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Roadsign for heaven

A wicked generation seeks a sign – and has one.

The richest man in Australia, media magnate Kerry Packer, has become somewhat of a specialist in metaphysics since he nearly died several years ago at a polo match at Warwick Farm. After his near-fatal heart attack, he was asked by a news reporter whether he was afraid of death. “Nah, mate,” he drawled, “I’ve been on the other side of death and there’s nothing there.”

While Mr Packer may be supremely confident that death spells the end of personal existence, his own family is not so sure. Judging from the inscription on their family vault at South Head Cemetery, Vaucluse, they’re hedging their bets. Over the doors of the mausoleum where his father and mother, Sir Frank and Lady Gretel Packer lie buried, are these words from the apocrypha: “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

It seems that on the question of immortality the Packer house is divided. One generation ago they looked forward to a future life, but now Kerry Packer’s brush with death has convinced him that there’s nothing beyond the grave.

Many Australians share his view. Indeed, any visit to an historic cemetery reminds us that since the early 19th century there has been a steady erosion of Easter faith in Australia. Graveyards are dotted with broken columns, young men hold lowered torches and headstones are often silent about a future life. The Christian idea of resurrection struggles to find a place in the modern world.

Interestingly, Kerry Packer regards his near-death experience as a sign that confirms his view that there’s no such thing as a future life. However, if we were to judge from the differing opinions of people who have passed through a similar experience, Mr Packer is on rather unsafe ground. Plenty of people are sure that they have heard voices from the other side. So a near-death experience is a little bit like the US Navy in its guarded approach as to whether nuclear weapons are on its ships: it neither confirms nor denies their presence.

So where do we turn to find any assurance about life-after-death? Is there a sign that provides conclusive proof?

The search for such a sign is hardly a



After death... what next?

modern phenomenon. In Jesus’ own day, there was a compulsive interest in signs which makes his remarks about them all the more significant. Jesus’ reflections on this subject occurred in the face of widespread rejection of his ministry. People refused to believe his messianic claims. So he put his credibility on the line with just one sign – the resurrection. Jesus said: “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt. 12:39-40).

It’s certainly a good thing – and a particularly convenient thing – that the crux of Christianity boils down to the one issue of the resurrection. It simplifies matters considerably for any who are uncertain about where to start in their search for truth. Jesus invites seekers to submit his claims to deity and messiahship to a simple historical enquiry that focuses on his resurrection.

This makes Christianity unique among the other great religions because Jesus challenges his hearers to verify his truth-claims by investigating the historical evidence for it. Anyone who wishes to assess the truth of Christian claims must turn to the resurrection.

Not surprisingly, we discover that Jesus’ earliest followers adopted the same strategy in focusing on the resurrection. For instance, the apostle Paul, when presenting his case to the Athenian academy, said that the resurrection of Jesus was an

irrefutable argument in favour of the coming judgment and a future life. He said: “God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world ... and he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Thus the resurrection becomes the linchpin in Paul’s argument. Jesus’ radical claims of divine Sonship rest upon this event. Indeed, he was “declared with power to be Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). In Paul’s mind at least, the resurrection of Jesus was an authenticated historical event that has life-and-death consequences “for all people everywhere” (Acts 17:30).

It has implications for the uninformed – those, like the Athenians, who have never investigated the matter before. Likewise, it addresses the sceptics – those who want strong, palpable evidence that Christian belief has more substance than a blind Nietzschean type-of-faith which is prepared to recklessly sail one’s ship into uncharted waters or foolishly build one’s house on the side of Mt Vesuvius. On the contrary, Christian faith is reasonable faith based on solid historical enquiry.

And this is the secret of its power. Because it’s true, it has profound consequences. It shows us which religion is the true one; it reminds us that death is not the end; it assures us that our sins are forgiven and that we can experience a new moral power. This Easter, we invite you to reconsider the one sign that will solve our problems: the resurrection.

Peter Hastie.

From the Convener

Woody Allen says he’s not afraid to die. He just doesn’t want to be there when it happens. With wit and despair, Allen encapsulates modern doubt: he’s afraid God exists, and he’s afraid he doesn’t. See page 20.



*Robert Benn,
Convener,*

National Journal Committee 

The cross: execution by torture

Barbaric, brutal, humiliating – and for us.



DETAIL FROM CHRIST ON THE CROSS BY GEORGES ROUAULT

The cross as a Christian symbol has been so sanitised and bathed in soporific haze that the ordinary Bible reader finds it hard to comprehend how barbaric, humiliating, and brutal this form of execution was to those who regularly witnessed it. While in antiquity its pre-eminent practitioners were of course the Romans, they were far from original in adopting the cross as a penalty, at least for political crimes. It seems to have originated with the Persians, though the Phoenicians also practised it.

The Greek historian Herodotus (4th century BC), in describing his travels in Persia, records several instances of crucifixion – even how Persian dignitaries suffered the penalty – but for them it appears not to have been so much part of their jurisprudence as the whim of the Persian monarch.

Also at that time the cross was as much for an intimidating public display of a corpse as actual execution, thus



Murray Adamthwaite

Herodotus uses the Greek term *stauros* for this display, while his term for a cross as an instrument of execution is *skolops*. After his time, however, the distinction disappeared, and *stauros* is the regular term in the New Testament.

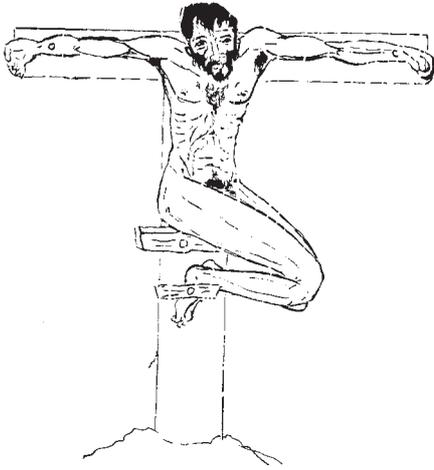
When Alexander the Great subdued Tyre in 332 BC, in revenge for the long siege he crucified 2000 of the inhabitants, arranging their crosses along the seashore for maximum effect. The Phoenician settlement at Carthage had early institutionalised the practice; from them the

Romans exploited the method, especially to subdue rebellion. Remember the famous example of the 6000 slaves crucified along the Appian Way after the defeat of the Spartacus rebellion in 71 BC. The movie depicted the horror of that dreadful spectacle.

Deterrence remained a prime motive for crucifixion of criminals and seditious persons: Quintilian, the Roman educational theorist (1st century AD), advocated the erection of crosses at the busiest intersections as a deterrent to crime.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, refers constantly to the excessive Roman use of crucifixion to “pacify” conquered territory, in particular Judea. In 7 AD the Roman Legate of Syria, Quintilius Varus, quelled a revolt by crucifying 2000 Jews in Jerusalem.

Rome reserved crucifixion with few exceptions for slaves, brigands, rebels and vile criminals, and perfected it as an instrument of slow death by the maxi-



Jehohanan on his cross as discerned from his remains

num of pain. Cicero referred to it as the slaves' punishment: "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears!"

Because of this distinction the notion of a "crucified god" in pagan parlance was an offensive, self-contradictory affront to respectable religion. Likewise, the cross also offended Jewish sensitivities: according to Jewish law a crucified man was accursed by God (Deut. 21:23); therefore Jesus could not be Messiah. Paul before his conversion had balked over this contradiction: only the realisation that he became a curse *for us* enabled him to surmount the offence which the cross constituted (Gal. 3:13).

Until 1968 scholars had to rely on classical sources for accounts of crucifixion, but then the Israeli archaeologist Vassilios Tzaferis discovered the actual remains of a crucified victim from about the time of Christ in a burial chamber at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, north-east of Jerusalem. In what is called an ossuary, a stone chest used for secondary burial (i.e. after the flesh had decayed the bones were gathered into this chest), were found the remains of a certain Jehohanan who had been nailed to a cross by his arms and ankles.

Taking the arms first, a small scratch on the *radius* bone just above the wrist of the right forearm revealed that the victim had been nailed to the horizontal bar or *patibulum*. To produce this mark the nail would have repeatedly rubbed against the *radius* in what would have been excruciating pain.

This aspect of the discovery helps to specify our understanding of Christ's cru-

cifixion wounds. You will remember how Thomas demanded to examine the wounds in His "hands" (Greek *cheir*), John 20:25. So much Christian art depicts the nail as piercing through the palm, but this is impossible: the nail would tear through the flesh under the body's weight. Roman executioners knew this well: hence they drove the nails through the lower forearms, just behind the wrists. The Greek word easily accommodates this extended meaning.

The other and most interesting aspect of Jehohanan concerns the 17cm nail through his ankle bones. There are two interpretations of this. The more plausible one is that the legs were folded in an unnatural position which left the body contorted, then a single nail was driven through both ankles and into the upright of the cross.

Most likely, as in many cases, a small wooden "seat" (*sedile*) was also attached to the upright to provide partial support for the left buttock. This sounds like mitigation of the agony, but the Romans did this deliberately to prolong it. Furthermore, to ensure that the man would not pull himself free from the nail a small wooden plate was inserted between the nail head and the feet.

However, in this case the nail point apparently struck a knot in the olive-wood upright and bent around, hence after the man's death the whole assemblage was pulled free, leaving the nail in place through the ankle bones.

The victim's right tibia or shinbone had been brutally fractured by a single blow into several large and sharp slivers. This strikingly confirms the Palestinian variation on normal Roman crucifixion, attested in John 19:31-33. Because Jewish law required that a body be buried before nightfall (Deut. 21:23) they introduced the barbarous practice whereby to end the agony more quickly a soldier in the execution squad smashed the victim's legs with an iron bar. With his means of support gone the hapless victim quickly expired from asphyxiation. Poor Jehohanan obviously suffered this fate to accelerate his death and enable a same-day burial.

An alternative view proposes that the legs were spread apart, and a nail driven through each ankle into the respective sides of the upright. While this remains a tenable interpretation of the available evidence, the above explanation is preferable. The discovery indeed casts light on this ancient practice, but several questions remain unanswered.

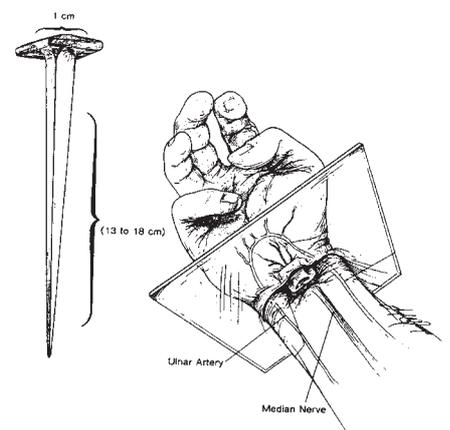
From classical sources we know the basic procedure of crucifixion from trial to death. Outside Italy, a court which imposed the death penalty could only carry it out with the consent of the procurator, who in our Lord's case was Pilate. While governors were expected to decide with strict justice, as often as not they bowed to popular pressure, as also in the case of Christ.

Once convicted, the victim was tied to a post and flogged savagely, though not quite fatally, with the *flagellum*, similar to the old cat-o'-nine-tails of the convict era but with bone fragments inserted. After this the execution squad placed the heavy crossbar (*patibulum*) over the back of the condemned man's neck and to it they bound his arms.

Then began the procession to the execution site. In front a soldier carried the inscription or *titulus*, indicating the name of the condemned and his crime. For Christ the two floggings, one to placate the Jews (John 19:1), the other the normal and harsher pre-execution flogging (Mark 15:15), were altogether too much, causing him to collapse under the burden. Thereafter a passer-by, Simon, carried the *patibulum*.

Once at the designated site, the victim was usually thrown to the ground, his outstretched arms then spiked by the wrists to the crossbar with large nails about 17 cm long (sometimes they were bound). Then he was hoisted up to the already erected vertical post, while his feet were either bound, or spiked with another nail to the upright.

The executioners then attached the title to the cross above his head. Often



Roman nail, and its placement into the wrist of the victim. Note the position of the median nerve.

they added the wooden mini-seat or *sedile*, usually pointed, to add to the pain and lengthen the death struggle. Ancient writers record many instances of victims staying alive on crosses for two to three days. Josephus records how he personally intervened for three acquaintances crucified along with other Jews. Titus had them taken down: two subsequently died while the other recovered.

For crucified victims the causes of death were manifold. The nails would either damage or sever the median nerves, which produced searing pain, especially when the victim flexed his arms in an effort to breathe. In addition, mortification of the wounds would make them gangrenous as blood progressively failed to reach the extremities and septicæmic toxins proliferated.

