

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

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## Healing

and the atonement

An Islamic dialogue • As to a little child • A better way



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*editorial*

No one who has ever ministered to the sick and suffering can afford not to be interested in the issue of divine healing. When you stand by the bedside of a terminally ill friend, or pray with tears for someone who will only ever know pain and suffering, you experience an intense longing for their healing. However, it's one thing to desire someone's recovery; it's another thing altogether to expect it. Do Christians have any right to expect God to heal them from all forms of sickness?

Clearly, some believe so. I once attended a large church in Sydney which was renowned for its claims of miraculous healing. When the time for healing arrived, the pastor claimed a special word of knowledge. He said that God had told him that there were people in the congregation who needed healing for their noses. He invited them to come forward. About 15 did.

One of them was a man called Garry, who had badly injured his nose in a basketball game. From that time on he hadn't been able to breathe through it. It certainly sounded as though he had a serious problem. However, the pastor assured Garry that God would heal him. He just needed faith. "Do you have it?" the pastor asked. "Oh yes," said Garry. "Then you'll be healed," the pastor said.

As everyone gathered around Garry to pray, the pastor called him to be "slain in the Spirit". Garry collapsed backwards into the arms of several attendants, and lay prostrate on the floor for several minutes. Then he got up. "Have you been healed?" the pastor asked. "Yes, I am," he exclaimed ecstatically. The rest of us were doubtful. He sounded just as nasal as he was before.

It is because so many Christians like Garry long for healing that the church has a responsibility to spell out quite clearly how God deals with the sick. This issue of *AP* takes up the challenge in the hope that sufferers will be helped and not deluded.

Peter Hastie *ap*

# My grace is sufficient

*What was true for Paul remains so today.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARINA OLIPHANT, COURTESY OF THE AGE

## What should be our attitude to miraculous healings?

C.S. Lewis, the Christian apologist, put it succinctly: “If we admit God, must we admit miracles? Indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain.” Once you admit that there’s a God who can act supernaturally, then it follows that there can be supernatural acts of God. Total skepticism is unjustified. As long as there is a supernatural being (God), then he can act supernaturally. And that means miracles are possible, which naturally includes healings.

## Do these sort of miracles occur in our world today?

Yes, they do. People get healed in amazing ways. But I think it’s important to point out that it’s a mistake to think that God only works in unusual ways when he saves someone from sickness as opposed to graciously helping them through it.

Although many in the signs and wonders movement agree that a person’s regeneration is a great miracle, I think J.I.



**Norman Geisler**  
talks to  
**Peter Hastie**

Packer is right when he says that Joni Eareckson (the unhealed quadriplegic) is a more helpful role model in our approach to sickness than John Wimber (who believes in signs and wonders). The main place where we can see the power of the kingdom operating today is in the believer’s regeneration and sanctification rather than in any physical miracles. Indeed, when physical miracles take place they preclude much of that other kingdom activity through which people learn to live with their difficulties and glorify God.

Of course, in addition to God’s miraculous work of saving grace, there is God’s miraculous work of sustaining grace. We shouldn’t only praise God when he saves us from sickness; we should also do it when he sustains us through it. The Lord said to Paul who prayed for relief from his

thorn in the flesh, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9).

## You say divine healing is possible, but does it really occur?

Yes, God still heals the sick today. Sometimes he does it in unexpected and extraordinary ways. But he usually heals through natural processes. The point I want to make is that God still answers prayer. And in response to believing prayer he heals the sick in a number of ways.

First, God heals through the amazing bodily processes he has created. Doctors are the first to admit that they cannot heal. They may be able to set a bone, but only the Great Physician can cause it to grow together again.

Second, God also heals by inspiring good attitudes in us. The Gospels show that faith was often an essential ingredient in a person’s recovery. We need to trust God for our physical as well as our spiritual well-being.

Third, God heals through providing good food to eat. The Bible commends

some foods and beverages for health purposes (Prov. 24:13; 1 Tim. 5:23).

