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THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

april 2000



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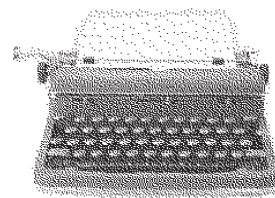
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A U S T R A L I A N  
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# Our rising hope

**T**he 20th century, more than all its predecessors, was a century of death. More than nine million soldiers, sailors and air crew died in the First World War. Another five million civilians are believed to have perished through the ravages of battle, disease, and starvation in the grim years of 1914-18.

The Second World War only accelerated the process of slaughter. As fighting erupted across six of the world's seven continents, fifty million human beings were crushed beneath death's wheel. Hundreds of millions of others were broken in body, soul and mind. One of the great war poets, the British officer Wilfred Owen, wrote to his mother in 1917: "My senses are charred; I don't take the cigarette out of my mouth

any more when I write 'Deceased' over their letters."

Two world wars have confronted the human race with the frailty of our existence and the sordidness of violent death.

If ever a century needed an answer to the waste and horror of human suffering, the 20th century certainly deserved it. This month, two events that are sacred to Australians will be celebrated only days apart. Their importance lies in the fact that the significance of the first event, Easter Sunday, provides an answer to the suffering which Australian servicemen and their families experienced in the service of their nation, and which we celebrate on 25 April – Anzac Day.

Shortly before dawn on 25 April 1915, 200 merchant ships alongside a fleet of battleships prepared for the invasion of Gallipoli. Some 12,000 Australian troops were put ashore. Many would never return. Within two weeks, the ANZACS had lost nearly 10,000 men. It became a defining moment for Australia. It is little wonder that that tragedy has been so deeply etched into our national psyche. It also explains why both old and young Australians make regular pilgrimages to the killing fields of Anzac Cove, Lone Pine and Steele Post every year.

**I**n this issue of *Australian Presbyterian* we have attempted to explain how Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead is our ultimate comfort in both life and death. Clarrie Briese uses his judicial expertise to remind us that the claim of the early church, that God had raised Jesus from the dead, is more than credible.

We also feature a special interview this month with Dr Paul Barnett, one of the world's leading New Testament scholars. While many within and without the church are skeptical of a genuine bodily resurrection, Dr Barnett shows how the New Testament text admits of no other possibility. Further, he explains why all our hopes for the future kingdom of God must be grounded in the resurrection of Jesus' earthly body. Scholars and preachers who cannot affirm the resurrection of Jesus' fleshly body have no message at all for soldiers facing death and the grieving loved ones of our war dead. They also have no right to minister in Christ's name.

This issue also recognises the sacrifices, both past and present, of Australian servicemen. Perhaps the greatest tribute that we can pay to members of our Defence Force is to recall that the New Testament always speaks well of soldiers. Four times, the gospel writers single out Roman officers for special mention. The centurion at Capernaum is mentioned for his humility and kindness, as well as the exceptional nature of his faith in Christ (Mt 8:5-13). Mark reminds us that the first person to grasp the significance of Jesus' death and to make a public confession of faith in him was the Roman officer in charge of the execution squad (Mark 15:38,39).

Luke mentions two other Roman army officers. The first, Cornelius, is referred to as a devout man who was held in deep respect by the Jewish community. He also came to faith in Christ (Acts 10:48). Julius, an officer in the "Emperor's Regiment", is noted for his decency, humanness and sense of honour (Acts 27:1,43).

Allan Harman's article on the Anzac Legend is of special interest to Presbyterians. In it, he mentions Rev. Andrew Gillison of Moorabool parish in Victoria, who was a chaplain at Gallipoli and died in action. The circumstances of his death remind us that the Christian life, as well as a soldier's, is a vicarious one: it is lived for the sake of others.

*Peter Hastie.*

## From the Convener

**A**s director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission, I recently visited Timor. The faith and courage of many in that ravaged land moved me deeply, and the need for our aid and prayers is very great. This issue of *AP* contains a short account of my experience (see News, page 17), plus testimony from Rod McAuliffe, chaplain with 10 Force Support Battalion – InterFET, and a courageous Timorese pastor, Emmanuel, in the face of the murderous pro-Indonesian militia (see Missions, page 22 and 23).



*Robert Benn,  
Convener, National Journal Committee* 

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# The verdict

*A judge applies the rules of evidence to the resurrection accounts.*



**H**istory is full of instances where a person's special experience changed the course of his life. The Apostle Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is one such example. According to both Luke (Acts 9) and Paul (1 Corinthians 15), the encounter Paul had with the risen Christ revolutionised his life. The experience was real and dramatic. It convinced Paul that Jesus must have risen from the dead, as the Christians whom he had been persecuting were proclaiming. It changed his understanding of God and the Old Testament Scriptures, and converted him immediately to the cause of Christ. Soon he became the most powerful advocate for Christianity in the world of the first century AD.

Paul's experience, if true, supports the accounts of the four Gospel writers. They give us details showing that after his death and burial Jesus made a number of appearances to his disciples to make plain to them that God had raised him from the dead.

Christians believe the evidence concerning the physical resurrection of Jesus because, being in the Christian Bible, we accept it to be the Word of God on this issue. However, we don't always realise



*Clarrie Briese*

that, as the Christian faith is based on actual historical events, accounts of these events come to us through human witnesses whose credibility one can scrutinise and assess in the same way that witnesses are judged today in settings like courts.

We note too that Jesus told his disciples that they were to be witnesses to him, which means that their testimony should be open to tough scrutiny and assessment.

Famous lawyers of the past have devised tests and rules of evidence which assist in assessing the credibility of witnesses as follows:

The credit due to the testimony of witnesses depends upon, firstly, their honesty; secondly, their ability; thirdly, their number and the consistency of their testimony;

fourthly, the conformity of their testimony with experience; and fifthly, the coincidence of their testimony with collateral circumstances.

So what is the result if we examine the four gospel writers and the Apostle Paul using the tests of lawyers?

Honesty: It is crucial to know whether a witness is sincere. In other words, does this witness believe that what he is saying is true? In the case before us, did Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as well as Paul believe that what they put down in writing was true?

To decide whether a witness is honest, you have to look to his or her character, then to the motive in giving the testimony.

As to character, when I read the accounts of the five witnesses I get an overall impression that they are men of integrity and truthfulness. They portray Jesus as one who taught with great authority and conviction, who was passionate for truth, and who abominated lying, hypocrisy and deception. As men of Jewish stock steeped in the Old Testament, they knew that the Law required witnesses to be true. I logically infer that they can be presumed to be honest men who were concerned for truth.



They do not appear to be deceitful.

Their writings contain some of the highest moral and ethical teaching the world has known. If these men were not honest, then they represent a baffling contradiction of what they themselves were proclaiming. If they were dishonest and deceitful, then the character they have created in the person of Jesus Christ is such that it is inconceivable that they were the real authors. How could these five men with their very different backgrounds and interests conspire to create a sublime character in a superb piece of fiction – if that’s what it is. It seems so preposterous, there is scarcely a single intelligent critic who argues today that the testimony of these five witnesses is deliberately false.

A motive to lie also presents a problem. What possible motive could have prompted them to proclaim the gospel as they did, and die for it, if they believed it false? They certainly knew when they went out to challenge the world with the claim that Christ had been raised from the dead that they would be persecuted and put to death – and that’s what happened.

Judge Chandler of the American Supreme Court, put it this way: “Nothing could be more absurd than the proposition that a number of men banded themselves together, repudiated the ancient faith of their fathers, changed completely their mode of life, became austere in professing and practicing principles of virtue, spent

their entire lives proclaiming certain truths to mankind, and then suffered the deaths of martyrs – all for the sake of a religion which they knew to be false.”

The conclusion would have to be that these witnesses must have believed that what they wrote was the truth, namely that Jesus had risen from the dead. Now, as witnesses to that event, they had a solemn duty to tell the world.

Ability: The law assumes that a witness is of sound mind and with average intelligence until evidence is brought which contradicts it. This legal presumption applies to Paul and the Gospel writers, but there is strong evidence to suggest that these men are well-qualified as witnesses of ability.

First, we note that they wrote in Greek, even though their background was Jewish. So they were obviously men of some literacy. Second, the writings themselves show the authors to be men of intelligence and ability. For example, modern scholars have shown that Luke, who wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was an historian of the first rank. His writings show him to be both professional and accurate in his approach to his work.

Some critics claim that the four gospel writers testified from a position of bias, and therefore exaggerated and distorted the facts. However, when we read their writings we do not encounter the language of fanaticism, prejudice or bias. Indeed, the gospel writers include instances of their own obtuseness, foolishness and mistakes. Calculating, biased and prejudiced people do not operate in this fashion. Men and women do not invent stories to their own discredit. So why would the gospel writers include incidents which showed up their past weaknesses, mistakes and stupidities? The inference is that they were concerned for the truth.

They also included difficult sayings of Jesus which could be misinterpreted and place Jesus in a bad light. For example, they mention his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane where he shrank from the thought of death. They refer to his cry of God-forsakenness on the cross. Men who wrote to present Jesus in the most heroic light would be sorely tempted to omit that view of him. That the authors of the gospels did not is a tribute to their ability and their honesty.

At least two of the gospel writers were eyewitnesses of many of the events about which they testified. In particular, they were present at some of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. All four, as well as Paul, obtained information from other eyewitnesses and sources considered reliable. These five were in an excellent position to record the events of the gospel histories because a great deal of their testimony rests on the best testimony of all – eyewitness testimony.

There is one final objection to the accounts of these eyewitnesses. Critics often claim that their accounts were written so long after the events that they had forgotten them or had confused them with various traditions and legends which had grown up about Jesus.

However, it has now been established that the gospels were written between 30 and 60 years after the death of Jesus, and that Paul wrote most of his letters earlier. That period is not long enough to affect matters of substance in their accounts.

But can we be sure that the Greek text of the New Testament as we now have it is the same text as the one originally written by the authors? One of the most reputable scholars today concerning the witnesses to Jesus is Paul Barnett, the Anglican Bishop of North Sydney, who has written *Is the New Testament History?* and *The Truth About Jesus*. He approvingly quotes Stephen Neill: “Anyone who reads the New Testament in any one of half a dozen recent Greek editions, or in any modern translation, can feel confident that, though there may be uncertainties in detail, in almost everything of importance he is close indeed to the text of the New Testament books as they were originally written.”

The number of witnesses: Lawyers know the value of witnesses who corroborate each other. The credibility of a witness is greatly improved if what he or she says is corroborated by other witnesses. Where witnesses disagree on matters of substance their credibility is weakened. On the other hand, where witnesses support each other word for word in every minor detail, it’s easy to infer that they may have been putting their heads together and concoct-

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ing the evidence.