Shallow breathing was, however, the major factor: the weight of the body on the outstretched arms made it increasingly difficult to exhale. In the end he would die of muscular spasms and asphyxia as breathing became ever more difficult. In addition, failure of blood and fluid flow would result in severe loss of blood pressure (hypovolemic shock).

Towards the end a combination of exhaustion, delirium, and weakened breathing functions would intensify. Only two factors helped to mitigate this torture: the pre-execution scourging would hasten death somewhat, while in Judea a ladies' aid agency gave the victim a drug-ging potion mixed from cheap wine and myrrh, a known narcotic. When this was offered to our Lord he refused it (Mark 15:23). When we observe therefore the revolting cruelties he suffered in our place, we can appreciate in greater depth how he "bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

The reference to "blood and water" in John 19:34 has fascinated many through the years, and has also provoked theories of the immediate cause of our Lord's death. One popular theory proposes that the blood came from a ruptured heart, and the spear thrust into the chest cavity then released the blood mixed with the watery

fluid of the pericardial sac around the heart. Hence Christ died literally of a broken heart.

Despite the edifying appeal of this theory we must make several important qualifications. First, not all Christian medical authorities are convinced, and have offered counter-explanations.

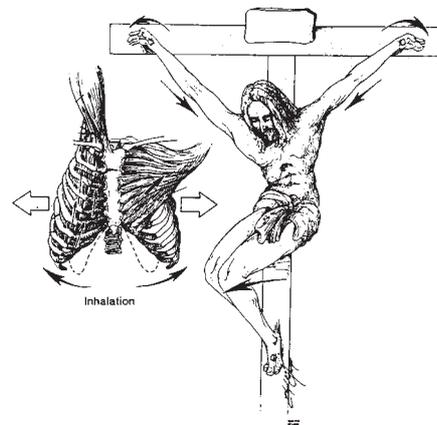
Second, whatever view we adopt here, we must insist that Christ gave his life voluntarily (John 10:18; Luke 23:46) – the physical agonies did not overwhelm him. Third, the spear thrust was not to "finish him off", but to ascertain whether he was really dead. It was by being "lifted up" on the cross that he was to die (John 12:33), not by a thrust from a lance.

For all this, we can nevertheless give qualified approval to the "broken heart" theory. As Dr. Stuart Bergsma in an article in 1948 pointed out, anything less than a ruptured heart would result in a minor flow of blood, a hardly noticeable trickle. However, a significant flow of blood was important for John's purpose, to refute the then current view that Jesus was a mere phantom who only seemed to have a body.

More recently, three authors in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1986) have given qualified support to this conclusion, even if it is not their preferred one. They write: "Rupture of the left ventricular wall may occur, though uncommonly, in the first few hours after infarction."

While we do not know from which side the spear thrust came (often assumed to have been the right), ultimately it does not matter: blood and serum would have filled the chest cavity which then flowed out through the wound.

Apart from this theory, we must also stress that Jesus actually died. The Roman executioners knew well their macabre business, and by law they could not release a body until they were quite sure that he was in fact dead (cf. Mark 15:44-5). To ensure this they made the customary spear thrust. Regrettably, variations of the hoary old swoon theory ("he didn't really die but swooned and later revived") not only persist, but also flourish, so this



Victim hanging on a cross. Chest diagram shows a fixed inhalation state.

point needs to be insisted.

While a discussion of crucifixion should and probably does fill us with horror, and contemplation of the tortures our Lord's endured should provoke a deep sense both of our sinfulness and the love of God, yet we should remember that the New Testament does not dwell on those physical sufferings. That the cross was for him the "death of deaths", that he endured the wrath of God, divine abandonment and curse, being "made sin" and the like, is the all-important dimension.

The *theology* of the cross is the focus, since he suffered all this for our sins. From this perspective the crucifix sends entirely the wrong message: it would have us focus on and sentimentalise over Christ's physical agonies when that focus should be elsewhere; also it proclaims ultimately that "Jesus is dead", whereas he is gloriously alive. Let us therefore meditate on the cross as the New Testament presents it.

(I wish to thank my wife, Corrie, for assistance on the medical aspects of this article.)

Murray R. Adamthwaite lectures in Ancient Near Eastern History, and holds a PhD in Ancient Near Eastern Studies from the University of Melbourne.

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The defence rests

The case against the resurrection is weak, William Lane Craig tells Peter Hastie.

Why is the issue of Jesus' resurrection so important?

There are a number of significant reasons. For one thing, it completes the work of the cross. Paul says Jesus Christ was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). So there is an intimate union between the death and the resurrection of Christ and his achieving victory over sin, death and hell. In Paul's mind, the resurrection completes and ratifies the work of the cross.

Second, I think the resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus' radical claims for which he was executed. Jesus claimed to be equal to God the Father. He put himself in the place of God. He claimed an authority to speak on matters properly belonging to God. And it was these radical claims that ultimately led to his crucifixion on the charge of blasphemy. But if the God of Israel has raised Jesus from the dead, then that means that the God who was allegedly blasphemed by Jesus has in fact vindicated those radical claims. So the resurrection shows us that Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be.

Third, the resurrection is the harbinger and foretaste of our own resurrection from the dead. It gives us hope for immortality and life beyond the grave. Therefore, the resurrection supplies the key to the human predicament of death that seems to make finite life meaningless and pointless. If everything is doomed simply to end in the grave, then it seems to make no difference how you live. But the resurrection provides hope for eternal life and shows that the lives that we do live now are imbued with significance of an eternal nature.

Finally, I believe that the resurrection is significant because it provides hope for ultimate physical and psychological healing. In this life we are broken people, not only in physical terms by virtue of our disabilities and diseases, but also psychologically. All of us are broken psychologically through the effects of sin on ourselves, our families or through poor up-bringing. The resurrection provides hope of a supernatural existence involving complete healing of body and mind and the full

integration of the human personality – in a physical, mental and spiritual sense. So the resurrection provides us with tremendous hope to look forward to something better.

Some say that the important thing about the resurrection is the theological truths it expresses, not whether it actually happened.

I don't think there's any merit in this claim at all. I believe that people who think like this have constructed a false dichotomy. Of course, the resurrection expresses important theological truths, as I've already indicated. But, it expresses those truths precisely because it did happen. If it didn't happen, then it's simply mythology. And a mythological symbol can't provide us with any real hope for physical and psychological healing. Nor can it provide us with any real grounds for justification from sin and the possibility of change inherent in the idea of sanctification. Further, it can't provide a real confirmation of Jesus' radical claims for which he was crucified. Without a physical resurrection, Jesus was just another of the failed messianic pretenders who were a dime a dozen in the first century.

So, the fact is that if you deny the historical reality of the resurrection, I think that you evacuate it of any theological significance that it might contain.

British philosopher Anthony Flew says there's just not enough historical evidence to prove the resurrection. What would be sufficient evidence?

I don't agree with Flew at all. I think that this argument, which stems from the sceptic David Hume, is an unsound argument. Indeed, it's recognized by the majority of scholars who have written on the problem of miracles to be an unsound argument. All that Hume shows, at the very most, is that a resurrection from the dead is impossible in a natural sense. That is to say, it cannot happen given the natural causal factors which operate in the world. But of course the Christian agrees with that. We recognise that a resurrection from the dead such as Jesus experienced is naturally impossible. However,

that says absolutely nothing about whether such an event is really possible or not. And that depends upon the prior question of whether God exists.

If God exists, then miracles are really possible and the evidence may well indicate that a naturally impossible event has occurred. So you simply have to look at the facts to see if there is sufficient evidence that a naturally impossible event has in fact occurred.

How might that be done? Well, it seems to me that what you would do is try to show that the evidence is best explained by the resurrection of Jesus in contrast to any other purported explanation of that evidence.

You don't even need to show that the resurrection of Jesus is more probable than not. All you have to do is show that the resurrection of Jesus is more probable than any other single alternative such as the conspiracy theory – that is, the idea that the disciples conspired to steal Jesus' body; or the apparent death theory – namely, that Jesus wasn't really dead when they took down his body from the cross; or the wrong tomb theory – that somehow the women got confused and visited the wrong tomb. So long as the resurrection is a more plausible explanation of the evidence than any of the other single competitors, it is the preferred explanation. And that's the standard procedure used in evaluating any sort of historical hypothesis.

Flew also claims that there's not enough evidence in the new Testament to treat it as serious history. Is the new Testament largely legend and myth, as the critics contend?

No. I don't think so. I know critics often say things like "All events in the past must be of the same kind as the events that we see in the present". This is one of the presuppositions of many modern New Testament critics.

But that seems to me to be quite wrong and mistaken. It would force the past into the grid of the present. It would mean that we could never discover anything radically new if everything has to conform to the present. So, in fact, the approach of

these critics is a very unscientific method of procedure.

Rather, when we evaluate things like myths or legends as unhistorical, we do so not because they fail to conform to the pattern of the present, but rather because they conform to certain patterns in the present that have no objective counterpart in the real world. For example, we know stories that are legends and we're familiar with fairy-tales, and if it could be shown that the New Testament documents conformed to that style of writing, then we would regard them as unhistorical. But the New Testament does not conform to that style.

Those who doubt the resurrection suggest the apostles pinned all their hopes on Jesus as Messiah, that their longings, fuelled by Messianic prophecy, have coloured their interpretation of what happened after Jesus died.

Well, I agree that the apostles pinned all their hopes on Jesus as Messiah. Indeed, they also pinned them on his resurrection from the dead. This is a point that actually supports the historicity of the resurrection. Many people fail to remember that without the resurrection, it would have been impossible for the apostles to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Ancient Judaism did not expect a Messiah who would be vanquished and humiliatingly executed. Judaism's Messiah was supposed to conquer Israel's enemies and restore the throne of David. The idea of a Messiah who would be executed and killed by his enemies was utterly unknown in Judaism. Much less the idea that he would then be raised from the dead!

This means that faced with Jesus' crucifixion and death, the disciples couldn't have entertained any reasonable hopes that this man would have been the Messiah. His death would have shattered any messianic hopes that they might have had of Jesus. Therefore, we need to have a credible explanation for how in the face of his crucifixion and death, the Jesus-movement managed to survive and promote its belief in Jesus as Messiah.

It seems to me that the best explanation for this is that the disciples came to believe that God had reversed the catastrophe of the crucifixion by raising Jesus from the dead. And so the issue for us now is: how did they come up with the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead? This belief ran counter to Jewish expectation. For an ancient Jew, the resurrection

was an event that always occurred after the end of the world at the judgment day. And it involved all the people, not just an isolated individual. Faced with Jesus' crucifixion and death, the disciples could at most have preserved Jesus' tomb as a shrine where his bones would reside until the resurrection on the judgment day. Then they and their master would be reunited in the kingdom of God with all the righteous dead of Israel. However, it would have been outrageous and un-Jewish to believe that somehow Jesus had risen from the dead before the day of judgement.

Is it possible that so much time elapsed between Jesus resurrection and the writing of the gospels that the forces which corrupt testimony have damaged the resurrection narratives? Can we rely on the accounts?



Yes, most definitely. Between the crucifixion and the time of the Gospels' composition there was simply insufficient time for legendary tendencies to accumulate to such a degree that they would wipe out the historical reminiscence of what actually happened.

This point has been made very well by the Greco-Roman historian A.N. Sherwin-White, in his book *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. He points out that the sources for Greco-Roman history that he works with are usually biased and often removed centuries from the events that they record. And yet, he says, historians reconstruct ancient history from these sources with confidence. For example, the earliest accounts we have of the life of Alexander the Great come from Plutarch and Arrian nearly 300 years after Alexander's death. Nevertheless, historians regard these documents as fundamen-

tal reliable accounts of the life of Alexander. The fabulous legends about Alexander the Great did not arise until centuries after these authors had written their accounts.

So when Professor Sherwin-White turns to the Gospels, he says that if these were legendary in their core, the rate of legendary accumulation would have to be unbelievable.

Indeed, he claims that many more generations would have been needed for legendary tendencies to have developed. Even two generations are too short a time-span to have allowed these tendencies to have prevailed over the hard historic core of oral tradition.

And when we realize that all the Gospels were written down and circulated during the life-time of the eye-witnesses, then we can see that it would be highly implausible to think that these narratives were legendary at their core.

Do you agree with J.A.T. Robinson that most of the new Testament was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD?

Yes, there is very persuasive evidence that the Gospels were written before the destruction of Jerusalem. I am convinced, for example, that the book of Acts was written prior to AD 62. It doesn't relate any of the significant events in the 60s like the siege of Jerusalem, the persecution by Nero, or the martyrdom of James. At the end of the book of Acts, Paul is still alive under house-arrest in Rome and awaiting his trial. Further, the theology of the book of Acts is still very primitive and in touch with the early controversies between Jewish and Gentile Christians. For all of these reasons therefore, the most plausible date for the book of Acts is prior to AD 62.