Fourth, God may providentially intervene in response to prayer. I have personally experienced God's gracious hand of healing. Just after I was married to my wife, Barbara, I came down with a serious case of hepatitis. My liver stopped its normal functions. I was so weak that I couldn't even lift my arm. While lying in the hospital, the radio announced that the late Senator McCarthy had died of hepatitis. My wife and the small congregation we served invoked God on my behalf. God heard their prayers and graciously restored me to health. I have suffered no ill effects for the past 30 years. I praise God for his goodness in healing me.

### **So what should a Christian do if he or she gets sick?**

You should follow the directions of the Letter of James in 5:14-16. James tells the sick person to request the elders of the church to visit him and pray for him as well as anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. It also tells us to confess our sins to each other and to pray for each other so that we are healed. I can see no reason why this advice from James should not be followed literally. Many churches do it with great profit.

We must never forget that God is concerned for all our needs, physical needs included. Indeed, Christ died for all our sicknesses and sins (Is. 53:4-5; Mt. 8:16-17). However, the fact that our ultimate healing is in the atonement (Rev. 21:4) is no more a guarantee that we can claim healing for every sickness now than it is that we can avoid old age and death (Rom. 5:12; 8:20-23). Our resurrection is guaranteed in the atonement too, but we cannot claim it today. In fact, none of us will be healed in an ultimate sense until our bodies are transformed in the resurrection, which is when we will receive the "redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23). Meanwhile, God graciously heals us from time to time in accordance with his will and in response to "the prayer offered in faith" (James 5:15).

### **Do we ever see God healing in an instantaneous way, such as restoring diseased organs or broken limbs?**

The answer is "Yes", but it's not God's normal way of healing. Let me tell you about the case of Barbara McCummiskey. At age 14 Barbara was perfectly healthy. A year later her hand began to slip as she gripped the gymnastic rings. Doctors were sure she had multiple sclerosis. Over

the next few years Barbara was ravaged by this crippling disease. Her bodily organs began to malfunction. A catheter was placed in her bladder. Breathing was so difficult that a tracheotomy was performed – cutting a hole in her neck so a respirator could be attached. Her vision worsened to the point of legal blindness. Several bouts of surgery followed, and she suffered three cardiac arrests. Lack of oxygen to her brain resulted in mental confusion.

Through her long ordeal, Barbara turned to God. She prayed simply but repeatedly in child-like prayers. Hearing of her plight, a local Christian radio station urged prayer on her behalf. Nearly 450 cards and letters flooded in to her. On 7 June 1981, two friends were reading cards to her. Barbara heard a voice over her shoulder (not the voices of her friends) saying,

"My child, get up and walk."

She had not walked in two years. Her legs were atrophied. Nevertheless, in simple faith she jumped out of bed and started down the hall where she met her mother who

shouted: "Calves! You have calves!" When Barbara met her father downstairs, they danced around the room. Barbara did ballet steps, standing on her toes and leaping.

Barbara is still rejoicing about it today. Her documented story was written up in *Christianity Today* (16 December 1983). I think Barbara's case is a reminder that God does heal today, sometimes in quite spectacular ways. But not all of them are what we would call a miracle. Some of these special works are more properly described as God's providence – God's careful prearranging of circumstances in a special way that conforms to natural law.

### **Is it possible that some apparent miracles are in fact some sort of magic?**

That's not only possible; it's demonstrable too. You can prove that much of it is. Let me give you an example. Peter Popoff was a famous charismatic evangelist who would do a trick that other charlatans have tried. He would stroll amongst his audience and say: "God has told me to go to row four." He would then walk to row four. He would look down at a man sitting there and say: "God told me your

name is Smith." Obviously, the man was surprised that he knew. Then he would say something like: "Your doctor's name is Jones and God has told me that you have heart problems." Of course, all this was true and the man would be absolutely amazed.

Now by this time the man is standing and Popoff says: "Do you believe in God?" "Of course I believe in God," the man would say. Then Popoff would pray for his healing. He'd say to the man: "Did God heal you?" And the man would become so excited that he'd say: "Yes, I'm healed." Then this whole charade would be reported as a healing.

