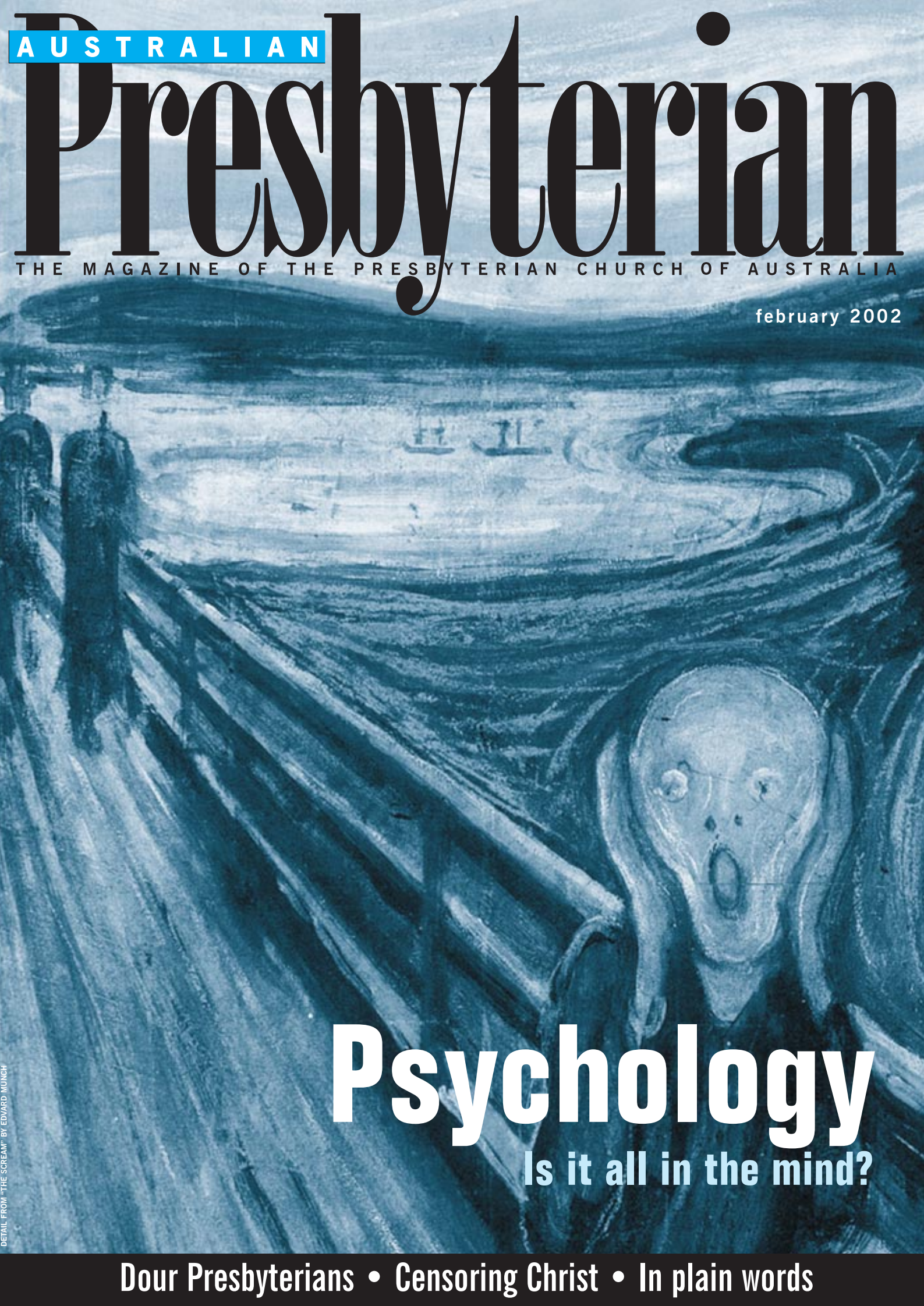


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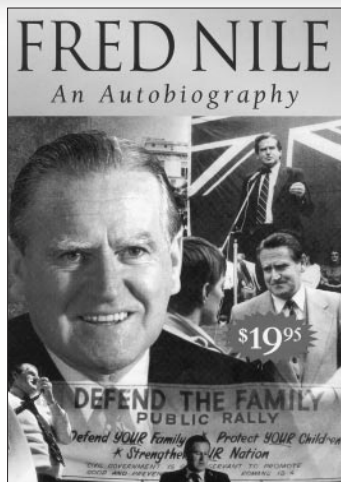
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editorial

One of the interesting features of ruling scientific elites is their hostility to knowledge that challenges the prevailing orthodoxy. Take medical science, for instance. In 1847, a young Hungarian medical professor, Ignaz Semmelweis, made a discovery that has saved millions of women from dying in childbirth. Semmelweis was appalled by the number of women at the time who were dying of puerperal fever during confinement (a quarter or more). He devoted himself to finding out the cause of the infection. In the process, he stumbled upon a cure – he required doctors and nurses to wash their hands in an antiseptic solution before they delivered a baby. The results were staggering. In the ward where he conducted the experiment, the mortality rate dropped to 1 per cent.

Strangely, while younger doctors welcomed his findings, his superiors scorned them. The editor of the leading medical journal, *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, wrote at the time: “It’s time to stop all the nonsense about chlorinated handwash”. Sadly, his critics didn’t realise how women died from bacterial infection. They didn’t understand that infectious disease was caused by the transmission of minute living organisms. It did not become orthodoxy for 30 years.

Interestingly, the psychiatric establishment has shown a similar disdain for perspectives that fall outside what it regards as the prevailing orthodoxy on human psychology. This is especially so of biblical counseling. Most psychiatrists now regard biblical perspectives of man’s inner life as primitive. This is strange because, as Carl Jung reminds us, there has grown up in the psychoanalytic movement “various schools with diametrically opposed views”. One may well ask whether it is ever legitimate, given the conflicting schools of thought in modern psychiatry, to reject such a well tried-tradition with a proven record of sustaining the weary (Isaiah 50:4)?

In this issue of *AP* we reassess the claims of the recently revived discipline of biblical counseling. Does it have anything to contribute to our knowledge of human psychology and behaviour? Are we on sure ground when we rely upon the words of the “Wonderful Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6) when dealing with our deepest inmost needs? This issue seeks to provide some answers.

Peter Hastie 

Mind-altering

Scripture is the psychologist's first manual.



Why are you so interested in biblical counselling?

I'm an adult convert to Christianity. I came to Christ at 26 when I was working at McLean Psychiatric Hospital, just outside Boston. It's one of the oldest psychiatric hospitals in America. Previously, as an undergraduate, I had done a psychology major in my arts degree at Harvard. I had been planning to go into clinical psychology like most of my friends when through the grace of God I became a believer in Jesus Christ.

Over the next five years I started to think through very carefully everything I'd ever understood about myself and others through having been involved in psychology for the previous seven years. So my conversion really made me grapple with whether Christianity had any direct relevance to a psychological understanding of people.

In fact, my new-found faith awakened a fresh interest in the field. As God so often does, he used the very gifts that he'd given me and my pre-Christian life experience to become part of a new redeemed



David Powlison
talks to
Peter Hastie

life with a completely different focus and direction.

So what happened when you began to rethink psychology in the light of the gospel?

After my conversion, I studied for a Masters degree in Westminster Theological Seminary. There I was exposed to a thoroughly reformed Christian worldview which revolutionised my understanding of people, human nature, the counselling process and so forth. I was also exposed to a new generation of biblical counselling begun at Westminster by Jay Adams about seven years previously. So I got in, not at the ground floor, but early second generation as it were.

After my Masters, I went on and did a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania in the history and philosophy of science and

medicine. My major interest was in the history of psychiatry. I did my dissertation on the history of counselling within modern evangelicalism. The major focus of my doctorate was on Jay Adams, but I looked at his contribution in the field as a lens into the wider Christian psychotherapy movement among evangelicals.

How did this dissertation affect your understanding of psychotherapy?

It gave me some insights I could've gotten no other way. I was forced to take a historian's perspective in a secular university and to write about things that were very dear to me. That was a salutary challenge.

But one of the major benefits of my study was that it gave me the opportunity to get to know just about everybody in the Christian counselling world in the USA. I surveyed the entire field within evangelicalism – from those on the extreme right who have great reservations about counselling, to believing Christian psychologists who are happy to embrace many of the theories of modern psychotherapy. I was able to establish many cordial and valuable relationships. It also

helped to give me a strong background for teaching practical theology at Westminster. I now teach pastoral counselling, which is the “personal conversation” aspect of ministry.

Historian Paul Johnson says Freud’s revolutionary understanding of human nature is a defining aspect of the 20th century. Do you think he’s on to something?

He’s clearly on to something. Negatively, Freud played a key role in dismissing the ideas of sin and guilt from our normal vocabulary. Positively, Freud uncovered some of the myriad complexities of human nature, which was a great achievement in the rationalistic Victorian culture of which he was a part.

Actually, Freud’s observations simply confirm something that any student of the human heart already knows through Scripture: that the heart is very complex and there’s far more there than meets the eye.

On the other hand, it has become clear, even among secular scholars over the past 30 years, that Freud is distinguished by his ability to have created an alternative myth about human nature. He was a myth-maker. And he created myths about the human psyche that are quite opposed to the Christian faith. So we can at least credit him with seeing a problem that was genuinely there. However, because he was not a friend of the God of the Bible, he fabricated his own substitute myth.

Actually, I’ve noticed that in Freudian psychoanalytic circles in the past 20 years or so, the consensus is that Freudian analysis is an art, not a science. Among secular philosophers and historians of science, talking about Freud would be more like talking about religion, poetry, or politics.

Although his case studies were supposed to be empirically based, most scholars today reject that claim. It’s pretty well recognised that he jiggled his case studies to defend his theories.

What has been Freud’s main contribution to self-understanding? You’ve already said that he saw man as more than a one-dimensional.

That’s true, but in a sense that insight is only a negative one. I’m not sure that it really takes us very far. Christians have a much deeper understanding of what goes on inside people. The Bible tells us that there’s a madness in human nature that arises in the heart. The writer of Ecclesiastes says “The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is mad-

ness in their hearts while they live”(9:3). This madness is the fundamental insanity that actively seeks to repress the knowledge of God. From this point of view, you could say that Freud’s distinctive understanding of the human condition is just one more expression of this very basic madness of the human heart. He too was seeking to repress the knowledge of God.

How has the evangelical church responded?

I will only answer this in a rather general way because there are obviously many different kinds of responses that I could give. Few Christians (or secular people) buy Sigmund Freud’s distinctive beliefs about the Oedipal Complex and the pre-eminent role of sexual energies. But popular Freudianism’s single, biggest influence has been to encourage the idea that our problems are due to the fact that we are essentially passive and determined by childhood experience. Our troubles are the result of the determining effects of our personal history.

This is an unspoken assumption in most counselling circles, even among evangelicals: “You’re this way because your Mom treated you this way, because your Dad set that kind of model, because you’re this personality type.” The idea is that we are fundamentally products of our sociology and physiology, rather than active agents who reveal what masters us, whether we are mistreated and misled or whether we are treated well and guided wisely. If you answer the “why?” question wrong, you’ll get the solution wrong, too.

Another of Freudianism’s major influences has been to popularise the idea of “mental illness”. Rather than locating people’s problems in their prideful rejection of God, his views have encouraged the notion that we are psychically determined so that we have diminished responsibility for our thoughts and actions.

Among evangelicals, Freud himself has not really been that popular. Evangelicals find cognitive-behavioural therapies more appealing because they’re so cut and dried, straightforward, and rationalistic.

What are cognitive-behavioural therapies?

Cognitive-behavioural therapies look at how people think, how they behave, and how thinking and behaving interact. Evangelicals like them because of their emphasis on conscious rather than unconscious function. By focusing on the conscious aspects of the mind, their advocates argue that they help us bring about more

direct and effective change in people’s lives.

So if a counselor is trying to deal with a person’s poor self-image, he might try to unpack some of the false ideas in the counsellee’s mind and then tinker with them. You know, a three-by-five card on the one side that says “I believe I’m scum.” Then you flip it over and it says “God doesn’t make junk.” These therapies generally give the impression that change is a relatively simple process that can be engineered by reconstructing the counsellee’s thought-world. Because



Freud was a myth-maker. And he created myths about the human psyche that are quite opposed to the Christian faith.

these therapies have a simple understanding of human personality, they’ve been very popular.

And then, probably even more popular among evangelicals, have been a number of humanistic psychologies. Carl Rogers has been very influential in Christian circles with his emphasis on being accepting and loving towards people, and then letting people’s healing forces flow from within themselves. Rogers believes that people have their own internal resources. He says that we have the power to make ourselves whatever we want to be. We just have to choose to use this power. Obviously, there are some ideas here that Christians would want to take issue with.

Another idea that’s popular among evangelicals is the notion that a person is a collection of psychic needs. Advocates of this approach believe that the best way to look at human personality is to see ourselves as filled with all sorts of needs: needs for love, needs for significance, needs for self-worth and needs for self-esteem. They say we must have these needs fulfilled before we can reach our full potential. Obviously, if others don’t meet our needs, then they’re to blame for our problems.

This analysis grows directly out of humanistic psychology. When such thinking is loosely Christianised, Jesus becomes the “psychic-need-meeter,” not the crucified Saviour and reigning King.

Humanistic psychology and cognitive-behavioral therapies tend to be more optimistic than Freud. Freud was a pessimist about human personality. And because he is so dark and dreary, he doesn't tend to appeal to Christians in the way that the more up-beat and rational therapies have tended to.