And since the Gospel of Luke was written before Acts, it was probably written in the late 50s. Of course, if Luke knew Matthew, and he certainly knew Mark, then that could push these Gospels back in to the early 50s, or even the 40s. That's just a decade or so after the death of Jesus.

So this would narrow the window of opportunity for legendary accumulation even further. In fact, it almost closes the window entirely.

We have very little evidence about the authors and the dates of the four Gospels. Doesn't this undermine the credibility of the resurrection when there seem to be inconsistencies and

improbabilities about the way in which it is reported?

Personally, I don't think anything hangs on either the authorship or even the exact dates of the four Gospels. The important thing, it seems to me, is that we accept the fact that they were written during the first generation.

As far as the authorship is concerned, it really doesn't affect anything. What New Testament scholars are after are the underlying traditions and sources behind the Gospels and Paul's writings, regardless of who wrote these. What scholars want to do is apply certain objective criteria to these traditions and narratives to bring out their historical quality.

For example, one of the most important tests that we can apply to the Gospel accounts of the resurrection would be multiple independent attestation. If a saying or an event of the life of Jesus has an early source, and it is independently attested by another source, then it's unlikely to have been made up. Therefore, it is more likely to have belonged to the historical Jesus.

So I think you can see that by applying criteria of that sort, the matters of authorship and date are only matters of secondary importance. What would be important would be whether we have multiple independent attestations of the resurrection appearances of Jesus or of the empty tomb. And the answer to that question is: "Yes, we do." So, these events pass the most important test for historicity. And that's the issue.

But what are we supposed to do with some of the apparent inconsistencies in the resurrection accounts?

These inconsistencies seem to be found in what I regard as the "secondary" or "circumstantial" aspects of the narrative, and not in the core. And, it is the core of the narrative that is at the heart of the debate over the historicity of the resurrection.

For example, with respect to the empty tomb, I want to argue that it's historically probable that the tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on the Sunday morning after the crucifixion. That's the core of the "empty tomb" story. Whether there was an earthquake; whether there were one or two angels; whether there was a guard at the tomb, all these things are secondary or circumstantial details that do not affect the historical core of the narrative. Of course, they're important for our understanding of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, but

they don't affect the essential facts of the resurrection which the critics challenge.

And so, I think I would argue that the core of historical events provides adequate grounds for inferring the resurrection of Jesus. And I would argue this way regardless of whether people believe there are inconsistencies in the secondary details of the narrative. My approach is to lay these things to the side. Let's focus on the fundamentals.

Some recent authors like Bishop Spong and Dr Barbara Thiering have said that the resurrection narratives in the Gospel are really a form of Jewish midrash and are not meant to be taken literally. Do these claims have any substance?



I don't think these claims have any substance at all. When you look at the Gospels, the genre of ancient literature to which they are closest is the genre of ancient biography, the so-called 'Lives' of ancient figures and heroes. Therefore, I think that the episodes that we read in the Gospels are meant to be understood as events which actually happened. For example, the empty tomb is something that would have been known in Jerusalem. It would have probably been visited by people who came to Jerusalem. This wasn't meant to be some sort of symbol. It would have been impossible for belief to have flourished in Jerusalem if, in fact, Jesus' body was still interred in the tomb. Even if the disciples had ignored it, the Jewish authorities would not have ignored it. They would have pointed to the occupied grave as the quickest and surest rebuttal to the proclamation of the early Church that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Yet, the Jews did not do so. Instead,

the Jewish authorities entangled themselves in a hopeless set of absurdities trying to explain how the body was missing. For instance, they claimed that it had been stolen by the disciples and so forth. So clearly, it was taken to be a literal event that had, or had not, actually happened. It was never taken to be a figurative type of event. And on this rock, the attempts by Bishop Spong and others to suggest that it was symbolic Jewish midrash, simply founder.

The Jesus Seminar has launched fresh attacks on the historicity of the resurrection in recent times. John Dominic Crossan, for example, says that the whole story is completely unhistorical. There was no tomb, Jesus was buried in a shallow grave. His body wasn't raised; it was eaten by dogs. Does he have any grounds for these claims?

When I first heard that Crossan was making these claims, I thought: "This is remarkable because the vast majority of New Testament scholars believe that Jesus was entombed by Joseph of Arimathea, and that he received an honourable burial." When I read his work I was shocked to discover that he had no grounds at all for these speculations. Rather, his ideas were based upon the fact that, in general, people who were crucified were thrown into shallow dirt graves reserved for criminals. That was the normal way that they were despatched.

But, of course, that sort of general presupposition doesn't do anything to deal with the specific evidence that we have in Jesus' case. In this instance, we know that Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and gave it an honourable burial. We have good specific evidence that what generally happened with crucified criminals didn't happen in Jesus' case.

Why do you think that so many scholars and churchmen have difficulty in believing that Jesus was raised from the dead?

Such people have a diminished view of God. If we believe in a God who created the universe out of nothing, who brought the Big Bang into existence – all matter and energy as well as space and time – then it would be child's play for such a Deity to raise Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. So, if you have an adequate conception of God, I don't see what the problem is.

What will William Lane Craig's resur-

rection body be like? Are you looking forward to it?

Yes, I really am. I have a neuromuscular disease which I inherited from my mother. It's caused a degree of muscular atrophy in my hands and legs. It's progressive in its development. Fortunately, I have a relatively light case of it, but many people who suffer from this syndrome have to wear metal braces on their legs. Some become terribly withered and atrophied.

So, I can honestly say that I'm really looking forward to my resurrection body. Only then will I be completely freed from all my disabilities. But I guess there's another reason too. Earlier, I mentioned that the resurrection is my hope that I'll be relieved from all my psychological struggles as well. I've been impressed in recent years how all of us are in some way broken psychologically. Each of us carries complexes, difficulties and burdens that only the resurrection will remove. So the resurrection is not simply the promise of physical healing. It also gives us hope for complete spiritual and psychological healing as well.

What happens to Christians if they die before Christ's return?

I believe that Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 that if the body dies, the believer's soul goes to be with Christ in a disembodied state. This is actually less than a fully human state because full humanity requires a physical body for the soul to express itself. But nevertheless, this will be a conscious, blissful state of closer communion with Christ.

However, at the resurrection at the end of the world, those who have died in Christ will be reunited with their resurrection bodies. For those who are still alive at the time of Christ's return, they will experience a similar and immediate transformation into their resurrection bodies. Then, we shall all be fit to inhabit the new heavens and the new earth to come.

How should we treat the bodies of believers who have died? The New Testament says the body will be raised. Are there any implications here for organ donation or burial practice?

That's a very, very difficult question. I don't think there would be any problem with organ donation, at least none that I can see immediately. We can do without some of our organs.

But as far as burial practice is con-

cerned, that's a bit more problematic. The Jewish funerary practice was to preserve the bones of the dead. They didn't cremate or destroy the bones. On the contrary, they preserved the bones in ossuaries because the bones were thought to be the principal object of the resurrection of the dead. We have a picture of that in Ezekiel 37 where the dry bones of God's people are clothed with flesh and come back to life again. And Jesus also said that when he came again, "The dead in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth."

So I am inclined to think that perhaps we ought to not cremate and scatter the remains of the dead as is being increasingly done today. However, even if a person is cremated, their remains should in some way be preserved. The reason for this is that the doctrine of resurrection is that it will be the remains of the dead that will be the object of the resurrection, whatever these remains might be. The Jews thought that the remains were primarily the bones. But, whatever the remains, it will be these that will be the principal object of the resurrection. The soul continues to live beyond the death of the body. So it's not going to require resurrection. However, it is the remains of the dead that will be raised. I suppose that's why I'm inclined to the view that we ought to have some means by which we should preserve the remains of the dead.

How would you sum up the evidence for the resurrection? Is it compelling?

I'm glad you asked that. Let me just

summarise the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. I'd like to do that under four headings that are very convenient to remember.

First, Jesus' honourable burial by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.

Second, the discovery of the empty tomb by some of the women followers on the Sunday morning following the crucifixion.

Third, the appearances of Jesus after his death on multiple occasions to various individuals and groups of people under a variety of different circumstances.

And fourth, the very origin of the disciples' belief that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Don't forget that this belief was completely contrary to what Judaism expected or what the disciples anticipated.

All four of these points represent the view of the majority of scholars today. And I am not talking only about conservatives or evangelical scholars here. I am referring to the broad spectrum of contemporary New Testament scholars.

Dr. William Lane Craig is one of the foremost authorities today on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Birmingham and the D.Theol from Universitat Munchen. He has served as Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and is currently Research Professor at Talbot Theological Seminary at Biola University in Los Angeles. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

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Dea-Jung International Language School, Korea

A reasonable faith

What could transform the defeated disciples into the triumphant Church?

Unbelievers, whether religious or irreligious, tend to portray the Christian faith as an assault on reason. Shelley, for example, declared that: "All religious notions are founded solely on authority; all the religions of the world forbid examination and do not want one to reason." Phillip Adams – who really should be more sceptical about his scepticism – bleats the same tune. Faith, he says, is "a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" and "the ultimate fantasy". Not that he has listened to many, but he claims that sermons are delivered in church along the lines of "believe, despite all the evidence to the contrary".

When it comes to the central tenet of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Bishop Spong and John Dominic Crossan both claim that the resurrection stories were legends which simply grew. Barbara Thiering believes that Jesus never died on



Peter Barnes

the cross, so, of course, there is no place for a resurrection. Sometimes one is even treated to an exercise in logic: "All men are mortal. Jesus is a man. Therefore Jesus is mortal."

This kind of thing is meant to leave orthodox Christians floundering in the wake of the advance of scientific thinking. Actually, the problem today is increasingly not so much that the evidence has been examined and found wanting, but that it has not been examined in the first place. One could only wish there was more hard thinking, not less. J. B. Phillips was right to complain that "the most important Event in human history is politely and quietly bypassed".

How, then, do we tackle the hard facts of the claim that in 30AD a man, Jesus, died on a Roman cross, but within three days rose from the dead, never to die again? The first thing to say is that the documents which make this claim are consistent with themselves. This is not to say that there are not a few difficulties. For example, all four Gospels tell us that it was the women who first made their way to Jesus' tomb on that fateful Sunday, but Luke mentions five women (Lk 24:10), Mark three (Mk 16:1), Matthew two (Mt. 28:1), while John only mentions Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:1). This could use an explanation, but it hardly represents an internal contradiction. After all, if there were five, there was also one; and if there was one, there could also have been five. John, for instance, does not say that there was only one.

One should also point out that the resurrection of Jesus was not something which took place in a corner. All in all, there were probably 12 resurrection appearances over a 40-day period. This

means that well over 500 men, not counting the women, saw Jesus after he rose from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-8). Scripture requires two or more witnesses to record a conviction in law (Deut. 19:15). The resurrection of Jesus thus amply fulfils this requirement!

The Old Testament itself had prophesied that the suffering servant would be vindicated (Is. 53:1-9,10-12) and that the one forsaken by God (Ps. 22:1-21) would rule to the ends of the earth (Ps. 22:21-31; see Ps. 16:8-11). Jesus too prophesied not only his death but his resurrection from the dead (Mt. 16:21; 17:9, 22-23; 20:18-19).

Jesus never presented himself as simply a mortal man, even an extraordinary mortal man. Consistently he portrayed himself as the Lord from heaven, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, who brings something of the glory of heaven to earth, veiled though it was in some respects. Jesus Christ is indeed the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

The bigoted unbeliever needs to explain some hard facts. Why could nobody produce the dead body? The authorities had every reason to produce it if they could, for Christianity could have been strangled in its infancy by the public display of Jesus' corpse. However, the authorities were not able to come up with the necessary body. The tomb was empty.

Further, what transformed the apostles from the fearful band who met on the Thursday night for the Last Supper to the fearless band which went out preaching the risen Christ in the hostile environment of Jerusalem? Something – or Someone – got hold of them and changed them radically. Peter had denied Christ three times (Mk 14:66-72), but in Acts 2-5 risks his life to declare that Jesus is the Christ, and the great proof of this is that he is risen forever from the grave.

The obvious explanation is that Peter (and the others) became convinced that Jesus had risen in the body. This was certainly not the result of wishful thinking. In spite of all the prophecies, none of the disciples was expecting Jesus to appear back from the dead (Mt. 28:17; Lk 24:11, 21, 25, 37; Jn 20:15, 24-28; 21:4).

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It was not only a case of one "doubting Thomas"; they were all the same. Mary Magdalene, for example, saw the risen Christ and thought that he was the gardener; she did not see the gardener and think that he was Christ risen. Those who are determined not to follow the evidence wherever it leads have a hard time of it.