When we apply this test to the witnesses before us, we note that there is a considerable number of them, namely five. They corroborate each other on the major issues. They agree that Jesus had been crucified, was dead, buried in a tomb, and had risen from the dead and was alive.

But there is a seeming discrepancy in some of the minor details. Are these discrepancies such as to weaken or destroy their evidence as to the resurrection itself? Not necessarily. Sometimes it is just these kinds of discrepancies that are so familiar to us in the courts, which give integrity and authenticity to their story.

In the first place, they indicate that the authors did not put their heads together. They are independent accounts of what happened. Furthermore, research work has shown that the four writers of the gospels had different audiences and different purposes in mind. This factor has a great bearing on some of the discrepancies, whilst others are mere omissions of details, a common problem in secular histories.

When we concentrate on the discrepancies in minor details, we can often be diverted from the fact that there is a huge amount of corroboration on matters of substance as well as some of the other minor details. In the gospels, the corroboration is so strong that we have special support for the proposition that these men were recording the facts of history concerning Jesus with minute accuracy.

**H**uman experience: When people testify in court, the judge or magistrate will mentally ask, "is this person's testimony in harmony with my own experience of the world? Could this have happened?" This brings us to what is probably the most serious difficulty for people reading the Gospels. They report that Jesus continually performed miracles. If this is true, he had the power to alter or suspend the laws of nature. Indeed, the Gospel writers tell us that he had the power to restore life to people who were dead.

However, miracles of that kind are not part of our experience. When we hear of miracles today they are usually bogus ones or highly suspect. Add that to our own life experiences, and it's not surprising that many people believe that the miracles of the New Testament are also false or highly suspect.

Does the report of miracles performed by Christ destroy the credibility of the five witnesses and hence the truthfulness of their accounts? I am not an authority on miracles. I do not understand how they occur or what processes are involved. Nevertheless, in my Christian world-view not only is it possible for miracles to occur,

but it would be quite strange if there was no sign of them in history.

The four gospel writers themselves seem to wrestle with the meaning of the miraculous events they record as performed by Jesus. They were also outside their previous experience. We see that it took a long time to draw their conclusion that here was the Lord of the universe in action. And the physical resurrection of Jesus was for them the final piece of evidence that put it beyond all doubt.

Surrounding facts: The fifth test is that there should be agreement between the testimony of witnesses and the surrounding facts and circumstances. In most cases, if a witness is truthful he will be willing to supply a considerable amount of surrounding detail. Any one who intends to commit perjury is wary of this. So false witnesses studiously avoid providing lots of details. On the other hand, the truthful witness is usually candid, free and unrestrained in his statements, willing to answer all questions, even those involving the minutest detail. Applying this test to the Gospel writers, Judge Chandler said this: "The Gospel writers wrote with the utmost freedom and recorded in detail with the utmost particularity the manners, customs, habits and historic facts contemporaneous with their lives. The naturalness and ingenuousness of their writings are simply marvellous . . . They were seemingly indifferent to whether they were believed or not. Their narratives seem to say – these are records of truth and if the world rejects them it rejects the facts of history. Such candour and assurance are always overwhelmingly impressive and in every form of debate are regarded as unmistakable signs of truth."

There are many instances where the

gospel writers give details which we find coincide with details given by secular writers of the time. The most obvious one concerning the resurrection is, of course, Pontius Pilate. The Gospels state that he sat in judgement on Jesus Christ. Both Josephus and Tacitus, secular historians, tell us that Pilate was Governor of Judea at that time. Also, secular historians, both ancient and modern, tell us that at the time of Jesus' death the power of life and death had been taken from the Jews and vested within the Roman Government. They are in agreement with what the Apostle John wrote in John 18:31.

**T**he important point is this: if the five witnesses can be shown from other sources to be accurate with regard to many matters of minor detail, and they certainly can be, that suggests that they should be accepted as accurate with regard to the major incidents and events they record, even when those events are extraordinary, miraculous and outside our personal experience of life.

Applying the tests of lawyers, the most reasonable conclusion is that the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus are witnesses of the highest credibility. If we are unable to accept their history, why do we accept other ancient historical accounts where the supporting evidence is much less than provided for the resurrection of Jesus?

Christians of all denominations are soon to celebrate the events of Easter again. As we hear the statement "The Lord is risen", it's comforting to know that on the basis of highly credible evidence we can respond, "He is risen indeed".

*Clarrie Briese is former Chief Magistrate of New South Wales.* 

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*It's not what but who you know that counts.*

**E**arly on Monday morning as we go for the snooze button on the bedside alarm for the third time, what difference does the resurrection of Jesus make? Or as we lower someone we love dearly into the cold earth, confronted again by the painful reality of death, and in an honest moment admit “one day this will be me”, does the resurrection make a real difference?

This article is based on two premises: that the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus actually happened, and that, because it happened, by faith in our crucified and risen Lord we can experience the resurrection. The Bible makes it clear that if Jesus was not really raised from the dead, to speak of experiencing the resurrection makes little sense. However, even those Christians who affirm a genuine resurrection ought to ask: what good does it do to believe Christ was raised if it makes no difference to our lives? How then are we to experience and be transformed by the resurrection – every day and forever?

The story is told of a Christian scholar in the 1930s who was writing a book on the resurrection. One day as, he was working in his study, an important truth dawned on him afresh. He got up from his chair and began pacing the full length of the study reciting four simple yet profound words: “Christ is alive today, Christ is alive today!”

Too easily we have forgotten this reality – this most basic truth. Over and above all else, the resurrection establishes that Jesus is still alive. Consider these two of many passages: “Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him; the life he lives, he lives to God” (Rom. 6:9-10); “he always lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). Jesus Christ is alive today – we are not dealing with some dead figure of ancient history. If



*Chris Ten Broeke*

this were the case, Jesus would appear only as a minor footnote in some obscure history book.

Have we grasped the importance of this truth? Because Jesus is alive it is possible to encounter him; in fact, Christianity is a personal relationship with our risen Lord. Before it ever became a system of doctrines, Christianity is first and foremost a relationship with a person. It is not simply a matter of what we know, but who we know!

It was this encounter with the risen Christ that transformed lives in New Testament times. If Christ was alive then, he is alive now. If they could meet him back then, we too can meet him today. This risen Christ is alive and longs to meet us. The resurrection is a call for us to meet the risen Christ with the wounds of past failures, mistakes, hurts, sin and guilt – to find forgiveness and healing. If this doesn't make a real difference to Monday morning nothing will.

Resurrection and lordship are vitally linked: “and through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4); “for this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Rom. 14:9; see also Eph. 1:19-23, where the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to cosmic lordship is for us who believe).

The resurrection was God's vindication of Christ's ministry – it made sense of his death. The resurrection is a graphic way of announcing that he has done what no one else has ever done. He alone is Lord.

**T**he practical implications of this for every day life are not always immediately understood. What difference does Christ's lordship make for each day? Irrational tragedies and horrible outrages do occur – we sometimes wonder if the world is mad, and has

simply been left to run out of control. The resurrection reminds us that God will win in the end – that Jesus is in control of the universe and our lives (Eph. 1:21,22; Phil. 2:9-11). We are allowed to live with hope – the resurrection is proof enough that no matter how bad things get, we can trust in God. He loves us. He has our best interests at heart (Rom. 8:28-39). The resurrection gives us a glimpse of his final victory.

The ethics of Paul are based on the fundamental conviction that “Jesus is the risen Lord”. Colossians 3:1 is an excellent case in point: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above”; or “So then, just as you received Christ as Lord, continue to live in him” (Col. 2:6).

New Testament scholar G. Walter Hansen argues that the resurrection of Christ in Paul's thought both establishes the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord, and gives liberty to believers to serve the Lord. This is certainly the case in Romans 12:1-15:13. It may come as a surprise to many that lordship and liberty go together. For Paul writes in Romans 14:8,9: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so whether we live or die we are the Lord's. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” In the context of Romans 14 – Paul is promoting moral freedom, but not moral relativism – freedom from the dictates of an over-zealous fellow Christian is not freedom from obedience to the Lord.

**I**t is through the resurrection of Christ that we are indwelt by the Spirit who is at work in us, changing us at this present time into what we ought to be. It is the Spirit – a resurrection gift – that enables us to serve the Lord in liberty. Romans 8:11f captures this well: “And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you ... Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the sinful nature.” The resurrection gives Christ the authority to call us to obedience, the Spirit gives us liberty to obey his lordship.

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# A body of truth

*Jesus is alive today, Bishop Paul Barnett tells Peter Hastie.*


little more distant, a little less real. We are a bit like the comedian Woody Allen who said “I am not afraid of dying – I just don’t want to be there when it happens”, or Maurice Chevalier who said “old age is not so bad – when you consider the alternative”. At least they were being honest – without hope, without the Resurrection – how can anyone view death with optimism?

The Biblical vision of Life in the face of death, flowing from the resurrection of Jesus, is immensely hope-filled. There is nothing negative or pessimistic in the Pauline letters – the resurrection of Christ is something entirely new, pioneering, something pivotal to our hope. Because Christ has been raised bodily and gloriously to life, so also we will be raised bodily and gloriously to life; the first fruits provide the assurance of the full harvest (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Take this wonderful verse in 2 Cor. 4:14: “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.” This verse, in context, doesn’t simply have future implications but also present impact: “Therefore, we do not lose heart ... though outwardly we are wasting away inwardly we are being renewed day by day ... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for a glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:16ff). Here we have the assurance that death does not grimly write the last page of our earthly existence – but life does! This certainly puts present sufferings, growing old, illness, pain and death itself in an entirely different light.

The resurrection enables the future – the new creation – to break into the present. The triumph of the forces of life over the forces of death is the stamp of God’s promised new creation in Scripture. In this way the power of God’s promised future reaches back into the present and decisively shapes it.

This future/present orientation, based on the resurrection, in Paul’s thought is very important. In a key passage on the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul speaks of the believers being raised, in the future, with “spiritual” bodies (v.44) and of death being swallowed up in victory (vv. 51,54), there is a present impact. In the meantime, with this sure hope before them, Christians are free to give themselves to the work of the kingdom – knowing that their work in the Lord is not in vain (v.58).

To be sure, we do not yet see the full implications of this identification with our risen Lord. We still wait for the redemption of our bodies from this sin-tarnished world, where things fall apart and people become sick and die. We groan because of the tragedies we experience. Yet in the midst of our pain the resurrection makes a significant difference – every day and forever.