How has modern psychology changed the Church's ideas and practices of pastoral care?

That's a complex question. One possible way to look at this is to see that God has used the growth of a new, persuasive and robust area of knowledge to challenge his people to grow up. Unfortunately, over the last couple hundred of years in America, pastoral counselling of a rich, thoughtful, and biblical kind has really dried up.

Ever since the time of Jonathan Edwards, biblical counselling which focused on the needs of people's souls has almost disappeared. By the time you get to the late 1700s and on into the 1800s, there was a strand still there. But even by the Civil War in the 1860s that strand had dried up. And in fact, in the USA, no conservative Christian had written on the biblical counselling aspect of pastoral care from before the Civil War until Jay Adams began to publish around 1970.

Why did this happen?

You're asking me to speculate here. There could be dozens of reasons for it from a human standpoint, but I suspect that the main one was that those who believed the Bible and loved Christ were in a fight for their lives for the fundamentals of the faith. During this period, higher critical thought was becoming a real threat to historic Christianity.

There were other threats such as Darwinism and humanism, to mention just a few. Anyway, many of the church's institutions, particularly the seminaries and colleges, came under the influence of these ideas. The church lost its institutions of higher learning and many of the denominations lost their way.

In this emerging crisis, the best believing scholars put their polemical and intellectual labors into the defence of doctrines such as the Trinity, substitutionary atonement, the deity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection and other fundamental doctrines without which you don't have a pastoral care. As they say, it's hard to build when you're also trying to put out a fire.

It has often been said in modern church history that one of the downsides

of this attack on the Christian faith was that Bible-believers concentrated all their efforts on defending the doctrine of God, while liberals devoted all their energies to developing a so-called view of man. This meant that most of the published works in pastoral care in the 20th century, or for the first three-quarters of it at least, were essentially liberal.

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if believing scholars had really tackled the doctrine of anthropology back at the beginning of the 20th century. But fortunately the wealth of Christian thought on counselling that was pretty well lost is being recovered and developed in the past 30 years.

Under such humanistic thinking, Jesus becomes the "psychic-need-meeter", not Saviour and reigning King.



One of the enduring problems of this crisis is that the church's institutions have lacked the proper resources for the cure of souls. There's been a kind of vacuum there. A direct consequence of this is that Christian pastors no longer see themselves as having a legitimate jurisdiction when it comes to helping people with the personal problems of their lives. Christian clergy are seen as having a primitive and obsolete view of human nature at the very time when powerful secular myths and alternative secular versions of caring for souls have been well articulated and developed.

You say Scripture has been displaced, both as a diagnostic and redemptive tool. How can we be sure that Scripture alone is sufficient to deal with the complexities of people's inner lives?

First, let me clear away a serious misconception that some people have about biblical counselling. I know of no one in the field of biblical counselling who claims that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture means that there is an exhaustive list of proof-texts for every psychological problem known to man.

When biblical counsellors claim that Scripture is sufficient for counselling, they are not suggesting that Scripture is an exhaustive compendium, like an encyclo-

pedia that catalogues every emotional and psychological problem, which a counsellor could use a concordance. What is being claimed is that Scripture claims for itself and offers us a true and comprehensive understanding of man. It offers many specifics, illustrations, and applications along the way. Scripture is truth in application, not in abstraction.

God orients us, so we can make further wise applications to meet the needs and problems of our day. Scripture gives us, to use Calvin's metaphor, "the eyeglasses" through which we can understand the human condition. The Scriptures show us how God the Creator and Searcher of hearts sees us. The Word then also shows us how God the Redeemer proceeds to cure what is wrong with us and our world.

This means that the sufficiency of Scripture gives a counsellor confidence to know what is important when dealing with troubled people. Scripture reveals how God weighs and assesses the various influences in human life.

Let me give you a very simple example. Jesus says that we can either "serve God or mammon." When Jesus says that, it sounds very simple. In one sense it is; however, it is definitely not simplistic. It plays out in a vast number of different ways.

People can serve mammon in a multiplicity of forms that are quite variable. For instance, you can reveal your worship of mammon just by feeling inferior when you walk into the house of someone who is wealthier than you. We all know the mental shuffling of feet that goes on with that. Or you can demonstrate your worship of mammon by drooling over the sales catalogues that come into your home. Again, worshipping mammon might lead you to shoplift or steal. Or it might lead you to cheat on your expense account. Some people show their commitment to mammon by engaging in sexually immoral practices. Others do it by pleading poor so that they don't have to pay the rent for that month. Others just worry, worry, worry about money. Paul amplifies what Jesus teaches when he says: "the love of money leads to every sort of evil." So we need to realise all the different nuances and forms in which one basic sin can manifest.

Does Scripture help with serious psychiatric problems, such as manic depression, ADD and obsessive-compulsive disorders?

Yes, God does not leave us adrift. This is one of those million-dollar questions for which I'll only give a 25-cent answer

here. As I've said, Scripture gives you the gaze or perspective of God; however, it doesn't have a proof-text on manic depression, ADD or whatever. But God shows us how to weigh the biological component (or any other suffering or disability – or ability, for that matter) in a world where God is sovereign and where people are sinners and need redemption. It also warns us to be wary of prevailing socio-cultural ideas in a world where we are called not to be conformed to this present order (see Romans 12:2). The Bible teaches us how to think.

Let me give you an example. One of the most significant counselling sessions that I had early in my ministry was with a man – a professing Christian — who had had three very destructive manic episodes. His episodes were severe – he disintegrated, went bizarre, didn't sleep for weeks and finally ended up in a psychiatric hospital. He had then plunged into the abyss of despair. I got to know him as he was slowly climbing out of his third abyss.

In getting to know him, I was looking for the answer to the crucial question, "What's going on in this man's heart?" I needed to consider him as a being made in the image of God, as a sinner who was redeemable. He was more than his diagnostic category. What I discovered was that his three episodes took place at highly significant times – one was a week after he got married, one was a week after the birth of his first child, and the third was a week after his second child. That got me thinking. Why did he become unhinged in facing such life events?

But it wasn't enough to know this man simply in the context of his breakdowns. I had to counsel him in the context of his whole life, because we bring our hearts to every aspect of life – not just the extreme moments, the major life events. I made an interesting discovery in my conversations with him. I found that he was (always) extremely lazy and highly controlling. He lived for ease, and he lived to have things his way. If a counselor had known that before he got married, he might have said: "Don't get married! Don't have kids!" A wife and kids are guaranteed to push his buttons. Now, why did he snap in the way that he did? Maybe there was something genetic to why he plunged completely over the edge. But his own heart motives made him run towards the edge and step over the edge.

When he became severely depressed, we should be glad that he received medication that might reduce the severity of his symptoms. But I don't dare, as a pas-

tor, view that as a cure, or view him as beyond the reach of the ministry of the Word. He needs a very pointed pastoral ministry. I needed to help him see how his desires to control everything and to have an easy life were defections from trust in God.

Are you saying that the disease model for what is commonly called "mental illness" is quite unhelpful?

I think the disease model is only helpful where a disorder is strictly biologically based. For instance, Alzheimer's disease is biologically based. The resulting forms of dementia are organically caused. So clearly, there are some psychiatric disorders that are the result of organic disease. But even then, spiritual issues always play simultaneously – at some level — in how a person reacts to these disabilities.

Sometimes you find that Christians want to adopt a simplistic division: either the problem is spiritual or it's physical. But I want to say: even if it's a physical disorder, people still remain God's image-bearers. We're still fallen creatures and we're still

There is no exhaustive list of proof-texts for every psychological problem known to man.

redeemable by Jesus Christ. So even where you've got a well-defined physiological origin for a disorder, which many of them don't have, you've always got a spiritual work to do also.

There's a 19th century English medical proverb dealing with diagnosis that goes: "If you hear hoof beats outside, think horse not zebra." Obviously the context is London not Nairobi! Here's how I apply that in counselling: if you meet a human being you must first think "image of God, fallen, and redeemable". Think "horse". Think of that as a large circle that includes all human beings. So, everybody has "horse problems", as it were. Within that large circle is a smaller circle of "zebra problems". I would put the zebra problems inside the horse doctor's circle. So pastoral ministry, working towards conversion and sanctification, works with everybody, even those whom zebra doctors can also help.

What are the main problems in treating emotional disorders as a disease?

The first major problem is that it skews your interpretation of what's wrong with

the person. We need to remember that none of our observations about a person is ever neutral. Our observations are shaped by our assumptions, which provide the framework for our analysis and understanding of the person's problems. The effect of a theory on our observation of people's problems is quite marked. The best thing you can say is that our theory makes us look for things. That can be good because it gets us hunting and turning up our microscopes. But it can also cause us to miss things as well.

The second thing that we need to remember is that our theory puts blinkers on us so that we only see certain pieces of information. The downside is that our theory may cause us to exclude bits, which are equally or more important.

The third effect of having a deficient theory is that it distorts everything we see. So everything that humanistic psychologists like Freud or Rogers see is distorted to some lesser or greater extent by their worldview, particularly their understanding of human nature and personality. Naturally, if they don't believe that people are sinners, that will profoundly affect their view of life. It colors every single fact about the person.

The final point that I would make about having a deficient theory is that such a theory actually creates a fabrication of the facts. One of the classic cases in recent psychotherapy has been the whole "repressed memory syndrome". This is the theory that childhood sexual molestation or some form of satanic ritual abuse is the cause of the victim's problems.

Tragically, this "repressed memory" theory encourages malleable and suggestible people to produce the requisite data that points the finger of sexual abuse at family members and other close relatives. It has unleashed a monster, causing tremendous heartache in families who have always loved their children and have never molested them. Of course, I'm not saying that there haven't been cases where children have been sexually abused. However, a theory that suggests that a person's sins or troubles in life are the result of being sinned against sexually not only fails the test of Scripture, but, like any false theory, it creates fabricating effects on the data itself.

David Powlison teaches practical theology at Westminster Seminary, counsels at the Christian Counselling & Educational Foundation (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA), and edits the Journal of Biblical Counselling.

ap

Stumbling down memory lane

Recovered memory raises more questions than it answers.

One of the most harmful practices to have emerged in the field of psychological counselling in the last two decades has been the attempt by some counsellors to attach significance to the phenomenon of “recovered memories”. These so-called memories are supposed to relate to instances of sexual abuse that were committed against the victims, usually by their parents or close relatives.

The memories often arise when adults suffering from disorders ranging from arthritis, asthma, depression and anxiety attacks to migraine and weight problems, come under the influence of “recovered memory” therapists who believe that people often carry buried memories of childhood sexual abuse and that abuse, while hidden, is the cause of their current distress.

In recent years, the practice has been the subject of heated

controversy amongst psychiatrists, psychologists, police, lawyers, and social workers. It has also raged in Christian circles and has polarised more than one church denomination. A number of international psychological associations have now criticised the method as being dangerous and unreliable. So too have the courts.

While sexual abuse of children remains a significant problem in our community, there are grave dangers in relying upon unproven and unreliable psychological tools such as “recovered memory” therapy. Charles Waterstreet is a barrister who has specialised in this particular area. In this article, which originally appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1996, he reviews *Talk of the Devil: Repressed Memory and the Ritual Abuse Witch Hunt* by Richard Guillatt.

Any investigation into the concept of repressed memory is like peeling an endless onion. Not only is there no real centre, it makes you want to cry.

Consider this. Thirty-something Barbara Emmett and Mindy Grant, daughters of respected and hard-working Clive Moore, suddenly in therapy, recall childhood events they had completely forgotten. So far nothing uncommon. But Barbara and Mindy remember up to 17 years of ritualistic, sadistic and relentless sexual abuse, beginning when they were three or four years old.

Barbara remembers being raped by her father, grandfather, uncle and two brothers. At other times she was sexually assaulted with crucifixes, scissors, matches, screwdrivers, drills, axes, hammers, soldering irons. Occasionally she was tied to swings in playgrounds or hung between trees and sexually abused. Hot wires were applied to her feet. She was told her teddy would be cut up if she spilt the beans. In her teens she became pregnant and dad performed a crude abortion. Eight years elapsed. Barbara had her own family. She casually visited dad in 1989 for lunch and he wrapped a telephone cord around her neck and raped her. She immediately forgot this incident for a number of years.

Mindy recalls being painted with blood

Charles Waterstreet

while chants of “lambs were slain” echoed around her. Knives and kitchen utensils were used sexually on her. Snakes were dropped onto her naked body. Dad held a knife to her cat’s throat to demand sex. She was tied to netball posts and over water boreholes. The Moore family may not be the Brady Bunch, but are they the Addams Family of sex?

Any confrontation between dad and his daughters about these matters was always going to be tricky. Instead of Henry Kissinger, the daughters bring their therapist. To put it mildly, dad is gobsmacked. He denies it all, as in turn do all the other alleged perpetrators and witnesses. The sisters’ therapist tells dad that he himself should undergo treatment to recover his repressed memories. What’s a father to do? Pay the therapists to incriminate himself? There is not a scintilla of consistent scarring or other evidence, current or contemporaneous, to support the repressed memories. The crimes existed in a vacuum of memorylessness. The sisters were victims without crimes.

The above is a thumbnail sketch of the infamous Bunbury case in Western

Australia. Richard Guillatt, a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, uses this case as the centrepiece of his thoroughly researched and revealing examination of recovered memory in sexual abuse and satanic ritual in Australia. Around this maypole revolve lawyers, psychotherapists, survivors, revivers and members of the recovered memory and satanic abuse industry. Guillatt reserves his most trenchant criticism for these industrialists of the repressed mind. These types of allegations are rampant, travelling the continent from coast to coast, from couch to court with the speed and viral spread of myxomatosis.

