is to combine love and punishment: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (Prov. 13:24). God's love is not sentimental: "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die" (Prov. 23:13). It makes sense, as C. S. Lewis put it, to speak of God's "severe mercy".

The author of the book of Hebrews points out the links between the discipline of a human father and that of our heavenly Father. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ... Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it ... Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12:7-11).

Such reasoning is often disputed today, often in the name of love and care. Even in the 1940s, in the context of World War II, the Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the rather surprising comment that "most parents today are too spineless". The God of the Bible, however, is both merciful and just, and he is the model for the Christian parent. Love which is too soft makes for weakness; justice which is too hard makes for harshness.

There is a place for other methods of discipline, such as the withdrawal of privileges and rewarding good behaviour. There

is even a place for distraction techniques, although they are just that – means for changing gear – not a basis for moral discipline. We have all been embarrassed – whether in the supermarket, the classroom, or even our homes – by a youngster in full flight who has completely flummoxed his parent or teacher.

Corporal discipline is not necessarily the last resort – in many cases, it would be better administered sooner rather than later – but there needs to be more in the parental armoury than bluff and the ability to manipulate.

Parents who refuse to use corporal discipline are not simply being foolish, they are deliberately ignoring God's clear commandments. Eli, the priest in the tabernacle of God, seems to have been a genuine believer, but not so his sons (1 Sam. 2:22). Eli rebuked them mildly (1 Sam. 2:24). But he did nothing else, so God removed the priesthood from Eli's family (1 Sam. 3:13). Eli did not commit the sins that his sons did, but he was still partially responsible because of his refusal to discipline his sons. David too failed in this area (1 Kings 1:5-6).

God holds us responsible for how we raise our children. God tells us to use the rod, and if we decide that that is barbaric, we will reap the consequences, and so will our children.


This schizophrenic society of ours loves children so much that it aborts 100,000 of them each year but cannot bear to think of a parent smacking a child for disobedience.

Those who cannot tell the difference between love and sentimentality or discipline and abuse are likely to create a state of affairs where anarchy is only contained by coercive state interference in schools and homes.

Hence at the same time we are facing increased anarchy, with rude, and even vicious behaviour, together with state intimidation of parents who use a wooden spoon for extra-culinary purposes. There are a multitude of would-be Sir Galahads, flying the banner of children's rights, who are more than willing to lead a crusade against corporal discipline. We are in serious danger of what Peter Berger calls "therapeutic totalitarianism".

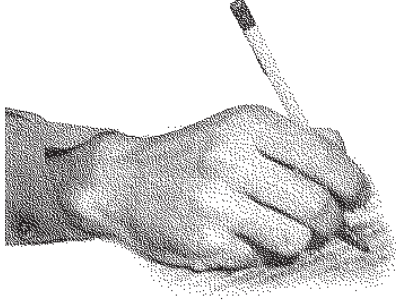
As one who, in my mis-spent youth, was sometimes on the receiving end of corporal discipline, my experience of it was that it was effective but did not arouse resentment. Other measures, such as standing in a corner, sitting through detention, or being yelled at, tended to prolong the agony and increase resentment. Today, authority is softer in many ways, but somehow the angst is raised.

It is a precarious policy to try to be more loving than God. The Christian takes "God is love" seriously and he takes the Fall seriously. James Dobson is no five-point Calvinist but he gets this right: "Children thrive best in an atmosphere of genuine love, undergirded by reasonable discipline."

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and books editor of AP. 

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letters



No conflict in God

I hope Peter Barnes' essay (*AP*, December, 'In what sense does God love the unsaved?') is not the last printed word on an issue that needs to be further discussed in a spirit of brotherly love and concern for the building up of the people of God in the truth.