H. S. Reimarus in 1778 claimed that the disciples did not want to return to their old jobs, so they stole Jesus' body, waited 50 days, and then proclaimed the second coming. One of the troubles with this conspiracy theory is that it was the disciples' belief that Jesus had triumphed bodily over the grave that led to the persecution of Christians. Fishing may not be everybody's idea of the ultimate thrill, but it appeals rather more than being flogged, crucified, stoned, or thrown to the beasts.

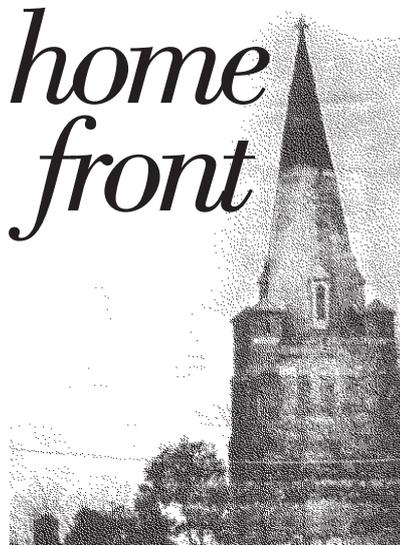
Ten men could not maintain the Watergate conspiracy for two weeks before the truth began to emerge. Human beings may be prepared to suffer for a lie which they do not know is a lie. Hence communism has its martyrs. But nobody will die for something which he knows is fraudulent. As for the explanation that the women went to the wrong tomb, that is rather like trying to explain Hiroshima by postulating some juvenile misuse of fire-works.

What does this mean for us? We know that we will die. Death will strike down our loved ones, and it will strike us down too. I have written this, you are reading it, but your life and mine will end in death.

We need to be reminded, in Thomas Gray's words, that "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." Many think that this only means that we will rot in our graves. Others hope against all hope that we will be reincarnated in some other form. But God says that we will be resurrected to face his judgment (Acts 17:31; Heb. 9:27). For the Christian, this is good news, for Christ has paid for sin and has conquered death.

We can pretend that these things are not true. Eugene Christian once wrote a book entitled *How to Live to be a Hundred*. Alas, he died at 69, although that is not the greatest tragedy of his life. The Christian lives with eternity in view. In April 1945 the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was led off to be tried and executed by the Nazis. Before he was taken away, he told one British prisoner to tell his friend, Bishop George Bell of Chichester, that "for me it is the end but also the beginning".

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



Centenary celebrations

On 24 July 1901, the United Presbyterian Church of Australia came into being.

On July 24 2001, we will celebrate 100 years of Presbyterian ministry in Australia, and a new century ahead of us to proclaim the Kingdom of God. A hundred years ago, the documents of union were signed at the Sydney Town Hall, and people gathered for the first time as the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The opening night of the 2001 assembly will be held at the same venue.

Several events are planned for the evening, including a theme song created by Bryson Smith and the Plainsong team. Peter Barnes is helping put together content for a multi-media presentation looking backwards and forwards, and musicians, choristers and singers are preparing for the night of celebration.

GAA centenary committee convener Robert Benn says the church wants as many people as possible to come. "We want the Town Hall filled to capacity.

Jack Hayward Watson

1916 – 2000

Jack Watson, born in Waverley on 29 November 1916, was one of two sons to Thomas William Watson, a surveyor, and Florence Elsie May Watson (nee Hayward). He went to primary school in Mudgee and Forbes, and to secondary school at Sydney Boys High School.

Jack joined the NSW Public Service in the Office of the Registrar General in 1933, and studied law at the University of Sydney, becoming a non-practising barrister at 20. He rose rapidly, and in 1958 was appointed NSW Registrar General, where he served until 1977. When the Registration of Land Titles and associated matters were moved to the Department of Lands in 1975, he was given the additional responsibilities as Under Secretary, Department of Lands.

Jack Watson's service to the state was recognised in 1973 when he was made a Companion of the Imperial Service Order, followed in 1981 with Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

He served with the Army Service Corps during World War II, and was

active in the scouting movement, rising from cub to assistant district commissioner in 1941.

Jack Watson's great love was the Presbyterian Church. He served as secretary, then chairman of the committee of managers, and as elder from 1969. In 1977 he was elected a member of the Presbyterian (NSW) Property Trust, where his professional knowledge of deeds, titles and registration was of tremendous value.

He rendered invaluable service on the committee overseeing the division of property following Church Union, and was still a member of the assembly's finance committee when he died on 21 February. Other offices included membership, then chairmanship, of the board of the Scottish Hospital, chairmanship of the board of the Presbyterian Homes for Aged Persons, Ashfield & Paddington, and clerk of the Korean Canaan Presbyterian Kirk Session.

A service of thanksgiving was held on 26 February.

This is an edited extract of the eulogy by Gregory L. Taylor.

We want whole congregations to come. We can start planning country and interstate buses for transportation.”

Sydney Town Hall, 24 July 2001, 7pm.

Forster appointment

Rev. Peter Flower was appointed to the **Forster Presbyterian Church** (Hastings Presbytery, NSW) at a commencement service on 31 January. The moderator, **Rev. John Thompson**, officiated and **Rev. Scott Donellan** preached.

First chaplain

The Reverend Charles Green has started as school chaplain at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne – the first in this distinguished institution's 126-year history.

The principal of PLC, **Mrs Elizabeth Ward**, was delighted to welcome Charles, his wife, Anne, and the youngest five of their eight children, to Melbourne from Queensland, where he has spent the past nine years as the minister of the multicultural **Logan** congregation. Earlier, he was minister at Tenterfield in northern New South Wales.

Charles has also served as a part-time army chaplain, on the board of the Bible Society in Queensland, and as a maths and science teacher in secondary schools as far apart as Bamaga, an Aboriginal and Islander community on the tip of Cape York, Nambour on the Sunshine Coast and Coolgardie in Western Australia.



Charles Green and his family, with PLC chairman Paul Swinn (far left) and principal Elizabeth Ward (far right), following his induction as the Chaplain.

Yemen move

Matthew Byrne has been commissioned at **Seacliff Presbyterian Church**, South Australia, to go to Yemen as a

teacher of English with the **Red Sea Team**. He is the first to be commissioned for several years.



Trevor Bickerton, Matthew Byrne and RST national director Wally Zurrer.

Australia Day award

Congratulations to **Alison Rigby**, of the **Gosford Presbyterian Church** in NSW, who received an Australia Day Community Service Award from the Gosford Council for her involvement with many ministries including Sunday School within the church, Scripture Classes in four schools, telephone counsellor and her involvement with the work of World Vision.

Vandals at Manilla

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Manilla, was broken into and vandalised in March. Intruders broke a window, then trashed the hall. They broke other windows, squirted paint on walls and smashed items of furniture and a cubby house. Nothing of value seems to have been stolen.

Most of the damage was done to property and equipment used in the ministry with children and young people. Police arrested three local boys aged nine and seven, who have been put on a programme repairing some of the damage.

New PIM patrol

Owen and **Sally Oakes** are the new patrol team with **Presbyterian Inland Mission**. They began their PIM Patrol Ministry in the South Western Queensland (Charleville) Patrol on 1 February.

Owen is from NSW, and Sally was born on the Isle of Man. They married in Sydney in 1981 and have two adult sons: Shane, who is married to Sharon (they

have one son, Damon) and Simon, single and living in Sydney.

Both graduated from the Sydney Missionary and Bible College in 1997 with Diplomas in Divinity and Mission, then worked with Minister **Kirk Patston** in **Charlestown/Eastlakes Presbyterian Church**.

across australia



Fury over 'abuse TV'

Church groups are furious at the recent rash of TV programs promoting abuse in human relationships, according to the **NSW Council of Churches president, Ray Hoekzema**.

“With the new ratings period has come a spate of programs – mostly so-called game shows and reality TV – encouraging players to be deceitful and abusive of others for personal gain. Other people are seen as expendable as long as you win the game. It's a utilitarian view of human life and a poor reflection on those who produce the shows.”

Mr Hoekzema listed *Greed*, *Survivor*, *The Weakest Link*, *The Mole*, *Shipwrecked*, and *Temptation Island* among those which deliberately set out to capitalise on human vice and weakness. He said that big cash prizes made people behave in ways which in normal circumstances would be considered unhealthy and socially unacceptable.

Churches say that a “greed is good” mentality is behind these programs, and that this is contrary to a Christian world view, where selflessness, kindness and respect for others are high priority.

“The courts are already log-jammed with cases where real-life people have suffered the effects of greed and jealousy.

Why should television be permitted to glorify what is essentially evil and harmful?" Mr Hoekzema said.

Fusion relinquishes 3AK

Fusion Media Pty Ltd has sold Melbourne radio station 3AK.

Fusion Australia's national director, **Mal Garvin**, said: "We were caught in the vice between our obligations to Southern Cross and the failure of our joint venture partner to provide the money that had been agreed upon.

"We would love people's support and prayer at the moment as it seems that there have been some less than helpful forces at work."

According to Mr Garvin, one of the real frustrations is that the station is finally on track to achieve what Fusion had been working towards over the past three years.

MAF 50th a flying success

Missionary Aviation Fellowship's 50th celebrations made a flying start on 10 February, when MAF supporters gathered at Morling College in Sydney to thank God for 50 years of operational service by MAF in Papua New Guinea.

Friends, visitors and ex-missionaries crowded into two rooms to hear presentations from **Ron Watts** on Central Australia and Northern Australia, while in an adjacent room, **Harold Morton** spoke of the developing work in Papua New Guinea.

Three speakers at the following dinner told of their involvement with MAF: **Arthur Kelshaw**, a former Australian Baptist Missionary builder in the Baiyer River area, **Bruce Searle**, coordinator of the MAF Aviation course at the Bible College of Victoria, and **Kay Liddle**, the chairman of New Zealand MAF.

Six score

On 20 May the **Uniting Church** in **Nerang** is celebrating 120 years of worship in Nerang. At first a Wesleyan Methodist Church, it became a Presbyterian charge in 1898. Since 1977 it has been a Uniting Church. The original timber Church was replaced by a modern brick building in 1983.

Mrs Lyn Reeves from the Nerang church hopes to hear from "anyone who has photos, memorabilia or stories to

share about our Church". "We will also welcome old friends to our celebrations in May," she said. She can be contacted on 07 55 964 333.

Clickety, click

A website that allows you to donate Bibles without paying? Sounds too good to be true? On 6 March the Bible Society in Australia (NSW) launched www.bibles2theworld.com, a new website that does just that! At Bible House, heads of churches, the media and interested people gathered to witness the first official click on the website.

Visitors to the site are met by a large button that says "click here to donate a book of the Bible – it's free", and this button does not lie! When you click this button you are shown a screen that thanks you for your donation! The site's sponsors pay the donation on your behalf. Every time a sponsor's logo is viewed, they donate 2.5 cents towards the cost of producing, printing and distributing a Bible overseas. So for each click, sponsors together pay for one book of the Bible!

So if you click daily (the software only permits people to click once a day), at the end of the year you will have donated 366 books of the Bible at no financial cost to you!

The Bible Society is thrilled at the response of individuals and sponsors.

Prayer for children

Prayer groups in Australia can join people in more than 70 countries in the sixth annual **Worldwide Day of Prayer for Children at Risk**, to be held this year on Saturday 2 June.

The Worldwide Day of Prayer for Children at Risk is an initiative of the **Viva Network**, an Oxford-based organisation which connects together the many ministries reaching out to children at risk in all countries. It has a website (www.viva.org) which draws attention to the terrible plight of millions of children at risk around the world because of poverty, war, famine, abuse, homelessness and rejection.

A 30-page resource pack is available to help you plan and prepare for this day. People in the South Pacific region, who would like to receive the pack can send \$5 to: Day of Prayer, Kingdom Living Ministries, Locked Bag 10, West Ryde, NSW 2114, phone (02) 9809 0700; e-mail: kingdom@epsilon.com.au

world news



Indonesian persecution worsens

Some 7000 to 15,000 Laskar Jihad Islamic extremists are currently waging a ruthless campaign against the Christian population of Indonesia's Moluccas islands. As many as 5000 Christians are believed to have been slaughtered and half a million more have been made refugees. Christians have been forced to undergo circumcision and violently compelled to convert to Islam. Laskar Jihad's aim is to cleanse the Maluku Islands of all Christians. Particularly disturbing are reports of women forced to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM), a barbaric practice that has been condemned worldwide.

VOM/Eskol Net

China fears growth

The Chinese government met in Beijing recently to discuss what members referred to as an "alarming" growth of the underground church. It is estimated that as many as 25,000 people are turning to Christ every day. Unable to understand the spiritual dynamics involved, the Communist Party in China views the growing Christian movement as a potential threat to their political control over the nation. Efforts to curb church growth are on the increase.

