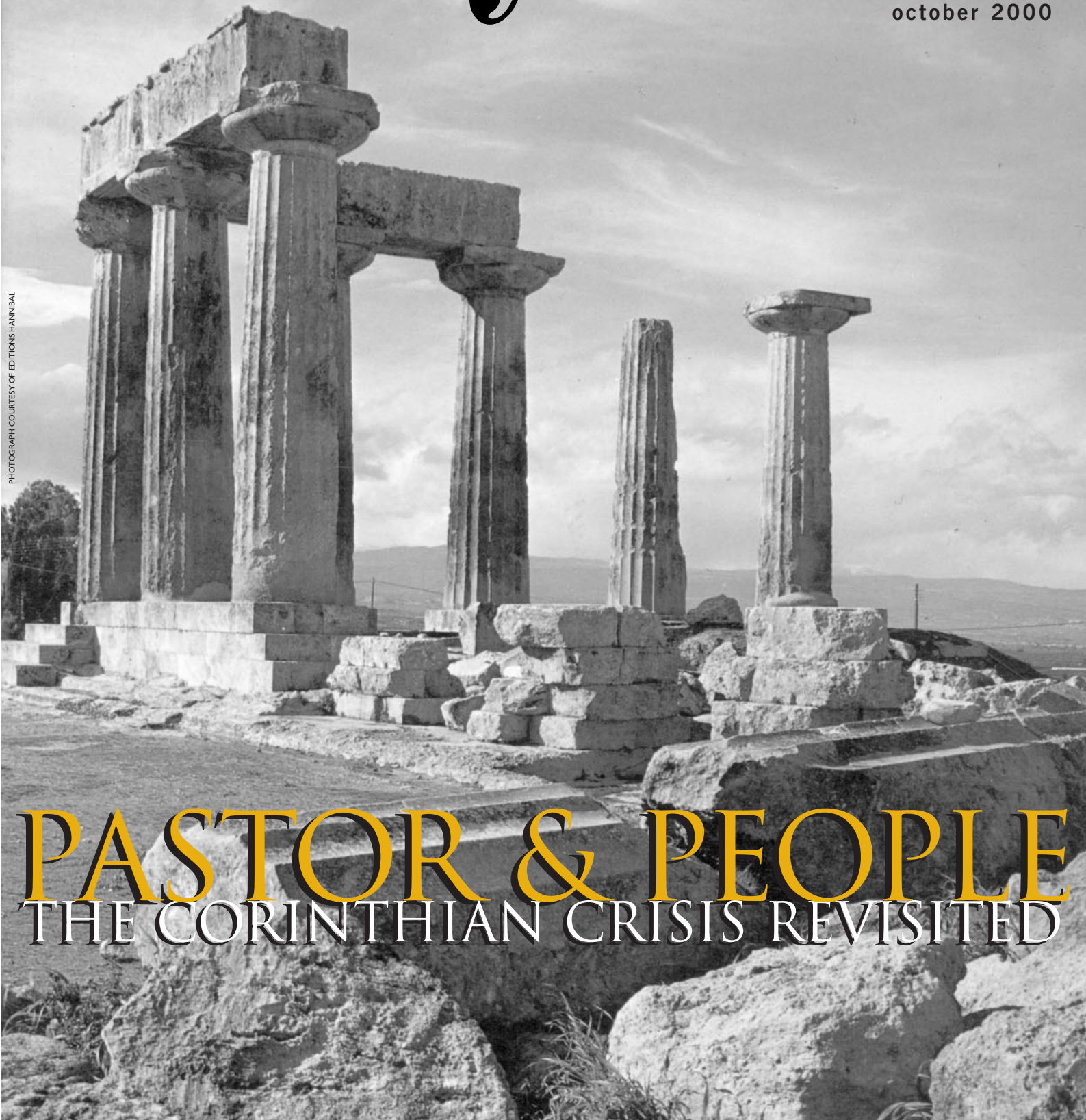


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Switched on

An age seeking power will find it only in the cross.

One of the big issues with which the church has struggled in recent times has been the issue of power. Power fascinates us. In the West, the spirit of the times has been typified in movies like *Top Gun* and *Rambo*, which have glorified power, success and self-reliance. However, when Hollywood sneezes, many within the Christian community go down with a cold. And nowhere is this more evident than in the way we have allowed the world to shape our understanding of power. The evidence of infection is all around us. On the broader cultural front, the church is under attack for its alleged abuse of power. Postmodernist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida have thrown down the gauntlet to Christian theologians by charging that all claims to truth, including assertions of the gospel, are simply well-disguised bids for power. The postmodernists claim that the reason Christianity has remained such a dominant force in the world is not because of its intrinsic truthfulness, but because up until the 20th century it has had more effective control of the universities and communication channels.

Likewise, feminists such as Gloria Steinem have pointed the finger at the Church for its male domination which, they claim, affords evidence of systemic victimisation of women. Similarly, advocates of oppressed peoples throughout the world have usually reserved a heavy dose of criticism for Christian agencies for aiding and abetting oppressors over the centuries. In all areas, a frequently recurring criticism about the church and its leadership is that it abuses power. Is this so? Is the whole enterprise of theology and Christian mission a quest for power? Are the structures of church government meant to function as levers of power where the strong exert their domination over the weak? Is the Christian faith a convenient cloak behind which power-hungry individuals are able to hide as they seek advantage for themselves? This is a pressing issue. It is certainly one reason why we have focused this issue of *Australian Presbyterian* on Paul's Corinthian correspondence. The church in Corinth was torn by divisions which arose from their misunderstanding of the nature of power. In his first letter to them, Paul warns that the power of God was displayed

in the weakness and shame of the cross (1:18-31). The power struggles in Corinth had arisen because they had forgotten this important point.

Actually, we discover that the divisions in Corinth were prompted by church members who were boasting in the "wisdom" of their respective leaders (1:12; 3:18-21; 4:6-10). That's why Paul treats the problem of division as symptomatic of a far deeper issue, which is that human wisdom is unable to appreciate that God displays his glory and saving power in the shame, terror and weakness of crucifixion. In other words, Paul is reminding the Corinthians that their method of doing theology will always cause division in the church because it assumes that the power of God must always manifest itself in success and triumph. Their definition of power is based on worldly categories. In a church that defines power purely in secular terms, division is inevitable.

On the other hand, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the true place of God's self-disclosure is the cross. It is at Calvary, where the eternal Son of God died for sinners, that God's wisdom and power are supremely displayed. It is on the cross that we see the power of God. While this seems irrational and inconsistent to the human mind, there's a divine logic in God's method of revelation. It is designed to humble our intellectual pride.

The cross proclaims a new way of knowing God. It is not only about atonement, it redefines our way of thinking and up-ends all our cherished values. It redefines "power" and "wisdom" in a way that the world regards as bizarre. For instance, Justin Martyr, a Christian apologist in the second century, lamented that his contemporaries ridiculed God's revelation of himself at the cross. To them, it was not simply "foolishness" (*moria*), it was madness (*mania*). Pliny the Younger, no friend of the Church, believed that God's revelation of himself in Christ's death was a "perverse and extravagant superstition" while Minucius Felix called it "a sick delusion". But for Paul, it defined true power and wisdom.

However, the theology of the cross does more than reinterpret our understanding of power and wisdom. It also provides an

interpretive lens through which we can understand many of the problems of life. It is interesting to note that in recent years a number of scholars have suggested that 1 Corinthians doesn't seem to have a unifying theme. They also say that it contains very little theology.

A closer investigation of the letter reveals that in almost every case where Paul is dealing with a pastoral problem, the basis of his appeal to them is grounded in the message of the cross. It's hard to avoid how central the cross is to his thinking. See, for example, 1:18-25,30; 2:1-2; 4:15; 3:11; 5:7; 6:11; 6:20; 7:23; 8:11; 10:16; 11:23-26; 13:1-3; 15:1-5,11. In the light of these references, it's hard to believe that all that Paul has on his agenda is the mere ticking off of a number of sensitive pastoral problems. We need to remember that this letter was meant to be read aloud. It makes sense to believe that Paul was building an argument from the beginning that would accumulate.


The way he starts has repercussions for all that follows: This is why he tells us that we cannot sort out our problems in the church, particularly the abuse of power, until we learn to reinterpret all our values, ideals and ambitions in the light of the message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17,18). If we are going to address the world's accusations and ensure that our relationships within the church are not abusive, we need to rediscover the meaning of "power" in terms of Christ's death. Those in authority must serve. Those who lead must protect. No one should seek his own glory or advancement since Jesus did not grasp after equality with the Father, but humbled himself in death.

Peter Hastie

From the Convener

A man born with no arms might be expected to feel bitter towards God. Not Brian Gault, one of 470 British thalidomide survivors and a man with a thriving ministry. Read his inspiring story on page 22.



Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee 

The power crisis

The gospel of power is an enemy of the power of the gospel, says Michael Horton.



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It was Tom Wolfe, author of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, who dubbed the '70s the "me decade". The '80s, he said, could be regarded as the decade of money fever. I would like to suggest, if Wolfe is accepting submissions, that the '90s' most obsessive expression of narcissism is its quest for power.

And that quest has not been without its effect on the church, from naming and claiming prosperity from the "pool of power" to "power ministries" in church growth, advocated by C. Peter Wagner and the Vineyard Fellowship, to "the power released by our Self-Talk" advocated by an evangelical pastor, and the blending of psychology, magic, and religion in Robert Schuller's remark, "You don't know what power you have within you! . . . You make the world into anything you choose. Yes, you can make your world into whatever you want it to be."

A great many Christians at the end of the 20th century appear to be interested in everything except the gospel. Motifs of political liberation, "spirituality" (with dozens of subheadings), celebration of sexuality, creation as sacrament, radical feminism, self-esteem and inner healing, signs

and wonders, church growth, spiritual gifts, moral crusades: you name it, we've got it. But the one thing we no longer believe in is the gospel.

There's no room for irrelevant dogmas about original sin, total depravity, guilt, atonement, propitiation, substitution, justification, the sovereignty of God, regeneration and sanctification, judgment, heaven, and hell. In our day nearly every one of those doctrines is up for grabs; one does not have to hold a "narrow" position on these issues to wear the evangelical label.

However, an evangelical must be absolutely certain about how to tackle issues such as abortion, pornography, socialism, affirmative action, homosexuality, the gifts of the Spirit, and the precise chronology of end-times events. Whereas the Bible does indeed have something to say about our behavior, spiritual gifts, and eschatology, often issues barely (some never) discussed in the Bible have become the standard tests of orthodoxy at the same time the most obvious biblical motifs are largely unknown.

In this article I want to present a sound case for a renewed confidence in the gospel

itself as "the power of God unto salvation." To do that, I would like to take a closer look at one of the most important challenges an apostle presented to a congregation: Paul in Corinth.

The commercial capital of Greece, Corinth was the quintessence of metropolitan sophistication in the region. Athens was the centre of academic life, but the practical Corinthians liked to think that they, too, were up on the latest ideas. Temple prostitution was big business at the shrine of Aphrodite (goddess of love). Down the street was the shrine of Asclepius, the god of healing. In fact, even decades later, after all of the 12 pagan temples were converted to churches in Corinth, the healing shrine continued to be frequented.

The purpose of Paul's letters to the Corinthian believers was to respond to news the apostle had received about divisions in the church (1 Corinthians 1:11). "Super-apostles," as Paul called them, had gained access to the congregation, bringing confusion in their train, and the apostle's patience was wearing thin: "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you

receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those super-apostles. I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge" (2 Corinthians 11:4-6).

In Corinth, the simplicity of the gospel was being undermined by those who sought to turn it into the speculative mysticism of Greek philosophy. Combining Christianity, folk religion, and esoteric wisdom, the super-apostles attracted the metropolitan upper classes much as Eastern philosophy has gathered a following among professionals in our time.