In one Victorian case, a brave but dissenting judgment by Justice Ashley spoke of the “public and legislative” fervour which was rendering alleged evidence of such child sexual complaints almost unchallengeable.

Not only do children lie, as every parent knows, but so do inner children, not mendaciously or deliberately but mistakenly, by mimicry or osmosis. Guillatt exposes the legions who call themselves memory workers, many of them untrained, unsupervised and unqualified. Powerful lobby groups are aligned against common sense.

Guillatt demands the legislature step in.

The practitioners use a variety of alleged memory retrievers. My personal favourite is the work of a husband-wife team of psychotherapists who, through “age regression”, found the truth behind an alcoholic patient’s drinking problem was that he died of thirst in a previous life. One of the Bunbury therapists practised “body memory”, transforming a recent pain in Barbara’s big toe into the spark of a memory that her toe had been clamped in a wrench by her father.

All of this would be the stuff of Stephen King were it not fracturing thousands of Australian families and splintering the substance of society. Guilliat is puzzled that Australian ritual-abuse hysteria unfolded several years after its appearance in the United States and Europe, where its validity is now seriously questioned. He should not be surprised. Our daily diet of foreign films, television and fashion only filters through to our fatal but fertile shores months, even years, after their appearance overseas.

A personal observation. Guilliat writes: “Lawyers involved in such cases find the truth a messy concept which complicates their job of advocacy ... the

goal is winning.” Frankly, truth is the only beacon in such cases. The lawyer implores the jury to use its common sense in tracking down the lie. Many times they fail. This book explains why.

Guilliat adds the Australian experience to a body of substantial international works. The catechism of recovered-memory believers is the million-selling *The Courage to Heal—A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* by Ellen

Bass and Laura Davis. While not, of course, *Mein Kampf*, it is, according to Guilliat, a very dangerous tool in the wrong hands. For example, they write, “If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were.” The authors are being sued by countless parents and recovered-memory survivors.

No one doubts that there are legitimate grievances and passions. Repressed and false memories are not a one-sided

debate. Guilliat’s book, however, shows some therapists’ ends are as unjustified as their means. In NSW, at least, the Supreme Court has turned the tide against such cases in *R v Tillott*. The NSW Court of Criminal Appeal dispensed with the reasoning in the Bunbury case with almost contemptuous dispatch.

The irony of recovered-memory and ritual-abuse survivors and therapists is that they now behave like a cult themselves, shunning outsiders and declaring war on mankind. As with UFO sightings and alien abductions in the 1970s and 1980s, one asks, where on earth are all these satanists meeting? As my grandmother used to say when I caught a cold as a child – it’s all in the head.

Guilliat may not expose why such memories occur but he does graphically illustrate their repercussions. This book is compulsory reading for all students of law, medicine and policing.

Charles Waterstreet is a Sydney barrister, and author of Precious Bodily Fluids and Repeating the Leaving. This article first appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald. ^{ap}

Recovered-memory survivors and therapists now behave like a cult themselves, shunning outsiders.

Sick at heart

Often there is a better cure for depression than medicine.

When you talk about medication and other somatic treatments for depression, you often encounter strong opinions. For those who have been dramatically helped by medication, these treatments are *the* answer. For those who believe that medication masks sin, these treatments are, at best, considered to be ill-advised.

They have even been interpreted as a modern expression of pagan sorcery.

Those who opt for these more extreme positions tend to either ignore Scripture or use Scripture legalistically, asking it to speak more precisely than it intends. This brief, practical review will attempt to steer a course between those who put their hope in medication, and those who believe that Scripture prohibits any pharmacological treatment.

Edward Welch

From a medical perspective, all we really know is that “more research is needed”. Although there has been extensive research over the past 20 years, no biological theory has clear empirical support. There are two propositions, however, on which there is broad agreement.

First, the best known proposition is that physical treatments, most notably antidepressant medication, can lighten depression in some people. In fact, there are times when the reduction in depressive symptoms can be dramatic. This is undeniable.

Even those who oppose medication would agree that depressive symptoms can be affected by physical treatments. They themselves often recommend various physical treatments. For example, although they might oppose medication, they might suggest more consistent sleep patterns, physical exercise, or a balanced nutritional program. These are all physical treatments that, for some people, might carry a benefit. We would expect physical treatments to affect some symptoms of depression. If depression had no accompanying physical complaints, then physical treatments would be irrelevant.

For example, if someone struggles with guilt from sexual sin, a physical treatment cannot alleviate the guilt unless it erases past memories. Only confession of sin to someone who forgives can quiet the conscience.

But depression includes physical symptoms. Similar to fear, it usually has spiritual roots, but its physical manifestations include sleep problems, change in appetite, lethargy, poor concentration, and even the actual *feeling* of depression.

Physical treatments can impact these physical symptoms.

The physical treatment that has received the most attention is psychiatric medication. The present-day assumption, in both lay and professional circles, is that such medication is the most helpful form of treatment, especially when depression is severe. The evidence for this assumption, however, is lacking.

Perhaps the assumption is fuelled by our admiration of science and technology more than by reliable observations. That is, we are prone to believe that a chemically sophisticated drug is much more effective than a friend who loves in word and deed.

Recognising that talk therapies and even ordinary relationships may help as much as medication, the mental health community has proposed that for more severe, “clinical” depression, medication has a distinct advantage. Yet even this supposed advantage for medication is questionable.

One reason that medication may be, at times, more effective than non-medical approaches is that medication is *perceived* to be highly effective by most people; therefore, it oftentimes *will* be highly effective. In other words, even if medication is not truly superior to other treatments, its placebo effect tends to inflate its claims.

When you are given psychiatric medication, it must first be prescribed by doctors who have significant prestige in this culture. Furthermore, when you consult them, they will speak with great confidence that medication is *the* treatment and it *will* alleviate depression.

Given this introduction, our expectations are very high, and results are likely to be exaggerated. Would psychiatric drugs be as effective if they were sold over-the-counter, without any prescription, and therefore without the accoutrements of medical prestige? Probably not. Without the hype, they would likely be similar to zinc lozenges for the common cold in that they might help some people, but results would vary, and many people wouldn't bother taking them when they had symptoms.

Researchers, of course, try to account

for and minimise this placebo effect. But even the double-blind studies of modern pharmacology are not enough to neutralise expectations. Too often, participants in drug studies can detect, by way of certain side effects, whether or not they are being given the active drug or the inert substance of the control group. Their expectations of a beneficial response then rise, enhancing the effect of the drug.

Of particular relevance to counsellors is how medical treatments compare to secular counselling. Even in cases of severe depression, careful analysis of the evidence does not demonstrate the superior effectiveness of medication over counselling.

Aspirin is an apt analogy for psychiatric medication: it can alleviate symptoms, but doesn't treat an underlying cause.



Why is this relevant to Christian counsellors? Too often, Christian counsellors have a vague suspicion that there is a magic, awe-inspiring medical treatment for depression, and they become less confident in Scripture's ability to speak deeply to the heart of depression. The reality is that medication, on the average, does not surpass the benefit of psychological (non-medical) approaches, with which biblical counselling could be loosely clustered.

Furthermore, neither medical *nor* psychological treatments provide the benefit of dealing with the deep issues of the heart. Assuming that psychiatric medications can bring some alleviation of symptoms in some depressed people, another question is, “Why?” In short, even though the serotonin hypothesis is widely accepted, we do not know why psychiatric medications alleviate symptoms in some people. The brain is simply too complex and our knowledge of its mechanics is too primitive. This year, serotonin is the favoured neurotransmitter. In previous years it was dopamine. In future years it will be another brain chemical.

Most researchers acknowledge that we simply don't know why psychiatric med-

ications work. And since we don't know why medication alleviates symptoms in some people, we don't know why it *doesn't* help some people; we don't know why, for any individual person, some medications are more effective than others; we don't know why medications that are chemically different have a similar effectiveness; we don't know why antidepressants seem to be equally effective with seemingly unrelated problems such as obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour; and we don't know why the antidepressants so often lose their effectiveness over time.

At this point, aspirin is an apt analogy for psychiatric medication in that it can alleviate symptoms but it doesn't treat an underlying cause.

One argument for psychiatric medication that has emerged in the culture of managed care is that medication is simply more efficient than talking and persevering with someone. With insurance companies looking for a cost-effective treatment, medication seems to be the likely candidate.

This perceived cost-effectiveness, however, is not as clear as it appears. Those who have taken psychiatric medications know that trying to find a helpful medication is a trial-and-error process. For example, you try a medication for two to six weeks, and, if it doesn't work, you switch to another. Or, perhaps you will add a medication to one that seems only minimally helpful. Then, when you have unwanted side effects, or when the medication is no longer effective, you switch again. In other words, pharmacological treatments only appear to be very simple, as if you just have to take a pill. However, for many people, the drug approach puts a person on a treatment treadmill that is hard to stop.

To summarise, the first proposition is true: physical treatments, most notably antidepressant medication, can lighten depression in some people. However, the claims for some of the physical treatments tend to be exaggerated.

The second proposition consists of the well-established observation that some known medical diseases can have depressing effects. Table 1 lists some of the more notable ones.

Depressions from known diseases tend to differ from other depressions in two ways. First, they have a clear medical cause, in contrast to the more common depression that has no distinguishing characteristics on medical diagnostic tests.

Second, they can usually be distinguished on the basis of the depressive experience. For example, depression from a definite medical condition tends to be more simple. It rarely includes the hopelessness, suicidal thinking, or self-loathing that are present when depression is, in some way, an expression of the heart.

Depression that is the result of a definite medical condition is rare when compared to the actual incidence rate of all depression, but counsellors should still be alert for it. You need to look for someone who complains about depression but has no previous history of depression, has a known disease, or has been taking medications.

Contained in these two propositions is a world of technical data and new terms. Counsellors, however, do not have to be experts on the most current medical treatments for depression. It is enough to know the following.

All depression needs more active spiritual attention.

Most depression, at the very least, will be lightened as those who are depressed attend to their own hearts, the knowledge of God, trust, and obedience.

Dozens of physical treatments have been effective in relieving some of the physical features of depression. The most popular include exercise, antidepressant medication, bright lights for those who have a seasonal rhythm to their depression, and electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). Others that are effective with smaller numbers of people include diet



and nutrition, and short-term solutions such as staying up all night in order to try to correct sleep rhythms.

The question for counsellors and friends is, when do we encourage others to consider or pursue medical treatments? Do we suggest that they consult a psychiatrist immediately, while we counsel them? Should we even raise the issue? The reality is that the question will rarely come up.

Medical treatments for depression are so well known that people will probably be taking medication before they talk to counsellors. Or else their friends or family will quickly suggest antidepressants or another physical treatment.

First, if they are already taking medication, it is not necessary to do anything except be aware. To argue that antidepressants are wrong would, I believe, be legalistic. It would ask Scripture to speak more specifically to the issue than it intends. So it would most likely be outside a minister's bounds (or a friend's) as outside his or her level of competence to encourage them to stop or change their medication. Counsellors have something to offer that is better than medicine, so they should focus on Christ and the encouragement and application of Scripture.

One issue that we will want to address is when we find the depressed person investing salvific hope in medication. This is certainly an issue of the heart. Christians don't put their hope in anything this side of heaven. To do so is idolatry. It is certainly appropriate to be thankful for the alleviation of some difficult symptoms, but there is a deeper thankfulness, embedded in the finished work of Christ, that should shape our emotional lives.

We would do well to consider how depressed people are doing while taking the medication, compared with how they were doing when they were not taking the medication. If they are doing worse or having deleterious side effects, we should encourage them to speak to the prescribing physician.

Second, if those who are depressed are not taking medication, it is not necessary to do anything. This doesn't mean that we believe medication is wrong, it simply means that our job is to focus on the heart, on Christ, and on renewal of a person's thinking and lifestyle. That is the greatest salve that we can offer.

Third, if those who are depressed ask about medication, ask them to consider first a season where they allow their

TABLE 1
Medical problems with known depressing effects

Parkinson's disease
hyperthyroidism
strokes
hypothyroidism
multiple sclerosis
Cushing's disease
epilepsy
premenstrual depression
head trauma
viral or bacterial infections
lupus (SLE)
certain types of headaches
vitamin deficiencies
heart disease
post-surgical changes
side effects of medication
AIDS
chronic fatigue
hepatitis

hardship to challenge and increase their faith, in which they say, "Lord, search me", and they meet with a spiritual mentor.

The benefit of postponing medication is that it is easier to know what proves helpful if you introduce one "treatment" at a time. For example, if the person immediately began taking medication and, after a few weeks, started to show a lessening of symptoms, we wouldn't know if it were from spiritual changes or medication. If the changes were inaccurately attributed to the medication, then the person could end up taking unhelpful medication for years.

When in doubt about how to manage people we are counselling with regard to medication, get advice from other pastors, counsellors, physicians, or laypeople who have both biblical wisdom and experience with depression. The question with medication and other physical treatments is not, "is this treatment right or wrong?" The question is, "is this treatment wise?" As such, the guidelines of wisdom apply. These include careful investigation of the treatment, seeking counsel from an experienced, wise group, and, most importantly, walking in the fear of the Lord.

This article is reprinted from the Journal of Biblical Counselling (Vol.18, No.3, 2000).



Repentance and lament

Recognising ourselves is part of praise, insists Marva Dawn.

Frequently as God reveals himself, our response will be like that of Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am ruined” (6:5, Martin Luther translated it, “I am annihilated”). The more we encounter the holy God in our worship, the more we will recognise our utter sinfulness and be driven to repentance. This, too, is an essential part of our praise.