First, Barnes claims that there are tensions within the Godhead concerning mercy and justice. A more un-Calvinistic statement I could not think of. The Bible and the Reformed Confessions speak of an unchangeable God whose decrees are eternal and who does all his good pleasure (Is. 46:11). Can God be in conflict with himself? The simultaneous exhibition of justice and mercy at the cross of Christ tells us that they are not in conflict. Calvin believed God's will is simple and without tension or contradiction (Institutes Bk 1, ch 18, sect. 3).

Second, I do not believe that God both loves and hates the elect at different times, as Barnes claims. It seems he has confused liability to condemnation with condemnation itself. No one denies that the elect at one time are deserving of God's wrath in themselves, but it is a far different thing to suggest that the elect sinner is an object of God's hatred before he or she becomes a Christian. The application of Christ's work to the elect sinner is a manifestation of God's eternal and unchanging love for his elect.

Third, in relation to Matthew 23:37 and Jesus' attitude toward Jerusalem, Hanko is correct in asserting there is no "well meant offer" and no desire of Jesus for the salvation of the non-elect. The main point of the entire chapter is the condemnation of the Pharisees and the Jerusalem teachers of the law. Certainly they were not willing that Jesus gather his sheep and are rightly judged for this attitude, but where is there any statement that they actually frustrated the will of God and caused him not to gather those he wished? Calvin says Christ is expressing indignation toward Jerusalem rather than compassion.

Perhaps those who wish to be Calvinists ought to read more of Calvin.

Robert K. Burford
Frankston, Vic

A failure of will

The issue *Brave New World* (*AP*, December) was thought-provoking and edifying, but there were serious flaws in Peter Barnes's essay.

Mr Barnes argues that God loves those whom he has not chosen to save (the reprobate) because "there is tension between his mercy and justice ... even tensions within the Godhead."

There can be no question that God loves the elect in Christ Jesus eternally, sovereignly, and savingly. But what Barnes seeks to demonstrate is that God loves all men. Or, to be more precise, he seeks to demonstrate a basis for universalising the love of God in Christ to the reprobate. This is the case, surely, as he is dealing with the disposition of God and the divine purpose with the preaching of the gospel.

Universal love in Christ, of course, stands opposed to Holy Scripture in Romans 9:13,18 and to the doctrine of sovereign reprobation as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith (3:7). Almighty God describes his disposition toward the non-elect in Romans 9, and he makes it perfectly clear that he is pleased to withhold mercy. Barnes describes this as a "tension" in the divine being. Is it not more of a contradiction?

Barnes' "tension" seems to rise out of his view of the relation between God's decretive and preceptive will. Barnes seems to agree with Murray and Stonehouse, who taught that the revealed will of God expresses an active desire and will within the being of God toward the repentance and salvation of all men (or at least as many as hear the gospel). Such a view creates two active, contradictory wills within the one being of God. The tension is between the secret will of God (the decree of election and reprobation which can never be frustrated) and the revealed will of God (the call and command of God in gospel proclamation to all to repent and believe which is often denied). The tension is resolved by the truth that God's decree is his purpose concerning his own actions, while his preceptive will reveals the rule for man's obedience.

Rev. Chris Connors
Minister, Evangelical Presbyterian
Church of Australia,
Launceston, Tas.

Remember Romans 9

Peter Barnes' essay (*AP*, December) perpetuates a number of all-too-common exegetical errors. At the root of them all is his reliance on simple Scripture citation: although the texts he quotes might appear to bolster his case, an identical approach could be used with as much justification to prove a universal atonement, or to show that Christ was somehow inferior to God.

The *locus classicus* in dealing with the issue of God's attitude towards the non-elect is Romans 9:11-13 – a passage that Barnes does not exegete. There was never a time – at any point in his life – when God loved Esau, a fact which the Scripture takes pains to emphasise: cf. Malachi 1:3. It would be grossly irresponsible and biblically wrong to suggest that God earnestly and sincerely desired Esau's salvation but that is the inescapable outcome of Barnes' argument.