Silver-tongued speakers would put on seminars and promise the keys to success and happiness. Because they made at least some appeal to Christ, the super-apostles convinced some of the Corinthian believers that they were simply bringing together the best of secular wisdom and Christian belief. The gospel was not enough; to make Christianity relevant in a pagan commercial centre like Corinth, in order to really market it well, the church had to promise answers to questions the Bible never answered and solve riddles about which the Bible was not the least bit interested. Where the Scriptures were silent, secular wisdom threw in its two cents worth.

The sophisticated Corinthian, confident and self-assured, had little time for sin and judgment, guilt and grace. Religion was supposed to supply social glue, give people a philosophy of life and a way of living a happy and meaningful life. In that sort of setting, the gospel was probably viewed as an answer to a question the people were not even asking: How can I, a condemned prisoner of my own depravity, ever have a relationship with a holy and just God?

But Paul's response was clear. Instead of taking a marketing survey of Corinthian attitudes and developing a gospel that would address "felt needs," he told them

what the real needs were, whether they felt them or not. In fact, said Paul, if they did not feel within them the need or were not asking the right questions, it was not because the gospel is irrelevant, but because "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The super-apostles were more powerful than Paul in terms of popular appeal. They appeared to be more relevant, offering the recently converted pagans something familiar, and they made it sound captivating. They could really sell the product, and Paul was being put on the back burner. Their success suggests that the super-apostles spoke more directly to the felt needs of the Corinthians. And what were those felt needs? Probably not much different from those about whom Paul warned Timothy: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive ... rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2-4) – and these were professing Christians!

This is the problem, isn't it? By preaching to "felt needs" we are often preaching to selfish and idolatrous cravings. What will be the "felt needs" of people who love themselves, money, and pleasure? Our job is not to preach to felt needs, but to expose such felt needs as sinful cravings that must be supplanted by Christ. Only in that way can unbelievers see their truest, deepest need for the One whose absence those distractions have sought to soothe.

In the meantime, Paul responds to the problem with the super-apostles by telling the Corinthians they are shallow and immature, captive to "the wisdom of this age", which did not even have the sense to recognise the most remarkable triumph of divine wisdom in history: the satisfaction of God's justice and mercy in the cross of Christ.

But Paul didn't let the Corinthian Jews off, either. Whereas Greek culture-Christianity turned Christian discourse

into a combination of magic, self-reflection, and speculation, Jewish sympathies led to a different distraction: the miraculous. In both cases, power was the key. Through understanding esoteric mysteries of life and knowing the secret "laws" that governed the spiritual realm, Greek religion promised Christians power through magic; the Jews promised power through miracle; and Paul said both promised what God considers weak.

We see the weakness of the miracles, even of those performed by our Lord himself. Well into his ministry, after scores of miracles, the Pharisees asked Jesus whether he was the Christ. Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not of my sheep" (John 10:25). Indeed, seeking signs and wonders was not considered by our Lord to be a sign of faith, but of unbelief: "As the crowds increased, Jesus said, 'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign.'" (Luke 11:29).


The cross was a stumbling block to the Jews also in that accepting its message meant coming to terms with the fact that they could not save themselves, not even with God's help. They were helpless to participate in their own redemption, and this public picture of Christ hanging on a cross, carrying the weight of our sins, meant that all of their works had been for nothing.

Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, was a scandalous notion to a religion that had become increasingly legalistic by the time of Christ.

The magic wisdom of the Greek and the miraculous signs and legalistic "righteousness" of the Jew are for Paul, therefore, stumbling blocks, not power encounters. The gospel does not step into the ring with such challengers. The gospel is not like a shy, physically retiring boy who needs his big brother to stick up for him, whether the big brother is the miraculous, secular wisdom, marketing, business, psychology, politics, legalism, or traditionalism.

Although miracles, philosophy, corporate and psychological insights, and political positions may well be part of the life of any Christian, they are weak substitutes for the gospel.

Part of the problem is that, as fallen men and women, we want power not only for the advance of the church in a secular culture, but even for ourselves. There is something exalting about being a part of something that is respected by society. If we can build larger buildings, have larger gatherings, create larger enterprises, and compete with other mass-marketed products, we will be a part of something powerful, something relevant, and the world will have to sit



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up and take notice of us for our impressive technological, philosophical, psychological, and financial sophistication.

That is what was driving the Corinthian believers, too, who had forgotten their roots. That is what Paul points out immediately after he describes the gospel as a stumbling block: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

The Corinthian believers did not want to win their sophisticated neighbours as much as they wanted to be like them. In a culture that idealised power, strength, wealth, wisdom, and nobility, Christianity made little sense. After all, the saviours of Greek mythology and philosophy redeemed by example. They displayed heroic qualities that wise followers emulated to their own immortal conquest. Although the gods were worshipped for each deity's unique role, all of them shared a common attribute: power. They made mistakes, mis-judged, miscalculated, mis-carried, waged wars among themselves, and committed adultery, but they were all powerful.

In the face of all of that, Paul expects the Corinthians to tell the neighbour next door that their Saviour-God was sentenced to death by (1) his own people, (2) the Roman authorities, and (3) God the Father himself. Thus salvation in this scheme is the result of a shameful death on a cross that, for Romans, had the equivalent criminal associations we would make with the electric chair.

No wonder many cultures have found it difficult to understand this core message of Christianity! Our culture worships power. Even if power is stolen or used manipulatively, it is respected by our society. Strength is reverence, if reverent hatred on the part of those who get the brunt of it.

Nevertheless, at the point Christianity is least saleable, it is the most powerful. The resurrection was such an overwhelming concept that those gathered in Athens to "hear the latest ideas" told Paul, "we'll hear more from you again on these things."

But today, we hardly say enough to provoke the slightest interest. In bending over backwards to be relevant, we have actually become politely irrelevant, mumbling when we get to the bit about judgment, hell, wrath, condemnation, human helplessness, and our utter dependence on the grace and righteousness of someone outside of ourselves. "Give us a god who shows us an example of greatness – power, virtue, wis-




dom; not a god who dies for us, but one who shows us how to live!" That is what the modern Greeks demand, just as others demand miraculous signs. But Paul continues his defence with the following: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while

I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

In other words, the apostle Paul could say today, "When I came to you I didn't have a lot of clever insights and tips for successful living, child-rearing, and inner healing. I didn't give you a political agenda or a building program." Paul even declines a "power encounter" between himself and the super-apostles. In addition to what we have already seen about Paul's superior education, he himself adds, "I am not in the least inferior to the super-apostles" (2 Cor. 12:11). And yet, "I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1).

There was not going to be a test to see whose gospel was the cleverest, whose gospel was the most relevant, whose gospel could attract more attention. "For I resolved to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2).

We want to stand out, to be relevant and "in touch," but when we don't talk about sin, judgment, grace, and redemption enough for even regular churchgoers to be able to articulate their theology, we couldn't be more irrelevant.

Michael Horton is president of Cure Christians United for Reformation, Anaheim, California. This is an edited extract from Power Religion, Moody Press, 1992 

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Earthen vessels

God's power is revealed in weakness – of pastor and congregation.

Life's milestones fly past quickly. Some have such poignancy that we're not sure we enjoy celebrating them. Such was my 40th! My wife, Paula, presented me with a new watch, a gift that I treasure to this day. I was delighted – for both its real worth to me as an item of beauty and value and also for the sentiment and significance of occasion. It was with real delight and pride that I shared the moment with the rest of the family. I wanted the whole family to enjoy it with me.

Amid the celebrations something else caught my eye that morning – my very young daughter. Her eyes lit up too, but not in the way I expected. She pulled herself up to the edge of the table and grabbed ... the box! A simple little container, made of hardened cardboard, with a flip-top transparent plastic lid. Wow! What more could a little one ask for? She ran off, dreaming of all that she could do with it. The container became her delight that day.

Some years later, we bought a new fridge – a superb, gloss-white piece of marvellous machinery ... delivered to us in an enormous cardboard package. Need I finish the story? Never mind the \$800 fridge, it was the container that delighted my young son. A massive portable indoor cubby-house to keep him amused for hours.

Children have the ability to take fairly ordinary looking packaging and put them to very special use. This, of course, is misuse. The containers are there to deliver goods and it's the goods that are meant to delight us. Young children confuse treasure with containers.

This is the warning Paul delivers in 2 Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Paul uses a metaphor describing those in pastoral ministry as containers and the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as treasure. It's the gospel of grace that gives power and delight – not the preacher.

This is of great encouragement to those in ministry – we ought *never* lose heart because the Lord brings power through the weakness of the preacher. It also brings focus to the Lord's people, who are to respond to the treasure and not be so "taken" with the container. Let's explore these two areas – gospel focus for pastors



John Wilson

and gospel focus for congregations.

First, encouragement for the pastor. We can persevere in gospel ministry because the power of the gospel comes from God and not from us.

Paul's words make a clear connection with the previous paragraph. The first word gives us the clue: "But". This suggests that he is about to draw a contrast with that which came before. In contrast with the glory of the gospel he had just spoken of (v. 6 "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"), he now speaks of the humility and weakness of the one who preaches it.

What he says is: the glory of which I speak (v. 6) has another side to it. This illuminating power is entrusted to fairly ordinary and unattractive and inherently worthless people. Let's examine the metaphor's two parts. This treasure stands for the gospel just explained (v.6). It is the light that floods a person on conversion – the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. The light of the gospel is the treasure. We recall one of Jesus' parables of the man who discovers a treasure, the pearl of great price.

Jars of clay stands for preachers of the gospel. Archaeology shows that Corinthian pottery was well-known, cheap and nothing really special. Paul could have been talking about any old household receptacle or container. Your sugar canister, for example. The Greek word, as used else-



where in the New Testament and used in a literal sense, has a fairly flexible meaning. It is used for instruments, implements and containers. Here it's linked with earth, in the form of earthenware container.

It reminds us of Genesis 2:7. I like to think that Paul was conscious of this connection as he wrote, where we are reminded in Genesis of the frailty of man in the creation account: "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground". It reminds us of our origins, and teaches us of our weakness and vulnerability – that we're basically dust until God breathes life into us.

For Genesis 2:7 goes on to explain: "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being". In the hands of God, man created of dust becomes something worthwhile and precious – a living, responding, spiritual being. Mankind is worthwhile because of the action of God.

So, in Paul's metaphor, these jars of clay have a sense of purpose, and have value and meaning in ministry because of the invaluable treasure we preach. One of the main reasons Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians is found here in verse 7 to teach that human weakness is no barrier to the great power and sovereign purposes of God.

The glory of the gospel is entrusted to the ordinary and reasonably uninspiring person of the minister of the new covenant so that, in the end, all the credit for conversion and all the glory goes to the author of the message and not the messenger.

We who pastor live daily with the inevitable tension, engendered by the paradox that we continually deal with holy and eternal things yet we do so mindful of our fallenness, fallibility and weakness. How can we live with this tension and not be consumed by it? How can we stand up under the crushing weight of our own (self) assessment and then the carping criticism from others? How can we not go under?

The answer has two aspects. First, focus on the treasure of gospel and grace. As pastoral clay jars we hold an imperishable and glorious pearl that shines in a wonderful way by its own inherent quality. The gospel of light shines gloriously by its own worth, even without any help from weary messengers. Remember the power of the light of

the gospel. Don't confuse the container for the treasure.

Second, take a realistic view of yourself – take God's view. Sometimes we're so hard on ourselves that we wish God would just do the work of the gospel without us. That God would by-pass our humanity. But he chooses not only the glory of the treasure, but also chooses the container, the clay jar. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust, and chooses to embed the themes of gospel power in the messenger, so others may see and hear the gospel through God's chosen agent. Cracked pots ministering the life of the gospel to cracked pots.