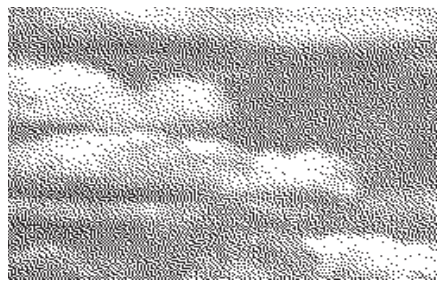
I have heard pastors disparage such hymn lines as “for such a worm as I”, and I disagree heartily (and “mindedly”!). I need to know that I am a worm – otherwise I will never experience the incredible freedom and immense joy of forgiveness. Our culture’s emphasis on self-esteem

confuses us. We forget that a true sense of ourselves begins with the dialectical interplay of God’s infinite grace addressed to our desperate need for it. Then grace sets us free for the most genuine and highest self-esteem.

But when darkness strikes again, my efforts to control it pervert personal worship and make God too small.

Some of the best worship gifts are time, silence, and words devoted to repentance within the genuine praise of God. Praise encompassing all of God’s character provides a safe haven within which we can face ourselves and acknowledge the truth of our brokenness, rebellions, and idolatries. This is not possible if

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



God is not the subject and object of our praise. If we focus on ourselves, we don’t have enough of the truth of God to reveal our inadequacy and alienation.

After worshipping with Christians in Ukraine, Henri Nouwen noted the predominantly penitential nature of Eastern spirituality and its deep recognition of human sinfulness. He exclaims, “There is great beauty to this spiritual vision because it shows God’s splendour and grace in the face of human depravity.”

The Church in the West has much to learn from our Eastern sisters and brothers, for “the awareness of human sinfulness hardly exists in the West”. My thesis is that we lack such an awareness because we dumb down the truth of God in false efforts to feel better about ourselves. We do not have enough of God – especially the truth of his wrath in the midst of his love – to experience the exhilarating freedom of confessing our sin and the joyous beauty of forgiveness.

Similarly, we need to have enough of God to let us lament. In our present world, in spite of the cultural optimism of the West, we find ourselves facing the realities of loneliness, unemployment, violence, worldwide political and economic chaos, family disruptions, brokenness and suffering, and the fragmentation of postmodern society.

Keeping God as the subject and object of our worship enables us to deal with the

darkness by lamenting it, by complaining about it. The psalms give us wonderful tools to move from addressing God with pleas, complaints, petitions, and even imprecations to the surprising outcome in our world.


When in worship we encounter God in all his fullness, our urgent desperation can be turned to gratitude and a sense of well-being. We need to learn through Israel’s worship the necessity for laments as well as understand the reasons why contemporary congregations ignore them.

As Walter Bruggemann says: “It is no wonder that that the church has intuitively avoided these psalms. They lead us into a dangerous acknowledgment of how life really is. They lead us into the presence of God where everything is not polite and civil.”

I write this as the chief of sinners. The last several years have brought me one health crisis after another – crippling of a leg and hands, hearing and vision losses, frequent wounds that won’t heal, intestinal dysfunctions, immunity deficiency, nerve deterioration and cancer. Too easily in the darkness I try to be in control, to manage by exercising enough or taking good care.

But when darkness strikes again, my efforts to control it pervert personal worship and make God too small. I need public worship to bring me a holy and merciful God who shows me my sinfulness and yet offers the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. I need worship that lets me lament and find in that cry God’s caring presence. I need an assembly of people who ask God to be God in their lives and thereby proclaim God’s power, faithfulness, and gracious healing.

To praise God in the midst of suffering or confusion is to declare the ultimate “Nevertheless!” It is to cling to faith in a God of grace despite apparent evidence to the contrary.

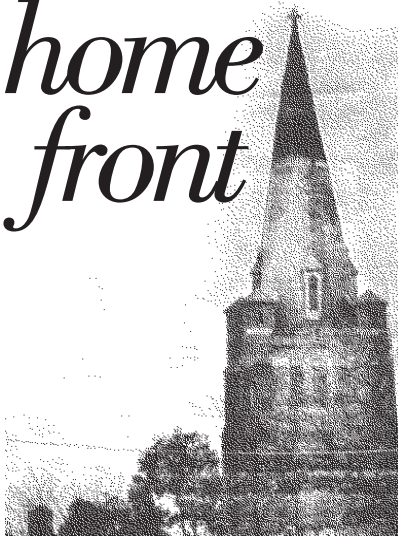
This extract is taken from Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down – A Theology of Worship for a Turn-of-the Century Culture by Marva J Dawn (Eerdmans 1995). 

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Get the logo

The Presbyterian Church of Australia's new logo, approved by the general assembly last year, is available over the Net for downloading, reports **Russell van Delden**, convener of the ad hoc committee on church logo.

The assembly decided. "without disowning the current Crest(s)", to approve and adopt the design and description of the logo as another visual emblem of the Church.

The design reminds us that we need to be "Going forward with the Gospel to Australia". It consists of a vertical, contrasting, stylised cross surrounded by five five-pointed stars in the form of the Southern Cross, positioned on a solid oval angled at 30 degrees.

The oval is a simple and modern shape. Its forward tilting symbolises our church's desire to move out into the world with the gospel. The towering cross symbolises the powerful message of the Gospel. Its central position reminds us that Christ is the centre of the church. The stars roughly form the Southern Cross, the most recognised and universally accepted symbol of Australia. Their five-point design is taken from our Church Crest.

The logo can be accessed at www.iig.com.au/~cns02097/pcalogos.

You can also get to it by following the links on our national church site. The site

provides clear instructions on how to download the various images and place them in your documents.

This site provides a complete range of logos and crests, in colour and black and white, with and without text, for a wide variety of uses. The crests are provided in two formats (Jpeg and Gif) whereas all the logos are provided in three image formats (low resolution Jpeg thumbnail image; high resolution Jpeg image & high resolution EPS image).

Quite a few churches have already successfully used the site to download images for their stationery, outdoor signs and even to print T-shirts.

A 37-year dream

In 1964 the congregation of **Narooma**, a holiday and retirement village on the NSW South Coast, opened a hall and had a dream. One day, under God's hand, they would add a church. Under successive ministries, now **Rev. Peter Barber**, the congregation – and the whole Moruya-Turoos Head-Narooma – had looked to this day. Turoos Head opened a self-help built hall a few years ago; now each congregation has a church and a hall.

On 24 November that dream came true as the **Canberra Presbytery** conducted the opening, with **Rev. C. R. Pass**, immediate past state moderator, Another special guest was the former chairman of Trustees in NSW, **John Mill**. The Trustees had generously granted \$50,000 towards the total project cost of \$120,000.

Of particular interest was how the congregation used the steeply sloped block to advantage. The church was built on top of the hall – bringing the entrance to street level.

Gosford worship centre

The **Gosford Presbyterian Church** has relocated its ministry and worship centre from 17 Mann Street, Gosford to 14-16 Young Street, West Gosford. A final thanksgiving Service was held on Sunday 2 December, when about 250 members and past members praised God for his faithfulness to his people in Gosford over the past 164 years.

The congregation has bought a carpet warehouse in West Gosford and will develop this site for its new ministry and Wwrship Centre. The new building is about three times the size of the previous building and will provide off-street parking for more than 70 cars. The first service was held on Sunday 9 December.

Rev. Chris Balzer preached at the thanksgiving service and **Rev. Rod Mallinson** preached at the celebratory service in the new centre.

Appointments

On 2 December the **Presbytery of Sydney** met at Darlington Public School, Darlington, to induct **Rev. David Thurston** as minister of **Central Sydney Presbyterian Church**. Worship was led by the moderator, **Mr Malcolm Beveridge**, and the Holy Scriptures were expounded by **Rev. Bruce Christian**.

Presbytery appointed David Thurston to Central Sydney 1999 when the congregation was established as a church plant in the inner city suburbs. The work has developed there to the extent that the congregation is now a pastoral charge and has been able to a minister.

On 16 November, **Rev. David Campbell**, former minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, was inducted minister of **St Andrew's, Newcastle (NSW)**.

On 7 December, **Rev. Timothy J. Abbey** was inducted to Bathurst (NSW)

New elders

On 2 December four elders were ordained and inducted at **St Andrews, Port, Macquarie, NSW**: **Mr Peter Charles**; **Mr Carl Learson**; **Mr Brett Locker** and **Mr David Powell**.

Cecil Laurence Miller has been granted the status of Elder Emeritus as from January 1. Mr Miller became an elder at **St Andrew's, Townsville**, on 13 November 1948, and has served as elder most of this time. He still plans to be present at worship each Sunday, health permitting.

Licensed preachers

On 14 December the **Presbytery of Sydney** met at Burwood Presbyterian Church to license **Mr David Enderby**, **Mr David Maher** and **Mr Mark Mitchell** as preachers of the gospel. The moderator, **Rev. Johnnie Li**, led the worship, and **Rev. C.S. Tang** preached.

The presbytery met again on 28 December at **Randwick Presbyterian Church** to license **Mr Wayne Connor**, **Mr Todd Galvin** and **Mr Harrijanto Rusli**. Mr Li led, and **Rev. Craig Tucker** preached.

On 21 December, the **Presbytery of West Melbourne** met at West Footscray

to license **Mr John Brennan**. Moderator **Rev. Cor VanderHorn** led and **Rev. Scott Kroeger** preached. John and his wife Michelle will be to an appointment at Horsham.

Retiring

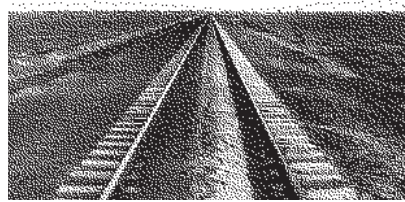
Rev. Colin Alston, minister at Annandale – Leichhardt/Sydney & Welsh has retired from 31 January. **Rev. Geoff McIntyre**, minister at Abbotsford-Five Dock (NSW) has retired from 31 December.

Bush evangelism

Members of Melbourne's **Clifton Hill, Essendon** and **Williamstown Presbyterian Churches** gathered on 17 November for a bush dance with a difference, organised by the Essendon congregation. They wanted it to be an outreach event, and the gospel was presented by Williamstown minister **Bruce Riding** just before supper, so anyone could ask questions without missing any of the dances. He was aided by computer graphics projected on to a big screen. It was a great

night out for several reasons – social, fellowship, recreational, and spiritual.

across australia



Message for men

Australia has not been shielded from the uncertainty and fear that has followed the September attacks in the US. In Britain, it's been reported church attendance is up, as is the number of people reporting to psychologists for counselling. The security, geopolitical, religious and economic fallout from those events has hit home to many men in this country as well.

Against this backdrop, the organisers of the **Men's Katoomba Convention** are preparing for their biggest year yet over the three weekends from 15 February.

"Jesus has a message for men in Australia today" says MKC chairman **Rev. Alan Stewart**. "He does not say "go that way" as he points to the path ahead. He says "follow me" as he calls us to walk on the path behind him. Discipleship will be a strong theme of the 2002 meetings." Mr Stewart believes the strong Biblical emphasis, and the range of speakers are key reasons many men keep coming back to the convention, year after year.

British pastor **Richard Coekin** is the convention's keynote speaker. Also on the programme is the director of **Pioneers Australia**, **Tim Meyers**. The convention will devote some time to strategies for developing an effective men's ministry in the local Church. Also on the programme is the founding chairman, **Bishop Dudley Foord**.

The silence that kills

In Africa, where sexual matters are mostly discussed in hushed tones, if ever at all, the sheer devastation of HIV/AIDS is bringing us all to the realisation that

silence is perhaps our biggest enemy in this enormous challenge in our history." That's the candid assessment of **Bernice Gatere**, executive director of **Trans World Radio-Kenya**, a pioneer in originating compassionate and life-changing broadcasts that tackle head-on the daunting threat of AIDS. Gatere's appraisal is blunt, but she emphatically states that Africa needs tough love.

In sub-Saharan Africa, at least 10 per cent of those aged between 15 and 40 are infected, and in several southern African states, the number is at least 20 per cent. Several countries report that their average life expectancy is plummeting at a frightening pace.

Trans World Radio-Africa has been breaking the silence about HIV/AIDS since the early 1990s. Its involvement in fighting AIDS began with a special on the epidemic through its developmental program, *Africa Challenge*, which links the gospel to a broad range of humanitarian issues. A sub-project, *The Honey That Kills*, was born in the mid-1990s, not only proclaiming sexual purity and marital fidelity, but also God's comfort and peace for those who are infected or affected – for everyone is now one or the other.

Thanks a million

Lifeline Sydney volunteers have provided more than one million hours of counselling to people in need during the past 38 years. The telling figures were revealed by Sydney manager **Anne Lenehan Jones** at a recent graduation of 95 telephone counsellors at Wesley Mission.

"Although that's pretty impressive it's not just about statistics, it's about our volunteers. It is those people who volunteered countless hours of service in a whole range of ways – as counsellors, as facilitators in the training and more recently as fundraising volunteers."

Lifeline receives more than 55 calls a day, ranging from people in crises such as domestic violence and suicide to people who just have a need to know that someone is there to listen. Volunteers have to undertake 70 hours of training followed by supervised telephone counselling shifts. After this they commit up to 100 hours of service over a year. Volunteers must also have "life experience".