How the trick works is that Peter Popoff's wife would go out into the audience before the meeting, when people were just starting to come in, and casually gather details from people she'd meet. She'd memorise their names, doctors, sicknesses, and row numbers. Then she'd go back-stage and radio this information to Peter Popoff, who was down amongst the crowd. It was a complete scam.

Popoff was exposed by James Randi, one of the top magicians in America who investigates this sort of thing. He's written a book called *Flim Flam* and another called *The Healers*. He exposed Popoff by tuning in to his radio frequency and reporting the transmissions that took place between Popoff and his wife. He got the whole thing on videotape including the voice transmissions. I saw it played on national TV twice. It was amazing.

Johnny Carson asked Peter Popoff: "What are you going to do now that you've been exposed?" Popoff replied – and this is a miracle – "I'm going to continue to do it because God told me to." But there's a second miracle here too – people are still dumb enough to give money to someone like that. So there are two miracles there, but they're not the ones they were thinking about.

It was amusing afterwards. James Randi said wryly – after listening to the tape of Peter Popoff's wife speaking to him and then Peter Popoff saying "God said...", "now we know that God is a woman and her voice is very much like Peter Popoff's wife."

### **Why is it that people are so gullible and easily misled by these deceptions?**

I have no idea. That's one of the most amazing things about people. P. T. Barnum, a former well-known circus man, said that a sucker is born every minute. I think deep down people want to believe something. There's a combination of

*God still answers prayer. And in response to believing prayer he heals the sick in a number of ways.*

God-given desire, the influence of their own fleshly desires, and a mixture of naivety. Satan plays upon our God-given desire to believe that there is a supernatural realm but with the intent to deceive us. It's a fallen world. Our minds, our hearts – everything is depraved. Satan is alive and well on planet Earth. You mix all that together and gullibility is the end product.

**Oral Roberts missed a great opportunity to bring a lot of atheists and skeptics into the Kingdom.**



Occasionally there are reports that people have been raised from the dead. What should we make of these sorts of claims?

They are claims of the same kind: sensational and unusual. But when you look into them, they suddenly vanish. For example, one of our famous faith-healers in America, Oral Roberts, claimed that he had raised fifty people from the dead some years ago. Now this was the time when he was in the newspapers because he had reported that if he didn't get several million dollars to build his faith centre in Tulsa, God would strike him dead. One reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, said: "Oral Roberts missed a great opportunity

to bring a lot of atheists and skeptics into the Kingdom. If he hadn't raised his millions and God had struck him dead, they would have all believed." Instead, he got his millions, supposedly miraculously, at the last minute.

So reporters were following him around. And they heard Roberts say: "Yea, I raised fifty people from the dead." So they said: "Can you give us some names and addresses?" He could only think of one. Now if I'd raised fifty people from the dead, I'd have their name, address, phone number, fax, email. I'd have everything written down in a little black book. But he could only think of one. So they went and followed this girl up and found out that she had only fainted in his service. So the reporter asked Roberts: "How did you know she was dead?" And Roberts said: "Her mother thought she was dead, I thought she was dead, and her body felt cold." Well, I'm sorry, but if that's a test for being dead then my wife has been dead for the last 45 years of our marriage. Her body is always cold! Let's face it, that sort of evidence shouldn't convert a believer, let alone a skeptic.

**Is it possible for the mind to heal some physical disorders? How about cancer or multiple sclerosis?**

Well, it's not impossible for the mind to play a major role in healing. It's a proven fact that the mind can heal. The mind has tremendous powers but there are also limits to what the mind can do. Personally, I think the limit is this: whatever is psychologically caused can be psy-

chologically cured. And when this happens, the cure takes place through the power of suggestion.