Pastor, how do you view yourself? As a minister of the gospel? Despite your passion for the Lord, zeal for the gospel and all your hard work, perhaps:

- You still can't seem to speak well (you lack convincing power)?
- You can't muster enough energy to cope with the expectations of ministry?
- You seem to be fighting the migraine ... the arthritis ... the depression more than spiritual issues?
- You don't seem to have the charisma to draw them in like the "super" church nearby?

Remember, your value, your sense of worth as a minister, is found in the gospel you carry. This is the paradox we live with.

The divine power of the gospel becomes all the more conspicuous through the weakness of the preacher. Human weak-

ness is *no* barrier to the purposes of God.

The second great focus is the gospel focus for the congregations – a warning to the churches.

In evangelicalism generally, there's too much attention given to containers. Even evangelical churches have fallen for the cult of idolising containers. Container-driven dependence says that the key factors in securing good ministry are found in the pastor himself – his personal characteristics and abilities.

Then, when a church selects a pastor with container-theology principles, he then teaches the church on those same principles: teaching that focuses on the person and his/her needs and encourages people to focus on their needs and upon themselves and how they feel; their personal image and emotional well-being.

Further, they teach Christians about personal empowerment, about family stability and parental skills and emotional strength – all at the expense of teaching about the treasure: the gospel of the atonement for sins, of justification, of living a holy life and eternal hope of glory.

Congregations have elevated pastors to pedestals and hoped for perfection from them in order to derive comfort from that and to bask in their reflected glory. "Our pastor is so wonderful ...". The practice of ministry has become man-centred.

Paul would say powerful ministry focuses not on the container but the contents, the treasure of the gospel.


And all this comes from treasure in clay jars. We admit, the clay jars aren't the most exciting things to look at. Our work in Christian ministry is not glamorous, nor exciting (in the usual sense of that word). Our work doesn't seem to pay dividends. For the hours spent, the payoff is very low.

Yet God takes our dead-looking work and fills it with life – the life of the resurrected Jesus – and through the treasure of the gospel brings help to the ailing Christian, conversion to the repentant sinner and glory to his Son: Jesus Christ.

Don't lose heart! All too often we are finding that people are not responding to the gospel message. We feel like throwing it all in. It's always so intense. It never lets up. We feel like David Fisher's friend (mentioned in his book: *The 21st Century Pastor*) who feels like Winnie the Pooh's teddy, dragged down the stairs with its head banging on every step.

We need the reminder that it's only God who can switch the lights on. Which drives us to prayer. It's not up to us to change people, it's up to us to persevere in telling the gospel to them.

What more can we want?

John Wilson lectures in theology at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne. 

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nathan tasker

Pastoral problems

The issues Paul faced in Corinth sound familiar today, Paul Barnett tells Peter Hastie.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians are two of the most interesting letters in the New Testament. When did he write them?

We think that he wrote them about a year apart in AD55 and 56. Some people wonder how we can be so precise about that, but it's possible to date them with a high degree of confidence. We can estimate Paul's arrival in Corinth by the Gallio (see Acts 18:12) inscription in Delphi and also by the fact that Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth when Paul first arrived there (Acts 18:1) They had earlier been expelled from Rome as a result of the edict of Claudius in 49 which required all Jews to leave the capital. So we can be fairly sure that Paul was in Corinth in 50-51. We know that from there he went back to Palestine. Then afterwards, he left for Ephesus. He spent another two or three years in Ephesus from 52 to 55. It is almost certain that at the end of that time he wrote 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians followed about a year later.

What was Corinth like in the days of Paul?

We really know quite a lot about Corinth. Archaeologists have uncovered an enormous amount of inscriptional material and there are contemporary accounts.

Corinth was a city with two periods of history. First, there was the classical period when Corinth was the rival of Athens. This came to an end when the Romans destroyed it in 146 BC. The city lay in ruins for exactly a century. Then Julius Caesar gave orders to rebuild it in 46BC. So when Paul arrived in Corinth in AD50, the new city was just under 100 years old. When Caesar rebuilt Corinth, he didn't



Paul Barnett

construct it on classical Greek lines. He designed it as a Roman city. So it has all the characteristics of Roman design and town-planning. It's a colony of Rome.

It was a wealthy city. Because of its position on the isthmus, it received a lot of trade. The Isthmian Games were held in Corinth every two years. Like the Olympics, they brought in a huge influx of tourists with a lot of money. From ancient times it had also gained a reputation for being immoral. But it's really a matter of speculation as to whether it was more immoral than other cities.

So Corinth as a city was brash; it was new; and it didn't have a completely Greek population as in classical times. There were all sorts of people from different cultures, which probably meant that there was a lot of corruption and criminal activity.

Do we have any idea how big the churches were in Corinth and where they met?

One leading scholar has estimated that the congregation in Corinth was rather small, probably 50 or so. But I am not so

sure. The congregations seemed to have met in people's houses, but periodically they would have come together as the whole church. The two Corinthian letters address such weighty problems that I find it hard to imagine that he was speaking to only a small group of people. I think that there must have been 300 or 400. Paul had a vision of a large church while he was in Corinth. This suggests that there was a lot of believers in the city (Acts 18:10).

Why did Paul first go to Corinth?

I think that he went there originally as a second-best option! Had he been able to, I believe he would have pressed on directly from Macedonia to Rome. But he couldn't go to Rome because in 49 Claudius had decreed that all Jews had to leave the capital. This decree was like a road-block for Paul. It effectively stopped him from continuing to Rome along the Ignatian Way once he had left Philippi. I think he said to himself: "For the moment, it's probably better to concentrate on the major centres of Roman population in Greece." I think that's why he went off to Athens. Frankly, I don't think he was keen to stay there. In AD49, Athens' days of glory had passed.

I think he said to himself, "Possibly Roman Corinth will have better prospects for ministry." So he stayed in Corinth for two years to establish the gospel there. Then he moved on to Ephesus, which was the capital of Roman Asia.

Do you see what he's done? He's planted the gospel in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. In other words, Paul has gone to all the strategic cities in the Roman provinces to create a solid block of churches all the way from Jerusalem in the east to Rome in the west.

I think he wanted to demonstrate to the Jewish leadership of the church in Jerusalem that the Gentile mission was here to stay. They needed to take on board that the Gentile churches were part of the world-wide people of Christ. I believe that one aspect of Paul's thinking in taking up the collection among the Gentile churches for the Jerusalem church was to show the Jewish Christians that the inclusion of the Gentiles was part of God's plan.

What sort of difficulties did Paul face in Corinth?

The Fragility of

The Centre for Christianity in Society will run a series of seminars on "The Fragility of Human Rights". The series will run over 4 Thursday evenings commencing at 8pm at the Armadale Uniting Church Hall, cnr Kooyong Road and Clarendon Street, Armadale, from 5 October until 26 October.

Cost for the series is \$20 or \$10 per single session.

For further information contact Rev Dr Max Champion on 9576 2664

The major difficulty that he faced was that he was there on his own. It must have been enormously difficult for him. Today, with all the benefit of centuries of hindsight, we know how hard it is when people are sent into tough situations to minister on their own. Paul was without the support of Silvanus and Timothy. He was all alone in Athens and Corinth. One of the greatest challenges he faced was that he had to confront a brash, materialistic society much like our own. The people of Corinth worshiped success, power, wealth and influence. They admired intelligence and wisdom.

That's why Paul got a cool reception at the start (1 Cor. 2:1-3). His message seemed so improbable. He was preaching about a Messiah who was a crucified Jewish carpenter and who had been raised from the dead. As far as the Corinthians and the Romans were concerned, every aspect of his message was laughable.

However, while the basis of his message seemed ludicrous to the average Greek, there were some people who were prepared to listen. These were the God-fearing Gentiles, who had wearied of the gods and mystery cults and gravitated towards Judaism, but were daunted by the necessity of circumcision, which Paul did not require. These people were certainly open to the gospel.

What sort of picture of church-life do we have of Corinth?

The very fact that Paul had to write his letters to the church in Corinth indicates that there were some serious problems there. Nearly all his letters are in the form of corrections. They are addressing major problems of departure from belief and Christian standards of conduct. This is certainly true of the letters he sent to Corinth. Part of the reason for all the problems in the church in Corinth was that Paul had a very short space of time in which to establish the church there. Very few people today would even contemplate trying to plant a church under these conditions. But Paul, because he wanted to establish the gospel throughout the whole of the Roman Empire within his lifetime, had another strategy. His aim was to plant churches quickly and then to rectify whatever problems arose by travelling couriers and occasional letters.

So, yes, he faced problems on every side. And that's characteristic of church life: it's not plain sailing and we shouldn't pretend it is. Paul himself was trying to cope with the problems of false wisdom and rhetoric as well as the challenge of the Judaizers. He also had to come to terms with the sadness he felt over the Corinthians' sexual failures.

But these weren't the only frustrations. He was also struggling with an intense fac-

tionalism in the church as well as many of the believers compromising themselves by attending pagan temples. He also faced class divisions which threatened the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the charismatic-tongues controversy, and major doctrinal deviations on the resurrection.

It seems that factionalism was a problem in Corinth.

Yes, factionalism was a serious problem among Christians there. I have a hunch that the people who caused it had risen in influence in the church after Paul left but before he wrote either of his letters. I don't think that either Paul or Apollos were responsible for it (1 Cor. 1:12). But in a sense it was predictable. Apollos, the teacher who followed Paul, was skilled in rhetoric. It was almost inevitable that some people would



have drawn comparisons between him and Paul. And Peter had been with Jesus from the start, and many would think he had better claims to apostleship than Paul.

Undoubtedly, Paul fell short of the expectations of some of the Corinthians. But I don't think that Peter or Apollos ever set out to undermine him. As I read the letter, I believe that it was local people in the church in Corinth who stirred up the strife. From his comments in 1 Cor. 4:14,18 – "I am not writing this to shame you ... some of you have become arrogant" – I don't think he wants to name them. To have done so would have caused these people a massive loss of face. He certainly wouldn't have won them over. Instead, he simply applies labels to the factions such as the Paul party, the Peter party and the Apollos party (1:12).

What are his views on factionalism?

Paul is deeply committed to the unity of professed Christians. He recognises that the church is made up of diverse people

based on differentiation of gifts. He celebrates that diversity. He is not a radical socio-economic leveller. He doesn't try to bring everyone down to the same plane. He recognises the social realities of slaves and free men, of rich and poor, of Jew and Greek. He's a realist in that regard.

Nevertheless, he is absolutely insistent that where people agree on the essentials of the gospel and submit to the lordship of Christ, they must be one. Therefore, tolerating factionalism in the church, especially where it is formed on personalities, is a serious departure from the gospel.

How does Paul's view of the cross help him to resolve the pastoral problems in Corinth?

It forms a lens through which he looks at everything. Actually, it's not just the cross which forms the lens. It's the resurrection as well. He believes that what he preaches, namely the death and the resurrection of Jesus, is the source of his life and the life of other believers too. So, for example, the notion of Christ crucified, which is the notion of humility and service, dominates the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians.

This theology of the cross up-ends all the world's values. The glory of power, wealth and wisdom, which is what the Greco-Roman world lived for, is completely subverted by Paul's preaching of the cross. The shame of the cross is actually the scene of God's greatest triumph. The meaning behind Jesus' death by crucifixion is the major driving force behind so much of Paul's teaching.

For example, his teaching on sexual relations in marriage in 1 Corinthians 5-7 is informed by this doctrine. Underlying the whole idea of conjugal union is the idea of the husband serving his wife, and the wife her husband. The principle of servanthood is the social expression of the doctrine of the cross.