Many passages in Scripture declare the exact opposite of Barnes' position; two of the most important in the New Testament are Matthew 13:11ff and John 17:9. Barnes' references to Ezekiel 18:23, etc., and to Christ's weeping over Jerusalem are inadmissible either because they are not contextually exegeted or because (in the case of the latter especially) they fail to recognise the then covenant of God with Israel. If Barnes wants to find support for God's love for the non-elect on the basis of Matthew 23:37 he will also need to explain Christ's utter indifference to the doom of Judas Iscariot (Mt 26:25).

God has an eternal (salvific) love for his elect people and an eternal hatred for the non-elect. This latter does not mean that God has *no love at all* for the reprobate (he sends his rain upon them), but it does mean that he has *no desire at all* for their salvation. Moreover, although God's people are, in their unconverted state, under his wrath, they are never hated by him in the same sense as are the non-elect.

Harry M. Klomp
Boronia, Vic

Good fellowship

AP (November) contained a brief news item referring to the Victorian General Assembly's opposition to the group known as "the Fellowship", going on to describe its secretive nature.

As the president of the organisation known as the "Presbyterian Fellowship", with its home in NSW, I want to make it clear that there is no connection between the two organisations. It would be greatly appreciated if any future references in your

journal to either of the groups could be clarified so as to avoid the possibility of confusion.

Far from being shrouded with a cloak of mystery and secrecy, "the Presbyterian Fellowship" is an incorporated body with a constitution and elected trustees. Our purposes include support for women in the ministry and the eldership. We support the principle of liberty of opinion and believe that the church is strengthened by its adherence to that principle.

Our organisation has a web-site (www.iform.com.au/homepage/pf) which contains comprehensive information on our views.

*David Crawford
President, Presbyterian Fellowship
Chester Hill, NSW*

Slicing the pi

John Yeo (Letters, November) is incorrect in stating that 2 Chronicles 4:2 gives an incorrect figure for Pi. The diameter is not the brim to brim measurement given but can only be calculated from the height (5 cubits = 2290mm) minus the well thickness (1handbreadth = 100mm) x 2. This equals 4380 mm.

Assuming the circumference (30 cubits = 13740mm) given is the inside circumference then $\text{Pi} = 3.13698301$. Allowing for rough conversion factors, this is a very accurate figure for Pi.

Moreover it is poor reasoning to assume that because NT genealogies are shortened therefore the original OT genealogy is also shortened. Rather the NT genealogies are permissibly abbreviated because they have the full OT genealogy as their reference point.

*Neil Cadman
Norman Park, Qld*

Clarrie's clarity

Recently I re-read Mr Clarrie Briese's four articles on evolution (*AP*, September to December). I am impressed by Mr Briese's clear reasoning in proving that Genesis 1-11 and in fact the whole of the Bible, means what it says.

Because of these articles may many come to believe God's sure word. Thank you Mr Briese, and thank you *AP* for publishing the articles. I do appreciate your magazine.

*Jean Duncan Bell,
Qld*

The right spirit

I see we have the young earth, old earth controversy up and running in *AP*. As an "old earth creationist", I'm more than happy with the contributions of John Yeo (Nov), Rowland Ward (Dec) and Colin Gauld (Feb).

What does concern me is the way in which young earth protagonists are prone to cast aspersions on the orthodoxy of those of us who remain far from unconvinced on the possibility of a young earth. Accusations and insinuations of compromise with modern unbelief are deplorable tactics. It is outrageous for Frank Savage (February) to link Rowland Ward to Barbara Thiering and Bishop Spong. There are good and sound reasons drawn both from Scripture and the testimony of God's revelation found in creation for considering the earth to be of great antiquity, which in no way reflects adversely on our convictions concerning the inerrancy, sufficiency and authority of Holy Scripture. Why the intolerance and harsh spirit?

I recommend the recent Zondervan publication, *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, edited by J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, with contributors from a wide range of disciplines – theology, philosophy and science, who argue the case for, in turn, young earth creationism, old earth creationism and theistic evolution.