*Chris Ten Broeke is minister of St John’s Presbyterian Church, Warrnambool.* 

**Augustine said in his Commentary on the Psalms that no doctrine of the Christian faith has ever been attacked with the same pernicious and contentious contradiction as the resurrection of the flesh. Do you agree?**

I think that Augustine is right. Nobody doubts that Jesus was a genuine figure of history. There have been a few eccentrics who from time to time have questioned his existence. But scholars don’t take them seriously. In similar vein, nobody doubts that Jesus was put to death by crucifixion. However, today we find many people disputing the fact of the resurrection – that is, the reanimation of Jesus from the dead after he had been killed by crucifixion.

Now we know that there’s more to the resurrection of Jesus than his resuscitation. There’s a transformation as well. But the idea of him being bodily/physically raised to life is a contentious distinctive of biblical Christianity. And it’s one of several major sticking-points between believers and the unbelieving world.

However, between those who fundamentally agree that Jesus rose again in his physical flesh and those who deny a bodily resurrection, there is another group. Half of this group is in the church and the other half in the unbelieving world. They recognise that something happened



**Paul Barnett**



**Peter Hastie**

to Jesus after he died, but they can’t bring themselves to affirm his bodily resurrection. And so they fall back into positions like “Jesus’ spirit continues to live on” or “Jesus lives within my heart”. But these positions won’t do; indeed they won’t do at all. For a start, they don’t take the text of the Bible seriously. Nor do they offer any solid ground for our future hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

**Some of your international colleagues, such as Bishops David Jenkins and John Shelby Spong, have openly denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, as have some Australian bishops, including the Primate. Do you sometimes feel like a lonely voice?**

Not at all. I think that by far the greater number of church leaders on the world scene, certainly in the Anglican communion, would hold a view of the resurrection such as the one that I’ve expressed. Those who have difficulties in believing the resurrection for the most part come from the developed world or the West. Of course, they are often a very outspoken and articulate minority, but they certainly don’t speak for the majority of us. And that’s why I don’t in any sense regard myself as a lone voice.

**How about among theologians and scholars?**

Probably, but what you need to remember is that, among scholars in the developed world particularly, there’s a lot of pressure to mirror the views of the wider community. However, despite this, there are many gifted and accomplished scholars who uphold the beliefs of historic Christianity.

**How do church leaders who deny the bodily resurrection continue to hold their office?**

I must confess that I have a great problem with the idea that people can do this. In most mainstream denominations or community churches, you are required to answer some important questions about beliefs before you assume a position of leadership. Usually, you must take an oath before you are given a platform from which to speak. Leaders are required to give some form of undertaking. Naturally, this brings in the whole question of conscience. And I think ministers have a serious moral problem when they break their promise to teach the historic doctrine of the faith and drive away error from the church.

**But how do those who deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus justify holding office when they obviously do not subscribe to the faith of the church?**

Well, they plead the magical word “interpretation”. For them it’s all a matter of interpretation. Their response is usually along the lines of “You may see things this way, but I view them differently. You interpret the Bible’s words like this; I understand them like that.”

They treat the word “resurrection” as a metaphor. But the problem for them is that they are using the word in a way that would not have been understood in first-century Judaism. For Jews at that time, the resurrection of the body was a physical thing. They wouldn’t have thought of it as a metaphor. It would have been inconceivable for a Jew to believe in Jesus’ resurrection and at the same time to claim that his earthly body was rotting in some Palestinian grave. But that’s what some of our modern-day church leaders want us to believe. It’s an untenable position.

So they are forced by a process of “double-think” to hold that Jesus lives on in beautiful music and lovely words in a grand liturgy conducted in a nice building with flickering candles. But this isn’t the meaning of resurrection in the New Testament sense of the word.

It seems to me that the New Testament is adamant that:

a. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. He is the one who fulfils the promises of the prophets. He is the Son of God – both God and man. Further, he doesn’t become that in the theological sense, as if theology is just a matter of ideas and words. Jesus is actually the Son of God, and,

b. His resurrection, while it has the dimension of transformation in it, is an actual bodily resurrection. So Jesus takes his manhood into heaven as the Reformers insisted. So we are not just dealing here with a neo-Gnosticism, where people

refuse to take the body seriously. The New Testament says that Jesus arose in his own body. That’s quite clear.

**What does Paul mean by “resurrection”? Could it refer to some exalted, luminous vision?**

It might include that, but it’s a broader concept. To any Jew in the first century, it could only mean a bodily resurrection. The idea of a resurrection that wasn’t physical or concrete is, as one scholar has said, as meaningless as a mathematician speaking about a square circle.

Given the world-view of the New Testament era, the resurrection is the ush-



ering in of a new age of God: the resurrection of all flesh. So what’s happening in the resurrection of Jesus is that the new age has actually begun. He is the first-fruits of it. The general resurrection and the end of the world have actually commenced. However, after Jesus’ resurrection, God has said: “Wait! I’m putting the brakes on. I’m calling a halt to the coming judgment so that people will have an opportunity to hear the gospel and trust in Jesus as their Saviour. In mercy I’m holding back the resurrection. But the day will come when I’ll release the brakes and announce the resurrection from the dead.” So the resurrection of Jesus is the breakthrough of God’s kingdom into our world.

**Could the gospel writers possibly mean that Jesus reappeared in a visionary or spiritual form?**

No. I don’t think so, and for a number of good reasons. First of all, you’ve got to contend with the appearances of Jesus after he was raised in the 37 days before he ascended. All these appearances of Jesus are attested to by the carefully sequenced statements of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, which are a tradition that he has received. Further, this tradition was confirmed by his own personal experience of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Then again, the Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – have their own sequences. In all, there are 12 known occasions where Jesus appeared and was seen by hundreds of eye-witnesses. And these appearances involved not only the witnesses’ sight, but also their hearing and touching.

Finally, you’ve got to contend with the empty tomb. When you take the emptiness of the tomb, and the fact of Jesus’ burial, and the attested appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, you can only come to one reasonable conclusion: we are not talking about some subjective idea that Jesus lives in the hearts of his people. Rather, we are driven to conclude that the body of Jesus is no longer on this earth. It has been physically raised from the dead.

**What did Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 15:8 when he said that Jesus “appeared” to him? Could he have meant that he simply had a mental vision of Jesus?**

No, I think there’s more to it than that. The word “appeared” is the standard word for “see”. It’s in the passive voice so it could mean “was seen by me”. In other words, Paul could be saying “I saw him” with my own eyes.

We must remember that Paul’s case is different to the other apostles because he was the only apostle that we know of who saw Jesus outside the 40-day period mentioned in Acts 1:3. Paul alone saw the Lord in the situation he mentions. And whereas the other apostles saw Jesus in actual geographical settings such as Jerusalem, Emmaus and Galilee, Paul saw Jesus directly from heaven. So there’s that difference.

However, having made those qualifications, it would be wrong to conclude that it was only a vision in his mind. He saw the Lord with his eyes and heard his voice with his own ears (Acts 9:3-8; 26:12-19). So Paul’s appearance is a special case which probably relates to the special nature of his apostleship to the gentiles.

**Is there any difference between Jesus’ resurrection and the one awaiting true believers?**

Yes, there is. Our bodies are psychikos

(“natural”, 1 Cor. 15: 44), by which Paul means bodies belonging to this age. As the fallen sons of Adam, our bodies are sinful and death-prone. However, when we are raised, we will have pneumatikos bodies (“spiritual”, 1 Cor. 15: 44).

Jesus, on the other hand, did not have a sinful body. So he didn’t have to undergo the same type of transformation that awaits us. Nevertheless, his resurrection body does have some interesting features that we only become aware of after his resurrection. For instance, it was not limited by things like doors and walls as it had presumably been before. But his body is still an actual body; it’s still identifiable. Jesus is not simply a spirit floating around in the ether.

And the same will be true of us. We will still retain our complete identities. We will still be able to see, touch and hear one another.

**Some modern scholars, such as Bishop Spong and Dr Peter Cameron, claim that Jesus’ body lies mouldering in a Palestinian grave. Can we be sure?**

Well, the tomb was empty. The New Testament says that and Matthew’s Gospel says that the Jewish leadership claimed that Jesus’ body had been stolen by the disciples. So both Christians and Jews agreed that the tomb was empty. The question is: Who took the body? Who moved the stone?

The possibilities are these: First, the disciples took the body and perpetrated a hoax, or, second, the Gospel account is historically true and God raised Jesus from the dead and finally took him away into the kingdom beyond our sight.

My own personal view is that when people try to talk about a “spiritual” resurrection which does not involve Jesus’ body, they get into all sorts of trouble. I find it totally unconvincing when people say that the apostles believed that Jesus’ spirit lives on when they knew that he was still physically dead. I don’t want to build my life on that, and I don’t want to waste other people’s time telling them that. It means nothing. If that’s all Christianity is, it’s a series of moral ideas built on an immoral foundation. If Jesus’ bodily resurrection was a hoax, I’d prefer to try and work out the meaning of life in some other way.

**Some scholars have suggested that Jesus’ resurrection body was a “spiritual body”. Do you have any comment?**

It gets down to this: where do you think the body of Jesus was four or five days after the crucifixion? If you think that it was decaying in some grave in Palestine or

had been torn apart by dogs, then you’ve veered out of the mainstream of apostolic thought. You’ve hit a rock. I think that historic Christianity must insist that the resurrection of Jesus was a bodily resurrection. The tomb was empty and the body was gone.

**How does your belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus affect the nature of your relationship with God and your belief in the afterlife?**

I relate with Jesus now in terms of the person I meet in the gospels where I hear his words and see him through the text. The Jesus I serve now as my Lord and speak to in prayer is that Jesus. He is still alive by virtue of his resurrection. The spiritual relationship that I have with the living Lord is in terms of the historic figure that I meet in the Gospels.

As far as the afterlife is concerned, I think about it a lot in terms of loved ones, friends and family. I think that it’s of immeasurable comfort to know that when they die safe in the arms of Jesus, they are actually safe in his arms. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, if the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not true, we are utterly deluded. Not only are our sins unforgiven, but our loved ones are lost forever. If that’s the case, Christians are an absolutely wretched and pitiable lot of people! What we’ve done is built all our hopes for those we love on a myth.

**How does the resurrection of Jesus affect your duties as a bishop?**

It affects them like this: The resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from my own resurrection which in turn cannot be separated from my judgment. While I am justified by faith alone and by grace alone, nonetheless along with other believers I must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. There I must give an account of myself.

If a person has accepted the privileges of Christian leadership, ministry, and had the benefit of theological education, then there’s no question in my mind that the judgment of God is infinitely more exacting. There’s a huge temptation in life to be a man-pleaser, and I have no doubt that I have failed on that score many times. But what I really want to be is a God-pleaser, and the reminder of the resurrection helps me to do that. It’s a huge incentive to please God. I should add that the prospect of the resurrection helps one to stand firm and remain full of hope in our deeply unsettled times (1 Corinthians 15:58).