Again, the theology of the cross affects the way we treat each other. Paul refers to the weaker brother that we are meant to love as the person "for whom Christ died" (1 Cor. 8:11). The way that we are meant to communicate with one another and share our gifts in 1 Corinthians 13 is controlled by the divine love, supremely expressed in the cross.

Some say the problems in the Corinthian church stemmed from the belief of some that the resurrection had already taken place, that it was spiritual.

Yes, I think there are good grounds for believing that. It certainly seems that the Corinthians were confused about the meaning of the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. Some of them obviously

thought that the resurrection was essentially spiritual. For them, the life of heaven had now begun on earth. It certainly helps to explain large sections of 1 Corinthians. For instance, I think this background helps us to understand the phenomena of tongues-speaking, which seems to have taken off after he left. Paul's likely reference to it in 1 Cor. 13:1 as an angelic language gives off a hint that some of the Corinthians actually believed that, in the period after Jesus' resurrection, they would be like angels (Matt. 22:30).

This likely background also serves to explain their marriage problems. Because they thought they were now living like angels, their marriages came under pressure. According to Jesus, angels don't marry. So it could be that the Christians at Corinth started to live like brother and sister instead of husband and wife. This would help to explain some of Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 7 about the sexual responsibilities of marriage partners to each other. He wants them to fulfil their conjugal obligations.

How did the problem of class and wealth affect the early church?

They posed huge problems for the early Christians. Paul reserves words of deepest shame for the Corinthian's behaviour



towards one another at the Lord's Supper. It seems that the rich left nothing for the poor to eat except a little bit of bread and wine. They did not share in the common meal. The rich excluded the poor.

But we're no different. The same lines of demarcation can easily exist in the present-day church. You only have to think of the Olympic Games and see how the rich and privileged are treated, as opposed to ordinary people. The lines of privilege were certainly clear and visible in antiquity. Indeed, they were expected. People in the church at Corinth accepted these social conventions. They didn't challenge them. However, Paul is horrified by this denial of the gospel. He refuses to tolerate it. He denounces their practices as though he is an Amos or Jeremiah. He is deeply concerned about fraternal caring and looking after the weak.

How does Paul view the sexual immorality in Corinth?

I think that both the apostles, Paul and Peter, are influenced by the paradigm of the Old Testament where the people of Israel came out of Egypt, were redeemed, and then received the Law as the basis for living in the promised land, which is quite specific about sexual matters. That's why in 1 Peter and 1 Corinthians 5-7 we have apostolic holiness codes, and the apostles make it very clear that the sinful sexual practices that are part of the pagan world have no place at all in the church. It doesn't matter whether the conduct is heterosexual or homosexual.

So I think that what you have in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 are the negatives – what you should avoid – and in 1 Corinthians 7 are the positives – what you should do.

What does Paul say to the Corinthians about money?

His teaching about money and giving in 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8 and 9 is really quite radical. Paul saw quite clearly that there was a worldwide people of God. Christians should therefore have a global view of the church in which they care for people who

are distant from them. I think that Paul saw that the believers in Corinth were well-off, whereas the Christians in Jerusalem were poor. So in 2 Cor. 9 he introduces the notion of equality in sharing. It's not a Marxist view in the sense that everybody must exist on the same level. Paul was more concerned with great inequalities where some Christians were literally starving while others were well-off. So Paul wants to ensure that all members of the church realise that they have mutual obligations to care for one another.

As far as financial propriety is concerned, Paul is insistent that the Corinthians do things in a way that shows that congregational money is handled with highest integrity. He is very aware of accountability with money.

Paul's boasting is rather odd. Why?

Paul boasted, of course, but he boasted in his weakness. It seems absurd to us, but he did it deliberately. Instead of boasting of his achievements, which were considerable, he boasted in the cross of Christ by which he was rescued from his sin. He boasted of his weakness, debilities and failures because people could thereby see how great God's grace was in accomplishing so much through such an unimpressive man. He also boasts like this to mock and undermine his opponents, who boasted about worldly things. Boasting was very common in the ancient world. Sadly, it's becoming very common in our society. We need to recognize that bragging about our achievements and being abrasive is a departure from 2000 years of Christian culture. It's a sign that our society is reverting to pagan values.

Paul suffered a great deal as an apostle. How does this accord with the modern prosperity theology?

Prosperity theology teaches that God is with us in the good times and he isn't with us in the bad times. However, Deuteronomy tells us that when the good times come, they are times of great danger (Deut. 8:6-20). On the other hand, Deuteronomy reminds the Israelites that God was indeed with them during the hard times (Deut. 8: 1-5). And that's what Paul is saying to the Corinthians in his second letter to them. God is with his people in the tough times to strengthen and encourage them. We are wrong if we think that a trouble-free life is a sign of God's blessing.

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

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

ap

Chief Executive Officer

The Council for Christian Education in Schools [CCES], an ecumenical body responsible for religious education and chaplaincy in Victorian State Schools, and publication of a Christian religious education curriculum, seeks a Chief Executive Officer, following the retirement of the CEO after 11 years in this role. The successful applicant should have

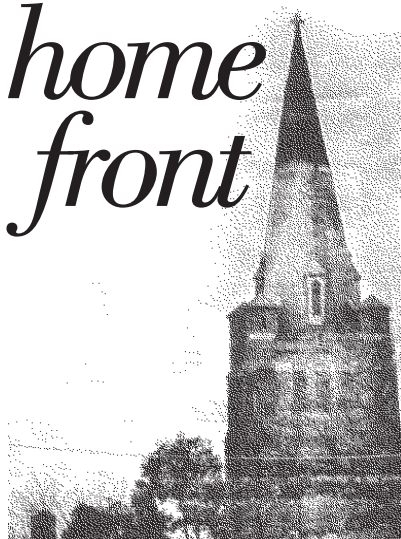
qualifications in theology and religious education, demonstrative leadership ability, and a competency in financial matters.

An appropriate remuneration package will be offered in keeping with the responsibilities of the position.

A job description is



home front



Canberra elders meet

Canberra Presbytery held a highly successful elders conference on 12 August. The 70 participants came from every parish in the presbytery.

The opening address by the **Rev. Tim Abbey** was a searching study on the qualities of the elder, as described in Titus. **Dr Ross Kingham** of Barnabas Ministries gave the key address on aspects of the elder's own spiritual life.

A series of workshops, through which all conference attendees moved, discussed practical pastoral issues for elders, and **John Quantrill**, of Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, closed the conference with the third keynote address, challenging elders to carry their evangelical and serving witness into the lives of their communities.

One highlight of the day was the spontaneous networking fellowship, which led to the recognition of just how many

resources are available as elders and sessions within just one presbytery, and how they can be shared.

Matthews moves to SA

Rev. Dr Reg Mathews, who has concluded his service as Home Mission Officer in Victoria has accepted a call from the newly-joined parish of **Norwood-Para Hills**. His induction is on 28 December. He is returning to his home state after service in France as a missionary, and as a parish minister and leader in extension and evangelism and Christian education in Victoria.

Rev Don Brookes, who will conclude his notable supply ministry at Para Hills in December, has been invited to serve with the **Princes St. Presbyterian Church, Singapore**, for two years. He and Betty had long service as OMF missionaries in Malaysia and Taiwan before coming to SA about 10 years ago.

Penola replete

There are now no vacancies on the southern SA presbytery of Penola, with the induction of **Rudi Schwartz** at **Naracoorte**, following that of **Alan Clarkson** at **Penola**, and the appointment of **Mr Geoff Keen** as assistant to **Rev. Rod Waterhouse** at **Mt Gambier**.

New elders

Mr A Grant was inducted as the new elder at the Belconnen charge (ACT).

Rev. John Macintyre, PO Box 123, Newcastle NSW 2300, has been appointed as clerk of Presbytery of the Hunter.

Mr William R. Maidment was ordained and inducted, and **Mr William A. Lenton**

was inducted to the office of elder in the congregation of **St David's Presbyterian Church** in Woy Woy, NSW.

John and Anabel McVey have been inducted elders at **Whyalla** in the Torrens Presbytery.

In July, **Mr Barry Rossiter** took up a part-time appointment as "resident supply" at Port Augusta.

A noble anniversary

Elder M.T. (Mack) Gibson celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination and induction into the eldership on 27 August. The whole period has been served in the **Wingham Session (NSW)** and for half of it Mack served as session clerk.

Wanted: Thatcherites

The Presbytery of Sydney transferred the jurisdiction of **Rev. Darrell Thatcher** to the Presbytery of Western Australia and declared him eligible for a Call. His contact address is 11 Hackett Rd, Dalkeith, WA 6009. Tel: 08 9386 8426; Mob: 0407 432 618.

Letter to PM

The **Church and Nation Committee** has written to the Prime Minister about IVF and single women.

The submission noted that every child born into this world needs and deserves a stable and secure family home, including both father and mother. "It is a tragedy of life in this world when through distance, death, desertion or divorce this is not afforded to a child and where such occurs we find the wider family, church and society have a responsibility to assist and to that degree humanly possible to compensate," the letter said.

Percy Milton Clark

1920 – 2000

Percy Milton (Pat) Clark was born at Guildford, NSW, on 12 April 1920. His family life was steeped in the Christian faith, and his early years fitted him for the Christian ministry.

Pat was of mature age when he began his studies for the ministry, bringing with him a wealth of experience of church life and commitment. His versatility and determination were finely honed in his long army career which stretched from 1939 to 1967 when he retired with the rank of captain.

He married **Ina Mather**, whom he met during their PFA days, in September 1941 in **St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Parramatta**.

Pat served in a number of parish appointments before being ordained to the charge of **Hay-Bairnald** in 1976. This was followed by **Parkes-Forbes-Peak Hill**, 1980-1983, and **Temora**, 1983-1987. Pat retired in September 1987 and moved to "Lochiel" Young.

After his retirement there was hardly a time when Pat was not exercising some

form of ministry on behalf of presbytery. He had a well-developed social and community conscience, and this was evidenced in the number of organisations with which he was associated over many years.

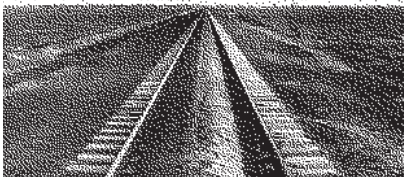
The parish of Young, where he served as interim moderator until his death, appreciated his leadership and his faithful preaching of the gospel.

Pat died on 11 May after a short illness. The Presbytery extends its sympathy to his wife **Ina** and family.

"It is not society's place through its governments to legislate for such a denial of that which only and both a father and mother can bring."

The letter also said: "It is a tragedy when children don't know who their dads are, let alone know nothing of their involvement in their lives – it is a greater tragedy when governments encourage it all in the name of equal opportunity ... The Bible testifies that God takes special interest in orphans, yet his creational provision and therefore perpetual intent was for a child to be raised in the loving and nurturing care of a father and mother in covenantal and stable union we call marriage."

across australia



Petrol sniffing

International Christian aid agency **World Vision** has moved to highlight the scourge of petrol sniffing among young Aboriginal people. This coincides with a submission to a House of Representatives inquiry that some indigenous mothers attached petrol-soaked rags to the jumpers of hungry babies to stop them crying.

World Vision's manager for indigenous programs, **Ray Minniecon**, described petrol sniffing as "one of Australia's most pressing human rights issues" but one which churches, governments and the community have failed to understand and deal with adequately.

Mr Minniecon, a descendant of the Kubi Kubi people of southern Queensland and a minister with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, oversees World Vision's strategic preventative health work in the remote Central desert community Papunya.

World Vision endorses the recent call of **Senator Aden Ridgeway** to empower indigenous elders to exercise traditional laws on petrol-sniffing youths. The Senator said it should be up to "each and every community" to decide how to implement such laws. According to World Vision Australia's chief executive, **Lynn Arnold**, petrol sniffing is not a primary problem, but "a glaring symptom of a much deeper malaise afflicting our nation.