The problem for proponents of a young earth is that the scientific evidence drawn from astronomy, physics and sedimentary geology is so resolutely set against them. We can't on the one hand applaud the biochemists (Denton, Behe, etc) when they ravage the theory of evolution and then denounce the astronomers, physicists and geologists, not a few of whom are Christians, when they marshal their evidence for an old earth. It is not wrong to look for some affinity between what Genesis 1 says and the findings of the scientific endeavour. After all, the same reality lies behind God's twin revelation in creation and the Bible.

*David Palmer
Sandringham, Vic*

Thanks ... I think

Considering that suggestions of heresy are said to be good for sales, I suppose I should be glad for Frank Savage's association of my *Foundations in Genesis* with Bishop Spong and Barbara Thiering (Letters, February), even if I'm supposed only to lead gently to their positions.

However, it would seem strange to find this pair approving of a book which insists on the essentially Mosaic authorship of

Genesis and its literary unity as part of the fully inspired word of God written, and that insists on God's covenant relationship with a real Adam and Eve.

Mr Savage, and many like him, often find it difficult to concede that others can have a different interpretation on some matter not at the centre of Christian truth. They suppose the clarity of Scripture means everything is clear, which is contrary to Scripture and the Westminster Confession I.7.

They also seem over-anxious to make one a supporter of millions of years since creation if you do not endorse their scheme. Personally, I have no difficulty with God introducing living creatures over a long period of time with man as the climax, but Scripture does not address the issue in scientific terms, while the provisional nature of our scientific theorising must always be recognised.

Might I suggest that in every debate, particularly this one, the 9th commandment should be kept in mind? The exposition in Larger Catechism 143-145 reminds us that rash, harsh or biased criticism is also a breach of the love we owe others.

*Rowland Ward
Wantirna, Vic*

Toppling the idols

I would like to congratulate *AP* for raising the issue of idolatry (February). The articles really highlighted the essence and application of the command against idolatry. They showed me that we Christians are probably more adulterous in our attitudes and consequently our behaviour than we have previously realised. The article 'Insights from idolatry' was particularly good.

With so many counselling theories on offer, it was most helpful to understand that human motivation and behaviour is to be interpreted in terms of the way we relate to God. As the author says, "The social and behavioural sciences miss this because they themselves are idolatrously motivated."

This article provides the foundation needed for both those in counselling professions, and us Christians who are to minister a message of hope to others who are suffering as a result of their own and others' idolatry. The insights of this article demonstrate why there is hope for deliverance, and validates Paul's claim that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Only the gospel provides an answer to the sin of idolatry.

*Wendy Allan
Ashfield, NSW*

prayer

MARCH

- 21 Bankstown (Revesby) parish, Sydney; about 45 communicants, 4 elders; Peter and Lyn Barnes, recently inducted.
- 22 Launceston parish, Tasmania, including Kirklands; about 350 communicants, 19 elders, 2 ministerial vacancies; Bruce Spaulding administrator, Brett Rutherford youth pastor.
- 23 Camp Hill parish, Brisbane southside; about 220 communicants, 19 elders; planning to move to new facilities from its temporary meeting place; Peter and Joy Barson, David and Elizabeth McDougall.
- 24 Pray about the massive preparations taking place for Christian witness during the Sydney Olympics in 6 months' time.
- 25 Rochester-Timmering parish, Victoria; about 125 communicants, 7 elders; Robert and Jeanette Duncanson.
- 26 Presbytery of Wide Bay-Sunshine Coast, Qld; 6 parishes, 2 home mission stations, totalling about 12 congregations with 265 communicants, 160 adherents, 125 children and youth, 44 elders, 5 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction; Ken Thomson clerk.
- 27 Toowoomba North parish, Qld; 3 congregations, about 65 communicants, 2 elders; vacant, Ken Gardner interim moderator.
- 28 Chatswood-Lane Cove parish, Sydney northside; about 100 communicants, 15 elders; Jeff and Carmelina Read exit appointment.
- 29 Belgrave Heights parish, outer eastern Melbourne; about 12 communicants, 2 elders; Mark and Alison Tonkin.