EHC

Indian priests abducted

In Rajasthan, India, at least two Christian priests were abducted and seriously beaten by a group of heavily armed men, believed to be Hindu militants, on January 4, reports *Compass Direct*. The two priests, **David Masih** and **Simon Sakria**, were attending a prayer meeting when about 40 heavily armed men burst in. David Masih was later admitted to a hospital in Gujarat with broken limbs, and the whereabouts

of Simon Sakria is still unknown.

Meanwhile, a prominent Indian church leader, **Joseph D'Sousa**, believes that an alliance of Hindu groups has been working very hard to curb Christian activity. He warns of a possible bloodbath against Christians.

Grandmothers save the faith

A key factor in the survival of the Christian faith in the former USSR has been the role of grandmothers, report *Interserve* staff workers. Grandmothers (babuschkas), regarded by the former Soviet Government as relatively unimportant in the political process, have never-

theless played a significant part in keeping Christianity alive.

Soviet authorities largely chose to ignore the babuschkas, seeing them as harmless citizens who wouldn't be around for very long. What they failed to take into account is that the babuschkas were responsible for most of the child-care and that they act as matriarchs in Russian family life. A staff worker comments: "When I speak with local people about how they first heard of Christ, they invariably say it was from their grandmothers."

Islamic extremists attack

Islamic extremists have intensified

efforts to contain the church in Central Asia. Sources in Turkmenistan, Tajikstan and Uzbekistan report new outbreaks of violence against individual congregations.

Harvest in Nigeria

In December, at least 60,000 members of the Nigerian Assemblies of God gathered to celebrate the end of the "Decade of Harvest" project and the extraordinary growth which the church has experienced. During the past 10 years, according to a press release, the church has not only gained 1.2 million new members, but also ordained 5026 new pastors and planted 4044 new churches in Nigeria.

Rev. Richard Wurmbrand

1909 – 2000

The Rev. Richard Wurmbrand, founder of Voice of the Martyrs, passed away in hospital, aged 91 on 17 February, in the USA. Richard will be remembered with great affection as an outstanding man of God, passionate for the cause of Christ, powerful in evangelism, persevering in suffering, for the sake of Jesus whom he loved. His wife Sabina preceded him, passing away on 11 August 2000.

Richard Wurmbrand was born in 1909, in Bucharest, Romania. His parents died when he was young, and he spent many years adrift in society during World War I. He was educated at school in Bucharest.

He met and then married Sabina Oster in 1936, soon after which both were converted and baptised in the Christian faith. Richard became a minister and pastored the Norwegian Lutheran Mission in Bucharest.

He and his wife were arrested several times by the Nazi government, and he began his underground ministry evangelising Russian soldiers who were prisoners of war. After August 1944, he continued this ministry with the Russian occupation forces. He and Sabina were active in working with the underground, unregistered church in Romania during World War II and throughout the Communist regime.

Richard was kidnapped by Romanian authorities in February 1948 following the Congress of Cults, and imprisoned in the underground Central Interior



Ministry Building prison area in the centre of Bucharest. While there he was subjected to brainwashing attempts, physical and mental torture, and threats to his family. In 1950, his wife Sabina was imprisoned as well, forced to serve as a labourer on the Danube Canal project. She was released in 1953.

Following her release, the Romanian authorities informed her that Richard had died in prison. Richard was discovered alive in prison by a doctor masquerading as a Communist Party member. He was released in 1956 and served as church pastor in Orsova and with the underground church. Rearrested in 1959, he was sentenced to 25 years, but thanks to political pressure from Western countries, he was released in 1964.

In December 1965, the Norwegian Mission to the Jews and the Hebrew Christian Alliance paid \$10,000 in ransom – more than five times the standard price – to the Communist government to let the Wurmbrand family leave Romania. Other Romanian underground church leaders convinced him to leave and become a "Voice" for the underground church to the world. Richard, Sabina, and their son Michael left Romania.

After an international speaking tour, in October 1967 he published the first issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs* newsletter, and began to establish the international offices which would assist him in efforts to inform Christians everywhere about persecuted Christians. By the mid-1980s his work was established in 80 restricted nations with offices in 30 countries.

In 1990 Richard and Sabina returned to Romania after 25 years of exile. He retired from the day to day work of *The Voice of the Martyrs* in 1992, but remained as a member of the Board of Directors and consultant until his death.

Richard Wurmbrand wrote 18 books in English, others in Romanian, which have been translated into 38 languages, the best-known being *Tortured for Christ*. His contribution will continue through his legacy of missions established around the world and the vision he provided for their leadership.

VOM USA

Movie Watch Traffic

Reviewed by Phil Campbell



Catherine Zeta Jones in *Traffic*

The movie *Traffic* left me feeling as if I'd been run over by a truck. It's an astonishing and disturbing film. And in a way that's a good thing. *Traffic* is a movie with a message – a movie some reviewers claim has “created a whole new genre”. And they may be right. In short, 24 hours after the final credits rolled, I'm still chewing over what exactly *Traffic* said to me and did to me.

Traffic traces the drug trade between Mexico and the United States. It's raw – almost like a documentary – with grainy footage, strange angles, and strong colour tinting that subliminally cues you to location. Action south of the border has a yellow haze, while in the USA there's always a tinge of blue. Much of the dialogue is in subtitled Spanish. Notably, too, there's almost no music – just an uncomfortable silence behind the action.

In short, *Traffic* is not a comfortable movie to watch... and that's exactly how the director wants it. In fact, there's nothing comfortable about the drug war at all.

This is a movie with multiple subplots, and – in spite of the presence of big names like Michael Douglas – no obvious star. There's a tension right from the beginning that warns that the good guys and the bad guys aren't always who they seem. So as we follow the paths of two Mexican policemen, two American policemen, US Anti-Drug Administration chief Michael Douglas and his drug-addicted daughter, it's hard to put down “emotional roots”. There's also the constant expectation of violence. In the drug war, nobody is safe. Ever.

Judge Robert Wakefield (Douglas) has just been appointed as chief of the White House's national drug control policy office. He's full of big ambitions – until he discovers his 16-year-old daughter is a junkie. As the movie unfolds, one strand

of the plot follows Wakefield's battle through the red tape and inactivity of Washington – complete with interesting cameo roles by real-life Senators Orrin Hatch, Barbara Boxer and Charles Grassley. Another strand of the storyline follows daughter Caroline in her inevitable decline into theft and prostitution to support her drug habit. Drug use scenes are disturbingly explicit, but certainly not glamorised.

Meanwhile, Mexican policemen Javier Rodriguez (award-winning Benicio Del Toro) and Manolo Sanchez are hard at work trying to stop drug runners, while they resist the daily bribes and threats that make up life in the Mexican police force. Recruited into Mexico's anti-drug task force, they soon discover that corruption runs right to the top.

In San Diego, we follow two federal drug agents, who arrest respected millionaire drug-runner Carlos Ayala. His wife, Helena (Catherine Zeta-Jones), makes an easy transition from innocent society matron to coordinator of the hit-squad targeting the chief witness in the trial against her husband.

What happens? Well, in short, the good guys don't win. And that's part of the punch packed by the movie. In fact, if there's one clear message *Traffic* leaves you with, it's the fact that things don't always work out quite as neatly as they do in the movies. Life is complicated rather than convenient. The war against drugs won't be won by cheery platitudes – nor by government initiatives.

At the end of the movie, the only note of victory is that the battle still rages, and the good guys haven't totally given up in

despair.

There's no doubt, though, that *Traffic* is a movie with a strong and worthwhile anti-drug perspective.

The big question for American Christians when the movie first aired there was, is the packaging just too gritty?

“Drugs are central to this film,” says one reviewer. “We see the abuse of marijuana, cocaine, freebase, crack and heroin. The amount of drugs and drug use in the film is disturbing, but one can't make an anti-drug film without drugs. A great film for youngsters, especially teens, and their parents to see together and discuss afterwards.”

But a *Focus on The Family* reviewer disagrees. “*Traffic* should be viewed as the equivalent of a moral flogging, *not* entertainment” says Stephen Isaac. “I can certainly understand why director Soderbergh injected such liberal amounts of foul language, violence and drug use into this film. But that doesn't make it right. Imaginative editing could have taken this R-rated indulgence and turned it into a strong morality tale that would have become mandatory viewing for every family in America. As it is, the raw images sure to be burned into young minds would compete fiercely with any life lessons learned. Too high a price for most families.”

My view? It's a movie I'd hate to take my teenage kids to. But I have a sneaking feeling that with drugs so easily available in most Australian school playgrounds, maybe I should.

Phil Campbell is *Culture Watch* editor. 

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Gospel according to Woody

Woody Allen is afraid God exists, and afraid he doesn't.

A red-haired boy sits next to his mother in the psychiatrist's office. She is describing her son's problems and expressing her disappointment in him. Why is he always depressed? Why can't he be like other boys his age? The doctor turns to the boy and asks why he is depressed. In a hopeless daze the boy replies, "The universe is expanding, and if the universe is everything ... and if it's expanding ... someday it will break apart and that's the end of everything ... what's the point?"

His mother leans over, slaps the kid and scolds: "What is that your business!"

This scene from *Annie Hall* typifies Woody Allen's quest for understanding! Allen touches on various topics and themes in all his cinematic works, but three subjects continually resurface: the existence of God, the fear of death and the nature of morality.

These are all Jewish questions, or at least theological issues. Woody Allen is a seeker who wants answers to the Ultimate Questions. His movie characters differ, yet they are all, in some way, asking these questions he wants answered. They are all "Woody Allens" wrestling with the same issues. He explains: "Maybe it's because I'm depressed so often that I'm drawn to writers like Kafka, Dostoyevsky and to a filmmaker like Bergman. I think I have all the symptoms and problems that their characters are occupied with: an obsession with death, an obsession with God or the lack of God, the question of why we are here. Almost all of my work is autobiographical—exaggerated but true."

But Woody Allen does not allow himself to dwell too long on these universal problems. The mother's response to her red-haired son's angst is typical of the comedic lid the filmmaker presses over his depressing outlook to close the issue. True, Woody Allen has made his mark by asking big questions. But it is the absence of satisfactory answers to those questions that causes much of the angst – and humour – we see on the screen. Off screen we see little difference.

Allen's (authorised) biography, published in 1991, sheds some light on his life and times. Woody Allen, whose given

David Mishkin

name was Allan Konigsberg, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. Allen describes his Jewish family and neighborhood as being from "the heart of the old world, their values are God and carpeting". While he did not embrace the religion of his youth, his Jewishness is ever present in his characters, plots and dialogue. Jewish thought is intrinsic to his life and work.

One can see this in the 1977 film *Annie Hall*, where Allen's character, Alvy, is put in contrast to his Midwestern, gentile girlfriend. In one scene he is visiting Annie's parents. Her grandmother stares at him, picturing him as a stereotypical Chasidic Jew with side locks, black hat and a long coat. The screen splits as Alvy imagines his family on the right and hers on the left. Her parents ask what his parents will be doing for "the holidays":

"We fast, to atone for our sins," his mother explains. Annie's mother is confused. "What sins? I don't understand." Alvy's father responds with a shrug: "To tell you the truth, neither do we."

Allen suggests that the greatest thinkers in history died knowing no more than he does now. He often uses humour to poke fun at pretentious intellectuals who spout textbook answers. In another *Annie Hall* scene Alvy is standing in line at a movie

theatre. The man behind him is trying to impress his date. Alvy is annoyed, and when the man begins commenting on pop philosopher Marshall McLuhan, Alvy turns and informs him that he knows nothing about McLuhan. To prove his point, he escorts McLuhan himself into the scene. The philosopher deftly puts the object of Alvy/Allen's scorn (a Columbia University professor of TV, media and film) in his place. Alvy steps out of character and, as Woody Allen, he looks into the camera and sighs: "Boy, if life were only like this..."

Allen's films do not merely expose and poke fun at pseudo-intellectuals; they point out that no school of human thought can provide ultimate solutions. Allen's lack of faith in the world's systems generates some great one-liners:

He tells how he was caught cheating on a college metaphysics exam: "I was looking into the soul of the boy sitting next to me."

He also pokes fun at existentialism, commenting on a course he took in the subject: "I didn't know any of the answers so I left it all blank. I got a hundred."

His first wife studied philosophy in college: "She used to prove that I didn't exist."

Psychology also figures into Allen's scripts – many of his characters are seeing a therapist.

In *Sleeper*, Allen's character wakes up 200 years in the future, where he quickly discovers that the future holds the same old problems as ever. Lamenting the wasted years, he remarks: "My analyst was a strict Freudian. If I had been going all this time I'd probably almost be cured by now."