NSW appointment

The NSW Council of Churches has appointed **Elizabeth Scott** as its new public affairs director. Among her qualifications are a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in mass communications, from Macquarie University and a Diploma of Bible and Missions from Moore Theological College.

She will be responsible for contact with the media, member churches and other groups, especially with parliamentarians, government departments and committees of inquiries. She will also research and submit position papers on relevant issues.

Elizabeth Scott is married to James Scott and they have one child, Anastasia.

True families

The NSW Council of Churches is concerned that Australian society is turning its back on what is right and true in family life. Calling on government and community bodies to rethink the importance of strong family life for the well being of society, Council President **Ray Hoekzema** said: "It's a very human desire to want to build a family with a life partner, and I empathise with all people who deeply want this for themselves, whether they be single, married or otherwise," Mr Hoekzema said. "But we mustn't get carried away by the myth that any and every family arrangement will have a positive outcome."

The debate over IVF technology and the rights of parents and children has clouded the truth about the success of the traditional family arrangement. He rejected the current emphasis on "rights" and said the community should instead look to what is "right".

Mr Hoekzema supports the call of the Anglican Church for a conscience vote on amendments to the federal Sex Discrimination Act.

The fact that science and technology move faster than ethical discussion is responsible for the current predicament, Mr Hoekzema said. "Science continually pushes the bounds of what's acceptable. But just because something is possible, it doesn't mean we should accept it."

Trends 2000 Conference

A conference being planned for Melbourne this month may well become a critical moment in modern Australian church history. Titled 'Trends 2000,' the gathering at **Harvest Bible College** is set to draw thinkers and "trend-watchers" with unequalled insights to contemporary culture.

Plenary sessions will include: Major geopolitical trends, economic and financial

trends, spiritual and church trends in Australia, the decline of the West, the rise of the East, and living with postmodernity.

Olympic witness

The *Southern Cross* newspaper said last month that the **Bible Society in Australia** was allowed to place a Christian information stand at the Homebush Bay site during the Olympic Games.

The stand was in the Olympics Expo area alongside Olympic sponsors, where it was seen by tens of thousands of local and overseas visitors each day.

The approval came as a surprise, after several approaches were refused. The society's general secretary, **Mark Francis**, said it followed tireless hard work and prayer.

Demand for Olympic evangelistic resources dramatically exceeded expectations. Around half a million extra copies of Mark's Gospel and the *Towards The Goal* New Testament were ordered to meet demand.

Hope for refugees

The **National Council of Churches in Australia**, in partnership with the **South Australian Council of Churches**, held a national celebration in Adelaide on 25 August in the lead up to Refugee Sunday on 27 August.

It was a celebration of the amazing contribution refugees make to Australia, and a recognition of the continuing political and social commitment to refugee issues in our communities, despite a difficult political atmosphere.

At midday there was a launch of 400 paper boats in Victoria Square fountain by South Australian school children. The boats signified the 400 or more children who have been in Australian detention centres this year, and the need for a more compassionate response to boat people.

Refugee Sunday itself was the most successful yet with hundreds of churches around Australia holding a special service on the need to respond to the plight of refugees with compassion

Schools face closure

In 1995 the NSW Parliament passed an act that banned corporal punishment in all schools. The act requires schools to include in their official school policies relating to discipline that they do not permit corporal punishment of students. At the time, Christian school organisations objected to the legislation. Two Christian schools, **Nambucca Valley Christian Community School** and **Sutherland Shire Christian School**, have refused to include the

required statement in their policies. The Board of Studies has recently inspected these schools and recommended their deregistration because they have not included the statement. Deregistration would mean the schools would not receive government funding. Parents would not be able to afford the full cost of education in a Christian school so the expected result would be the closure of very good, effective schools at the end of this year. **The Council of Christian Community Schools** has requested member schools and parents to write urgently to the NSW Minister for Education.

world news



Bid to ban Bible

A German religious group **Universal Life**, has tried to outlaw the bible. They claim the bible contains many brutal and racist passages that could harm young people. Universal Life's authority comes from its prophet **Gabriele Wittek**, who claims she receives direct revelations from Jesus Christ. Its authority rests in her rather than the Bible.

Martyr dies

Sabina Wurmbrand, co-founder of the **Voice of the Martyrs**, has died. For more than 30 years she served the persecuted church with her husband Richard. Sabina's life showed a understanding of Christian love and forgiveness, with an effort to redeem lives for Christ.

Russia weeps for sailors

The five Baptist churches in Kursk, Russia, are mourning the death of 118 sailors who perished in the nuclear submarine. **Pastor Ivan Petrov** hopes that more Russians will turn to God as a result of the "great tragedy". He hopes that politicians

will learn to put their trust in God rather than their own faculties.

Gay vote postponed

Britain's **United Reformed Church (URC)** recently voted to leave unresolved the issue of practicing homosexuals in ministry. At its recent annual assembly, the URC declared that there was a lack of agreement on "the mind of the church on the subject". The assembly voted for a seven-year moratorium from further resolutions.

Angry dialogue

In India, both Christians and Hindus are angry over proposed dialogue by the National Commission for Minorities. The Christians are angry as they were not informed about the date of meeting and are divided over holding a dialogue with Hindus, while Hindus are angry that Christians did not talk. The Christians are now meeting to determine consensus on basic questions before they meet Hindu groups.

Sharia costs more lives

The installation of Islamic law of Sharia has lead to death in three different areas of Nigeria. In Logus State, Muslim military shot two Christian soldiers. In Kaduna, Captain Idris Abdullahi led Muslim soldiers to kill 90 Christians, and 22 pastors have also been killed. In Saki, a Muslim preacher, Alfa Mofoye, has preached that Jesus was a bastard, and incited the burning of three Baptist churches.

Fiji reconciliation

Fijian churches of 12 denominations have come together to help restore peace, provide food and clothing. One minister, **Pastor Mateiwai**, said: "Up to 97 per cent of Indo-Fijians are not Christian. This is a great opportunity to share both food and the Gospel with people in need."

Portland Festival 2000

In Oregon, USA, the **Portland Festival 2000** has set a new model for evangelistic events, which will now be used round America. Instead of a traditional stadium, the festival was held in a Park, with 140,000 attending. The festival included a free Christian music concert, with **Palau** presenting the gospel each night. Also children enjoyed face painting, a petting zoo, miniature golf, and a specially built skateboard park.

Winning Edge

A new book has been produced to help share Christ for the Olympics. The book is called *The Winning Edge* and is written with non-Christians in mind. It features testimonies of 25 high profile sportspeople, such as **Michael Chang**, **Carl Lewis**, **Donald Robinson** and **Penny Heyns**.

Molucca Islands update

Violence between Muslims and Christians is still great, forcing many Christians to leave their home and become refugees. The fighting has forced many aid organisations to leave, and food clothing and medical care are in short supply. Christians groups are calling for believers worldwide to pray not only for refugees but also for the persecutors.

10,000 Billy Grahams

At the Amsterdam 2000 convention sponsored by the **Billy Graham Evangelistic Association** the torch has been passed to a new generation of 10,732 participants. Seventy five per cent of participants came from developing nations. **Franklin Graham**, Billy Graham's son, told the conference: "People ask me, who is the next Billy Graham? ... Who is the next Billy Graham? You are."

Gospel in PNG

Six isolated communities in Papua New Guinea will now hear the gospel in their own language. **Mrs Sybal Shaw**, from **Language Recordings**, has produced tapes of a gospel picture book containing an overview of the Bible and an explanation of how to live as a Christian. Members of the communities in the remote Western Highlands spoke the words on to the tapes, which will be sent along with the books. Mrs Shaw hopes the recordings will "free people from the control of witch-craft and spirit worship, but also bring revival to nominal Christians".

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Case for the defence

Christians must be deep thinkers, argues William Lane Craig.

Apologetics (from the Greek *apologia*: a defence) is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith. Apologetics is thus primarily a theoretical discipline, though it has a practical application.

In addition to serving, like the rest of theology in general, as an expression of our loving God with all our minds, apologetics specifically serves to show to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to believers, and to reveal and explore the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths.

Now, this is bound to be disappointing to some. They're just not interested in the rational justification of Christianity. They want to know, "If someone says, 'Look at all the hypocrites in the church!' what do I say?" There's nothing wrong with that question; but the fact remains that such practical matters are logically secondary to the theoretical issues.

Indeed, we dare not ignore the theoretical issues! Christians need to grasp a wider picture of Western thought and culture, rather than concentrating exclusively on their immediate evangelistic contacts. As Francis

Schaeffer reminded us, we are living in a post-Christian era, when the thought-forms of society are fundamentally anti-Christian. His warnings are now more applicable than ever.

If the situation is not to degenerate further, it is imperative that we turn the whole intellectual climate of our culture back to a Christian world view. If we do not, then what lies ahead is utter secularism.

Throughout Europe – and in Australia – evangelism is immeasurably more difficult than the United States because the intellectual climate and culture there are determined by the conviction that the Christian world view is false, and therefore irrelevant. Christian missionaries often must labor years to get a handful of converts. If we lose the theoretical issues, then in the end our practical application will be fruitless.

Charles Malik, former Lebanese ambassador to the US, in his inaugural address at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, emphasised that as Christians we face two tasks in our evangelism: saving the soul and saving the mind, that is to say, not only converting people spiritually, but intellectually as well. And the Church is lagging dangerously behind with regard to this second task.

Mark his words well: "I must be frank with you: the greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind in its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough. But intellectual nurture cannot take place apart from profound immersion for a period of years in the history of thought and the spirit.

"People who are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earning money or serving the church or preaching the gospel have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past, ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking.

"The result is that the arena of creative thinking is vacated and abdicated to the enemy. Who among evangelicals can stand up to the great secular or naturalistic or atheistic scholars on their own terms of scholarship?"

These words hit like a hammer.

Evangelicals really have been living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence. The average Christian does not realise that there is an intellectual war going on in the universities and in the professional journals and scholarly societies. Christianity is being attacked from all sides as irrational or outmoded, and millions of students, our future generation of leaders, have absorbed this viewpoint.

This is a war which we cannot afford to lose. As J. Gresham Machen warned in 1913, on the eve of the fundamentalist controversy, if we lose this intellectual war, then our evangelism will be immeasurably more difficult in the next generation.

He wrote: "False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root."

Unfortunately, Machen's warning went unheeded, and biblical Christianity retreated into the intellectual closets of fundamental-

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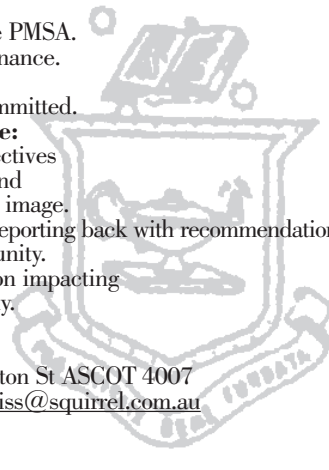
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ism, from which we have only recently begun to re-emerge. The war is not yet lost, and it is one which we dare not lose.

What good does it do to preach on, say, Christian values when a large percentage of people, even Christians, say that they don't believe in absolute truth, or what good will it do to simply quote the Bible in your evangelistic Bible study when somebody in the group says that the Jesus Seminar has disproved the reliability of the gospels?

If we fail to do our homework in these areas, then there will remain a substantial portion of the population – unfortunately, the most intelligent and therefore most influential people in society, such as doctors, educators, journalists, lawyers, business executives, and so forth – who will remain untouched by our ministry.

Moreover, it's not just Christian scholars and pastors who need to be intellectually engaged with the issues. Christian laymen, too, need to become intellectually engaged. Our churches are filled with Christians who are idling in intellectual neutral. As Christians, their minds are going to waste.