- 30 St Andrew's parish Canberra, including Weston Creek; about 580 communicants, 45 elders; Joy (minister) and Arnold (associate) Bartholomew recently inducted, Sue Mitrai youth pastor.
- 31 Ithaca parish, Brisbane northside; about 65 communicants, 5 elders; Robert Herrgott.

APRIL

- 1 Penola parish, South Australia, including Dergholm and Kalangadoo; about 90 communicants, 10 elders; Alan and Laleen Clarkson, recently inducted.
- 2 Bible Society work in Sri Lanka, (18 million people, 6 languages) the "Big Rescue" Sinhala Bible and the "Cover to Cover" Bible Reading plan.
- 3 Les and Sandra Percy of Zillmere, Brisbane. He is coordinator for Middle East Reformed Fellowship of Australia.
- 4 Kangaroo Ground parish, Melbourne; about 30 communicants, 4 elders; Ivan Barker.
- 5 Joanne Cutler from Parramatta City Church, NSW; teaching English and involved with women's work, Talua Ministry Training Centre.
- 6 Bowral-Mittagong parish, south of Sydney; about 95 communicants, 7 elders; Doug and Del McPherson recently inducted.
- 7 Our denomination's relations with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia ("Free Church"), the Reformed Churches of Australia, and similar sister denominations.
- 8 Canaan Korean parish, Petersham, Sydney; vacant - Bruce Christian interim moderator.
- 9 Dr Jacquie McLeod from Armidale and Kogarah, NSW; back at Galmi Hospital, Niger after a time in Benin, both in West Africa.

- 10 Presbytery of Illawarra, NSW; 5 parishes, 3 home mission stations, totalling 19 congregations, 910 communicants, 470 adherents, 195 children and youth, 80 elders, 8 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction, 1 deaconess, 1 naval chaplain. Peter Currie clerk.
- 11 Fremantle parish, Perth; about 60 communicants, 3 elders; Jim and Norma Nocher.
- 12 Bexley-Rockdale parish, Sydney south; about 80 communicants, 5 elders; Ewen and Elizabeth Brown.
- 13 Monto home mission station, Qld; 3 congregations, about 35 communicants, 6 elders; Brian and Gayle Hoy, Henry Pennings moderator.
- 14 Peter Richardson, acting Principal of theological training in Brisbane, and the committee investigating distance methods in theological education.
- 15 Rick and Kayleen Manton and their four children, working among Aboriginal people in outer western Sydney.
- 16 Sydney Young Nak Korean parish, Telopea, on the city's northside; about 260 communicants, 5 elders; vacant - Man Kyoung Pak interim moderator.
- 17 The Leigh parish, near Geelong, Vic; Shelford and 2 other congregations; about 110 communicants, 10 elders; Tony and Joyce Parle.
- 18 St Philip's parish, Newcastle, and its endeavour to reach the local community in new ways; John and Louise Macintyre.
- 19 Presbytery of Kilnoorat, western Vic; 6 parishes, totalling 15 congregations with 1015 communicants, 220 adherents, 130 children and youth, 63 elders, 1 school principal. Keith Bell clerk.
- 20 At this Passover, pray that many Jewish people may come to realise that it was the sacrifice of Jesus that sets people free.

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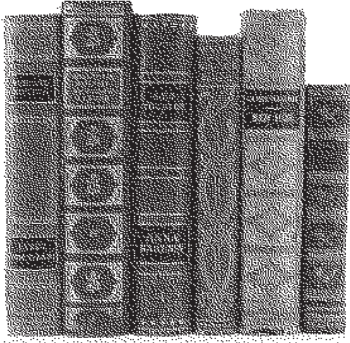
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books



Heaven is a Far Better Place

Eryl Davies
Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1999.
All reviews by Peter Barnes

When the doctor told the evangelist Billy Bray in 1868 that he was going to die, Bray shouted with joy: "Glory! Glory be to God! I shall soon be in heaven."