Penetrating voice

The lifetime desire of an Australian Chinese was realised recently when

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Australian-based radio **Voice International** began broadcasting the Gospel into Asia, including China, through its broadcast centre at Maroochydore, Queensland. **Mrs Annie Yum**, who was born in China, is the senior producer/presenter of the Chinese Mandarin language program for Voice International.

The signal is being transmitted through the former Radio Australia transmission facilities at the Cox Peninsula near Darwin acquired by Voice International and, while the station now broadcasts 10 hours a day, it is on course to broadcast 24 hours a day in three languages – Mandarin, Indonesian and English – within months.

Stott to visit

Christian leader **John Stott** will be making an extensive tour of Australia in July. The man once described by **Billy Graham** as “the most respected evangelical clergyman in the world” is now over 80, and believes that during his remaining time of ministry he should give some priority to sharing his concern for the needs of the Church in the developing world.

Dr Stott is visiting Australia from 5 to 23 July in cooperation with the newly formed **Langham Partnership**, an international organisation he established more than 20 years ago to equip leaders, provide evangelical literature and train preachers in the developing world. He will visit Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra and Perth, accompanied by **Dr Chris Wright**, recently principal of All Nations Christian College, north of London, and now international ministry director of Langham Partnership.

For more information, contact Wendy Toulmin, Langham Partnership (Australia), PO Box 530, Springwood, NSW 2777; Tel/fax: 61 2 4751 9036; email: toulmin@mis.net.au

2CH turns 70

Sydney’s easy listening music station **2CH** is to celebrate 70 years of broadcasting. The **Council of Churches** secured a license and began broadcasting on 15 February 1932.

Originally, Sir Frederick Stewart and his family provided equipment and property which was taken over by Amalgamated Wireless Australia (AWA) beginning a long partnership of

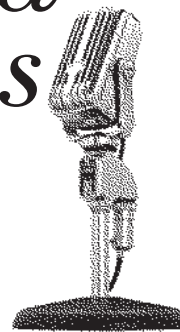
nearly 60 years. The Council of Churches now operates under an agreement with Radio 2CH giving it the same amount of time for its Christian programming and community involvement, continuing to be the voice of the member Churches.

There have been many changes in format through the years, none so important as the introduction of **GOOD MUSIC** in 1974 that led to the station topping the ratings in several surveys. Since then the number of radio stations in the Sydney market has increased and the FM band introduced. 2CH Easy 1170 retains a consistent place in the market, regularly refining its music.

Christian messages are presented in every main session Monday to Saturday by **David Reay, Bob Smith, David Kerr** and **John Edmondstone**. The ‘Council of Churches Comments’ are presented by **Margaret Rodgers**, head of Anglican Media. Sunday is a high rating day for 2CH. All through the day there are devotional spots, book reviews, promotion of the Christian events and news of the member Churches.

A thanksgiving Service will be held on Sunday 17 February at 3pm in **St Andrews Cathedral**, Sydney Square, led by the acting Dean of the Cathedral, **Archbishop Harry Goodhew**. **Rev. Ross Clifford**, Principal of Morling College, will preach, and there will be music by the Cathedral Singers. 2CH personalities will take part in the service.

world news



Gaining ground

For the first time in almost half a century, a substantial majority of Americans see religion as gaining influence in public life. The shift in public perception is both sudden and dramatic. The number of Americans who say religion now has a higher profile in society has more than doubled just since the beginning of this year – a leap that can probably be attributed, at least in part, to Sept. 11 and its aftermath.

This viewpoint – which, according to a nationwide survey, jumped dramatically from 37 per cent in March to 78 per cent in November – is shared by virtually all demographic and religious groupings.

“The widespread influence of religion is now more visible, more welcome, and more diverse,” says **Charles Haynes** of the **Freedom Forum’s First Amendment Centre**.

The Christian Science Monitor

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Nearer to God

A fifth of Europeans questioned in an international survey say the September 11 attacks in the United States brought them "closer to religion", while almost half now claim to have "changed priorities". Three-quarters of those surveyed said their family was now "most important" to them, with 47 per cent saying that they expected to be more "family-focused" in the future.

The survey, conducted by **Euro RSCG Worldwide**, an international advertising agency network based in New York, also found that 35 per cent of Italians and 16 per cent of Dutch people planned to "focus more on religion" over Christmas.

AIDS drugs

The Church of Uganda's diocese of Namirembe will start providing generic anti-retroviral HIV drugs, according to acting diocesan secretary **Moses Matovu**. Matovu said the drugs would be provided to members of the diocese who test positive with the HIV/AIDS virus.

"We are going to carry out a counselling and testing exercise this month. People who will participate in the testing will join the diocese's post test club," Matovu said. "Those who test positive will get drugs and treatment for the minor infections. We will not discriminate in religion. Every person in the diocese will benefit." Anti-retroviral drugs are given to HIV/AIDS patients to boost their immunity and prolong their lives.

Matovu said a United Kingdom-based non-governmental organisation, **Christian Aid**, will fund the program of providing HIV/AIDS drugs until March. "As we provide the drugs, we shall also counsel the patients, teach them positive living skills and train them in income-generating activities. This will make the victims responsible and useful citizens," he said.

Mosque fears

Leaders of the Christian churches in Jerusalem are alarmed at plans for a new mosque in Nazareth on state land in front

of the **Shrine of the Annunciation**. In November they called on the Israeli government to "revoke without further delay its decision." In the statement they said, "We are surprised and distressed to see that promises and assurances given us by the government representatives have not been honoured and that the requests, appeals and protests of the Christian churches in the Holy Land and throughout the world have been treated with virtual contempt."

Bishop Riah Abu Al-Assal of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East joined his colleagues representing the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Maronite, Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Syrian Catholic churches.

Episcopal News Service

Burning Bush

Conservative Christians in the United States say their support for **President George W. Bush** remains strong, based more on the President's personal religious background than any outspoken stands or policies on their top social issues. On social issues, conservative Christians have mixed responses. They were pleased with the naming of **Attorney General John Ashcroft**, a conservative Christian. And they approved of Bush's stated opposition to cloning. His compromise approach to embryonic stem cell research got a muted reaction. But they grumbled about his administration's early abandonment of school vouchers in the education debate, and his efforts to use religious organisations to dispense federal help for the poor drew both support and opposition. Bush has talked little about abortion, though he placed abortion restrictions on US international aid soon after his inauguration.

With a job approval rating close to 90 per cent, they say Bush has the leeway to do more. "He's proven himself to be a bona fide leader with resolve, guts, grit and determination," said Ken Connor, president of the conservative Family

Research Council. "He should apply those same qualities to the domestic agenda." Conservative Christians, estimated at about a fourth of the nation's population, say they have been watching closely to see how Bush will handle their issues — especially the possible nomination of a new justice for the Supreme Court, which could see an opening. "I think Christians overall are pleased with what President Bush has been doing," said Rev. D. James Kennedy, who heads a worldwide ministry from his Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in south Florida. "But we have certain concerns. ... We are concerned that he appoint judges who are pro-life. If he does not do that, it would be tantamount to 'read my lips'."

Associated Press

Budapest vigil

About 70,000 young European Christians gathered in Budapest, Hungary, for a five-day young-adult meeting that ended on New Year's Day. Brothers of the France-based **Taizé** community, which organised the event, encouraged young people not to give up hope and to carry out their Christian faith, at a time of world tensions. The young adults prayed for the suffering in a massive vigil rarely seen in post-Communist Hungary. Hungarians, many of whom are used to more traditional style churches, expressed surprise as they watched the enthusiastic youngsters in metro and bus stations. However Protestants from former Soviet Union countries could expect serious problems when they returned home, *ASSIST News Service* reported. In Russia and other states, non-Orthodox groups are reportedly intimidated by the secret service and police.

Missionary murdered

An American missionary was shot dead near Mbale, in Uganda, on 28 December, reports *The New Vision* newspaper. The Ugandan newspaper said that thugs who broke into his residence about 3.15am gunned down **Mike Stachofsky**, 59.

Mbale Police chief **Celestine Eyagu** said the motive of the murder was not established. He said the thugs demanded money but got nothing. Stachofsky had been working with a Christian organisation assisting people in the rural areas drill wells and install water pumps.

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Censoring Christ

Systematic enmity in the UK has ominous implications.

Premier Radio, London's Christian radio station, has been given a "yellow card" by the Radio Authority. This means that if the station does not mend its ways it could lose its licence. But what foul could a Christian radio station possibly have committed to merit such a booking? To find out, I got hold of the Radio Authority's *Quarterly Complaint Bulletin*.

It makes interesting, and revealing, reading. Like most people, I occasionally find myself offended by material on television or radio. Sometimes I even consider making a formal complaint, but my initial indignation dissipates before I can track down the relevant contact details and find the time in my schedule to write a letter. Consequently, I have often wondered what kind of people actually make formal complaints. There seem to be two main groups: ad hoc complainers and professional complainers. The former inadvertently stumble across material which genuinely offends them and therefore complain; the latter listen for material which they may exploit to promote their agenda.

The case of Premier Radio was particularly baffling. The chances would seem slim of someone casually tuning in to a Christian radio station long enough to hear something offensive, and then having the time and energy to write a letter to the broadcasting authority. But you'd be surprised.

The Radio Authority's bulletin shows that of all the stations receiving complaints, Premier Radio had 14 programming complaints and one advertising complaint lodged against it, which is far more than any other station listed. But I was not prepared for what I spotted next: every single complaint about Premier Radio was from the Mysticism and Occultism Federation. Clearly this was not a case of ad hoc complainers, but rather of blatant professional complainers.

The federation, as I discovered from its website, has five "part-time unpaid volunteers" who monitor the media, particularly Christian media, such as Premier Radio, looking for "unfair" and "offensive" comments which are exclusivistic or

Colin R. Nicholl

"intolerant" of other "spiritualities", such as Satanism, occultism, New Age, magic, astrology and divination.

Apparently these volunteers are so committed that they carry on their activities "at unsociable hours": presumably, when most of us are sound asleep, they are listening to evangelical preachers. Why these sleepless nights? It seems that they are just longing for someone to make some juicy exclusive claim about Christianity, some moral judgment, or some sermonic faux pas (for instance, they made a big deal of one pastor's cheesy joke: "Hinduism, Buddhism, rheumatism"; incidentally, the Radio Authority judged this remark to be "unacceptable" and "serious").

A quick scan of the website uncovers their particular disdain for what they brand "fundamentalism", in which category they insist on placing Premier Radio.



It is disturbing how much mischief can be accomplished by one group of occultists and religious chauvinists acting in the name of religious pluralism.

"Christian fundamentalists", we learn, belong in the same camp as Marxists, Maoists and Nazis – they are all "fanatics" and "Scripture cultists". Indeed, they are xenophobic blasphemers whose thoughts and ideas are "more sinister" than racism in serving as the "impetus for persecution".

Then I discovered that, irony of ironies, the pretext for this group's moni-

toring and complaining is in fact "pluralism". The group that seems hell-bent on removing Premier Radio from the airwaves claims it is actually committed to valuing and respecting the beliefs of others. Indeed, these campaigners for religious censorship claim that their objective is to act as a check to an "Orwellian-type authoritarian state".

One is surprised then to learn just how seriously this group's complaints were taken by the Radio Authority. It seems that between July and September 2001 the Radio Authority received 64 complaints, of which 17 were upheld. Of the 17, it is striking that eight relate to Premier Radio, six complaints against this station having been "upheld" and two having been "partially upheld".

And in a further two cases the authority's acquittal was qualified in terms which indicated a sympathy with the concerns of the occultists. Indeed, the crimes of Premier Radio were such that they were shown the "yellow card" and warned that serious sanctions would be imposed on them if they continued to offend. And the Radio Authority has even pledged to join the occultists in monitoring closely Premier Radio's output.

So why has the Radio Authority taken sides with the occultists against the evangelicals on so many points? Let us examine a representative sample of the occultists' complaints which were upheld. An evangelical minister, Dr Michael Youssef, in a sermon on the lame man at Bethesda, suggested that mainline churches were following a PC agenda and accommodating to secular culture instead of trusting in Jesus alone, "the true redeemer, the true saviour, the only one who can make them whole". He insisted that the only cure for our society was following the word of Jesus Christ. In addition, Dr Youssef expressed his conviction that it was "crazy" to claim that one can be a "practising homosexual" and a "good Christian" at the same time, in view of Paul's teaching in Romans.

Concurring with the occultists' complaint that these comments were "offensive", the Radio Authority judged that they "denigrated the beliefs

of other people” and thus contravened the Programme Code. Aside from the “offence” many mainline Christians might feel at occultists being received as their authoritative representatives, I doubt that many mainline Christians would mind Youssef’s rather innocuous intramural critique. And in regard to his comments on practising homosexuality and the Christian, is it now the case that only those Christians who interpret the Bible as permitting homosexual practice can air their views on radio?

Another well-known evangelical preacher, Dr Charles Swindoll, warned Christians of the dangers of “dabbling in the occult” and advised them to destroy any occult materials in their possession. In advocating this, Dr Swindoll was merely reiterating the counsel of Acts 19:19. However, in a rather fascinating PC judgment, the Radio Authority asserted that “divination” was a part of some religious belief systems, and that Swindoll’s homily was tantamount to denigration of others’ beliefs.

This ruling raises a number of questions: since Satanists worship Satan, is it similarly offensive to portray Satan in negative terms? Since the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks considered themselves to be obeying Allah, is it now denigration of others’ beliefs to denounce them as “evil” and “deceived” and to pro-

nounce that theirs is a “religion of terrorism”?

Yet another preacher said of the sacred books of the major non-Christian religions that: “I cannot pretend to have made a study of these books for myself but I can say, on the authority of reliable students who have, that their content, and the teaching of them, does not begin to compare with the Bible. They are full of superstition and absurdities.”