In another film he describes the unproductive nature of his own therapy: "My analyst got so frustrated he put in a salad bar."

So much for faith in therapy! And when it comes to science, Allen asks and answers the questions, "Can a human soul be glimpsed through a microscope? Maybe – but you'd definitely need one of those very good ones with two eye-pieces."

The political process as a means of



change is also shrugged off: "Have you ever taken a serious political stand on anything?" he is asked. "Sure," he responds, "for 24 hours once I refused to eat grapes."

It is the questions of the human soul – its mortality and morality – that seem really to preoccupy the film maker. "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying."

In his early writings, fear of death provided a great platform for a punch line: "It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

"It is impossible to experience one's own death objectively and still carry a tune."

"Death is one of the few things that can be done as easily lying down."

"What is it about death that bothers me so much? Probably the hours."

The absurdity of Allen's humour helps to cushion the seriousness of the subject. Could it be that his comments are so clever and funny that the laughter drowns out the genuine note of anxiety over those issues? In his later films Allen began dealing with death more realistically:

In *Hannah and Her Sisters* his character Mickey Sacks is tested for a serious medical problem. He agonises over the possible results only to learn they are negative. Mickey is elated – he leaves the office literally jumping for joy. Yet the next scene shows him depressed again. He realizes that the encouraging test results are but a postponement of death which is still inevitable. In despair, he attempts suicide. Failing that, he goes to a movie theatre. The Marx Brothers' film *Duck Soup*, an old favorite of his, is playing. The film provides a temporary escape; it even cheers him. His immediate answer to depression is that one should enjoy life while one can.

However, that answer apparently did not satisfy Woody Allen, the writer, as *Hannah and Her Sisters* is one of the few films in which Allen provides a happy ending. Later films raise the same concerns – and usually conclude on a less optimistic note. "To you I'm an atheist, to God I'm the loyal opposition."

Allen's fear of death is inextricably linked to his uncertainty about the existence of God. He ponders in an early essay:

"Did matter begin with an explosion or by the word of God? And if by the latter, could he not have begun it just two weeks earlier to take advantage of some of the

warmer weather?"

Again, glibness is his antidote to grappling with the hard questions. The eternal is brought down to the level of the earthly, and therefore minimised.

Yet, Allen never fully embraces the position of atheist. He ponders spiritual matters, but a punch line always yanks the focus to the sublime, then to the ridiculous. For examples: "I keep wondering if there is an afterlife, and if there is, will they be able to break a twenty?" And "there is no question that there is an unseen world. The problem is, how far is



Diane Keaton and Woody Allen in *Annie Hall*

it from Midtown and how late is it open?"

Woody Allen is, in the words of his biographer, "a reluctant (he hopes there is a God) but pessimistic (he doubts there is) agnostic who wishes he had been born with religious faith (not to be confused with sectarian belief) and who believes that even if God is absent, it is important to lead an honest and responsible life."

The existence of God is an issue which would not only answer the questions of death and an afterlife, but also the problem of how we ought to live now. Two of Allen's films which best deal with this issue were made 14 years apart: the 1975 cinematic spoof on the Napoleonic wars

and Russian novels, *Love and Death*, and the 1989 critically acclaimed piece, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*.

Love and Death was the last of his all-out, zany comedies and the beginning of his on-screen grappling with issues of God and morality. In it Allen plays the part of Boris who denies the existence of God but would truly like to have real faith.

"If I could only see a miracle," Boris argues, "a burning bush, the seas part ... Uncle Sasha pick up a check." Or, "If only God would give me some sign. If he would just speak to me once, anything, one sentence, two words. If he would just cough."

Boris is often debating with his wife Sonia on these important issues of life. Boris: What if there is no God? ... What if we're just a bunch of absurd people who are running around with no rhyme or reason? Sonia: But if there is no God, then life has no meaning. Why go on living? Why not just commit suicide? Boris: Well, let's not get hysterical! I could be wrong. I'd hate to blow my brains out and then read in the papers they found something!

Later in the film Boris attempts to assassinate Napoleon. Standing over the French emperor, he prepares to shoot. But his conscience (not to mention his cowardice) prevents him from pulling the trigger. His previous philosophical rambles come to a halt when the rubber meets the road. Boris concludes that murder is morally wrong. There are universal standards and there is even a reason to act morally.

The film ends with Boris being executed for a crime he did not commit. Could it be that Woody Allen was punishing his own character for believing, even momentarily, that there are indeed moral standards and even accountability?

In *Crimes and Misdemeanors* Woody Allen tackles the issue of morality on a much more serious level. Wealthy ophthalmologist Judah Rosenthal has been having an extramarital affair for two years. When he attempts to end his illicit relationship, his mistress threatens to tell his wife. When backed into an impossible corner and offered an easy way out, Judah finds himself thinking the unthinkable. He succumbs to the simple solution of hiring a hit-man to murder his demanding lady in waiting. After the crime, Judah experiences gut-wrenching guilt. Judah Rosenthal finds the case for morality so strong that after the murder he blurts out: "Without God, life is a cesspool!"

His conscience pushes him to great despair as, again, he examines the situation from a past vantage point. He envisions a Passover seder from his childhood. The conversation becomes a family debate over the importance of the celebration. Some of the relatives don't believe in God and consider the ritual a foolish waste of time. The head of the extended family stoutly defends his faith, saying, "If necessary, I will always choose God over truth."

Judah almost turns himself in; however, the price is too high and so he chooses denial, the most common escape. "In reality," he says in the last scene, "we rationalise, we deny or else we couldn't go on living."

Another character, Professor Levy, speaks on morality in one of the film's subplots. Levy is an aging philosopher much admired by the character played by Woody Allen, a film maker. The film maker is planning a documentary based on Levy's life, and we first see the professor on videotape, discussing the paradox of the ancient Israelites: "They created a God who cares but who also demands that you behave morally. This God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, who is beloved to him ... After 5000 years we have not succeeded to create a really and entirely loving image of God."

Levy eventually commits suicide. Despite his great learning, his final note discloses nothing more than the obvious: "I've gone out the window."

Professor Levy's suicide leaves Allen's character stunned. Still, his humour ameliorates the situation as the filmmaker protests, "When I grew up in Brooklyn, nobody committed suicide; everyone was too unhappy."

The final comment on Levy's suicide is a surprising departure from Allen's security blanket of humour: "No matter how elaborate a philosophical system you

work out, in the end it's gotta be incomplete."

Remember, all of the dialogue is written by Woody Allen. Though his own character supplies comic relief to this dark film, his conclusions are just as bleak. Everyone is guilty of something whether it's considered a crime or a misdemeanor.

Yet, Allen's theological questions rarely address the nature of that guilt. The word "sin" is reserved for the grossest offences—the ones that make the evening news – or would, if they were discovered. Judah Rosenthal's crime is easily recognisable as sin, while various other infidelities and compromises are mere misdemeanours.

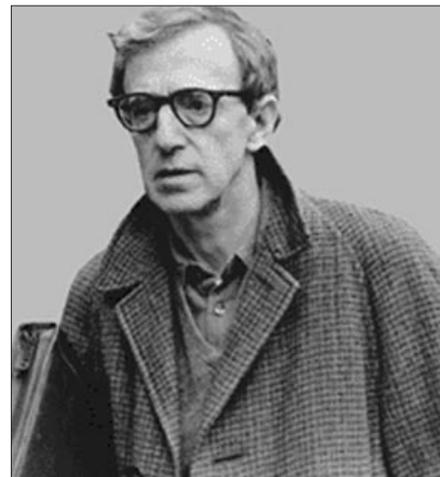
Sin against God is not something Allen appears to take seriously in any of his films. In Allen's theology, all have fallen short to a greater or lesser degree, but ironically, his view of human imperfection never appears in the same discussion as his thoughts about God.

He does admit to being disconnected with the universe: "I am two with nature." But he doesn't mention a connection with a personal God because he doesn't see a correlation between human failures and the question of connectedness to God.

While Allen is a unique thinker, he seems to be pedestrian when it comes to wrestling with problems of immorality and even inhumanity. While he calls the existence of God into question, he does not deal with our responsibility in acknowledging God if he does exist.

It is simple to analyse sin on a human level. The more people get hurt, the bigger the sin. But the biblical perspective is quite different: Any and all sin causes separation from God. One cannot view such a cosmic separation as large or small based on degrees of sin. Ironically, one of Allen's short stories underscores the foolishness of comparison degrees of sin: "Astronomers talk of an inhabited planet named Quelm, so distant from earth that a man traveling at the speed of light would take six million years to get there, although they are planning a new express route that will cut two hours off the trip."

The biblical perspective of separation from God is similar. Having "better morals" than the drug pusher, the rapist or the ax murderer makes a big difference – *in our society*. We should all strive to be the best people we can be, if only to improve the overall quality of life. But in terms of a relationship with God, doing the best one can is like being two hours closer to Quelm. God is so removed from any unrighteousness that the difference



between "a little unrighteous" and a lot is irrelevant.

The question his films and essays never ask is: Could being alienated from God be the root cause of our alienation from one another ... and even our alienation from our own selves?

Is film making Woody Allen's escape from the world at large? His biographer notes, "He assigns himself mental tasks throughout the day with the intent that not a moment will pass without his mind being occupied and therefore insulated from the dilemma of eschatology."

It is a continual process – writing takes his mind off of the ultimate questions, yet the characters he creates are always obsessed with those very same questions. Allen determines their fate, occasionally handing out a happy ending. And he seems painfully aware that he will have little to say about the ending of his own script.

There is much to be appreciated and enjoyed in Woody Allen's humour, but it also seems as if he uses jokes to avoid taking the possibility of God's existence very seriously. Maybe Woody Allen is afraid to find that God doesn't exist, or on the other hand maybe he's afraid to find that he does. In either case, he seems to need to add a comic edge to questions about God to prove that he is not wholehearted in his hope for answers.

Will Woody Allen tackle the problem of his own halfhearted search for God in a serious way in some future film or essay? Maybe, but if the Bible can be believed, it's an issue that God has already dealt with. The prophet Jeremiah quotes the Creator as saying: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

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Charles Spurgeon

Charles H Spurgeon is rightly regarded as one of the most influential preachers of the 19th century. He became a pulpit phenomenon in his own day, speaking twice a week in the huge 6000-seat Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Even today, a century after his death, his published sermons remain popular with a wide readership.

Spurgeon was born into a Christian home and his childhood years were spent in Baptist circles where there was a strong evangelical influence. He grew up in an atmosphere where the doctrines of sin, grace, and salvation were commonplace, and the influence of John Bunyan was profound.

His conversion took place in his late childhood in a little Methodist church during winter. It had been snowing heavily, and Spurgeon found it more convenient to worship with this congregation than his normal one. The preacher that Sunday was not an ordained pastor. But he spoke a word that brought the boy under deep conviction. This is Spurgeon's own story of how God moved his soul.

In my conversion, the very point lay in making the discovery that I had nothing to do but to look to Christ, and I should be saved. I believe that I had been a very good, attentive hearer; my own impression about myself was that nobody ever listened much better than I did.

For years, as a child, I tried to learn the way of salvation; and either I did not hear it set forth, which I think cannot quite have been the case, or else I was spiritually blind and deaf, and could not see it and could not hear it; but the good news that I was, as a sinner, to look away from myself to Christ, as much startled me, and came as fresh to me, as any news I ever heard in my life.

Had I never read my Bible? Yes, and read it earnestly. Had I never been taught by Christian people? Yes, I had, by mother, and father, and others. Had I not heard the gospel? Yes, I think I had; and



1878

yet, somehow, it was like a new revelation to me that I was to "believe and live".

I confess to have been tutored in piety, put into my cradle by prayerful hands, and lulled to sleep by songs concerning Jesus; but after having heard the gospel continually, with line upon line, precept upon precept, here much and there much, yet, when the Word of the Lord came to me with power, it was as new as if I had lived among the unvisited tribes of Central Africa, and had never heard the tidings of the cleansing fountain filled with blood, drawn from the Saviour's veins.

I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel.

In that chapel there may have been a dozen or 15 people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that I did not care how much they made my head ache.

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was

obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: "My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look'. Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just 'Look'. Well, a man needn't go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" said he, in broad Essex, "many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto Me.' Some on ye say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.'"

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: "Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out 10 min-

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utes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home.

He continued, "and you always will be miserable – miserable in life, and miserable in death, if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said – I did not take much notice of it – I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do 50 things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved." . . .

It is not everyone who can remember the very day and hour of his deliverance; but, as Richard Knill said, "At such a time of the day, clang went every harp in Heaven, for Richard Knill was born again", it was e'en so with me. The clock of mercy struck in Heaven the hour and moment of my emancipation, for the time had come. Between half-past ten o'clock, when I entered that chapel, and half-past twelve o'clock, when I was back again at home, what a change had taken place in me! I had passed from darkness into marvellous light, from death to life.