*Paul Barnett is bishop of North Sydney, and a renowned international New Testament scholar. He has published many New Testaments commentaries and books on NT history and apologetics.*

*Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.*



## belgrave heights



# The Anzac legend

*The Gallipoli legacy is precious and powerful.*

Some years ago I spoke at a Remembrance Day parade at Scotch College, Melbourne. Brigadier Gilmour was there from the army to take the salute. At the afternoon tea his mother, who had accompanied him, asked specifically to be introduced to me. She immediately said, "Did you have an uncle by the name of Walter?" When I replied "Yes", she said, "Your uncle was my husband's best friend and they served at Gallipoli together".

A few years later we were in the north of Scotland, and in early evening went looking for a meal in Bonar Bridge in Sutherland. We were the only customers in a small restaurant. After the meal we went to pay and talked to the husband of the woman who had served us. He asked what we were doing in the area, and soon found out that he had known my uncle who had ministered nearby. Then he insisted we come and have a look at some photographs of his father and uncles in the uniform of the Lovat Scouts. Turning to me he said, "Your uncle was with my father at Gallipoli". Two uncles from both sides of my family serving at Gallipoli!

I have sometimes wondered whether they met, or even served alongside each other. For Australians, Gallipoli will always be a name to remember. It was the first time Australian troops (as distinct from state troops) went into action together. There is much truth in the saying "Australia was born on the beaches of Gallipoli". The Anzacs helped to weld the various states together, as soldiers from all over the continent took part in that tragic episode.

Anzac Day each year gives us an occasion to reflect upon what we owe to those in our armed services, and to remember the tremendous sacrifices that were made. As I go around preaching I always read the memorial boards in our churches, and never cease to be amazed how many from our congregations served and how many gave their lives. War brings out the best (and also the worst) in people.

Those serving our country in the services are fulfilling a role very similar to that which our police carry out. We need police to guard property and people, and to enforce the law. Similarly we need soldiers, sailors, and airmen to protect us as a nation, and also to assist in emergencies elsewhere.



*Allan Harman*

Australian troops have helped in United Nations peacekeeping efforts in various trouble spots, and the recent work in East Timor was a tremendous Australian contribution.

Looking back over British and Australian history, it is remarkable how many notable Christians were in the services.

General Gordon's fame rests now not so much on his military exploits last century but his work in trying to identify the sites where Jesus was crucified and buried. In Jerusalem, Golgotha and the nearby Garden Tomb are the sites that he designated last century.

Sir William Dobbie was Governor of Malta when it was under intense bombardment early in the Second World War. There were practically no planes to defend the island, and ships bringing supplies and arms were sunk. In his book, *A Very Present Help*, he tells of how he prayed, and encouraged others to do so, that God in his mercy would deliver them. In the gracious providence of God, Malta was saved.

Wars always leave their mark, not only on the countries in which they are fought, but in the lives of those who served and on their families. The loss of life is tragic, but



so are the consequences for those who come back with injuries and memories that often never heal. Ex-servicemen often carry with them physical and emotional scars that never disappear. Even though they don't talk about them, those who have been in battle never forget the sights they witnessed, nor do those who suffered in prisoner-of-war camps.

Anzac Day also gives us an opportunity to reflect on the role of chaplains in the services, and specifically of the work being done today in all three branches of the Australian services by our Presbyterian chaplains. We have both full-time and part-time chaplains who are fulfilling an important role. A military base, with all its varied activities and often residential housing for staff, forms a mini-world of its own. Into that world the chaplain can enter. It is not only that he is there to conduct services, but he is important as a counsellor and friend. Troops know who to turn to when they are in trouble, and it is vital that an evangelical ministry is available for them. It is a different ministry than in a parish, but a wonderful opportunity for serving Christ and specifically to minister to people many of whom have no real church connection.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia has a long record of involvement in chaplaincy work in the services. Many ministers served as chaplains and some lost their lives. At Gallipoli, Chaplain Andrew Gillison (of the Moorabool parish near Geelong) was killed.

Rev. E. N. Merrington (author of the hymn "God of eternity, Lord of the ages" RCH 642) was deeply troubled as he witnessed the increasing number of casualties. In his diary he wrote: "Oh my God, what a price we are paying for liberty." After Gallipoli he returned to Australia, but couldn't settle while Australian soldiers were still in action and offered for service in France.

Chaplaincy work can be lonely, as the chaplain often lacks the support he would have in a parish situation. We all need to encourage our chaplains, and if we live near a base where one is serving, then we should offer friendship and help. Let him know you are praying for him and his ministry.

*Rev. Prof. Allan M Harman is principal of the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.*













# A call to arms

*Courage and obedience are the soldier's virtues – and the Christian's, says Ken Short.*

At 18 I became an infantryman in the Australian army in the closing stages of the Second World War. It was during this time as a young lieutenant that I realised why Paul and others found such interest in certain aspects of military life. As I grew in my experience of soldiering, it became clear that Paul saw great similarities between the life of a soldier and a Christian's experience. I think that's why he used the soldier as a picture of the Christian life.

The army puts a lot of emphasis on soldiers being able to endure hardship and to face danger and difficulties firmly. Valour was the term used back in my day. One of the most noble qualities that we look for in soldiers is courage or bravery. It's also an important characteristic in a Christian's personality.

The need for courage in the face of the world's opposition is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). Part and parcel of a soldier's life is facing pain and privation for a higher cause. Likewise, God expects us to suffer gladly for the higher cause of the gospel.

Again, I discovered in my army career that another aspect basic to a soldier's life is obedience. One of the hardest things that every rookie has to learn is to "obey lawful commands". It doesn't come easily. And yet without it, an army cannot function.

I began to see why God regards obedience so highly. It's basic in the Bible, which I suppose is not surprising when you consider that the "soldier" figure is caught up in God's name. When God is called the "Lord of Hosts", it means "the Commander-in-Chief" whom every follower must obey. This same Commander-in-Chief has made it clear: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Finally, I've noticed that even a superficial reading of the Bible reminds us that a soldier's work is to wage war. For Paul, all of life was war. For example, using military language, Paul tells Timothy to see his whole ministry as war. He must keep his mind on the job of living Christianly, and not yearn for a way of life in which Christ is not in charge. The kingdom is always the priority.

## IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



Specifically, he reminds Timothy that "no soldier on service gets entangled in civilian affairs" (2 Tim. 2:4). He charges him "to fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). When he looks back on his life he is unembarrassed to say: "I have fought the good fight ... I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

The challenge of this army imagery is to remind us that we cannot take a casual approach to life. In wartime we devote all our resources to survival and victory. We cut out the luxuries so we can focus on the necessities. Whether we're on the battle front or the home front, the war touches every one of us. We cut back on the unimportant things, so we can throw all our effort into victory. Ocean liners are turned into troop ships.

But there's one major difference between the way an ordinary soldier wages war and the way that Christians are required to: we already know the final outcome. Because Christ has triumphed over Satan, conquering him by his death and resurrection, he calls us to join in the battle not on the basis of fighting for victory but from victory.

Certainly there are still battles for Christians to fight, battles against dishonest teaching and behaviour in the church, battles against injustice, as well as corruption and scandals in our community like the gay Mardi Gras. God will deal with these. But the war is won. Spiritual victory is ours. Satan actually knows his fate, as the last book of the Bible records: "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12).

There are many other things that I've learned from my army experience, but these are two of the most valuable. I guess that's why the New Testament image of the soldier is such a fruitful one for me.

*Bishop Ken Short, previously Dean of Sydney, based at St. Andrews Cathedral, Sydney, is a former Chaplain-General to the Australian Army, and Bishop to the Defence Force. He is now retired and lives on the South Coast of NSW in Kiama with his wife, Gloria.*

ap



## Benn back from Timor

*APWM director Rev. Robert Benn has returned from Timor, describing the experience as overwhelming. Here is his report.*

I wondered whether it would be kosher to use the Indonesian language when I was in Timor. That soon sorted itself out and I guess 95 per cent of my conversation was in Indonesian – a tremendous advantage. From Australia I could not conceive what a “scorched-earth policy” meant. Dili had had a population of more than 100,000 with a vibrant CBD – fully stocked. The referendum took place on 30 August, and the results were announced on 4 September. Then the whistle blew, and through a finely tuned and well-orchestrated militia movement, by the evening of 6 September the city was destroyed – citizens were instructed to get out, trucks were commandeered, all goods were removed, and fire trucks sprayed the city with inflammable fuel. The city was torched. That happened throughout East Timor – city and village.

The main city Protestant congregation, Hosanna, had had a congregation of around 7000 with four services on Sunday, three full time ministers (and others helping), 186 elders, 120 home groups, and a weekly collection of \$A15,000 to \$20,000. Today there is one unpaid minister, 7 elders, and only about 300-400 attendees at the one 8am service, mostly of the poorer class.

There are about 120 non-government aid organisations, and peace-keeping troops abound. UNTAET (the UN transitional administration) is in control for three years – in all departments of life. The Synod Office is a huge store

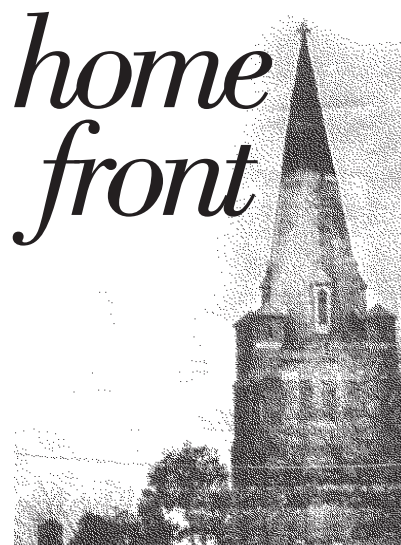
house for distributable goods, upon which the people rely heavily.

The moderator and church leaders are worn out dealing with issues of reconciliation, distribution and interpersonal strife – very often related to perceived inequality in distribution of goods. Hearts are aching. The very tired moderator said to me, “Every morning I pray for a renewed spirit!” I talked for many tens of hours. I met no one who didn’t flee before the onslaught of the militia, nobody who had not lost friends or family members. Many described their traumas in vivid detail. According to the UN High Commission on Refugees, 136,000 East Timorese have returned from West Timor, and there are up to 150,000 left.

I was only about 200 metres from where a skirmish broke out. When shooting began I saw the measure to which the local people (about 6000) were shell-shocked and frightened – understandably, after all they’ve been through. I ran too.

The desperate need is for people who will serve in Jesus’ name, getting right beside these local people, listening, serving, teaching, nurturing and not being in attitude a colonial lord. They’ve had 450 years of that, and now are on the road to independence. Our opportunity is to do this through English and Bible teaching, and a pile of person-to-person nurture. I just wanted to stay!