One result of this is an immature, superficial faith. People who simply ride the roller coaster of emotional experience are cheating themselves out of a deeper and richer Christian faith by neglecting the intellectual side of that faith.

They know little of the riches of deep understanding of Christian truth, of the confidence inspired by the discovery that one's faith is logical and fits the facts of experience, of the stability brought to one's life by the conviction that one's faith is objectively true. Intellectual impoverishment with respect to one's faith can thus lead to spiritual impoverishment as well.

But the results of being in intellectual neutral extend far beyond oneself. If Christian laymen don't become intellectually engaged, then we are in serious danger of losing our children. In high school and college Christian teenagers are intellectually assaulted on every hand by a barrage of anti-Christian philosophies and attitudes.

As I speak in churches around the country, I continually meet parents whose children have left the faith because there was no one in the church to answer their questions. For the sake of our youth, we desperately need informed parents who are equipped to wrestle with the issues at an intellectual level.

Machen, like Malik, believed that "The chief obstacle to the Christian religion today lies in the sphere of the intellect," and that it is in that sphere that the issues must be addressed. "The Church is perishing to-day through the lack of thinking, not through an excess-of it.

This concludes the three-part text extract from Reasonable Faith by William Lane Craig, copyright 1994. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, USA. ap

Movie Watch The Road Home

Rated PG

Directed by Zhang Yimou

Reviewed by Matthew Hodge



As a general rule, we guys (especially 21-year-olds) are not renowned for liking "romantic" films. After all, they're hopelessly soppy – we much prefer our car chases, retractable steel blades in the knuckles and massed battle scenes. Besides, our mates will pay out on us.

For me, as well as the first two concerns, I find that what passes for "romance" nowadays is nowhere near a biblical role model of what makes a good relationship. In Proverbs 31, we're given a model of a biblical wife, one who works hard, encourages her children to do so, and is such a loving and strong partner to her husband that her husband actually says "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."

Now, compare this to Hollywood. Nearly all the romances in the movies are based on the idea of two people being attracted to each other because they have interesting personalities or, more often, because of looks and sex. (Compare this with Proverbs 31:30 where it says "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting.")

The idea of long-term commitment, of a supportive relationship is rarely seen on films nowadays ... until I stumbled across Zhang Yimou's *The Road Home*.

This movie was the first shown in an Asian film festival that was opening in Brisbane. I'd never seen much Asian cinema before, but a quote on the flyer caught my attention. "I made my last two films *Not One Less* and *The Road Home* as a reaction against the current tendencies in Chinese cinema, against the logic of the market," says director Zhang. "I wanted them to be simple, immediate and anchored in reality ... they address the viewer with real feelings and emotions."

The film opens with Luo, a Chinese businessman, driving to a small rural town for the funeral of his father. It's mid-winter, and everything is desolate

(made to look even more bleak because it's filmed in black and white). Luo arrives in town to find that his old mother is apparently causing a stir because she wants to have a traditional Chinese funeral which involves carrying her husband's coffin all the way from the hospital to the village so it can be buried. (According to Chinese tradition, this shows the departed person "the road home" in case their spirit gets lost.) The problem is, it's a full day's walk in the middle of winter.

At first, it looks like a case of an old person stuck in an old-fashioned rut; but then Luo starts to relate to us the story of his mother and father's courtship (and you tell me, when was the last time you heard that word used in a film?). Suddenly, the screen is alive in glorious colour (the cinematography and colour scheme of the film are some of the best I've seen in ages) and we see the village 40 years ago when Luo's father, Yusheng, arrives as a 20-year-old schoolteacher.

His mother, then aged 18, was instantly attracted to the teacher, who didn't notice her at all. As the film progresses, we see the many different things that Luo's mother does to attract Yusheng's attention. Most of them are subtle, many of them go unnoticed, many of them are at great cost to herself.

I've never seen anything like it. It's almost like the words of Proverbs 31 being acted out. There's no kissing – actually, no physical contact at all – there's no romantic talk, and yet you'd have to be absolutely jaded not to be touched by the obvious devotion the girl feels for the new village schoolteacher.

To say more would spoil a fantastic movie experience. In a day and age when films, television and the media are pushing more and more wrong and ungodly ideas about romance and relationships, this film comes as a breath of fresh air. Despite the PG rating, there is no questionable content at all, except for the Chinese beliefs that are portrayed. Recommended.

Matthew Hodge is secretary of PY Queensland. ap

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Look, no hands!

Dan Wooding tells the inspiring story of thalidomide survivor Brian Gault.

Brian Gault was born without arms. He is one of the 470 survivors of “miracle drug” Thalidomide’s exposure to the British market in the mid-20th century. But instead of being angry, this courageous man has turned his setback to a vibrant witness to the power of God’s grace as he has struggled to prove himself normal in an abnormal world. He has released a book in Britain that he wrote with Helena Rogers called *Look, No Hands!* (Hodder and Stoughton).

In a foreword to the book, Joni Eareckson Tada – herself a quadriplegic – wrote: “Like me, you will think, if this gentleman can by the grace of God overcome his limitations I can too.”

In an interview, in which he typed his answers to my questions with his toe on his laptop computer from his home in the Isle of Man, Brian explained, “I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 23 September 1961. My parents, William and Isobel, lived in a farming community 15 miles north of Belfast, on a smallholding near the town of Ballyclare, in beautiful County Antrim. I have an older stepbrother, Derek, my brother, Alan, then aged five, and sister Patricia aged two when I was born. Then a few years later my younger sister Gwen was an addition to the family.”

A doctor prescribed Thalidomide to his mother to help alleviate “morning sickness”. Back in the early 1960s most countries around the world felt the impact of Thalidomide. It was hailed as a “wonder drug”, completely safe even for pregnant women.

About 470 Thalidomide victims are alive in Britain today, and another 10,000 in the rest of the world.

Brian says: “My mother knew that something was not quite right. Then the doctor who delivered me shared with my mother that her third child was born without both arms. Her response was complete numbness and shock for several days. Thankfully, a cousin, also a doctor heard, and shared with my mother that there had been other babies born in recent months without limbs, like her Brian. This was just sufficient comfort to help mum cope, and gradually realise it wasn’t her fault.”

At two-and-a-half, he was sent to Edinburgh, in Scotland, to be fitted with

artificial arms. “Up until this time, I was doing everything with my toes, using them just like fingers. I grew to eat, write, draw and play with my toes. This is when it truly hit me between the eyes that I was different! Yet, as a very young child, I kept asking myself why I needed these heavy, cumbersome metal contraptions on my wee shoulders?”

Growing up in a farming community, his first school had only 26 pupils and one teacher. “Whereas the other children had a desk and chair, I sat on the floor on a piece of carpet, painting and drawing with my toes. The teacher recalls being amazed at how I peeled an orange with my toes. It was decided that I needed much more specialised support than the little country school could give,” Brian says.

“My mother and father went up to Fleming Fulton School in Belfast, they heard a talk from a Mr Wilkie from the USA who had no arms, “just like our Brian”. Well, Mum and Dad were totally amazed at how full and active a life he had, with a wife and family. He took dollar notes out of his wallet with his toes, and drove a motorcar. It was such a confidence booster to my parents, and everyone who met Mr Wilkie that day.”

The Gaunt family eventually moved to the Isle of Man to live – an island in the

Irish Sea with a population of about 75,000. “I was eight at the time and other children there had never met someone without arms,” he said. “For 38 years, I’ve been telling people ‘My feet are my hands, except when I’m walking on them’. Throughout my childhood at school I was given many challenges to overcome using my toes. I learnt to swim at seven years old, play many other sports, horse-riding, table-tennis, plus practical domestic chores like putting on and off my clothes, light-switches, all with my toes.

I was never allowed to say the word *can’t* but rather “*Try! Try! Try!*” I’ve never been able to wash my hair, or tuck in my shirt, but this was minor in contrast to everything else.”

Brian said he hated those artificial arms. “The artificial arms were strapped to my chest and as I moved pressure-pads on my shoulders the arms moved up and down. As I expanded my chest muscles, the hooks would open and close. Oxygen gas cylinders powered the arms.”

As children’s growing feet seems to demand new shoes every six months, Brian had to go to Edinburgh every four to six months for new substitute arms. The first time he was away 10 weeks, and felt abandoned. Later the visits became much shorter, often about 10 days.

“The reality was I’d do anything not to have the arms on. Throughout my childhood years, the artificial arms were actually draining away my confidence instead of building me up, as the professors said. After having ‘arms’ for 11 years I’d had enough, and thankfully the teachers at school had come to the same conclusion regarding the metal contraptions.”

Brian said that as he grew into a teenager, he would get angry with his artificial arms. “I took much of my anger and frustration out through my temper tantrums with my metal arms. It was not so much not having real arms like other teenagers, but convincing others that I’m an OK person without arms.”

After 12 long years of an emotional battle in the British courts, all the thalidomide families received compensation from the drug company. “Our court system is not as generous as the USA,” he said. “I would be a typically ‘middle case’ without upper



limbs as a criteria."

After leaving school, Brian went to college, and then began searching for a job. "After many, many rejections, I was eventually given a three months' trial with the Isle of Man Government, working at the harbour office," he recalled. "My job entailed doing ledger bookkeeping, compiling reports for the various harbors on the Isle of Man. Amazingly, my workmates were so supportive, and actually encouraged me to slow down a bit!"

Brian did have a religious background. "As a wee lad, I'd be sent off to Sunday School at Ballylinney Presbyterian Church, literally two minutes from our home," he said. "We would sing choruses and learn stories about Jesus and his friends. I must be honest and say that I found church very boring. It was only after a good friend called Alan Wilson became a Christian, that I saw such a difference in him.

"During my 13th year as well as getting rid of my artificial arms (physical burden), later that same year I got rid of the (spiritual burden) of sin, when I realised that Jesus died for me, had forgiven/accepted me as I am without arms. The difference was an overwhelming sense of peace, and a new longing to be with other Christians for encouragement."

At college and after, he drifted away for six years. "I learnt to drive a motorcar, got

new friends and, with the pressure of studies, sadly Christian fellowship went further down the list. Praise God, he never lets go of us. Just after Easter 1984, aged 23, I repented of my sins, and asked the Lord that I may have boldness and courage like that of Caleb, who wholeheartedly served the Lord. I started going along to Broadway Baptist Church, in Douglas. The church family has been fabulous at accepting, loving and supporting me in my spiritual journey.

"Pastor David Gordon and the rest of the church leadership were not surprised when I felt God's challenge to leave my job at the harbor after seven years, and go to Bible College." Five girls offered on a rota to do his laundry, and some of the boys to wash his hair, and tuck in his shirt each morning.

At last I could thank God for creating me the way I am," said Brian. "I became convinced that I am not a biological accident with a meaningless existence, but that in his wisdom, God loved me and planned that I should exist. He gave me a life that is both responsible and meaningful, and his plans for me are utterly good."

Brian found college invaluable, giving him a firm foundation in Christian teaching, studying, interaction with the various communities, laughter and tears in the friendships made, plus special times to enjoy God. Among Brian's closest friends are Rick Wakeman, the legendary keyboardist who played with the British super group Yes, for many years, and his wife, Nina Carter Wakeman, an actress and model. Rick Wakeman said, "Brian Gault is one of the most remarkable men that I have ever met. He is a Christian who many people just can't fathom out why. Here is a man born without any arms and given a particularly difficult childhood because of it, and many people say he should therefore hate God for what he has allowed to happen.

"Everyone except Brian that is. Brian sees what has happened almost as a gift and is using it accordingly. He is a credit to the human race."