In one sense all of the Bible is about heaven, the place of glory, where the fullness of God's grace, righteousness and mercy is made known. Yet, strangely enough, in Louis Berkhof's 784-page *Systematic Theology* only one page is specifically devoted to the subject of heaven. We say we believe in it yet we tend to ignore it.

Eryl Davies has set out to remedy this. The result is a work which is based on good scholarship but is also simply written and helpful.

Davies portrays heaven as both a state and a place. Heaven has to be in us before we can be in heaven, but Jesus nevertheless goes to heaven to prepare a place for his people (John 14:2). Perhaps the most contentious – and, in my view, least convincing – part of Davies' work is his assertion that there are no degrees of glory in heaven for Christians. A number of biblical passages would appear to be against this view (notably Mt 18:1-4; 20:20-28; 25:14-30; Lk 12:41-48; 22:24-30; 1 Cor. 3:8-15; and 2 Cor. 5:10).

Most sobering of all is the reminder that "a person may go to heaven without health, without wealth, without fame, without a great name, without learning, without a job, without culture, without beauty, without friends, without 10,000 other things. But he can never go to heaven without Christ." Indeed, heaven is a far better place – a place that is worth reading about.

Won By Love

Norma McCorvey, with Gary Thomas
Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997

In 1973, in the famous (or notorious) *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down all the nation's anti-abortion laws. Norma McCorvey was the Jane Roe involved in that case. In the 1990s, however, she came to profess faith in Christ, and has now told her story. It tells of a woman's long struggle against God and reality, until finally she capitulated.

The abortion industry from the inside is not a pretty sight. The *Roe v. Wade* decision was based on the claim that Jane Roe had been pack-raped, which was a lie, and known as such by many. The media have played their part in portraying pro-lifers as mean-spirited and sanctimonious bigots in contrast to the free spirits who favour abortion.

The truth is that abortion clinics consist of freezers containing the dismembered remains of little babies. This must not be faced by those involved in the work. As McCorvey says, "that's why drugs, alcohol, and coarse jokes are so popular inside the clinics".

With Bernard Nathanson, Carol Everett and now Norma McCorvey switching from heavy involvement in the abortion industry to embrace pro-life and Christian views, the sordid nature of the whole abortion industry has been thoroughly and graphically exposed.

Surely it behoves pro-lifers to press on with the struggle against a cause which is so obviously corrupt and decaying. It may be that, in the providence of God, victory may come unexpectedly and quickly. Who knows? Pro-choice rhetoric may collapse as rapidly as did Marxist rhetoric in 1989-90.

Blame it on the Brain?

Edward T. Welch
New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998.

The relationship between the brain and behaviour is a complex subject, especially for those of us without medical training. Welch's thesis is that physical problems do not force a child (or anyone else) to sin.

Welch treats Alzheimer's disease, head injury, depression, attention deficit disorder, homosexuality and alcoholism. Often they are viewed as diseases, but, while not denying a physical component in each of

them, Welch is convinced that there is also a spiritual and moral component present.

Since Welch's book was written, Professor Cindy Hazan of Cornell University has even claimed that love is triggered off by a chemical cocktail in the brain, which only lasts for 18 to 30 months. It is the sort of finding which will cause havoc to a lot of love poetry and love songs: eternal love sounds rather more inspiring than love for a year and a half.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was sympathetic to the view that physical problems can lead to sinful behaviour, and cited the example of a godly deacon who suffered from arteriosclerosis, and came to swear like a trooper. Welch would say that the man was responsible for his sins; Lloyd-Jones did not.