Charles Swindoll:
“denigration”.

The Radio Authority concluded that this was “totally unacceptable” and a “clear and serious breach” of the Code and the Broadcasting Act (1990), which states that pro-

grammes must not contain “abusive treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination”.

Is it out of the question that such an evaluation as this preacher offered could be regarded as empirically true rather than as a statement of prejudice? I know a significant number who would readily express a similarly negative view of the Christian Bible. Should they be prevented

from communicating their view by radio? And should no consideration be given to the fact that Premier Radio attracts an exclusively evangelical audience?


On this point the Radio Authority is adamant: “Stations must be vigilant not to abuse any religious beliefs whatsoever, regardless of whether the audience at whom the service was aimed might themselves be offended or not.” But they should surely note that none of the complaints cited against Premier Radio were ad hoc.

The authority is making an ass of the broadcasting legislation with its PC judgments which fundamentally undermine the freedom of religious expression for Christians. It is disturbing how much mischief can be accomplished by one group of occultists and religious chauvinists acting in the name of religious pluralism who conspire to look for trouble and report every statement which is capable of being construed as exclusivist.

And their objective? Well, by January Premier Radio has to reapply for its broadcasting licence, which is set to expire in 2003, and all upheld complaints seriously damage its chances of staying on air.

Perhaps it is time the Radio Authority considered whether the yellow card it issued was in fact an embarrassing gaffe. To avoid a repetition of the same, all future complaints relating to religious matters should be entrusted to a sub-committee consisting of trained theologians. Moreover, just as football referees are kept accountable by the Football Association, so the Radio Authority must be kept more accountable by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

We can only hope that the Radio Authority turns back from this petty madness before it goes any further. One parting thought: in the light of this rather pathetic state of affairs, in which the broadcasting legislation is being interpreted in such a remarkably draconian way, what will be made of Part 5 of the government’s anti-terrorism laws, which outlaws with the threat of up to seven years’ imprisonment “insulting words or behaviour likely to stir up hatred against a group of people because of their religious belief”?

Dr Colin R. Nicholl lectures at the Faculty of Divinity of Cambridge University, England. This article is reprinted from Spectator magazine. 

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In plain words

What model do insults and sarcasm in the Bible provide for us?

To insult people is a somewhat precarious activity. For one sinner to have the temerity to criticise another seems presumptuous, and liable to do more harm than good. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that one should hear praise, especially at funerals, that the subject “never said a bad word about anyone”. It reflects a sentiment which is not without merit, but there is also merit in Richard Baxter’s barbed comment: “To do no harm is the praise of a stone, not of a man.”

It is also commonly said that sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, and we must acknowledge that a sneering tone often illustrates well why Proverbs 17:14 was written: “The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.”

Yet, for all that, biblical authors are not unwilling to criticise, and even insult and mock, those who deserve such treatment. In doing so, they occasionally resort to sarcasm.

This raises the issue for the Christian today: when is it appropriate to resort to the use of insults and sarcasm in confronting sinners with the truth claims of the living God? And in what spirit must it be done?

In the contest on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal, the prophet of God thought that a little indulgence in ridicule was appropriate. He mocked the prophets of Baal over the inactivity of their fertility god: “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27). Some Jewish exegetes even took the reference to being busy to mean “busy at the privy”. Whatever the case, these taunts spurred the prophets of Baal to more furious but fruitless activity (1 Kings 18:28).

Perhaps the chapter in the Old Testament which is most saturated with derision is Isaiah 44. Here God is pointing out the folly of idolatry. A man nurtures a tree, then finally cuts it down, for two uses. “Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself; yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; indeed he makes a god and worships it; he



Peter Barnes

makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat; he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.’ And the rest of it he makes into a god, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for you are my god!’” (Isa. 44:15-17).

But Jeremiah 10 is almost as strong: “For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good” (Jer. 10:3-5).

The gods of the nations rank with fuel used for cooking! Sin is not only morally evil but intellectually absurd.

One of the most unforgettable insulting images used in the Old Testament is found in Amos’ portrayal of the high society women of his day: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountains of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring wine, let us drink.’” (Amos 4:1). The picture is savagely drawn, but in every way appropriate. Such a heartless love of luxury called out for fierce denunciation, not a mild expression of disagreement.

Interestingly enough, Psalm 22 refers to the strong bulls of Bashan who had encircled the crucified one (Ps. 22:12).

One needs to be careful not to find irony and sarcasm where it is not. In Jeremiah 28 the false prophet Hananiah predicted that the Babylonian yoke would be broken in two years, not in 70 as Jeremiah had predicted in Jeremiah 25:11. Jeremiah responded: “Amen! The Lord do so; the Lord perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring back the

vessels of the Lord’s house and all who were carried away captive, from Babylon to this place” (Jer. 28:6).

R. K. Harrison considers that Jeremiah was being ironic, but J. A. Thompson is surely correct in taking it all as face value. Jeremiah prophesied doom, but he was not one who desired the woeful day (Jer. 17:16).

Christ himself was perfectly capable of sarcasm when the occasion demanded it. In Mark 7:9 he condemns the Pharisees for setting aside the clear word of God to maintain their pharisaic traditions. The gist of what he says is: “You are making a good job of rejecting the commandment of God...”

Something similar operates in John 4 where Jesus asks the Samaritan woman by the well at Sychar to call her husband and return. She replies that she has no husband, to which Christ responds: “You have well said, ‘I have no husband’, for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (Jn 4:17-18). Clearly, Jesus was raising the subject of her sinful life. By means of a half-truth, the woman was trying to evade his supernatural knowledge of her sins, but Jesus’ gentle sarcasm made the divine scalpel all the more pointed.

Surely too Jesus was being sarcastic when he told the parable of the lost sheep against the scribes and Pharisees, and concluded with the words “I say to you likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7). Calvin took at face value the reference to the 99 who need no repentance, and said it meant those who were genuinely converted, and so did not need to repent for the first time. More convincing is the view of William Hendriksen and J. C. Ryle who thought

In Matthew 23 Christ unleashes an onslaught of withering invective against the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and distorted values.

that the 99 referred to “people who think themselves righteous and just, like the Pharisees, and fancy they need no repentance”.

In Matthew 23 Christ unleashes an onslaught of withering invective against the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and distorted values. It no doubt hit its mark, and it is revealing that it also offends the inclusivist sensibilities of the arch-liberal Episcopalian bishop, John Shelby Spong, who, while claiming to be a Christian who loves the Bible, criticised Christ for being “narrow-minded, vindictive, and even hypocritical”.

Admittedly, Matthew 23 is not something to be repeated every Sunday morning, but it does reflect Christ’s holy exasperation with the hardened unbelief of those who had seen more than to convince them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ. As Spurgeon put it, “he is not the most loving who speaks the smoothest words”.

The slanging match between the Pharisees and the man born blind in John 9 is also revealing. Whereas the man’s parents had capitulated meekly for fear of being put out of the synagogue (Jn 9:18-23), the man himself proves to be quite a lively debater who refuses to take a backward step. Perceiving the corrupt motives of the Pharisees, he mocks the nation’s religious leaders: “Do you also want to become his disciples?” (Jn 9:27). He was reviled for his trouble (v.28), as the Pharisees claimed to be Moses’ disciples whereas they did not know where Jesus was from. This draws from the man born

blind all his considerable powers of sarcasm: “Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where he is from; yet he has opened my eyes!” (v.30). It was a fearless, if not altogether tactful, speech, and it led to the man’s removal from the synagogue, although our Lord then found him, and he came to saving faith in Christ (vv.34-38).

On one occasion the disciples tried to engage in a little gentle irony at Christ’s expense. When the woman with the issue



**Jerome:
intemperate**

of blood touched the hem of Christ’s garment, Jesus asked who touched him (Mk 5:30). To his disciples, this was a silly question because there were people crowding all around him. They made their views known (Mk 5:31), but Jesus ignored them, and concen-

trated on the needs of the woman.

The apostle Paul too was capable of sarcasm and mockery when appropriate. He is none too gentle in Galatians 5:12, where he attacks those who were advocating a gospel of justification by faith in Christ plus circumcision. Paul’s blood was boiling: “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!” The KJV and NKJV, along with William Ramsay and J. B. Phillips, interpret Paul to be saying that he wishes that those who were troubling the

Galatian Christians to cut themselves off, but the Greek text and the overall context favour the harsher reading.

Jerome offered the translation: “Tell those who are disturbing you I would like to see the knife slip.” It is clear that the great apostle is being serious, but not literal.

Paul’s Corinthian correspondence provides many other examples of the use of the studied insult or biting sarcasm. There is obvious irony in Paul’s comparison between his estimation of himself and the Corinthians’ estimation of themselves: “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured!” (1 Cor. 4:8-10). The NIV has emphasised the sarcasm by inserting a “so” into the text: “We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ!”

Before the cross, the self-sufficient triumphalism of the Corinthians was totally out of place. Any biblical theology of glory must be derived from a theology of humiliation.

If anything, Paul is even more devastating in his sarcasm in 2 Corinthians 10-13 as he battles the false apostles who have sought to undo his work in Corinth. Paul was obviously reluctant to speak of his authority and thus appear to be boasting, but the activities of the false apostles left him no choice. Hence he writes: “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12).

Later, he lampoons the Corinthians themselves: “For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.” Then, in exasperation, Paul offers a mock apology: “To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that” (2 Cor. 11:19-21). Another example, though not all see it as sarcasm, is found in the next chapter: “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you;

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for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.”

Down through the ages a number of Christians have spoken very vigorously, and indulged in sarcasm and invective, without always hitting the mark. One of the most obvious examples is Jerome, who lived from about 331 to 420. He possessed a deep need for friendship, but had a terrible capacity for falling out with those who were once his friends, and then attacking them in most intemperate language. When his Latin translation of the Gospels was criticised, he claimed that this criticism came from “asses with two legs”.

When Jovinian tried to argue against some of the extremes of Christian asceticism, Jerome ridiculed his book as “vomit which he has thrown up”. Pelagius (a huge man) was attacked as a “big, bloated Alpine dog”. At times Jerome’s unbridled language embarrassed those who might have leaned to his side of the argument. It was his public and acrimonious dispute with his erstwhile friend Rufinus which led Jerome to new heights – or depths – in verbal abuse. He attacked Rufinus in every way: “So great is your purity that the devils sniff noisily at your vests and underpants.”

He continued to denounce “the Scorpion” and the “Grunting Pig” until 411 when, after Rufinus’ death, Jerome could breathe a sigh of relief: “The many-headed Sea-serpent has at last ceased to hiss against me.” Small wonder that Augustine could lament the fragility of human ties, and ask Jerome: “Into whose breast can confiding love now pour itself without reserve?”

Jerome specialised in zoological terms of abuse. There is no shortage of these in the Bible. Psalm 22 refers to bulls (v.12), a lion (v.13), and dogs (v.16), as well as the lion’s mouth and the horns of the wild oxen (v.21). John the Baptist condemns the Pharisees and Sadducees: “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Mt. 3:7). In Matthew 23, Jesus declares God’s woe upon the scribes and Pharisees as ‘blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel’ (v.24) and as “serpents, brood of vipers” (v.33). He once referred to Herod Antipas as “that fox” (Lk 13:32). Those who are outside the New Jerusalem are dogs (Rev. 22:15), while those who profess Christ and then fall away are likened to a dog which returns to its own vomit or a washed sow which then wallows in the mire (2 Pet. 2:22). The difference is that the Bible can be fierce, but, unlike

Jerome at his worst, it is never mean-spirited and vain.

Martin Luther at times went beyond the bounds in his condemnation of his opponents. In 1545 he published his *Depiction of the Papacy* which consisted of nine illustrations, all of them coarse. In a graphic way, they were meant to depict the diabolical origins of the papacy and its supporters. It is probably best not to describe these illustrations but R. W. Scribner’s comment is fair and just: “The reader who squirmed uncomfortably at the distastefulness of some of the imagery in his little work has probably got his message.”

Luther was quite capable of delicate spiritual insight, remarkable common sense, and brutal and coarse invective, sometimes in the same work, and sometimes even on the same page. His *Table Talk* is especially full of this strange mixture of qualities.

Many years ago I taught English literature at a high school, and once had to work my way with a class of senior students through Evelyn Waugh’s marvelous little satiric work *The Loved One*. Set in California, the novel revolves around a pet cemetery and crematoria. At one stage, a Mr Heinkel is negotiating with Dennis Barlow of the Happier Hunting

The bible is not afraid to engage in ridicule, sarcasm and insulting language whenever the occasion requires.

Ground over Arthur, his wife’s dead dog. Although the Heinkels are not religious, they would like a religious service, complete with the symbolic release of a white dove, for their deceased hound. Barlow offers further comfort: “And every anniversary a card of remembrance is mailed without further charge. It reads: Your little Arthur is thinking of you in heaven today and wagging his tail.” Heinkel responds: “That’s a very beautiful thought, Mr Barlow.”

One might have hoped that the satire was clear enough and savage enough, but, no, one sweet young 16-year-old looked up at me, and mooned: “But it is a very beautiful thought.” The triumph of sentimentality has made life difficult for satirists.

Whatever can be said about the Bible, it is certainly not bland. It is not afraid to engage in ridicule, sarcasm and insulting language whenever the occasion requires. But those who try to imitate its style in criticising people need to beware. Tertullian could be vigorous and humorous, but Jerome was often rude rather than barbed. Luther at his best was superb, but at his worst was embarrassing.