Let me give you an example where a well-known American Christian psychiatrist, Dr Paul Meier, healed a girl who had blindness. Now this was a rare form of psychosomatic "mind over matter" blindness where she couldn't see. He examined her lens, her eye, and her optic nerve. Everything was physically OK, so he determined that she had a psychosomatic form of blindness. The girl believed in him, so he said: "I'll tell you what to do. I want you to go home and sleep in another room and tomorrow, when you wake up, you're going to be able to see." The girl believed him and when she woke up the next morning, she opened her eyes and she could see. And she's been able to see ever since. So that shows you the power of mind over matter. Now if she had been born blind and there was a physical cause for it, that cure could never have happened. If a condition is psychologically caused, then it can be psychologically cured.

Again, there are cases where people, just by meditation, can change their body temperature by up to 15 degrees simply by the power of the mind. So the mind has incredible powers. But it can't perform a miracle, not in the biblical sense of the word.

**So if the mind is not responsible for the original disease, it can't do anything? How about cancer?**

Cancer of the spleen has never been known to be cured by any placebo pills, sugar pills or mind-over-matter type of thing. And quadriplegics have never been cured by those things. They danced in the streets with Joni Eareckson, sometimes they prayed around her, but she's still a quadriplegic.

**Many faith-healers claim to be able to perform miracles on the condition of a person's faith. Do true miracles depend on one's faith?**

If they did, then none of the people who were restored to life in the Bible would have been raised because none of them believed. They were dead. So if a true miracle depends on somebody believing, then they'd still be in the grave. Lazarus wasn't sitting there in a tomb believing and then suddenly came back from the dead. It's ridiculous!

Many of the miracles that Jesus performed had nothing to do with the person's belief. And when the Bible says he

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didn't perform a miracle in a certain region because of their unbelief, it doesn't mean that belief was a condition for doing it. It means that he didn't want to cast pearls before swine. Why waste miracles? Jesus is not in the entertainment business; He's in the salvation business.

### Do you see serious dangers in faith-healing ministries?

One of the things we do here at Southern Evangelical Seminary is to train people in counter-cult ministries. And I can tell you, from our experience with the cults, that they're a very dangerous thing. There was a book written a number of years ago, *We Let Our Son Die*. This was a case of a family whose son had diabetes. The faith-healer pronounced him cured although he still had the symptoms. The parents told the healer that the disease was still present. He said: "Well, the symptoms are there but I can assure you that the disease is gone. You've got to trust God." So they didn't give him insulin. He got worse and worse. The faith-healer continued to assure them: "Just trust God, he's really cured; this is the devil testing you." Tragically, the boy died. It was taken to court and the judge found the parents guilty of negligent homicide. Finally, they owned up themselves in the title of the book they wrote.

### Then in what sense should Christians be praying for healing?

In the biblical sense, it's proper to pray for anything as long as we preface it with: "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." We need to realise that there's no guarantee that we are going to be healed. God hasn't promised that he's going to heal everyone in this life. The final healing comes with the Resurrection. We have to wait for the redemption of the body. He's not promised to keep us from getting the four "Bs": bald head, bifocals, bridges and bunions. In this life we are all going to decay and die.

Romans 8 reminds us that salvation is progressive. God doesn't give us every blessing all at once. This is a serious theological misunderstanding into which our Pentecostal friends have fallen. The atonement doesn't guarantee that our sicknesses will be healed now. It guarantees that our sin is forgiven and that we will experience the fullness of salvation at Christ's return (Heb. 9:28). But you can't demand today what God has only promised to deliver tomorrow.

### Is it possible to distinguish between true miracles and false ones?

I think it is. I think the distinguishing features are very clear. A true miracle is under God's control and is done at God's will. It's not naturally repeatable and there's no deception involved. You can distinguish them by the characteristics the Bible gives to a true miracle and the characteristics it gives to satanic signs. Is the sign associated with the occult? Is false doctrine being taught in connection with it? Does it involve a spiritist or a medium?



**You can't demand today what God has only promised to deliver tomorrow.**

Are they using physical objects of divination? There are at least 12 different characteristics of things that are associated with false miracles, and we've already stated the ones that are associated with true ones.

### Is God still performing miracles today?

God can perform miracles today; in fact, he can perform miracles at any time. But is God performing miracles at this point in time? If he is, they're rare. I haven't personally seen any. The one so-

called miracle that I did see wasn't a miracle at all. So be careful that you use biblical criteria for determining miracles. It's very easy to be fooled.