This excerpt is taken from The Early Years by C.H. Spurgeon (Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) ap

DEVOTION

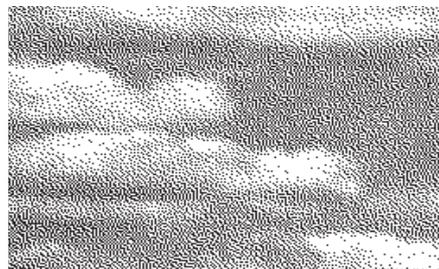
Resurrection reflections

We may be flawed, but we are not bound, insists Ruth Rosen.

There is a kind of reverse – or maybe I should say *perverse* – resurrection whereby we sometimes "bring back" that which is better left dead and buried: decaying desires, rotten self-righteousness (or its evil twin, self-loathing), resentments, all kinds of thoughts or attitudes that we once put to death. For whatever momentary satisfaction it may bring us, in times of weakness we indulge in thoughts that summon these old spectres back to life. We greet them like old friends, embrace them, and when the pleasure of the reunion wears off and we step back to look at these old "friends," we find ourselves feeling somewhat hollow, if not horrified for having held them.

Have you ever felt overpowered by your own spiritual weaknesses? In fact, many of us ascribe a tremendous amount of strength to our weaknesses, as though they were heavy, unbreakable chains that hold us in place. Do you see the irony? Yes, our weaknesses are real and we all have limitations, but weakness by definition is *not* powerful. In fact, one drop of blood can smash all of our chains. We

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



don't get that blood from beating ourselves up, either!

Jesus, the Lamb of God, shed his blood to free us from our sins. Just as the blood of the Passover Lamb delivered the children of Israel from death and caused Pharaoh to relinquish his hold on them, the blood of Jesus delivers us from death and slavery to sin....

True, we can bring some of our old sins back into our lives, re-live bad habits, bad

attitudes and suffer consequences for them. *But we can never give them the power they once had over us.* Jesus broke that power at Calvary, and the proof is the empty tomb. Because he triumphed over death, nothing that is dirty or decayed or loathsome can ever control even a day of our destiny. We only imagine our weaknesses to be so terribly strong because our vision of God's power is so terribly weak.

God has promised that power to you and me. Yes, the dead in Christ will one day be raised, even as Jesus, the firstfruits of the dead, was raised. But in the meantime, his resurrection power can breathe life into those things we may feel are gone forever. His Holy Spirit can continually renew us by bringing back to life hope, love, joy, purity, a part in his plans—all the things the devil would have us believe our weakness has destroyed.

Why believe the lie when we can trust the Resurrected Lamb? He is risen indeed, and his resurrection power is available to us every single day. Hallelujah!

This article originally appeared in the April 1999 Jews for Jesus Newsletter. ap

Should we use psychologists?

Biblical wisdom and practical experience serve Christians best.

I never refer people to psychologists or psychiatrists for counseling unless the person bearing the title is committed to biblical counseling, in which case the professional title is incidental. Many biblical counselors happen to have degrees in psychology, general medicine, neurology, nursing, education, psychiatry, or social work. They studied secular counseling theories and methods that they have rejected in favor of biblical theory and practice.

Just as you don't blindly trust the title "minister" or "pastor" without looking at what the person teaches, you should not naively trust in any other title. Your responsibility is to refer to people who counsel biblically.

Would I ever refer to a psychiatrist or psychologist for other reasons? Yes. A psychiatrist's medical training could help in determining whether or not neurological or other organic problems contribute to a person's problems in living, and a psychologist might help by providing intelligence testing. But, unfortunately, psychiatrists and psychologists too often adopt the role of a psychotherapist. They trespass into the domain of the Spirit, the Word, and ministry because they counsel people in unbiblical ways.

A letter from a leading Christian organisation contained the following statement:

"Psychologists do far more than engage in the practice of psychotherapy. To whom would you take a six-year-old boy to determine whether he was emotionally and physically ready to enter the first grade?To whom would you turn if your wife became schizophrenic and ran screaming down the street? Would your pastor be able to deal with that situation? What if you wished to make a career change in mid-life and wanted an objective evaluation of your strengths and interests? Whom could you ask to help you? To whom would you go to seek help with an adolescent who was extremely rebellious and resentful of his father? In each of these instances, and in a hundred others, you should look for a psychologist whose first love and highest commitment is to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God.



David Powlison

And how silly to say, there is no such thing."

Let me interact with this statement sentence by sentence.

"Psychologists do far more than engage in the practice of psychotherapy." Indeed they do. Of course, psychotherapy is the money-making staple for most Christian psychologists. But such counseling practice is legitimated by a great deal of popular writing and speaking. In fact, psychologists' biggest influence in the Christian church at this time is not through psychotherapy but through

scores of conferences, video tapes, radio shows, and bestselling books.

The statement stresses the "service roles" psychologists have assumed. But (at least in this quote) it does not mention their biggest role: teachers about human nature, about problems and solutions. In an ominous development for the Church, psychologists claim that they are the answer to three critical questions: 1) Who is right in their interpretation of human beings and their problems? 2) Who has the right to work with people experiencing problems in living? 3) Who can make it right and solve people's problems?

Here is the dilemma: the typical Christian psychologist's interpretations of people are systematically twisted by error. What do they teach? Diverse as they are in the details, popular Christian psychologists are united in teaching that man's fundamental problem stems from some lack, emptiness, unmet need, woundedness or trauma (eg "low self-esteem", "love hunger"). In contrast, the

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Bible teaches us that our fundamental problem stems from the active desires, thoughts, and intentions of the heart. Are we basically sinful, or do we simply react sinfully to the failings of primary caregivers to meet our needs?

The excerpt cited appeals to the de facto institutionalisation of psychology within contemporary secular and Christian culture as if this establishes psychologists' legitimacy. Their authority is made to appear self-evident – because people go to psychologists, psychologists are needed. However, each of the examples cited above proves dubious upon inspection.

“To whom would you take a six-year-old boy to determine whether he was emotionally and physically ready to enter the first grade?” Take him to a medical doctor for the physical questions. Take him to the principal and kindergarten and first grade teachers for the other questions. They have dealt with hundreds of kids over the years. Other parents are also a resource. Experienced people can give you good advice to weigh into your determination of your child's readiness.

“To whom would you turn if your wife became schizophrenic and ran screaming down the street? Would your pastor be able to deal with that situation?” If your wife's behavior and thinking became bizarre, between a medical doctor, the police, and your pastor (or other wise pastoral counselors), you should be able to do what can be done humanly.

Psychologists' success with so-called schizophrenics is not noteworthy.

“What if you wished to make a career change in mid-life and wanted an objective evaluation of your strengths and interests? Whom could you ask to help you?” A career counselor could provide interest and aptitude testing and a knowledge of the job market. Any pastoral counselor worthy of the name could help you think through your motives for considering a change as well as help you with other aspects of the decision-making process. People who know you well and people in your current and contemplated careers could also offer practical advice.

“To whom would you go to seek help with an adolescent who was extremely rebellious and resentful of his father?” This is bread-and-butter biblical counseling. Bring both the adolescent and the parents in for counseling. Find out why and how the child is resentful and rebellious and whether or not the father is provoking him. Help them both to make necessary changes, learning how to love and respect each other.

In each of these instances, and in a hundred others, you should look for a psychologist whose first love and highest commitment is to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God. And how silly to say, There is no such thing.” I honestly can't think of any instances, except perhaps intelligence testing from a school psychologist, where

the title psychologist would be significant. Biblically wise people from many walks of life might prove helpful in these instances. Such a person might happen to have the title of psychologist or psychiatrist, or the title Pastor, or Mom, or teacher, or Mrs Smith from next door, or Officer Jones from the precinct, or Doctor. Look for biblical wisdom, not a title.

My biggest problem with the “psychologists whose first love and highest commitment is to Jesus Christ and to the Word of God” is that, sadly, most of the ones I have met and read deviate markedly from the professed commitment in both their theory and practice. Verbal commitment to the Word of God coexists with deviant teachings from enemies of that Word. Christians who are psychologists almost have to deviate from Scripture as well in order to define themselves as legitimate professionals with some unique expertise.

After all, the territory they are claiming is not theirs by natural right. It is the territory of parents, pastors, teachers, doctors, friends and a host of practical advisers who make no pretense to being psychologists. It is the territory of life's problems. And wisdom in that territory lies open on the pages of Scripture. Though hard won through experience in applying truth to life, such wisdom is available to all who seek it.

This article is reprinted from The Journal of Biblical Counseling (Vol 13, No.2, 1995).^{ap}



**Sutherland Shire
Christian School**

Principal

The board of Sutherland Shire Christian School is seeking expressions of interest from possible applicants to be our next school Principal.

Due to illness this position is expected to become available in the near future.

We will be seeking a mature Christian person of reformed persuasion with extensive experience in and vision for Christian education, including the areas of administration, curriculum, staff development, pastoral care and policy.

Sutherland is a Christian parent controlled, Kindergarten to matriculation, Protestant, coeducational school with enrolment in 2001 of 770 students and a staff of over 70. Buildings and facilities are all modern and well equipped. The school is located at Barden Ridge in a delightful bush-land setting 25 km south of Sydney.

For more information about the school or the role of Principal, please contact either the Business Manager, Bob East on 02 9543 2133 (BH) or 02 9521 4632 (AH) or the Board President Greg Jones on 02 9521 3088 (BH) 02 9520 8738 (AH) or visit our web site at www.sscs.nsw.edu.au

We see ourselves as an extension of the home, so that Christian teaching given in the home is reinforced by the school in a non elitist caring environment. Our aim is to strive for excellence in the academic and personal life of all students so that they may reach their potential to the glory of God and the enrichment of life.

Panic stations

It may be Mission Impossible, but Paul and Carol Lukins will make it.

Seen a whirlwind pass lately? It may have been the Lukins family! We're in the final stages of leaving Australia on 22 June this year to work as SIM missionaries in Ethiopia. The problem is that we have hardly started preparing to leave yet! We began deputation several weeks ago, and now we only have a few more weeks to go! Is it possible for the jigsaw to come together in that time? SIM told us that nine to 16 months is the usual time allocated for effective deputation.

Is it because we are naïve that we are leaving behind 20 years of settled country ministry at Condobolin, NSW, to sit in dusty cattle camps with nomadic cattle herds in southern Ethiopia?

Do we really understand the gospel of Jesus and the centrality of the cross of Christ sufficiently well to be able to stand against a totally animistic culture? Aren't the needs of our small home church important too? And doesn't rural Australia need gossellers?

It is 14 months since we approached SIM (Serving In Mission) with the tentative suggestion that maybe they could use us to help bring God's word to a marginalised people group in Ethiopia called the Mursi. This would be a big change for Paul after 19 years as district agronomist with NSW Agriculture at Condobolin, working with farmers to help them grow better crops and pastures, and for Carol, who has taught in western NSW schools, edited Sunday school and school scripture lessons, taught adult literacy at TAFE, and taught music.

Against this picture was the other story: that we had been partners and yoke-fellows with the Geddes family for the 10 years since they left Australia as young SIM missionaries to proclaim Christ to the unreached nomadic Mursi people in Ethiopia; that Carol's mother had already spent five months in 1999 home-schooling the Geddes' children in Ethiopia; that the short-term ministry of two ladies from nearby Dubbo Presbyterian church with the Geddes – Janet Riley (a vet) and Irene Floth (a teacher) – increased our awareness of the needs there; that the old lady who had



lived with Paul in his single days (the one who was converted at 89, then charged on until she was almost 105) had just died, freeing him of further responsibility.

Proclaiming the gospel overseas is no more noble than proclaiming the gospel at home. True. The responsibility starts at home. If cultural adjustment is often hard within our own culture, it will be even harder in a foreign, less sympathetic culture. True.

A midlife crisis? A good question. An escape from a testing situation at Condobolin? Another good question.

But SIM detected a kinship with us, and so we proceeded to the second round of evaluation, to two weeks of orientation, to doctrinal assessment, extensive and protracted medical and dental health checks, psychological assessment, a second interview, more trips to Sydney, to the third round of evaluation. Plus parallel applications to APWM, more doctrinal assessment, interviews, trips to Sydney, more late nights. If only we hadn't been between ministers at our church for over 12 months – if only the bloke we called had accepted – there would be more time at night and weekends to think and to unwind!!