As the apostle Paul says: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). Salt is not the same as wit, but it is certainly not insipid. It stings and bites, but it also heals.

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

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A portrait of emptiness

How a picture's absence kept a mission to Moscow alive.

In May 1991, I flew to Moscow to investigate a job opportunity that a friend of mine had heard about through a contact in Russia. Having just graduated with a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), I was ready and eager to serve God in Moscow as an academic missionary. The Moscow Textile Institute offered me a position to teach undergraduate English, but they wanted to meet me first and have an interview.

The day after I arrived in Moscow, I had an appointment to meet the vice rector to negotiate my salary and the terms of my contract. His office was in the newest and most modern building on campus. I was impressed because it was one of the few buildings on campus that had a working elevator.

I remember walking into the office and immediately seeing a giant portrait of Lenin over the vice rector's desk. The ceilings in the room were quite high and the enormous painting took up most of the wall space behind the desk. I stood there amazed.

The vice rector came up behind me, leaned over my shoulder and declared, "This picture of Lenin will never come down." I smiled, awkwardly, wondering why in the world he would think I cared about his office décor. The painting's content didn't matter to me; I was just stunned by its size.

On August 19, 1991, the Soviet Empire tumbled — not in the blood bath everyone had predicted, but rather quietly and with few casualties. However, as a result of the changes in government, life in the former Soviet Union became transitional at best, and chaotic at worst. It was very difficult to find food, clothing and products of any kind. Most of the trains and trucks that for years had brought goods to Moscow had ceased to supply the capital with much needed food and produce as a symbol to the city that elitism would no longer be tolerated.

Some things in the city though remained unchanged. For example, my classes started on time. The autumn semester began on 1 September 1991, but



Teri McCarthy

there were no textbooks, electricity was sporadic and there was a shortage of chalk. Students came to class undernourished, confused by the political changes and worried about their futures.

Life there made me very exhausted. I lost 45 pounds in the first four months, because food was so difficult to come by. Bread lines lasted as long as six hours. I had a very small room in a hospital dormitory. The cockroaches, cold weather and hardships of the city were taking their toll.

I was heading home for Christmas break and I had decided not to return to

Moscow for the spring semester. I was miserable with the lack of heat, the lack of food, and the lack of materials for teaching my classes. I decided that I would let the vice rector know before I left for home that I would not be returning.

He had stepped out, and his secretary

kindly let me into his office to wait for him. I was shocked to see that behind his desk was a big empty yellow space; just an outline remained of the once impressive portrait of Lenin. I stood there gazing at the two different colors on the wall and wondered how the vice rector would paint over that ridiculous spot when there wasn't an ounce of house paint to be found in the city. I kept thinking over and over to myself, "What are they going to use to replace Lenin? What are they going to do to take Lenin's place?" And then I heard my words for the very first time, "What would they do to replace Lenin?"

The fall of communism had left a

gigantic hole in the lives and hearts of Soviet citizens. My students especially struggled with what to believe and what not to believe. The fall of the USSR left its citizens disillusioned, empty and hungering for spiritual meaning and purpose to life.

My heart broke as I recalled the faces of my young college students wanting to discuss religion, Christianity, politics and life in general. And I realised how fortunate I was to be in Russia at such a time. I, through the work of God's Word and his Holy Spirit, could help replace Lenin in the lives of my young students. I could give them a new basis for hope and a desire to know truth.

Tears filled my eyes as I surrendered to the Lord at that moment and committed anew my life to serve him at the Moscow Textile Institute. Something was going to take Lenin's place in the lives and hearts of my students and I wanted to be certain that Jesus Christ, and his claims, would be available to any of them who were longing for truth or interested in Christianity. I decided not to go home.

I didn't hear the vice rector enter his office. I was lost in the struggle of my own thoughts. I turned around when I heard his voice. He shrugged his shoulders, wryly smiled and said, "So I was wrong."

Today, millions of university students around the globe desire to shape their worldviews and to form some type of a belief system. *World Leaders Almanac* reports that for the first time in history, 95 per cent of all world leaders have graduated from a university or an institution of higher education.

This means that future leaders, and those that influence culture, are in today's university classrooms. It is not only strategic, but it is imperative that Christians with academic qualifications commit themselves to reaching these students with the truth and hope of Jesus Christ.

Dr Teri McCarthy is director of faculty development, International Institute for Christian Studies, Kansas, USA.

ap

Dour Presbyterians?

Perhaps we need to do a bit of work on our image.

Strange but true the name Britney Spears is a perfect anagram of Presbyterians. That's a co-incidence that was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* well known *Column 8* on Saturday 12 January – one of the few times you'll see our denomination mentioned alongside the name of the world's most famous pop-star.

But seeing "Presbyterian" in print in the popular media like that made me stop and think. Just what does the 21st century world think of us – if it thinks of us at all? What pictures spring to mind, if not a bouncing Britney Spears?

First, we need to come to terms with the fact that we're not often in the public eye. A quick survey of the *Sydney Morning Herald* online archive reveals the word "Presbyterian" appeared in 63 documents in the last year – that's a hit rate of a little over once each week. A quick scan shows that a number of the articles mention "Presbyterian" in the context of institutions, like the "Presbyterian Ladies College" and "St Andrews College." Others are simply snippets in the "Vice Regal" column, or in obituaries. Then there's the December 8 story of the historic Presbyterian city church being transformed into designer units, and the sorry tale on January 9 of the Anglican parish whose unwelcome Freemasons have found a home at the Presbyterian church up the road.

The picture overall? A casual reader could easily think we're an organisation that gets reasonable TER scores for young ladies, enjoys sandwiches and tea with the Governor General, and has little need for city church buildings.

But let's cast the net a little wider. The recent movie *The Man Who Sued God* at least included the Presbyterian Church as a co-defendant in the thought-provoking "act of God" law-suit. Overall, though, our make-believe moderator didn't

impress. The token Presbyterian was weak-kneed, money-driven, overly fond of Scotch whiskey and, implicitly, a fringe atheist. It was up to the Catholic Cardinal to save the day with a heart stirring sermon from the bar. Maybe we need to learn some lessons in "product placement"?

You'll find the occasional reference to Presbyterians in modern novels, too. I love a good detective story, and I've been reading Sue Grafton's "alphabet" series featuring PI Kinsey Millhone since the



In the real world, there are Presbyterians who are actually quite fun to be with... and even enjoy a bit of Britney Spears.

early days of *A is for Alibi*. Feel the ambience in this passing snippet from her latest novel, *P is for Peril*: "The memorial service for Dr Dowan Purcell took place at two o'clock Saturday afternoon in the Presbyterian Chapel on West Glen Road in Montebello. The Sanctuary was narrow, with high stone walls, a beamed ceiling, and 50 pews divided into two sections of 25. Six stained-glass windows, done in tints of deep scarlet and indigo, reduced

most of the available light to a sombre gloom. I don't know much about the Presbyterian faith, but the atmosphere alone was enough to put me off predestination."

There's a similar tone in *The Falls*, the latest novel in Ian Rankin's popular Inspector Rebus series.

"I think it's astonishing that so many people would want to read about a dour Presbyterian Edinburgh cop," said Rankin in a recent interview. But it's not just the Inspector who's dour – Rankin paints a picture of the dark side of the city of Edinburgh, which he describes in a pithy one-liner in *The Falls* as "repressed, Calvinist and Presbyterian, a city of conspiracies".

This is not, as they say, good press. And yet the conclusion seems unavoidable – almost every time we're mentioned, the adjective of choice is "dour". If you're wondering, that's synonymous with "po-faced, stern, severe, straight-laced, grim, unfriendly and harsh". That bad news is confirmed by a web search – check for sites containing the words "dour" and "Presbyterian" and you'll find an incredible 684 hits! (Try it yourself on www.google.com.)

Do we have to be dour? Not on your life. Does a Calvinistic "doctrine of election" squeeze all the joy out of life? Not at all. In fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised to find that in the real world there are Presbyterians who are actually quite fun to be with, whose church meetings are joyful and enjoyable, and who are anything but po-faced, unfriendly and harsh. They might even enjoy a bit of Britney Spears.

Spotted any "Presbyterians" in the media? Email me at phil@mpc.org.au

Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor. 

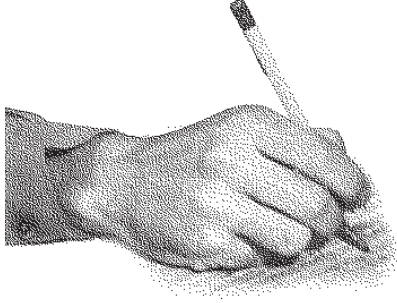
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letters



Age of miracles

What Bible does Norman Geisler read to affirm “miracles have ceased because God’s revelation of himself is now complete” (*AP*, December)? This is to say that miracles were given by God only to confirm his man and his message. But Peter says “Jesus went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). He did so for mercy’s sake – see Matthew 14:14, among many examples. While Geisler is right that Jesus’ lordship was confirmed in his miracles, so also is his mercy. God’s unchanging mercy in Christ is our confidence today that he continues to heal the sick and rescue the perishing – which he does, in all

sorts of ways. A small boy I know was suffering early this year frequent severe epileptic fits, and now is quite free of them after prayer alone. Must we insist this is only a “natural process”? Why try to distinguish natural and supernatural anyway, when our God rules most wonderfully over all? I am concerned that we trust God’s Word not just as a faithful historical record but as his message for today.

I believe in miracles, not only because I have seen many, but because our Bible declares them and nowhere cancels them. Norman Geisler claims miracles ceased somewhere about 70 AD, but he has no Biblical text to support this. He cites Hebrews 2:3,4, which mentions past miracles, but doesn’t say there won’t be any more. If there is any verse which makes clear that signs and wonders are or will become defunct during the age of the church, I have yet to read it.

God is of course sovereign, and doesn’t always heal – in this life, though ultimately he will (Ps. 103:3). Moderate charismatics like author Jack Deere acknowledge his sovereignty. Epaphroditus and Trophimus suffered illnesses, because God is sovereign, and not, as Geisler claims, because they were a decade late!

*Ken Martin,
Cranbourne, Vic*

A miraculous start

Norman Geisler (*AP*, December) helpfully defends biblical miracles. He says a genuine miracle occurs immediately; it’s not gradual. But later he seems to accept a gradual creative process beginning with a “Big Bang” 15 to 20 billion years ago.

There is similar uncertainty in his recent book, the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Yet there he asserts the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus, even though such an event contradicts what scientists observe happening today. Why not apply the same principle to the Genesis account of creation?

It is logically inconsistent to accept the biblical accounts of all miracles except that of creation. Genesis 1-3 is written as normal historical narrative. A mature universe fully formed in six days, complete with trees bearing fruit, stars shining, and two adult humans would look to any scientist as if it were much older than it really was. Only an eyewitness could tell what really happened. The only eyewitness to creation is God, and he has told us.

To allow for the possibility of 15 to 20 billion years is dishonouring to God, when God says he created everything in six days, about 6000 years ago.

*Frank Savage
Trundle, NSW*

Miracles? Yes

I was deeply concerned by the prevailing attitude in the article ‘Miracles? Yes and No’ (*AP*, December) as well as the presentation of ‘Reason to Believe’ on the following page. The defence of biblical miracles in both articles was scholarly and articulate, however the point I wish to raise is regarding the assertions that in “AD 70 ... the age of miracles had ceased”, and that because we don’t “need” any miraculous new confirmation of the truth of Scripture in our world, that miracles are now not seen or not needed – that a simple belief in Scriptural miracles is enough and should be enough.

While I agree that we should not look to miracles as a substitute for believing the Scripture, I would strongly disagree – as would thousands of Christians around the world of all denominations – that God no longer performs miraculous acts to heal, defend, rescue, provide for and testify to the glory of his Name among his people.

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to confirm the revelation of Christ in Scripture, but also that “the eyes of [our] heart[s] may be enlightened in order that we might know the hope to which he has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe”.

Jesus himself said to his disciples “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works that these he will do; because I go to the Father” (Jn 14:12).

Never does Jesus qualify to the disciples that the Holy Spirit will only be given to help us understand the Scriptures, but he will also “lead us into *all* truth” and make Jesus and what he has done for us so real that our lives and actions and our very selves will be completely transformed.

Jesus could not do miracles in some places because of unbelief. However, I would be so bold as to suggest that this unbelief extends to subscribing to the view that God no longer does miracles to testify to the truth of His word in our lives. Let us certainly continue the scholarly defence of Scripture, but let us not in our church be found guilty of grieving the Spirit by our unbelief.

*Niki Tulk
Mont Albert North, Vic.*

Cover up, please

Call me a prude, if you want to, but I do not understand why Christians should follow the brazenness of the world, instead of setting an example in modesty and dignity. Pregnancy is a beautiful thing, and a reminder of how we are fearfully and wonderfully made. But blazoned on the front cover of a Christian magazine it is downright offensive to some of us.

I cringed at the front cover of the December edition, and I would be ashamed if any of my African brothers or sisters should see it. I also cringed at the title on page 9 – very clever, but to me it was crude. This is not the first time I’ve wanted to hide the magazine. Are there some Australian Presbyterians left who are not inured to the standards of unbelievers?

*Elsbeth Slater,
Burkina Faso, West Africa*

Uncommon era

I don’t understand what is common about the era! It seems John Davies lives in a different world from us ordinary folks. And that world must be hostile to

Christianity because of his use of the term “inclusive” to try (euphemistically) to justify non-use of the Christian term. Fact is, the dating system we use in our culture was developed by Christians to record (despite minor imperfections) the “years of our Lord” (AD = Anno Domini). The secular humanists should develop their own system for recording elapsed time if they don’t like ours.