*See Missions, pages 22, 23*



### Bird a Master

At the commencement service of the 135th year of the Presbyterian Theological College of Victoria, **Dr Tony Bird** graduated with a Master of Theology degree, researching the authorship question of the pastoral epistles. **Barry Oakes** and **John Rickard** each graduated with a Bachelor of Ministries degree. **Rev. David Innes** preached from Romans 6 on the fact and faith of the Christian experience.



From left: John Wilson, Allan Harman, Tony Bird, John Rickard & Barry Oakes

### Seven earn diploma

More than 200 people gathered at the graduation and commencement Service of the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, held at the Burwood Presbyterian Church. **Rev. Dr Alan Harman** spoke on God’s presence and God’s power in ministry.

This year seven candidates for the ministry were awarded the Diploma of Theological Studies: **Hamish Burke** (Cronulla), **Paul Harris** (Grenfell) **Geoffery Keen** (Mt Gambier), **Song Dae Pak**, **Mark Powell** (Wee Waa), **Jeffery Read** (Chatswood) and **Lyle Sims**



(Walcha). **Michael Boyd**, a candidate for the Congregation Church also graduated and has been appointed to Revesby.

The principal of the PTC, **Rev. John Davies**, reported that student numbers had increased again this year to 111, including 29 candidates for the ministry, 3 deaconesses candidates and 27 women students.

### Randwick minister inducted

**Rev. Grant Spurgeon Thorp** was inducted to Randwick on 4 February, the congregation's 11th minister since 1885. Thorp's previous charges were Wee Waa and Ballina, NSW. He and his wife, Susan, have been welcomed into the community with their four children, Hannah, Joshua, Thomas and Hamish. The Member for Coogee, Mr Ernie Page, and his wife Barbara, attended the ceremony.



From left: Ernie Page, Barbara Page, Susan Thorp, Grant Thorp.

### Appointments

#### Queensland

**Gregory Watt** was ordained and inducted into the Caboolture Charge on 10 February. The service was conducted by the **Rev. J. Gilmour**, and **Rev. N. McKinlay** preached.

Two new elders, **Keith Black** and **Wilfred Crump**, were admitted to the session of North Pine Presbyterian Church on 13 February.

**Rev. Gary Tosh** was set apart as chaplain to aged care within PresCare at a service conducted in the Graceville Presbyterian Church on 17 February. The service was conducted by the moderator of Mowbray Presbytery, **Rev. Dan Mihailovic**, **Rev David Johnston** preached, and **Keith Stewart**, chairman of PresCare, gave a brief talk.

#### Victoria

**Rev. Mark Crabb** was appointed to the parish of Mt Evelyn on 17 March. The ser-

vice was conducted by the moderator of the Maroondah Presbytery **Rev. G. Vanderwert** and **Rev David Schulze** preached.

**Rev. Bruce Riding** has accepted the call to the Williamstown Parish and his induction is scheduled for 7 April. Riding was formerly of Scots Presbyterian Church in Ballarat North and was the first Presbyterian minister ordained and inducted after Church Union on 22 September 1977

### Passed over

**Elder Jack Bull** has gone to be with his Lord. He died whilst undergoing surgery for a heart condition. Jack was an elder of Cairns St Andrews Presbyterian Church from the 1960s where he served for many years as session Clerk. Jack became an elder of the new Cairns Presbyterian Church in October 1999, after the amalgamation of St Andrews and Cairns South.

### Vacancy

The Peninsula Charge in Queensland is now vacant. The interim moderator is **Rev. Gary Fintelman**.

### EMF missionaries to visit

**Leonidas & Irene Kollaros** have been missionaries in Greece for about 15 years. They hope to be in Australia from 15 June, returning to London on 12 July. For further details contact your state liaison officer.

### From the Flynn Patrol

**Rev. Laurie Peake** reports: The first day out on this patrol was one of the most satisfying we have had in South Australia. It began with a hospital visit where I was able to comfort two people with the gospel. After that we headed for a ghost town where there are a few people living. We have had contact with one Christian couple there for a while. This time they sent us up to another old Presbyterian lady, 86, still longing to see more folk attending the little bush church in town. We got there at an awkward time, but one of the first questions she asked was, "Have you had lunch?" She soon had two sizeable plates of chicken stew before us, just as if she was prepared for us.

During our final visit for the day, I was able to open the Scriptures and after the reading, got into issues like the eternal destiny of people of false religions. The husband concluded, "You don't hear much about this sort of thing in churches today!"

### Trinity on record

The choir of **Trinity Presbyterian Church**, Camberwell, under director of music **Andrew Bainbridge**, has recorded 17 favourite hymns from the Revised Church Hymnary on compact disc. The recording, *Praise to the Holiest*, was released in mid-December. The recording was engineered by a member of the congregation, and the artwork and photography were also provided by church members.

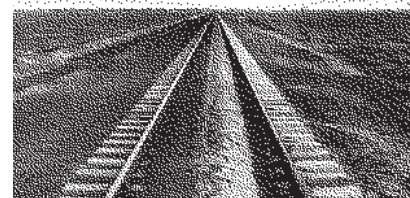
Among the hymns recorded are "Jesus loves me", "Love divine, all loves excelling", "Man of Sorrows!" and "Stand up for Jesus", and there are others by Isaac Watts, John Newton, Charles Wesley and Frances Ridley Havergal. For ordering details, see the advertisement in this issue of AP

### Food for Thought

Preach the Gospel all the time; if necessary, use words".

*Francis of Assisi*

across  
australia



### Time for Mr Eternity

The story of Mr Eternity has been told again but this time it has the benefit of the Sydney millenium celebrations. The booklet *The passing of Mr Eternity* was written by evangelist **John G Ridley** who was the person responsible for Arthur Stace's 33-year mission to write "eternity" over the streets of Sydney. Copies are available free from the Herald of Hope, PO Box 216 Marayong NSW 2148

### Pastor killed

Cairns pastor **Terry Gould** has died after an alleged knife attack. His attacker turned on Pastor Gould during a counselling session. Mr Gould served the Manoora community near Cairns for many years as a religious and community leader.

## Ambonese seek refuge

About 54 Ambonese arrived in a boat seeking the safety of Australia after escaping from the Maluku Islands. They believed they had no option but to risk their lives crossing the dangerous seas. Wounded physically, mentally and spiritually, they are also destitute.

The Ambonese community in Victoria released a statement in which they thanked Gull Force and other people who have strong links of friendship with Ambon for their prayers and support.

## March for Jesus

Ten thousand school children from across Australia will have the opportunity to take part in the largest public witness to Christ in history. They will perform at Stadium Australia, the venue for the Olympic Games, as part of the global **March for Jesus** on 10 June. They'll take part with tens of thousands of Australians from a range of denominations and ethnic backgrounds in an event that will involve more than 10 million Christians from around the world.

## Mission's \$20,000 challenge

The head of the Wesley Mission, **Rev. Dr Gordon Moyes**, has made an offer that the Bible Society is eager to take up. During an interview on 2GB's *Sunday Night Live*, during which **Tom Treseder**, director of Bible Society (NSW), spoke movingly of his recent visit to China, Dr Moyes said: "I challenge you to do all in your power to tell every church in NSW that Wesley Mission will match, dollar for dollar, all gifts given by churches for the project *Bibles for China's Poor*, up to \$20,000.

## Pen Pals

**ASSIST** Ministries, a worldwide outreach launched some 11 years ago by international journalist **Dan Wooding**, has announced the Australian launch of its Bridge of Friendship pen pal programs to the former Soviet Union and Taiwan. Also announcing the appointment of Alan and Rhonda Owen as ASSIST Australia representatives, Wooding said the project was about "love tucked inside an envelope". "This is a wonderful opportunity for Australian Christians from all ethnic backgrounds, to become missionaries to the former Soviet Union or Asia without leaving home."

Contact Alan and Rhonda Owen at 43 Cedar Street, Katoomba, NSW 2780; phone: (02) 4782 7371; or email at <owenar@hermes.net.au>.

# world news



## Furore over American priests

The news of the consecration of two American priests as bishops in Singapore on 29 January by a group of conservative primates and bishops has prompted colourful outbursts from across the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion.

The two new bishops, **Charles H Murphy III**, and **John H. Rodgers**, were consecrated to help "re-establish the unity that has been violated by the unrebuked ridicule and denial of basic Christian teaching" in the Episcopal Church.

"I am appalled by this irregular action and even more so by the purported 'crisis' that has been largely fomented by them and others, and which bears very little resemblance to the church we actually know, which is alive and well," presiding Bishop **Frank T Griswold** wrote in a letter to all bishops.

In Australia, **Harry Goodhew**, archbishop of Sydney and a leading conservative, declared, "While I appreciate the concern and frustration that has prompted this action, I wish to express my profound disappointment that these consecrations have taken place and in this manner."

## African Christianity

The Christian faith is growing faster in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world. Adherents to Christianity, which is the world's largest religion, are increasing by 3.5 per cent each year in Africa, compared with 2.5 per cent in Latin America and Asia, and less than 1 per cent in Europe and North America.

In 1970, Christians in Africa represented 10 per cent of all who claimed to be Christian throughout the world; in 2000 they represent 20 per cent or 400 million people.

The most significant surge in growth in the last decade has come from the African

Independent Churches – a widespread movement that encompasses some 10,000 different churches. For instance, in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, the number of churches has tripled in the last three years (from 75 to more than 200).

## Prosperity problem in Africa

Most African Independent Churches congregations hold their services in local language and focus on the work of the Spirit and miracles, and prosperity theology has become increasingly popular. **Stephen Jubwe**, assistant professor of sociology and anthropology at the University of Monrovia, says: "It is a miracle people are looking for. And they want it right here, not in the next life."

The teaching of Prosperity Theology is starting to have a significant influence on people's commitment. Says **Father Emmanuel Hodges**, a minister with the Episcopal Church in Liberia: "People go from place to place searching for an answer. If they find what they need, they stay. If they don't, they move to the next one. There's no commitment."

## Irresponsible

What do Andrew Cunanan, Luis Garavito, and Ted Bundy have in common? They all murdered. Are they responsible for the actions? No, say an increasingly vocal group of American psychiatrists and criminologists. They suggest that people who have the tendency to break rules, violate the rights of others, who lie, are involved in white-collar crimes, or who are cold-hearted criminals, suffer from a disorder known as antisocial personality.

**Thomas Thompson**, a New Mexico forensic psychologist, insists that many criminals are programmed to commit crime and lack free will. His evaluations recently helped convert the sentences of two death row inmates to life in prison. **Donald Black** (University of Iowa) has recently published a book (*Bad Boys, Bad Men*) which has suggested that violent criminals may not be responsible for their actions.