My sympathies lean in Welch's direction, and I am less than convinced by the modern view that Ritalin and Prozac can help undo the effects of Genesis 3. Welch's book does not defend an extreme position, and it deserves to be read seriously by any who are interested in this subject.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and books editor of AP.

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To the Jew first

Jews, like anyone else, are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

The words of Romans 1:16 have always been a source of strength to those who are involved in evangelism. The text tells them that the gospel they proclaim is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Some who are engaged in Jewish evangelism often like to focus on the words in the last statement of this text, namely “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”, from which they conclude that a priority must be given to Jewish work. But there are a number of pitfalls to be avoided in relation to these words.

For example, some maintain that before the gospel is preached in any community or parish, we must first find any Jews living there and preach the gospel to them first. Only then should the gospel be proclaimed to the gentiles. Others, like Marcion, want to remove “first” from the text!

Calvin speaks of the eminence and rank of the Jews. He does not enlarge on what he means by these qualities; only to say that the Jews were first in the promise and call of God. Murray says it is significant that Paul expresses the priority of the Jews. He does not see it as being merely a priority of time. Murray says the implication appears to be rather that the power of God unto salvation through faith has primary relevance to the Jew. A number of other notable commentators, including Moo, speak in the same vein. Many of those who hold to pre- and post-millennial eschatological positions would see this text as giving a special place to the Jew.

Other commentators — like Hendriksen, Barrett and Plumer — regard the statement “to the Jew first” as nothing more than a reference to the historical circumstances of the apostolic preaching which began with the Jews and moved to the Gentiles. Plumer says the same peculiarity and order are observed in Rom.



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2:9,10, but that the Scriptures are careful to let us know that there is no adaptation of the Gospel peculiar to any one people or nation. In Christ, one tribe of men is as welcome and as well provided for as another. Simeon, who was divinely inspired, named the Gentiles first and Israel afterwards. (Luke 2:27-32).

I believe the latter view is exegetically sound. It does not dampen my drive for Jewish evangelism, or detract from the thrust of Romans 9-11. All people need Christ; the Jews need Christ; so it is our responsibility and duty to make sure that the Gospel is proclaimed to the Jews and to every other nation to the ends of the earth.

Throughout history Jews have suffered much at the hands of a corrupt church, both through active persecution and deliberate neglect in evangelism. Missionaries were sent out to foreign fields but the mission at the doorstep was somehow disregarded.


Things began to change in the early 18th century when religious revival took hold in Germany. Later, evangelical awakening emerged in England. In Scotland, evangelical stalwarts like Robert Murray McCheyne and Andrew Bonar emphasised the importance of reaching the Jews with the gospel and they were instrumental in founding the International Society for the Evangelisation of the Jews in 1842. This

society has assumed a number of titles over the years, and today it is operating as Christian Witness to Israel in various countries throughout the world, including Australia.

For the Jewish evangelist, the one certainty is being confronted with historical facts about the failings of the church. Typical Jewish responses include: “How can you have the nerve to tell me about Jesus when so many of my people were put to death by his followers. Have you heard of the Crusades? Have you heard of the Inquisition? Don’t you know that it was the country in which the Reformation began that caused six million Jews to be exterminated?”

In such a situation it is important to listen, and not argue. Invariably, an opportunity will arise to explain the significance of the message of Jesus Christ and to show that many of those who bear the name Christian may not necessarily be true followers of Jesus. It is good to be challenged. It helps us to give a reason for the hope that is in us.

According to Romans 1:16 the gospel is the power of God to salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. Both this text and the great commission teach that evangelism involves presenting the gospel of Christ to all people and that salvation is only by grace. This point has to be made, because many have romantic notions about Jews. Without the gospel Jews will perish like anyone else. It was to Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, that our Lord said “you must be born again”. Neither his Jewishness nor his orthodoxy could save him. Like Jews and Gentiles in every generation, he needed Christ. Salvation is by grace alone.

John Graham is involved with Christian Witness to Israel. He worships at Bondi Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 

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