Brian describes how he first met this show business couple. "During the early 1990s, Rick and Nina began worshipping at my home church. After seeing a television documentary from Brazil in 1993 regarding Thalidomide children, it was friends like Rick and Nina who gave me the inspiration to keep writing my story *Look, No Hands!* I'm so green, whereas Rick and Nina's vast experience and knowledge plus their wisdom, support, encouragement and love have been immense, especially with finding a publishing house. Rick is used to me bending

his ear for his thoughts and advice as I seek new doors of serving the Lord." All royalties from the book's sales are going into a charitable trust to aid these children in Brazil.

Since 1992, Brian has been working full-time as a church worker within the community in Douglas, Isle of Man. Now, newly married to May, and after eight years at Broadway, he has joined Joni Eareckson Tada's organisation, Through the Roof, as a field worker.

What is his message to physically challenged people around the world? "Fully grasp your potential in Christ Jesus," he said. "Each of us is of immensely great value and worth to our Heavenly Father. We all have a role within the body of believers, other wise the local churches are missing such a blessing. (Luke 14:14).

"Personally, I believe that God will use my disability to help others come to faith in the God who never makes mistakes. He made me without arms for a purpose and I trust he will use me to take his love to those whom he has created to be 'different'. For 38 years I've had no arms, and known no other way. My desires in the public arena are that people see something of Jesus' character in an imperfect body. Yet, in the sight of my Lord, I know I'm whole. Still a sinner, saved by grace."

Dan Wooding is the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times). Wooding is also the author of some 39 books. 

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A modern ministry

It's still prayer and the Word, suggests D.B. Knox.

Luke 10:20 says, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." This verse comes at the end of a short passage reporting our Lord's words to the 70 disciples on their return from the ministry on which he had sent them. They came back full of joy in the success of their ministry. Jesus had sent them into the towns and villages which he was planning to pass through, and had commissioned them to heal the sick and to proclaim the nearness of God's rule.

In this passage we note the reality of the spiritual world of evil and the reality of the conflict with evil. Indeed, it is the most striking feature of the passage, this spiritual nature of the conflict in which the Christian is engaged.

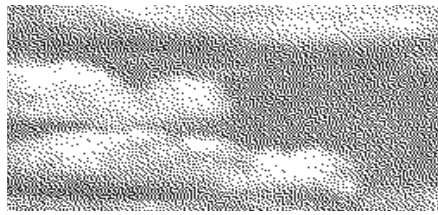
The reality of this spiritual world and spiritual conflict is in sharp contrast with the way we ordinarily look at the world today. Jesus, God's Son, took the spiritual world of evil very seriously. He spoke much of Satan, the devil, the prince of this world – "the enemy", as he calls him in this passage.

The world of spiritual wickedness is a reality. Jesus met it in conflict at the beginning of his ministry in the temptations. Satan is at work in God's world. The woman afflicted with sickness for 18 years, Jesus told the synagogue leader, was bound by Satan with that sickness. And in Acts 10:38 Peter told Cornelius that Jesus, in his ministry, had gone about doing good and healing the sickness of those who were oppressed by the devil. At the end of his ministry, Jesus told Peter that Satan had wished to sift him like wheat. It was through Jesus' prayers that the devil's machinations and purposes were thwarted, and Peter himself later described the devil as like a roaring lion going about seeking whom he could devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

We must be aware of this, we must keep our eye fixed on our target. Our attention, our ministry, must not be engrossed with projects, plans and activities of ministry, which have only a light heavenly dimension and are essentially temporal things belonging to this world.

Today we have very largely lost sight of the fact that it is Satan and spiritual evil that we are up against. Our interests and our energies are directed at, and our prayers are

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



absorbed by, all sorts of lesser objectives and projects for their own sake.

Yet the conflict is a real one. In this passage Jesus calls Satan 'the enemy'. We must not lose sight of the enemy. Field Marshal Montgomery, when he was fighting General Rommel in the Libyan desert, had a photograph of Rommel hanging in his field headquarters caravan because, as he said, he never wanted to forget who the enemy was and what he might be up to. Our world view must never neglect the spiritual world and the spiritual powers of evil which are engaged in fighting God and his purposes and with whom God, through Christ and us, is in conflict.

First, the Luke 10 passage teaches us that the conflict is real but, second, that the victory is also real.

It was on the cross that Christ won the victory when he endured the full penalty of sin, the curse which sin evokes and he bore this curse triumphantly. The ministry of the 70 anticipated that victory of the cross; they shared in it before the event.

The authority that Jesus has given us over every power of the enemy is a spiritual authority over spiritual opposition. We are not promised authority or protection against all the physical ills which Satan may be permitted to inflict (2 Cor. 12:7). We have seen that sickness is the oppression of the devil (Acts 10:38) and the Epistle to the Hebrews says the devil has the power of death (2:14); he exercised this power of death not long afterwards against the apostle James and the martyr Stephen.

So, plainly, the promise "nothing shall in any way hurt you", which was only spoken

a few years at most before these men's deaths, is not in the physical realm.

It is authority over every spiritual evil of the enemy which we have been given, and we should exercise our ministry with this assurance from Christ for certain victory, for Christ has graciously joined us with himself in his victory.

We should turn to the apostles' example to find the way in which we are to engage in this victorious conflict, this spiritual ministry to which Christ sends us. It is by giving ourselves to prayer and to the Word. The apostles summarised their ministry in Acts 6:4 as "we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word". Prayer is primary. It was through prayer that Jesus defeated Satan's intentions to sift Peter as wheat. "I have prayed for you," he told his apostle (Luke 22:32).

Prayer is primary in our ministry and yet how little we exercise this powerful battering ram against Satan's strongholds. As we go to our ministry, whether in the ordinary daily avocations of life as lay people or in the more specialised ministries of preacher or pastor, we must follow the example of the apostles who told their fellow disciples that they would give themselves to prayer.

Along with prayer the apostles gave themselves to the ministry of the Word. That Word is the same Word that Jesus entrusted to the 70 and, earlier, to the 12 apostles. It is to proclaim the kingdom of God, which means proclaiming the cross, for Christ's death established the kingdom or rule of God.

Martin Luther had a phrase, "let the Word do it", that is the Word of the cross, the Word about the King. Prayer and preaching were the only ministries which the apostles referred to in summarising their activities in Acts 6.

Jesus has promised that this ministry will be rewarded with success, spiritual success. We will tread down snakes and scorpions. Nothing will harm us, and so we must address ourselves, unflinchingly, to this commission with the authority we have received to triumph over every power.

D.B. Knox is a former principal of Moore Theological College. This is an edited extract from Sent By Jesus, Banner of Truth, 1992, a collection of talks on Sydney radio station 2CH.

books



The Second Epistle to the Corinthians

Paul Barnett
Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

I was holding forth once at a conference, and a man came up to me after and told me how much he was enjoying my commentary on 2 Corinthians. I was sorry to have to set him straight – I am, mercifully for all concerned, not the Bishop of North Sydney, and I am unlikely ever to write a commentary on that Second Corinthians, and certainly not one as distinguished as this one.

To make matters worse, on another occasion I gave an historical lecture at Macquarie University, and when it was written up, it was attributed to Paul Barnett. So I have received some of the credit for his work and he has taken some of the blame for mine! So be clear as to who is the writer and who is the reviewer.

Second Corinthians is undoubtedly Paul's most personal epistle. Here, as nowhere else perhaps, Paul wears his heart on his sleeve and reveals his inner thoughts to the reader. Paul Barnett rightly sees the 'power-in-weakness' theme as one which pervades the letter. Hence, we have the paradoxical notion, for example, in 2 Corinthians 2:14, of God's leading his people in triumph in Christ. What is usually an occasion for humiliation and dejection for the captives becomes for the Christian an occasion of triumph. What would normally encourage bitterness in the captive brings forth thanks to God in the Christian. This extraordinary paradox comes to the fore also in 4:7-12; 6:4-10; and 11:23-12:13.

On 2 Corinthians 5:14, however, Barnett takes the L out of TULIP as he puts forward the view that Christ died for all, and that "none is excluded from the sphere of God's saving purposes in Christ". This means that he has to distinguish between the "all" for whom Christ died, and the "all" who have died in Christ for they can only be those who have saving faith in him.

One can forgive him his Amyrauldianism because this commentary is a clear and incisive piece of work which should be a standard reference for many years to come.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP

Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity

Paul Barnett
IVP, 1999.
Reviewed by Peter Hastie

One of the more significant books on the New Testament in recent times is this work by the Australian scholar, Dr Paul Barnett, whose reputation as a first-class biblical exegete and New Testament historian is well-deserved.

Barnett has written this substantial work of 450 pages out of a long-held conviction that the engine that drives the story of the New Testament is the historical Jesus – not a mythological figure that was an alleged later invention of a second-century church.

He believes that Christ's claims on individuals and societies are only real because they are based on the genuine historicity of Jesus as the Son of David, who came in fulfillment of ancient prophecy, died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead. In Barnett's estimation, only the force of such a figure is sufficient to explain the phenomenon of the New Testament.

Not suprisingly, Barnett's project is rooted in a deep respect for the historicity of the movement of early Christianity. His grasp of historical details and issues is encyclopaedic, but not unexpected. His earlier commentaries on Mark, Revelation and 2 Corinthians have demonstrated his mastery in this area. For him, the real and historical nature of the New Testament events is the bedrock upon which the gospel proclamation is based. That's why his study is slanted towards authenticating the NT data and building his work on solid historical investigation.

Interestingly, and this is where the value of the book derives, Barnett's focus on the historical Jesus illuminates the rest of the New Testament. It may sound strange, but most of the other standard New Testament histories – Bo Reicke's *The NT Era*, FF Bruce's *NT History* and Richard Niswonger's *NT History* pay scant attention to the historical person of Jesus as the explanation for the rise of the early Christian movement. Barnett sets out to redress this imbalance, and does it in a satisfying manner that relates NT events to OT core promises.

As expected, this book contains fascinating historical summaries based on wide and exhaustive research. The reading list and footnotes are comprehensive. He has

very interesting sections on Qumran, Herod and the inter-testamental period. His treatment of areas which are of apologetic interest are thorough and precise. See, for example, his section on the resurrection that handles all the problems which critics raise on the issue.

This is a book which Christian apologists and NT students will return to often. It is written in a readable and simple style yet deals with profound issues. It is highly recommended. (\$34.95)

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP

Learning about the Old Testament

Allan Harman
Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2000.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

The Old Testament is a daunting book to people just beginning to learn the faith, so it is good to have a helpful and short introduction to its teachings. This is a revision of an earlier work by Professor Harman, put out in 1990 and published by Aus Press.

The two additional chapters are Worship in Ancient Israel and The Fate of the Monarchy. Professor Harman wears his scholarship lightly, and is able to open up a subject without weighing down the reader.

The chapter on 'The Covenant of Creation' will lead to some discussion. Professor Harman thinks that the length of days in Genesis 1 is not fixed, and then writes of the curse following the Fall: "The effect of sin was not to introduce a new principle (death), but to alter the existing relationships so that life became burdensome." Surely, the Fall did indeed usher in death, not just painful inconvenience (e.g. Rom.5:12-21).

That criticism aside, this would be an ideal book for a study group wanting to gain an overview of the Old Testament. The price of the book is only \$4.95 – an additional incentive to make good use of it.