Some may not know that our dating system is not universal. We know that there are many dating systems/calendars in the various cultures/religions around the world. These systems have religious significance for those using them. By the way, we also see common use of the seven-day week in many cultures; which harks back to God’s work of creation in 6+1 Earth days around 6000 years ago. Interestingly, the Jewish calendar says that the total of years is approaching number 6000. And they should know! They have been the custodians of the written history of the entire world for a long, long time. And it is reasonable to believe that they had it handed down from the pre-flood Patriarchs. They could write, you know.

*John Thallon
Wynnum, Brisbane.*

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prayer

FEBRUARY

- 21 More than 26 million Chinese now have access to the Internet compared with only 100,000 six years ago; plenty of good Christian material to be available to them.
- 22 Alstonville parish far northern NSW; about 55 communicants and 4 elders; Stephen and Rose Marquet.
- 23 The biennial Banner of Truth conference being held at Collaroy, Sydney, next week, which many of our ministers (and wives this time) will be attending along with those of other churches – the speakers including Iain and Jean Murray, Peter and Lyn Barnes, Noel Weeks and John McCallum.
- 24 Presbytery of Hunter, NSW; 12 parishes and 4 home mission stations totalling 31 congregations with about 1745 communicants and adherents, 2 hospital chaplains, 3 defence chaplains (part time), 7 retired ministers; John MacIntyre clerk.
- 25 The vacant Miles parish western Qld, including Condamine and Dulacca; about 75 communicants and 7 elders; Harold Wills.
- 26 Scotch College, Hawthorn, Melbourne. All the boys and staff; Gordon Donaldson principal; Graham Bradbeer and John Buchanan chaplains.
- 27 Leongatha parish in Victoria's Gippsland; about 35 communicants and 4 elders; vacant, Peter Swinn interim moderator.
- 28 At Purim, the celebration by Jews of their preservation from destruction (see the book of Esther), pray earnestly for an end of the terrible violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

MARCH

- 1 Australian Presbyterian World Mission convener David Pilgrim and treasurer Ian Campbell and the office staff working with new director Bill Lutton at Picnic Point, Sydney.
- 2 Blayney-Carcoar home mission station in Bathurst presbytery, NSW; about 60 communicants and 7 elders; vacant, Angus Ewen moderator.
- 3 Horsham parish, western Vic.; about 35 communicants and 3 elders; John Brennan, exit appointee; Ron Traill interim moderator.
- 4 Presbytery of Melbourne East, Vic; 14 parishes and 2 home mission stations totalling 17 congregations with 1170 communicants and adherents, 1 ministerial candidate, 2 theological lecturers, 3 school chaplains, 1 missionary, 2 retired ministers, 2 under jurisdiction; Kevin Childs clerk.
- 5 Central Burnett (Gayndah) home mission station north of Brisbane; about 30 communicants and 3 elders; vacant, Noel Thomason interim moderator.
- 6 The national Church and Nation committee as it prepares and propagates material on our denomination's approach to public moral and social issues.
- 7 Numurkah regional parish Vic. including Cobram and Tallygaroopna; about 70 communicants and 8 elders; John Rickard, ordained recently.
- 8 Pray that annual congregational meetings – specifically your own – will not be a mere formality but rather an occasion for new vision of what the Lord purposes for his church (Acts 20:28).
- 9 Reservoir parish, north Melbourne; about 85 communicants and 8 elders; Chris and Rose Siriweera.
- 10 Pray for the 170 million people of Brazil – the world's 5th largest country – 125 million R.C., 11m Protestant, 8m. Animist and 5m. Non religious and the 1870 Presbyterian congregation.
- 11 Gwen Gibson from Canterbury, Melbourne worker with Wycliffe Bible Translators, PNG since 1958, and her partner Joy McCarthy, involved in producing materials and training supervisors in literacy.
- 12 Pray for a just dealing with the "asylum seekers" in detention in this country and overseas.
- 13 Christine Platt from Orange, NSW, radio engineer involved in gospel broadcasting in Loja, Ecuador with SIM.
- 14 Presbytery of North Brisbane, Qld; 5 parishes and 1 home mission station totalling 7 congregations with 575 communicants and adherents, 4 retired ministers, 1 under jurisdiction; Gary Fintleman clerk.
- 15 Pray for reconciliation between Tutsi (14%) and Hutu (82%) people in Burundi, Africa – total population 7 million – 57% R.C., 13% Protestant, 7% traditional, 3% Muslim.
- 16 Young Nak Korean parish, Telopea, northern Sydney; vacant, Man Kyoung Park interim moderator.
- 17 Nicky (and Dale) Stock from Mitchelton, Brisbane, and US, working with Hindi tribes near Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan.
- 18 Taree and Lower Manning parish NSW north coast; about 115 communicants and 17 elders; John and Betty Thompson.
- 19 John and Lynette Ellis from Clarinda, Vic. as they lecture and counsel students at a Presbyterian seminary in Asia.
- 20 Pray for the children in your parish, even if you have no work among them – for parental teaching, work in schools and children's activities such as club.

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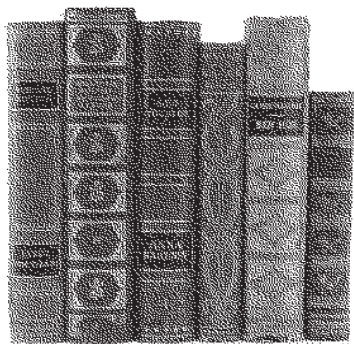
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books



Bound Only Once

Editor: Douglas Wilson

Canon Press, 2000

Reviewed by Peter Hastie

Once remember reading a book for a politics course called *The Selling of the President* by Joe McGinnis. It was the story of how an unelectable candidate, Richard Nixon, was sold to the American people by a group of marketing and advertising executives. They simply got rid of everything in Nixon's appearance and public persona that people didn't like. And they succeeded. Nixon won the 1968 election.

This book, *Bound Only Once – The Failure of Open Theism*, describes a similar makeover that's been done on God by a group of so-called evangelicals during the last decade. Largely aided and abetted by Interspersary Press (USA), this group of scholars, including Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Gregory Boyd, and William Hasker, has been promoting in Sanders' words "a new and courageous way of thinking about God".

Their basic idea is that God doesn't know the future. (Maybe somebody sliced Isaiah 42:9, 46:10 and Ephesians 1:11 out of their Bibles – who knows?) Anyway, this crew thinks that God is ignorant and often mistaken in his views. Indeed, he's frequently frustrated when people don't do as he anticipated. Their rationale for this radical reconstruction of God is that classical Christian theology has placed too much stress on God's omniscience and not enough on human freedom. Just as Nixon had to lose his five o'clock shadow to get elected, so the biblical God needs to shave off a bit of his sovereignty if he wants to appeal to the 21st century mind. Again, as Nixon had to shed his rumpled suits, so we need to cast divine foreordination into

the theological rag-bag. You get the picture?

Where all this leads is anyone's guess. Last year Donald Carson said to me he didn't believe it would become a serious problem in Australia. However, it's often the case that when America sneezes, Australia catches a cold. That's why this book, *Bound Only Once – The Failure of Open Theism*, is a must read. This copy (provided by Fletcher and Fitchett, Benalla) is an excellent critique of the danger lurking in the wings for the church. It contains some insightful chapters by John MacArthur Jnr, John Frame, Douglas Wilson and Joost Nixon of what will happen to Christian belief, witness and prayer life if these errors are widely embraced. Presbyterians need to be forearmed. My own view is that these ideas will win an audience if we're not careful.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

"Playing God" Ethics and Faith

Andrew Dutney

HarperCollins Religious 2001

Reviewed by Mark Perrin

Which God are we to play? Approvingly quoted by Dutney: he that "has created the world and its processes in such a way that even [he] does not know exactly how they will fare and what they will become since that simply cannot be known"; yet a God who is "influencing outcomes by strategic responses to events as they unfold". It is a view of God that will be heard more frequently in coming years.

Dutney argues that science has placed destiny, to a large extent, in our hands. In such a situation we trust the future not to providence but to ourselves.

In this troubled ethical wilderness, abortion, while "a destruction of human life", is also said to be decided "case by case". And a "pregnancy may evince more the fallen condition of the creation than God's benediction 'Be fruitful and multiply'."

A wider realm in which to practise our "freedom" does not sanctify every path. It increases responsibility as necessary submission to the will of God remains. Adam had choice beyond what was right. And in his one wrong "glorified" his autonomy, but began "all our woe".

Dr Mark Perrin is a registrar at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney.

Saints and Patriarchs

Keith Black

Mitchelton: Bethel Ministries, 2001

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Some people experience the trials of life in a way that leaves the rest of us marveling at how they cope, let alone rejoice and give thanks. Keith and Betty Black are two such people, and so are the Sudanese Christians.

In this work Keith tells the story of the church in the Sudan. At a time of barbarous persecution, which saw about 20 per cent of the country's population perish, the Sudanese Church of Christ maintained its witness and grew in an extraordinary way. Those who fondly believe that Islam is a religion of peace and love would do well to consider its record when it gains political power.

Here is the story of Keith's conversion under John G. Ridley (the man who inspired Arthur Stace to chalk "Eternity" on Sydney's pavements), his battles with liberal theology at university and at college, the indifference of his home church to his missionary work, his call to the Sudan, language learning, medical work, Bible teaching, and the tragic car accident which claimed the life of one of his daughters and a grandchild.

In the midst of all that are stories of the Sudanese and their own country – of an attack by an elephant and another by a hippopotamus, of roads which are more like bogs, of a crocodile 20 metres from a convert being baptized, of slavery, and of remarkable Christian testimonies. One that struck me concerned a woman with poliomyelitis who used to walk on her hands. God greatly used her witness in southern Sudan. It is interesting that Keith is no cessationist, and he records miracles that took place.

One might criticise the work by arguing that a stricter adherence to chronology would have given it more coherence, and prevented some repetition. Yet, that criticism aside, this is a remarkable account, and one which is lovingly told. As James Frazer of China put it: "Many of us cannot reach the mission field on our feet, but we can always reach it on our knees." This is a book that will surely stimulate greater missionary awareness and drive us to more prayer.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

The erosion of liberty

True freedom flourishes only in Christian soil.

We live in a community which still likes to believe that it holds dear the concept of freedom. In August even the secular Western media professed to be shocked when the Taliban regime in Afghanistan arrested eight foreign aid workers and 16 Afghans for the crime of seeking to spread Christianity.

All faced the real threat of execution, although thankfully that was averted. The Afghan department in charge of this tyranny had the Orwellian name of the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue. Evil invariably presents itself as virtuous.

The defence that those arrested were not really spreading Christianity misses the point. Why should people face execution for proclaiming Christ, crucified and risen?

Yet there are also many ominous signs in the West that Christianity is becoming barely tolerated. In 1963 the Supreme Court in the United States banned prayer and the Bible from all public schools in the country. This has been taken to extreme lengths, and in 1989 in Denver a principal in Denver was ordered to remove the Bible and a book on Jesus from the 250-book classroom library. In New York City this year a sixth-grade teacher was dismissed for answering her students' questions about death, God and heaven, and then praying. This great crime took place after one of the students had drowned.

It is small wonder that the *New York Times* reported in June that the nation was facing a teacher shortage of over two million. American education has no place for prayer or the Bible, but it has not been so successful in ridding its places of learning of guns, drugs, immorality, and disorder.



Peter Barnes

In Australia we are seeing the same trends. In October, skywriting appeared in Sydney skies, proclaiming *Jesus Loves U More*. It is not the first thing one would want to tell an unbeliever, but the response was quite disturbing. One enraged letter writer asked: "With all the talk about possible terrorist attacks throughout the world using biological and chemical weapons, why is this practice allowed to continue?" He then predicted that it was only likely to arouse anger in the Muslim community. In fact, it seems to have aroused more anger in the pagan community. Another indignant writer referred to the writing in the sky as an act of "criminal irresponsibility".

Why should people face execution for proclaiming Christ, crucified and risen?

Periodically there are moves, especially by the Law Reform Commission, to bring churches and Christian schools under the Anti-Discrimination Act. This would mean, for example, that Christian schools could be fined if they did not employ homosexual teachers.

Before the Association of Executives of Christian Schools in May of this year, Mr Michael Lee (the shadow Federal Minister for Education) refused to give an assurance that this would not happen. He would only say that he would be prepared to discuss the matter – which, of course, is

Newspeak for "we will make the decision and you will obey it". Thankfully, Mr Lee lost his seat in the recent elections, but there are plenty more where he came from.

In recent times some public schools have been keen to unite all and sundry in inter-faith services for Christmas. Christians and Muslims are supposed to pretend that they are saying the same thing about Jesus Christ, and the churches are expected to go along with latest fad from the institute of political correctness.

Christianity combines freedom and order. It gives us freedom, but tells us that before we submit to any man we ought to submit to God as he has made himself known through his Word. It maintains order by giving us laws which are for our benefit. Therefore, the Psalmist could write: "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts" (Ps. 119:45).

Take away the Christian faith, and we are left only with empty concepts. Karl Marx argued for a free press, but the first thing any Marxist regime ever did was destroy all hints of opposition. Dostoyevsky predicted it: "Starting out from limitless freedom, I end with limitless despotism." It was a French woman on the way to the guillotine who declared: "O Liberty, what crimes have been done in thy name!"

The commitment to religious freedom in the so-called Western democracies has been seriously eroded in recent decades. True freedom cannot flourish except on Christian soil.

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

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