Then the crescendo – in November



2000 both SIM and APWM accepted us as appointees! Praise God! But now the crunch – SIM felt it would be good for us to be in Ethiopia to start learning the national language within seven months so that we can fit in with the SIM Ethiopian plans. Could we do it? And complete the six-week intensive linguistics course at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Melbourne, starting new year's day 2001? And have our brochures printed over the Christmas holiday break to be ready to start deputation on our way home from Melbourne in February? And start the vaccination program to fit in between deputation trips away?

And we do have 4 children aged between two and six to consider!

Can we really learn two new languages in two years? Will Ethiopia give us work permits for the four-year term? And more work permits for subsequent terms?

Now, how to rationalise our affairs: Carol's mother Betty Berry, the one who home-schooled the Geddes children, sold her house and moved into our home as caretaker/cook/cleaner/child carer/prayer/confidante. How would she cope with four empty bedrooms around her and four more years before we would fill them again? Should we be taking our children away from their great-grandmother and three grandparents, and from their local families?

The Lord knows all things. And he still says "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh – is anything too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:17).

God guides his people, but it is often not through the big things that we expect. Rather, it is through our everyday living, talking, walking, and being in relationship with Jesus. It's through assurance of our salvation in Christ and the conviction of the necessity to be gossellers wherever we are, as revealed in his word.

Seen a whirlwind lately? Yes, it was definitely the Lukins family! Their management of life often leaves a lot to be desired!! But they know a truth which sustains them: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1).

prayer

APRIL 2001

- 21 Mowbraytown-Norman Park home mission station Brisbane; with about 30 communicants and 3 elders; vacant, Jorge Lievano moderator.
- 22 The Christian Education committees of the Victorian and Tasmanian assemblies (Conveners Allan Lendon and Donald Geddes).
- 23 Don and Betty Brookes (formerly of Adelaide) at Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church, and David and Glenda Burke (formerly of Sydney) at Orchard Rd Presbyterian Church, Singapore.
- 24 Burwood Chinese congregation, Sydney; the members and elders, Dennis and Dorcas Law, and the two exit appointees – John Leung (and Kiet) and Eugene Hor (and Pauline).
- 25 Goondiwindi-Texas-Inglewood parish, south west Qld., 3 congregations with about 30 communicants and 6 elders; Malcolm and Leone Pierce.
- 26 Exit appointments to two parishes in far N.S.W.: Keith and Melissa Boulden to Byron Bay-Mullumbimby (about 90 communicants and 10 elders); Philip Strong, interim moderator and Philip and Karen Weidemann to Kyogle parish (4 congregations with about 75 communicants and 5 elders).
- 27 Sale home mission station Gippsland, Vic. with about 20 communicants and 1 elder; vacant, Peter Swinn, moderator.
- 28 Ingleburn home mission station N.S.W with about 30 communicants and 5 elders; Janet Frost.
- 29 Presbytery of Wagga Wagga, N.S.W; 9 parishes and 3 home mission stations totalling 35 congregations with 1660 communicants and adherents, 1

- ministerial candidate, 3 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction, 1 deaconess; Peter Greiner, Clerk.
- 30 Dandenong home mission station, Vic; with about 35 communicants and 1 elder; Henri Joyeaux, Michael Jensen, moderator.

MAY 2001

- 1 Robert and Laurel Benn as they move to Springwood-Winnmalee parish in the N.S.W. Blue Mountains, 2 congregations with about 170 communicants and 10 elders. Thank God for his service as A.P.W.M. Director and pray for the appointment of a successor.
- 2 Pray for peace and stability in Fiji, whose 795,000 people are 48% indigenous Fijian and 46% Indian; 38% are Hindu, 8% Muslim, 9% R.C. and 43% Protestant (mainly Methodist)
- 3 Barbara Arnold from Manly-Lota, Brisbane serving in P.N.G. since 1967; lecturer at Dauli Teachers' College.
- 4 The Entrance parish north of Sydney with about 115 communicants and 11 elders; Robert and Wendy Boase, exit appointment.
- 5 Harold and Gladys Skinner from Wahoonga, Sydney; working in catering, finance and maintenance with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Darwin after more than 30 years in PNG.
- 6 South Australian General Assembly meeting at Seacliff; Rod. Waterhouse, Moderator; Rupert Hanna, Clerk and all office-bearers and members.
- 7 Nurmukah Regional parish, Vic; 3 congregations with about 60 communicants and 10 elders; John and Heather Rickard, exit appointment.
- 8 All staff of the Church Offices in Chalmers St, Sydney, Collins St, Melbourne and Fortitude Valley, Brisbane (to move to Carina).
- 9 Whittlesea-Mernda home mission station Vic; with about 40 communicants

- and 2 elders; vacant – Bernie and Maree Thomas, Don Elliott, moderator.
- 10 Presbytery of Gippsland, Vic; 4 parishes and 2 home mission stations totalling 8 congregations with 920 communicants and adherents, 1 retired minister; Jared Hood, Clerk.
- 11 Leederville appointment parish, Perth; with about 25 communicants and 4 elders; Andrew and Kathleen Robinson, exit appointment.
- 12 Pray for revival of the church in Germany; of its 80 million people 22% are non religious, 36% R.C. and 37% Protestant, but often far from the message of the Reformers.
- 13 Matthew of Seacliff church, Adelaide as he teaches English in the Middle East.
- 14 Wingham-Upper Manning parish on the N.S.W north coast; 2 congregations with about 50 communicants and 3 elders; vacant, John Thompson, interim moderator.
- 15 Tasmanian General Assembly. The Moderator; David Turner, Clerk and all officebearers and members.
- 16 Barbara Sayers of Cairns, Qld – Bible translator since 1961 (Wik Mungkan for Aurukun N.Q.) in her advisory work.
- 17 Stephen Lilley from Hurstville, Sydney, engaged in language survey work with W.B.T. in South Asia.
- 18 Port Macquarie parish N.S.W. with about 150 communicants and 10 elders; Scott and Cassie Donnellan.
- 19 Peter and Michelle Franklin, from Devonport, Tas; hydro engineer with Interserve in Nepal and their two adopted Nepali children.
- 20 Presbytery of Wide Bay-Sunshine Coast Qld.; 6 parishes and 2 home mission stations with 750 communicants and adherents, 5 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction; John Tucker, Clerk.

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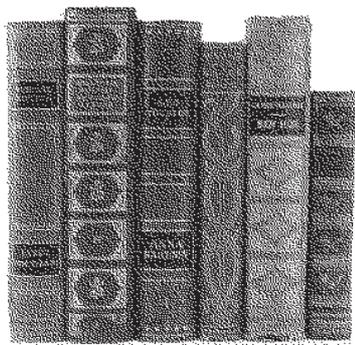
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books



Out of Control Who's Watching our Child Protection Agencies?

Brenda Scott
Louisiana: Huntington House, 1994.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

This is a horror story to end all horror stories. It deals with the situation in the United States, but no doubt the same philosophies and practices are evident elsewhere. Brenda Scott's thesis is that child protection agencies have ceased to be charities and instead become law enforcement agencies.

The charges which she aims at the child protection agencies are not mild: the number of false accusations is huge, malicious reporting is granted immunity but the failure to report even suspicions is not, one is treated as guilty unless one can prove one's innocence, spanking is regarded as child abuse, and programs designed to help are often pornographic and harmful (ie the therapists themselves are abusers).

Justice Louis D. Brandeis commented that "The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understand-

ing." However, on the evidence which Brenda Scott has presented, not all child protection workers are well-intentioned. Many of them are simply anti-family, and they are well aware that something as basic as honesty could lead to budget cuts.

Ms Scott's conclusion is damning indeed: "The system doesn't need more funding; it needs to be overhauled." This is one of the most disturbing books I have read in a long time.

You Sank My Boat!

Jim Cromarty
Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2000.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

There are not many books designed for family reading which deal first with the five points of Calvinism, but here is one. Jim Cromarty is a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia who has taken up a writing ministry in recent years. His books of family readings have proved popular, and rightly so.

The only criticism I have – apart from a reference to the Assyrians on page 145 when the Babylonians are intended – is that some of the stories are a little wordy, or there is one illustration too many. But Jim Cromarty is an accomplished story teller and a faithful Bible teacher, and his books should be widely used in the difficult and sometimes apparently thankless task of trying to teach the next generation the truths of the faith.

The Christian's High Calling

Maurice Roberts
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Maurice Roberts is the editor of the monthly *Banner of Truth* magazine. His editorials reveal him to be a man who is

gifted at tackling familiar subjects from not-so-familiar perspectives. We are constantly challenged not to be content with what is shallow and mundane. Hence Maurice writes on subjects such as "the danger of becoming battle-weary", "dealing with our deadness", "why is there no wrestling?", "feeling Christ's love afresh", and the last piece, "more than a dream".

Always the subjects are tackled from the perspective of Christ and eternity. Characteristically, Maurice cites the saying of the English martyr John Bradford, who said that he made it his rule not to go away from any duty before he had felt something of Christ in it. Something of this flavour is found in these essays too.

This is an unusual collection of articles, but they exude a sense of Christ and the privileges of his gospel. They will surely stimulate and warm many a Christian reader. ap

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A public faith

What Christians have given democracy? Most of it.

The United States is still licking its wounds from a contentious presidential campaign that ended in agonising deadlock. Despite the post-election ordeal, one good thing came out of the campaign: a resounding reaffirmation of the role of religion in public life. Ironically, it came not from the right but from the left.

Campaigning in Detroit, Senator Joe Lieberman declared, "We need to reaffirm our faith and renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God and God's purpose." And he argued, "We need a greater place for faith in America's public life." Some observers were scandalised (though not as scandalised as they were when evangelical Christian leaders Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell said the same thing).

Was Lieberman right? Of course! He was merely echoing the words of America's founders. John Adams famously said, "Our Constitution is made for a religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the governance of any other."

Getting this issue into public debate may help expose how false are the charges against Christians – like the accusation that we want to "impose" our agenda. Most Americans think, that charge was first aimed at the Moral Majority. Not so. It was raised in 1860 by slave-owners who attacked Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists for wanting to "impose their religious views". Thank God they did "impose" their views!

The same accusation was made even earlier when William Wilberforce was fighting to abolish England's slave trade. On the floor of Parliament, Lord Melbourne, a defender of the trade, thundered, "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life." Thank God religion invaded public life that time as well.

And the charge that Christians want to "impose" their views is preposterous on its face. Religiously motivated people do nothing more than everyone else does – work for a majority in the democratic process. We have no power to "impose."

Polls show that 58 percent of



Charles Colson

Americans agree with Lieberman that religion should play a greater role in public life. So the senator has done a great service opening a healthy dialogue in America. And he's made possible a great apologetic opportunity for Christians to explain why Judeo-Christian influence is so important to America. The arguments are powerful.

First, think about ethics. Dostoyevsky asked the great question in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "Can man be good without God?" Sure, atheists jump on hand grenades in foxholes, but can they consistently live a virtuous life? I would answer no. For one thing, in today's relativistic era, they can't decide what is right. In addition, every human being has an infinite capacity for self-rationalisation – as I discovered in the White House. Only a commitment to Christ transforms human will, as C. S. Lewis compellingly argued.

And the evidence proves an impact on society. Juvenile crime was lowest in England when Sunday school attendance was highest. As Sunday school declined, juvenile crime increased in direct proportion.

Second, religion encourages good health. Psychiatrist David Larson has spent 20 years researching faith's effect on health. He discovered Christians have less stress, fewer heart attacks, and are less prone to commit suicide than those without faith. He even found that married Christians have better sex lives than secular couples.

Third, Christianity encourages productivity. The work ethic grew out of the Protestant Reformation. Deferred gratification, work done for God's glory, fueled the industrial revolution.

Fourth, the Christian faith undergirds political freedom and human rights. The

whole idea of Western liberal democracy rests upon Christian premises. The Scottish cleric Samuel Rutherford published *Lex Rex* – "the law is king" – which led to the Rule of Law. Support for a republican form of government was advanced by the reformers, who advocated sphere sovereignty and limited government. Christian commitment to "unalienable rights" is why Christians from Wilberforce to the civil-rights activists to the anti-

Communist resistance in Eastern Europe have been the most valiant defenders of human rights.

Finally, Christianity encourages compassion. Historically it was Christians who built hospitals and orphanages, fought slavery, and outlawed child labor. Today Christian compassion leads millions of Americans to feed the hungry, minister to pregnant teens, and buy Christmas gifts for Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree kids each year.

A wealth of material buttresses these arguments. Christians need to learn to make the case – and then seize the opportunity. The time is ripe: more than half the nation recently told pollsters that America is off-track morally.

You and I must give them the 'answers that they are obviously searching for.

This article is reprinted from The Magazine of Prison Fellowship Ministries, Winter 2001

ap

Coming up in AP...

Exclusive interviews with:

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