## Planning for divorce

"Till death do us part, for better or for worse" has become a throwaway line, according to **Sandra Morgan**, a lawyer living in Los Angeles. She reports that 20 years ago no one had even heard of pre-nuptial agreements. Nowadays, more and more people are planning for divorce years before it happens. Some are also inviting their extended family members to help with divorce planning.



# Generally Strained Times?

*What the GST means for your church.*

**I**t's only three months to go until the Goods and Services tax (GST) arrives, and the question for the Presbyterian Church is, are you ready?

The GST will bring about sweeping changes in business, and there are predictions that many small businesses will fail because they cannot come to terms with the new tax regime. So churches need to make sure that they understand the legislation.

The first thing that your committee of management should do is register your church with the tax office, either via the Internet (at [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au)), by phone (13 24 78), or drop in to one of their offices and pick up the necessary forms. Some newspapers also carry the registration papers.

Many churches run a number of different business activities under the one umbrella, such as a pre-school, bookstore and an opportunity shop. Basically, you have a choice. Since some of the activities could be subject to the GST you may want to register each activity separately, or you can apply for one registration to cover them all.

When must churches pay GST? For a start, there is no GST payable on open plate "free-will" or "planned envelope" offerings for the congregation. Similarly, fees paid for weddings and funerals attract no GST unless the fee is paid to a soloist, is used to buy flowers, or to print song-sheets for the wedding. Then GST is paid.

Where the committee of management has to pay GST on the cost of maintenance or power for a manse or church hall, you can claim a credit and get a refund from the tax office.

Unfortunately, for some activities a local congregation will have to pay the GST. For instance, if your church runs a bookstall and sells new books, you will have to pay



*Neil Colquhoun*

GST. If you conduct fund-raising events such as a church dinner you will have to pay GST; likewise if you hold a fete and sell new goods at a stall. But the GST can be claimed back as a credit from the tax office.

You have to pay GST at least four times a year – by 21 January, 21 April, 21 July and 21 October. You have to lodge what the Tax Office calls "a business activity statement". Your statement will include the GST you have collected minus any GST claimed as input-taxed credits, as well as the final balance of GST you owe or the refund the tax office owes you.

For the committee of management, this means that the time has come to start using a computer to prepare your accounting records. You must now keep comprehensive records of receipts and payments and you should clearly show the GST collected and the GST paid. The tax office's *Guide to GST* will give you examples; get it by phoning 13 24 78.

Finally, churches need to know about some so-called "grey areas" in the GST legislation. For instance, if a group in the church like a Ladies Guild or PWA has a street stall, do they have to pay GST for cakes or knitted goods. Only if the price of the item is more than half what you would pay in a shop, including GST. If a jumper is worth \$40 in a shop, including GST, then as long as it is sold for under \$20 on the stall, it's GST-free.

Second-hand goods are GST-free provided they retain their original character. But if, for example, your church runs an opportunity shop and you recycle second-hand clothes as industrial cleaning rags, you will then have to pay GST.

Grants or donations in cash or kind are GST-free as long as they are made unconditionally. But when the donor specifies the purpose, you're liable. For instance, if a GST-registered religious organisation receives an annual grant from a local government body to provide community counselling services, it will have to pay 1/11 of its grant to the Tax Office as GST. However, you can claim this GST as an input tax credit.

**O**ne area that will create potential problems is the operation of church non-cash benefit accounts. Payments from a non-cash benefit provided to a minister will in many cases be subject to GST. It is imperative that the recipient of those benefits should make available tax invoices to the committee responsible for the finances of the church so that input tax credits can be claimed back from the tax office. Ministers should be careful to keep all receipts.

Remember, the obligation of meeting responsibilities under the GST legislation falls squarely on the committee of management.

*This information is general, and is not a substitute for specific professional advice, which I recommend should be sought.*

*Neil Colquhoun, a practicing chartered accountant, is the principal of Colquhouns, a member of Epping (NSW) Presbyterian Church, a trustee of the PCA in NSW Property Trust, and chairman of PLC Armidale.*

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# Ashes and dust

*Robert Benn visits a ravished land.*

Chaplain Rod McAuliffe arrived in East Timor in October 1999 to minister to the Australian troops serving with INTERFET. Of course he saw the results of the desolation in the wake of the militia, and grieved. But at the same time he made it his business to get to know the situation of the local Protestant church, and soon was urgently communicating to anyone from his home church who would listen to his cry for help for the suffering church.

When I responded, a battery of communications landed on my desk, and with a few days notice I was on the plane. On the day of the first major skirmish this year, therefore, I was at the border of East and West Timor (19 February), and rubbing shoulders with Australian troops who had arrived in East Timor in October 1999.

Major General Peter Cosgrove faced anarchy and destruction. Early in 1999 the militia massacred many villagers and students in a grave yard in Santa Cruz, just south of Dili. A video of this was shown around the world, and was a major event in arresting international attention. Then in April we learned of the further horrifying actions of the militia when fearful Timorese crowded into a Catholic church at Liquica (west of Dili) were hacked to death by machetes.

The results of the referendum were



Simon Gould

announced on 4 September, and that is when we saw Dili burn. The attitude of the militia was "if we can't have it, we won't let you have it either" and the East Timorese people ran for their lives, or lost them!

It wasn't easy for Major General Peter Cosgrove's InterFET troops. The world was rather critical that he did not move faster to bring the militia to heel, but events have shown him to be a master tactician. He nullified the militia's reign in East Timor in only three weeks, without any InterFET deaths in combat.


At the border I spoke to Lieutenant Colonel Simon Gould of 5/7 RAR (Mech) and Warrant Officer Class One Rod Speter. Simon Gould informed me that not one shot had been fired by his InterFET battalion in combat. Their commitment was not to offence but to defence. This was not

because they had not been provoked, but that they had been well tuned to discipline themselves for their peace-enforcing role. "But," said Simon, "we have the authority to use the maximum of force if this is deemed necessary."

Arlindo Marcal, the moderator of the Protestant Church of East Timor, told Radio Netherlands: "What I appreciated about the Australian troops was that their charter was very clearly defined. If I requested something that was not part of their responsibility, they made that very clear. But if my request did fit within the boundaries in which they operated, they were most helpful."

"One of our border churches was damaged in September, so the Australian troops repaired it, and came along to the service of thanksgiving. We appreciated that. They seemed ready to get their hands dirty, helping local people in their efforts to rebuild their country. Our people feel safe with the Australians here. As far as I'm concerned they are the best troops we've had on our soil!"

General Cosgrove has now surrendered his command. Most of the Australian troops have returned home, to the applause of the world.

*Robert Benn is national director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission.* 

## A courageous soldier of the cross

Like everyone else, Home Missionary Emmanuel was angry and terrified. He was aware of the tactics of the militia. Everybody had talked about Santa Cruz and Liquica. The vote had been taken. People had fled for their lives.

The militia had commandeered trucks and were getting closer to the village where he had ministered for 15 years. Would the same thing happen here as had happened all over East Timor – looting and destruction? He was fairly sure the church building would not be destroyed, a fate that was normal for houses.

He decided to act fast in the interests



of the members of the church. "Bring your household goods to the church. They'll be safe here," he pledged. Emmanuel had the pews moved aside, and stockpiled all the goods. The militia arrived as expected.

Like Zacchaeus, Emmanuel is a short

man. That did not present an obstacle for him. "You have no right to be here. This is the house of God. You have two options. Either to loot and plunder, or to go. If you decide to take our goods, you will have to kill me first. My body you must bury right in front of the church. I'll be resurrected by my Saviour God. You will pay the price of your actions. Now go!"

The militia withdrew sullenly, and left the church.

This was one of the few places where at least some of the goods were saved.

One minister said of Emmanuel, "Small body. Big voice. Big boldness. Big heart. And big dependence on God."

# A chaplain's story

Chaplains are sent with soldiers on active service because people whose lives are threatened have new fears and emotions to face. I found some of that among Australian soldiers while Indonesian soldiers were in Dili, first through guarding our compounds against an unknown threat of attack, and second through knowing they would have to respond if the Indonesian army (TNI) fired on boldly hostile Timorese crowds in our vicinity.

Nothing happened despite some tense moments, and my battalion's soldiers were much more settled when the TNI left East Timor. But also they were far less interested in things like God and death, so the religious side of my ministry was less in demand than I had anticipated.

Soldiers' problems at home were the most difficult part of my work, but not the bulk. The heaviest pressure on most of my battalion was the long, tiring work, day after day. Our service to InterFET was unloading ships, processing stores and food through warehouses, operating a 24-hour aircraft and diesel fuel depot, feeding several hundred from each mess, rewiring most of Dili and keeping the generators



Rod McAuliffe with an InterFET captain

running, moving water, food, ammunition, fuel and stores . . . all night, for many!

Our soldiers did it so well that they earned our commanding General's compliments. They felt the pressure of the work, but they did not crumple because of it. I did not get chaplaincy crises because of the hard and exhausting work, but I was often tired from keeping in touch with our soldiers at several sites in Dili. Perhaps my contribution was encouragement.

Many East Timorese refugees returned across the Dili dock, which was in my battalion's hands. The first cruise liner arrived with 2000 refugees. That gave us the opportunity personally to help the East Timorese by carrying their luggage from

the ship to the dispersal area.

At another refugee arrival our soldiers ran down the road to a melee where a few men – "Militia! Militia!" – were being beaten by the crowd. Then a UN lady grabbed me, shouting "Come quickly! Somebody injured!" When I arrived the man's wife was hysterical because he was about to be injured ("Militia!"), but some soldiers on a Land Rover whisked him away.

My delight at least twice a week was time with the Protestant Church in Sunday services, and visits. It was heart-rending to see men come to the Hosanna Church minister asking for food, only to be told he didn't have any. It was a welfare point before the militia rampage, I gather, but now it's struggling itself.

I noted that the preaching was good biblical encouragement to forgive the recent crimes and survive spiritually by faith in Jesus. But they are so very, very short of people to preach, teach and live the faith in all the churches across the country.

*Rev Rod McAuliffe was chaplain with 10 Force Support Battalion – InterFET.*

## 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  
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# Movie Watch

## Dogma

Reviewed by Justine Tob

**D**ogma will raise eyebrows, is guaranteed to offend religious viewers, and may irritate everyone else. But it will also make you laugh, right from the opening disclaimer: "We apologise in advance to sensitive viewers, but remind you that God does have a sense of humour. After all, just look at the play-pus."

This whimsical, light, comedy adventure – written and directed by Kevin Smith – pokes fun at all things pious ... and hardly ever with taste. Along the way, though, it manages to dredge up serious questions about the nature of faith and belief in God. Kevin Smith's trademark script overflows with profanity, but if you can get past the mire there are some rare gems underneath.