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OCTOBER

- 21 Ulverstone parish in Tasmania's north; about 60 communicants and 15 elders; Daniel and Amanda Combridge; and the Mole Creek congregation with 6 communicants, Robert White interim moderator.
- 22 Margaret Price, who has served with WEC in Indonesia and Canberra, as she takes on a new role.
- 23 Melbourne bayside parish of Clarinda; about 75 communicants and 3 elders; John and Lynette Ellis, and the three-year-old East Bentleigh outreach established by Reg Mathews.
- 24 Carol Whipp from Somerville, Vic., who previously worked in Fiji and studied in Delhi, and has been seeking a visa to return to north India.
- 25 Dromana-Mornington, another Melbourne bayside parish with some 75 communicants and 10 elders in 3 congregations; Andrew and Marilyn Venn.
- 26 Mavis Price from Castlemaine Vic, literacy facilitator for the Girawa people of PNG, and her fellow worker Pat Lillie under WBT.
- 27 The Gippsland home mission station of Bairnsdale; with about 35 communicants and 2 elders; where Laurie Leighton works with Peter Swinn as moderator.
- 28 Adrian and Diane de Graaf and the 6 elders or so and about 90 communicant members of the Liverpool parish in SW Sydney.
- 29 Robina parish on the southern Gold Coast of Queensland; about 45 communicants and 2 elders; Kevin and Beverley Ridley.
- 30 Presbytery of Canberra, NSW/ACT; 7 parishes and 3 home mission stations totalling 21 congregations with 1620 communicants and adherents, 1 other minister under jurisdiction 7 retired ministers; Peter Davidson clerk.

NOVEMBER

- 1 Seacliff-Mt Barker parish, Adelaide (southern suburbs and the hills); Wally and Rosemary Zurrer and Rupert Hanna (also Assembly Clerk) about 110 communicants and 14 elders in three congregations (Murray Bridge also).
- 2 Orange parish, NSW central west; about 115 communicants with 11 elders; William and Robyn Stewart.
- 3 Grant and Esther Vayne and the 2 elders of Kaniva-Nhill parish, Western Victoria, with some 5 members.
- 4 Peter Dunstan at the Toukley parish north of Sydney; about 70 communicants and 8 elders making good use of a new building.
- 5 Hervey Bay parish, Queensland; about 95 communicants and 7 elders; John and Lorraine Roth.
- 6 Robert and Hazel Looney now back in Perth representing Wycliffe Bible Translators after several years doing the same in New Zealand.
- 7 Ballarat West parish, Sebastapol, Vic.; about 45 communicants and 3 elders; John and Lesley Stasse.
- 8 Springwood parish on the NSW Blue Mountains, including Winmalee; about 170 communicants and 10 elders; vacant.
- 9 All those facing death, and ministers and others ministering to them, that their confidence may be in the crucified and risen Christ.
- 10 Presbytery of Bendigo, Vic; 5 parishes and 2 home mission stations with a total of 10 congregations having 450 communicants and adherents; Andrew Clarke clerk.
- 11 Bassendean home mission station, Perth; about 35 communicants and 3 elders; vacant, James Nocher moderator.
- 12 The 39 million people of South Africa

(73% black, 14% white, 10% mixed race, 3% Asian) as they seek to overcome a legacy of racial conflict, and the churches in their evangelistic and prophetic work (38% Protestant and 8% RC faced by 18% following traditional religions, 24% indigenous syncretistic groups and 9% non-religious, Hindu and Muslim).

- 13 Hawthorn parish, Melbourne; about 20 communicants; Graham and Beth Lyman.
- 14 Tamworth-Manilla parish in NSW's New England – 5 congregations in three groupings; about 250 communicants and 20 elders; Stuart and Marion Andrews (also her work on Women in Ministry Newsletter), Vic and Gillian Johnson, Keith and Vivian Walker, and some vacant positions.
- 15 Ian and Roseanne Johnston and 4 elders of the Ayr parish, north Qld; 2 congregations with about 55 communicants.
- 16 Forestville-Killarney Heights parish; one congregation., about 40 communicants and 7 elders; Phillip and Lydia Chang.
- 17 Neville and Lynette Heywood from Uralla, Qld, working among Aboriginal people in Armidale NSW and the Boggabilla area on the NSW/Qld border.
- 18 The NSW North Coast parish of Kempsey including South West Rocks; about 55 communicants and 2 elders; Trevor and Dawn Woodland.
- 19 Auburn parish, Melbourne; Peter and Linda Swinn and the 4 elders; overseeing about 30 communicants.
- 20 Presbytery of Brisbane Qld; 11 parishes comprising 15 congregations with about 1035 communicants and adherents, 1 professor, 1 department head, 1 missionary, 1 deaconess, 7 retired ministers; Guido Kettmiss, Clerk.
- 21 Universities and other tertiary educational institutions; those students graduating shortly, and the preparation for Christian witness in 2001, especially to new students.

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When can we boast?

Only when we are fools – as Paul was.

“I am the greatest,” boasted Muhammad Ali, the most famous boxer the world has known. But life has a disturbing way of reversing our boasting, and now Muhammad struggles with a debilitating disease, barely able to talk. In 2 Corinthians Paul does a little boasting of his own, but so different to worldly boasting it might be better labelled “boasting in reverse”.

In the Corinthian Church Paul’s authority was questioned. A group of “super-apostles” had arrived and undermined his ministry. They produced “letters of recommendation” and claimed other apostolic signs, which left Paul in a difficult situation. He would not play the super-apostles’ game – his authority, after all, derived not from human accreditation but from Christ – but if he did not rebut the charges they might stick, strengthening the false teachers.

Paul is clearly disappointed by the Corinthians’ willingness to listen to the false teachers, and feels somewhat betrayed. But he must defend (as far as it is possible) his apostolic ministry, given directly by Jesus. The evidence of his love and service to the church should have been obvious and in the “fools speech” he reminds them of what they should have plainly understood – his ministry to the church has involved much hardship and great suffering.

His “fool’s speech” (2 Cor. 11:1-12:13) is a daring attempt to try to awaken this church to the danger they are facing, by boasting, not of his strengths and status but his trials and weaknesses. The speech has defensive overtones, as Paul seeks to re-establish his credentials against those of the infiltrators. This is evident in two verses that form an “inclusio” and mark the nature and reason for his defence – “I do not think I am in the least inferior to those super-apostles” (11:5) and “I ought to have been commended by you for I am not in the least inferior to the super-apostles” (12:11).

Chapter 11 is a scathing attack on the message and ministry of the so-called super-apostles. Paul clearly sees himself as doing battle for the very future and destiny of the Corinthian church. They are being “deceived” and their “minds” are being led astray. Eternal issues are at stake. The opponents have underhandedly sought to



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discredit Paul, not so much on the basis of his message but on the fact that he preaches it free of charge (11:7-12).

But, far from apologising for this free service, Paul “boasts of this privilege” (11:10). Neither does he recognise the message of the super-apostles as legitimate. They preach a different Jesus, a different Spirit and a different gospel. (11:4)

Paul continues his defence in 11:22-33 by comparing the status claims of the “false apostles” with his track record as an apostle of Christ. They may boast of their letters of recommendation and their descendancy from Abraham (11:22). Paul is able to make similar claims, and he knows they count for little in the work of the kingdom.

Rather than boasting of pedigree, he boasts of prisons and floggings, stonings and shipwreck, danger and toil and exposure and weakness, and all this because of his love for the church and the gospel. In this daring reversal, Paul has boasted of things that truly legitimise his apostolic ministry. His suffering for the sake of the gospel is something the super-apostles actually thought of in negative rather than positive terms.

Paul clearly believes that birth, privilege and race mean nothing now in the work of the kingdom of Christ. What counts, and what should have legitimised his ministry among the Corinthians, is his labour, zeal and suffering for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

One of the points of contention in this battle for the minds of the Corinthians was the spiritual prowess of the super-apostles as compared with Paul. His record seemed lacklustre compared with the visitors. Paul does remind them of his “signs, wonders and miracles” (12:12) as confirmation of his apostolic ministry, but he never makes these signs the final judge in matters of

ministry. In fact, he could go into great detail about being called up to paradise (12:1-4), but to boast about such matters would undermine rather than substantiate his ministry in the eyes of Christ.

Paul’s whole ministry is ordinarily founded on the principle that he will boast in Christ alone and never in his own experience, no matter how spectacular. He will boast about his weakness and his “thorn in the flesh”, which for Paul is a sign of the power of Jesus which is made perfect in weakness. (12:9)

The “fool’s speech” is a remarkable and challenging introduction to legitimate Christian ministry. It reminds us that the ways of God are never the ways of the world. The very things that legitimise and count in the eyes of the world mean little in the work of the gospel.

True and legitimate Christian ministry that God is pleased to own is characterised by a willingness to count the cost in proclaiming the gospel. That is the service the Holy Spirit blesses. The world will not recognise this and – as the Corinthians sadly prove – even the church sometimes doesn’t.

But Paul kept his integrity. He preached and pleaded with the wayward Church. He never abused the authority he was given, but by every means possible – even by way of the “fool’s speech” where he boasts of his weakness – he seeks to call the Church back to Christ.

Russell Stark is minister of Cronulla Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 

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Severity and mercy

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It is not uncommon to hear, both inside and outside the professing church, the silly – indeed heretical – notion that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and severe while the God of the New Testament is loving and merciful. Such a notion can only be sustained if one does not actually open either Testament.

Even a perfunctory reading of the Bible reveals that the New Testament stands on the shoulders of the Old. If a person does not believe the writings of Moses, neither will he believe the words of Christ (John 5:46-47). The Old Testament Scriptures, rightly explained, portray Christ just as the New Testament Scriptures do (Luke 24:27; 2 Tim.3:15).

When Christ wished to repulse the temptations of the devil, he cited the Old Testament with the formula “It is written” (Matt.4:1-11). The New Testament fulfils the Old Testament; it does not repudiate it. A closer inspection of the Bible in fact reveals that, if anything, the tendency is the other way – that God in the New Testament is more severe with those who reject his word because they are rejecting greater light.

Preaching to the Athenians, Paul says that God overlooked the times of ignorance (Acts 17:30). In Romans 3:25 Paul explains that at Calvary God demonstrated his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over the sins that were previously committed. Douglas Moo comments well: “This does not mean that God failed to punish or “overlooked” sins committed before Christ; nor does it mean that God did not really “forgive” sins under the Old Covenant. Paul’s meaning is rather that God “postponed” the full penalty due sins in the Old Covenant.”

The biblical position is that “to whom much is given, from him much will be



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required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Hence the author of Hebrews can write: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb.10:28-29).

Indeed, the whole structure of the epistle to the Hebrews revolves around this point – that God gave much to his people under the old covenant, but in the new covenant has given much more. The consequences of refusing that greater covenant are accordingly greater. Christ himself had already used the same argument when He upbraided the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum whose inhabitants had seen and heard the Messiah yet still not trusted in him. Tyre and Sidon (where wicked Queen Jezebel had come from) and even Sodom itself will find the day of judgment more tolerable than those cities which had the Light of the world in their midst but preferred the darkness (Matt.11:20-24).

Spiritual privileges are dangerous things to the unbeliever! One should also point out that it is in the teaching of Jesus himself, and not the Old Testament, which most graphically sets out the Bible’s view of everlasting punishment. Nothing in the Old Testament rivals Jesus’ picture of a place where the unsaved are tormented in flames (Luke 16:24) without any hope of ever changing their circumstances (Luke 16:26). It is Jesus himself who on the day of judgment will say to those who have rejected him: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). This will be a place of outer darkness with a furnace of fire, where there will be not annihilation but wailing and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 25:30).

The true teaching, of course, is that God is consistent in both Testaments. As Paul tells the Christians at Rome: “Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness” (Rom.11:22).

It is, after all, the Old Testament which first speaks of God as a loving and guiding Shepherd (Psalm 23). Jesus picks up this image and develops it in John 10, but it was hardly a novel doctrine. It is also true that the God of the Old Testament is spoken of as a consuming fire (Deut.4:24) – but so is the God of the New Testament (Heb.12:29).

It is the critics of the Bible who are inconsistent; the Lord himself never changes (Mal.3:6). He is just and he is merciful, and he judges us according to our works and the light he has given us.

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

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