Probably a legacy from Smith's earlier offerings, *Dogma* has attracted bigger names, among them Alan Rickman, playing the seraphim Metatron, and Linda Fiorentino, playing "the chosen one". A cameo from a well-known music star rounds out *Dogma's* holy trinity.

Smith's courage to tackle controversial issues never wavers, and his fearlessness is admirable. First of all there's Rufus (Chris Rock), the disgruntled 13th Apostle who has been kept out of the Bible because he was black. Then there's the ever-present argument that God is a woman. Above all, there are two homicidal angels who not only moralise to sinners, but also mete out their own brand of divine justice through a bloodbath, deriving immense enjoyment from the process.

Where could the story possibly be with all of these characters? Loki (Matt Damon) and Bartleby (Ben Affleck) have

been exiled to earth and wish to return to Heaven, as they find living in Wisconsin a fate worse than hell. Someone informs them of a loophole in Catholic dogma: if the two angels can get to a specific church in New Jersey, they can re-enter Heaven. But by doing so, they would contradict God's will, and since the whole of creation rests on the infallibility of God, this contradiction would reverse all of it. As Rickman's Metatron says, "Creation would become nothingness." And there's the rub.

So enters Fiorentino, playing Bethany, a half-hearted Catholic who's having the worst of times with her faith. Where was God when she was declared sterile? Joining her on her quest are the two prophets, Jay and Silent Bob. Bob mostly communicates through facial expressions as he chooses his moments to break his silence very carefully. In short, the fate of the world rests on a bunch of mismatched, ragbag and unlikely heroes.

A Christian audience will need a big sense of humour to sit through this one, and if you try to keep Smith's disclaimer in mind you might just survive it. It's gratuitous in a violent, over-the-top sense, it offends fundamental Christian beliefs through its portrayal of God, and it takes the mickey out of organised religion. Maybe we Presbyterians could learn a thing or two from Cardinal Glick's "Catholicism WOW!" reach-out program.

If anything redeems this harmless piece of tosh, it's the penetrating questions it raises about faith. For how many people are like Bethany, and only go through the motions of religion like a habit? Perhaps a film like this can inspire discussion about these issues, even if facetiously.

*Justine Tob is studying journalism at the University of Technology in Sydney and attends Randwick Presbyterian Church.*

# The Talented Mr Ripley

Reviewed by Phil Campbell



Matt Damon in *The Talented Mr Ripley*

**I**f cinema is the reflection of a culture's psyche, things are pretty dark out there. Looking for a relaxing movie to unwind with on a recent Monday, I chose *The Talented Mr Ripley*. In spite of the upbeat trailer and the bright cast – Matt Damon in the title role, with Gwyneth Paltrow, Cate Blanchett and Jude Law – this is an ugly and depressing movie. Young Mr Ripley's talent lies in pretending to be someone he's not – and killing anyone who gets in the way.

It all starts with a borrowed jacket. Wearing a friend's Princeton University blazer to play piano at an upmarket party, Tom is mistaken for a graduate; a business tycoon offers to pay him \$1000 to bring home his runaway son from Italy. Tom – in reality a theatre janitor – jumps at the chance. Within weeks, he finds Dickie, ingratiates himself into the jazz-loving circle of expats, and settles into the luxurious Mediterranean lifestyle.

Things take a chilling turn, though, when the errand fails – Tom kills Dickie in a fit of rage, and assumes his identity.

As the charade continues, Tom kills again... and the violence is graphic. Add homosexual undertones and an uncompromising sense of despair and deception, and – believe it or not – *The Talented Mr Ripley* leaves you feeling drained and depressed.

The most poignant moment comes as Tom looks back on it all. "I thought it would be better to be a fake somebody, than a real nobody," he says. If there's any value in this two-hour torture, it has to be in the resounding "No" that it sounds to Tom's sentiments. Be real. Be who you are. Better to be a genuine nobody any day.

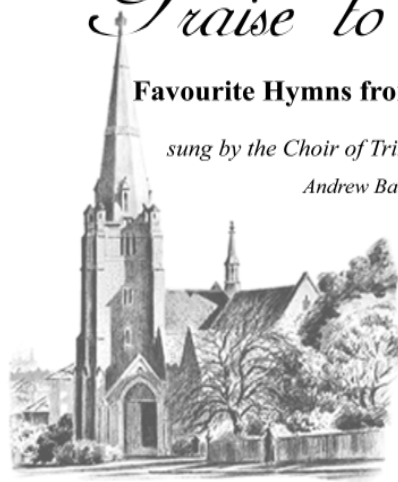
*Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor.*

*Praise to the Holiest*

**Favourite Hymns from the Revised Church Hymnary**

*sung by the Choir of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Camberwell*

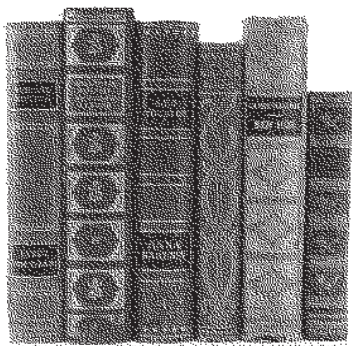
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# books



## Discovering Christ in Ruth

Donald Fortner  
Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1999  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

Donald Fortner describes his aim in this little book: "I have not attempted to give a thorough exposition of this blessed little history. I leave that to others who are more capable. It has been my purpose simply to show forth the grace and glory of God in Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer, as he is portrayed in these four chapters." Hence there is good use made – rightly so – of typology in seeking to understand the message of Ruth. Boaz, for example, is a type of the greater Kinsman-Redeemer, Christ Jesus.

However, often typology gives way to allegory, and the result seems somewhat strained. For example, Boaz appearing in the field is likened to Christ appearing in Scripture, the feeding of Ruth is compared to God's feeding of his people with his word, the invitation to Ruth to dip her bread in the vinegar is a picture of Jesus bidding of us to dip our piece of bread in the gravy of his grace, and the close relative who potentially might have redeemed Ruth is the law.

Pastor Fortner's baptistic views are vigorously expressed to the point where a paedobaptist might find them a little heavy-handed. Also, the treasure in the field in Matthew 13:44 is surely the gospel, not the

church. For all that, I found my heart "strangely warmed" (if citing Wesley is not too provocative to the Grace Baptists) to read through Ruth again with this book as a guide.

## LifeWorks

John North and Robert Forsyth  
Sydney South: Aquila Press, 1999.

This work is not supposed to be a set of talks, but in fact it is just that. There are 11 chapters which are obviously designed to be notes for evangelistic talks rather than tightly constructed essays for reading. North and Forsyth have a gift for communicating in an arresting way, such as when they distinguish between Beetroot Truth (which is subjective – you either like beetroot or you don't) and Bus Truth (whether you believe it or not, it is true that if a bus runs over you, you will be squashed). There are some excellent quotations and illustrations, and some very practical suggestions, especially on prayer. It is also encouraging to hear of one man who became a Christian after reading the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17.

Nevertheless, there are some weaknesses in the book. To tell an unbeliever that God loves him/her unconditionally is surely tantamount to lunacy or heresy. It is asking to be misunderstood. At times North and Forsyth sound more Arminian than Reformed, and their view of baptism seems to reflect the baptistic views prevailing in much of Sydney Anglicanism. It is also revealing that in dealing with God as creator, they studiously avoid the issue of evolution.

For all that, this is a stimulating work, and should prove useful to Christians who are seeking to extend the boundaries of the kingdom.

*(Available at \$19.95 from Moore Books, 02 9577 9966.)*

## St John's Gospel in Poetry

Stuart Peterson  
PO Box 1060, Albion Park Rail 2527, 1999.

This is an interesting rendition of John's Gospel in poetic form, the fruit of 22 years' work. The poetry sometimes consists of blank verse, and sometimes is in rhyme, although neither the metre nor the rhyming is consistent. Occasionally, contractions are used which sit uneasily with the more majestic Authorised Version lan-

guage (e.g. 'hath', 'floweth'). There are some interesting lines e.g. on John 1:29, 'On the next day, / In an ordinary sort of way, / John saw Jesus coming. / Then in an extraordinary way / Felt his senses humming. / His tongue was fired / With prophecies of gold: / "Behold ...'

The disciples' faith could hardly be said to rarely grow dim, despite what Mr Peterson says. But there will be many people who find this experiment to be not only worthwhile but inspiring and helpful. It will bring pleasure to its readers.

## The True and Living God

Kim Hawtrey  
Kingsford: Matthias Media, 1998

Kim Hawtrey has written an evangelistic work which is clear and simple, yet is deep enough to be satisfying. The theme is that God must be our most deeply held belief or we do not have saving faith. To put anything or anyone else before God is to be guilty of idolatry (cf. Eph.5:5; Col.3:5). As A. W. Tozer asserted: "Let (the average man) be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and men, between God and personal ambition, between God and human love, and God will take second place every time." Bill Gates of Microsoft illustrates Tozer's point by claiming "just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning".

Hawtrey thus presents the gospel in a Zwinglian-like contrast between the true God and his false rivals. There are some most helpful and memorable illustrations, such as Christopher Wren's pillar which never reached the ceiling of St Paul's Cathedral and the Friendship Bridge between Thailand and Laos. Hawtrey even knows what Cleo magazine is up to. Most important, of course, is Hawtrey's capable handling of Scripture.

Criticisms are relatively minor. Hawtrey equates faith with assurance in a way which is somewhat heavy-handed, and I am not sure that it is a very intelligent question to ask whether the school principal or the Scripture teacher has the more significant job. Scripture, for example, does not seem to place Ezra the scribe above Nehemiah the governor. These criticisms aside, this should prove a useful book in seeking to evangelise non-Christians who are still willing to do some serious reading.

*Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.*

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# prayer

## APRIL

- 21 Good Friday. Pray that Christ's "one sacrifice for sins forever" may be relied on as the sole ground of our salvation.
- 22 Grafton parish, far northern NSW; 4 congregations, about 140 communicants, 15 elders; vacant – pray for the interim moderator and preachers.
- 23 Pray for the message of the new life and living hope which believers have through Christ's resurrection to grip all worshippers.
- 24 Concord-North Strathfield parish, Sydney; about 50 communicants, 5 elders; vacant – Geoff McIntyre interim moderator.
- 25 Greg and Rosemary Braid from Boort, Victoria; language worker and librarian in south Asia.
- 26 The Protestant Church in East Timor (about 30 congregations and 12 pastors) and help from the Presbyterian Church of Australia following the recent visit by Rev. Robert Benn.
- 27 Woori Yallock parish, Vic; about 33 communicants, 1 elder; David and Roslyn Brown.
- 28 Auburn-North Lidcombe parish, Olympic Park, Sydney; about 75 communicants, and 11 elders: Pange and Sophia Mahutariki, Kawa and Esther Elisaia.
- 29 Arundel home mission station, Qld. Gold Coast; about 55 communicants, and 2 elders; Robert and Coral Carner.
- 30 Presbytery of Moree, northern NSW: 5 parishes, 3 home mission stations, totalling 22 congregations with 620 communicants, 250 adherents, 210 children and youth an 66 elders; Elizabeth Style, Gunnedah, clerk.

## MAY

- 1 "Jean Flynn" home mission station, Elizabeth, northern Adelaide; about 45 communicants, and 3 elders; vacant – Wally Zurrer moderator.
- 2 Truthfulness and fairness in the print and electronic media, and the influence of all Christians involved in them.
- 3 Horsham appointment parish, western Vic.; about 35 communicants and 3 elders; Wally and Shona Rakete.
- 4 Beacon Hill parish, northern Sydney; about 100 communicants and elders; Andrew and Doneale Clausen.
- 5 Gympie parish, Queensland, 2 congregations; about 60 communicants, and 5 elders; David and Elizabeth Cranney.
- 6 Grenfell parish, western NSW, 3 congregations; about 65 communicants and 8 elders; Paul and Elizabeth Harris (exit appointment).
- 7 Ballarat South parish, Vic., 3 congregations; about 65 communicants, and 10 elders; David and Carol Stewart.
- 8 S A General Assembly meeting at Mt Gambier – particularly action on the report of the Special Commission on providing "Gospel ordinances" in weak congregations.
- 9 Graham and Caroline Sharp from Kogarah, Sydney, involved with aircraft maintenance under Missionary Aviation Fellowship, Alice Springs.
- 10 Presbytery of Penola, South Australia: 4 parishes, totalling 11 congregations with 430 communicants, 160 adherents, 115 children and youth and 33 elders, 1 under jurisdiction. Brian Johnson, Mt Gambier, clerk.
- 11 Presbyterian Country Ministries, WA (Stuart Bonnington) and the David Shearer P.I.M. Patrol (Ray Rutland).
- 12 Pray for federal and state politicians – of both houses and all parties, particu-

- larly your own representatives – to exercise power with wisdom, integrity and godliness.
- 13 Gardenvale East parish, Melbourne; about 30 communicants and 3 elders; Edward and Margaret Pearsons.
- 14 Walcha parish, northern NSW – 4 congregations; about 65 communicants and 10 elders; Lyle Sims (exit appointment).
- 15 John Knox parish, Rockhampton, Qld – 5 congregations including Mt Morgan; about 45 communicants and 10 elders; Jonathan and Nancy Chandler.
- 16 Christian witness among the 18 million people of Ghana, west Africa: 20% traditional religions, 16% Muslim, 28% Protestant, (including some 2500 Presbyterian congregations with 1.1 million followers), 19% Roman Catholic and 17% "marginal" sects.
- 17 Dale & Nicky Stock from America and Mitchelton, Brisbane, missionaries working with several tribes near Hyderabad, Pakistan, under Interserve.
- 18 All those responsible for financial management at the denominational level, with the relocation of church offices in Sydney and Brisbane.
- 19 Ashburton parish, Vic.; about 65 communicants and 5 elders; Peter and Toni Orchard.
- 20 Presbytery of Darling Downs, Qld: 9 parishes, 7 home mission stations, totalling 45 congregations with 1275 communicants, 220 adherents, 660 children and youth and 109 elders; 3 retired ministers, 3 under jurisdiction, 1 school chaplain, 1 P.I.M. patrol minister. R G Williams, Toowoomba, clerk..

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# Did Paul baptize for the dead?

*What does this puzzling verse mean?*

Paul writes: "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?" (1 Cor 15:29). Did Jews or early Christian practice this? Why do we believe it's wrong to practice it today?

In Mormon doctrine, no one can enter the "celestial" heaven without being baptized. But those who have died can gain admittance if others are baptized for them. Today, Mormon doctrine requires that the dead person for whom someone else is baptized must be named (hence their interest in genealogical research), and proxy baptism is considered one of the most important elements of Mormon "temple work."

So it is surprising to discover that the Book of Mormon never mentions the doctrine. This is even more so when one considers that Mormons believe that the Bible and the Book of Mormon between them contain "the fullness of the gospel" and that the Book of Mormon ostensibly contains "the fullness of the everlasting gospel". Still this does not prevent the Mormons' Doctrines of Salvation from boldly asserting, "The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, 'The greatest ... commandment given us, and made obligatory, is the temple work in our own behalf and in behalf of our dead.'" Presumably, the biblical basis for this is 1 Corinthians 15:29.

Mormon teaching aside, how should we understand this verse? Christian leaders have long been wary of imposing on the consciences of believers as crucial something that is mentioned in only one verse. It's not that something becomes "truer" or more binding if it is repeated many times. Rather, when something is mentioned only once, it cannot be given the same weight of importance as the central themes of Scripture. (One of the marks of heterodoxy is that, while central truths are skirted, relatively peripheral matters become life-and-death issues.)

More important, when something is mentioned only once, there is more likelihood of misinterpreting it, whereas matters



*Don Carson*

repeatedly discussed are clarified by their repetition in various contexts.

We can see this problem in the more than 40 interpretations of 1 Corinthians 15:29 that B. M. Foschini catalogued 50 years ago in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. They included that Christians in Corinth were being "baptized into the ranks of the dead" by martyrdom (thinking of "baptism" in the light of Mark 10:38, Luke 12:50), that this was ordinary Christian baptism that took place "over" the grave of the dead, or that new Christians were baptized to "replace" Christians who had died.

Though interesting, these proposals lack credibility. The most plausible interpretation is that some in Corinth were getting baptized vicariously for the dead. Several factors, however, put this into perspective. Although Paul does not explicitly condemn the practice, neither does he endorse it.

Several writers have offered the following analogy. Imagine a Protestant writing, "Why do they then pray for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all?" No one would take this as an endorsement of the practice of praying for the dead; it is a criticism of the inconsistency of praying for the dead while holding that the dead do not rise. To make this rhetorical question an endorsement of the practice of praying for the dead, one would expect, "Why do we then pray for the dead?"

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 15:29 Paul preserves the more distant they. After all, his primary concern in 1 Corinthians 15 is the defence of the Christian doctrine of resurrection. His rhetorical question in verse 29 may simply be pointing out the inconsistency of those who deny the final

resurrection, granted their rather strange baptismal practices.

And they were strange. There is no good evidence for vicarious baptism anywhere in the New Testament or among the earliest apostolic fathers. By the same token, there is no hint that this vicarious baptism (if that is what it was) was intended by the Corinthian believer to cover as many deceased people as could be named.

If the practice existed at all, it may have been tied to a few people or special cases – for example, when a relative died after trusting the gospel but before being baptized. We really do not know. If it were something like that, one could understand why Paul does not make a federal case of it.

In any case, Paul's clear emphasis is that people are justified by grace through faith, which demands a personal response. Christian baptism is part of that personal response, even as it is a covenantal pledge. In contrast, baptism on behalf of someone who has not exercised such faith sounds like magic, something far from Pauline thought.

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# Novel to hovel

*The continual quest for the new impoverishes us all.*

Back in the first century the Stoic philosopher Seneca commented that “we are attracted to novelties rather than to great things”. About the same time the biblical historian Luke made a similar comment regarding the Athenians who came to hear the apostle Paul: “For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:22). It takes no profound insight into modern culture to realise that Seneca and Luke might well have been describing our own times. People, whether religious or not, seem to possess “itching ears” (2 Tim.4:3).

Joy Davidman (C. S. Lewis’ wife) tells of how the airmen who dropped the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945 returned home to the United States, and a prominent Washington hostess gave them a reception. The highlight of the reception was a cake in the shape of an atomic explosion. Such events make one realise how difficult it is to underestimate public taste. As Dame Nellie Melba said, “Sing ’em muck.”

So often in what passes today for music and art, novelty wins out over substance. The media seem to delight in any kind of new fad, no matter how degraded or bizarre. *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* has now been followed by *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*. Modern art exhibitions routinely contain material that one would not want to describe, let alone go and see. Andres Sarrano and Robert Mapplethorpe have produced pretentious garbage, but they have no trouble obtaining media support.

Much in life is cheapened, trivialised and distorted. Most current affairs shows are really truncated show trials. As the film director Alan Rudolph says, “truth is whatever gets the most applause”. The Spice Girls are more newsworthy than Joni Eareckson-Tada; and the Olympics more important than famines and wars.



*Peter Barnes*

David Puttnam, the producer of films such as *Chariots of Fire*, *The Killing Fields*, and *The Mission*, turned his back on making films in order to take up a political career in the British House of Lords. In 1999 he was asked whether he missed producing movies. His reply was emphatic: “It’s a relief to be away from the money and the egos of the film business.” It seems extraordinary that a man can seriously suggest that political life is a refuge of sanity and proportion, compared with what he experienced in the film industry – that is comment enough on what prevails in the movie world.

We should not imagine that it is any different when we turn to spiritual matters. Prayer and preaching tend not to produce riveting television, so we are treated to the spectacle of the televangelists who, at best, seek to entertain rather than teach.

Taken as a whole, the media are more interested in producing an effect than in promoting the cause of truth. Then again, so are most theological colleges. It one sense, it has ever been thus. Almost 200 years ago William Jay warned: “A disposition for novelty in religious truth is the spring of error running through the flowery field of speculation into the gulf of apostasy.” Why else would people read Barbara Thiering or watch Benny Hinn, and neglect the treasures to be found in Bunyan, Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones?

As Neil Postman says, we are amusing


ourselves to death. Postman sees Las Vegas as “a metaphor of our national character and aspiration, its symbol a 30-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl”. He adds: “Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business.” Australia, of course, is no different.

Late last year I complained about a Solo advertisement (the one with the exhausted fellow outside the sperm bank) to those who supposedly police whatever standards are left for our television gurus to adhere to. I receive back the expected letter, reassuring me that in these pluralistic days the board which looked after these matters was made up of responsible people who reflected community values. It was hardly the sort of reply to cause one to sleep more soundly at night. What I thought was the problem, they thought was the solution.

Seneca himself considered that “the times will come when our successors will wonder how we could have been ignorant of things so obvious”.

In such a world it is a relief to turn to the Bible, with its simplicity and its substance. I read somewhere that a goldfish has a memory span of three seconds. Left unchallenged, the modern media culture will soon produce a race of human beings with similar characteristics. Not so with the Scriptures. Here is truth, which is aimed at “making wise the simple” (Ps.19:7).

In Hollywood, said Evelyn Waugh, “all is a continuous psalm of self-praise”; in the kingdom of God, all is continuous serving and worship of God and the Lamb (Rev.7). In Hollywood, it is a case of *Eyes Wide Shut*; in the kingdom of God, it is a case of meditating on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable (Phil.4:8).

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

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