I don't believe that the gift of miracles exists today. I don't think anybody has these special powers that were the signs of an apostle. I think it's important to remind ourselves that the gift of miracles was a special apostolic sign. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul said: "I showed you the signs of an apostle." Hebrews 2:3,4 says that these signs were given to apostles. So, apparently, only the apostles had them and could perform them.

Now the apostles aren't around today. Acts 1:22 says that to be an apostle you had to live in the first century and be an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection. We're obviously not in the first century. So what I say to anybody who tells me that he has these sign-gifts is this: "Show me your birth certificate. If you're not 2000 years old, you don't qualify." The other thing I say is: "Let's go out to the cemetery and visit my uncle George. He's dead. You can wake him up and get him talking. If you can raise uncle George and you're 2000 years old, then I'll believe you've got these sign-gifts."

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# Now – and not yet

*The place of divine healing in the atonement*

**N**o one who believes in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' miracles doubts the power of God to heal us in the most extraordinary ways. That God heals, and that he heals in answer to prayer, should not be open to dispute among Christians.

But there's a further question that's not quite so easily resolved: whether healing is one of the blessings that flows out of Christ's atoning work. We all know that Christ took away our sins through his death upon the cross. But has he also borne away our sicknesses in a similar manner? Can we claim freedom from illness in the same way that we can claim freedom from the penalty and power of sin?

Those who believe the answer to this question is "Yes" usually point to Matthew 8:16,17: "and he healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'."

Now at first sight it seems that this passage definitely supports the idea that Jesus bore our infirmities and diseases on the cross in somewhat the same sense that he bore our sins there – that is, he suffered in our place. Of course, *our* sins could never have been transferred to him so as to make him the actual sinner. Nevertheless Jesus bore our sins by suf-



**Peter Hastie**

fering the judgment which we deserved because of those very sins. In the same way, some argue, when Jesus died he bore all the suffering and pain of our sicknesses as well. In this way, he became the substitute for sickness as well as for sin.

Throughout the history of the Church, many Christians have maintained this position. Now, with the growing popularity of the charismatic movement, increasing numbers of believers find it a convincing argument.

**F**or instance, earlier last century A.B. Simpson wrote on Matthew 8:17: "This is the great evangelical vision – the promise of healing, the very strongest possible statement of complete redemption from pain and sickness by Christ's life and death. Just as he has borne our sins, Jesus Christ has also borne away and carried off our sicknesses; yes, and even our pains, so that abiding in him, we may be fully delivered from both sickness and pain. Thus 'by his stripes we are healed'."

I think that it's important that we

understand exactly what A.B. Simpson and other modern faith-healers are claiming. They want us to believe that every known human disease – for instance, cancer, diabetes, smallpox, typhoid and AIDS – has fastened itself on Christ's body as he hung upon the cross; that he endured all the ravages of these illnesses so that he might remove them from us. Now, they insist, in view of Christ's resurrection, the risen life of his glorified body is available to all believers by faith. Through the power of his risen life, we can combat the various types of disease that may be present in our bodies.

There is no doubt that these are bold claims. The question, however, is whether they are true. Perhaps the first thing that we need to do is re-visit Matthew 8:17 for a more careful examination. When we do, the first thing that strikes us is that Matthew did not have Jesus' atoning death in mind when he referred to this passage from Isaiah. He wasn't thinking of the cross at all; rather, he was trying to explain why Jesus was so heavily involved in a ministry of healing.

The healings which took place in Capernaum, and to which Matthew refers here, seem to have no substitutionary element in them at all. It's hard to see how a universal principle of healing by substitution could be established through what Jesus did in this one local event.

When the apostle Peter gives us the true interpretation of this passage from Isaiah in I Peter 2:24, he reminds us that Christ's work of atonement took place in his death, not in his life. He tells us that "He himself bore our sins in his body *on the tree*, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; *by his wounds* you have been healed." I think it is clear that in Peter's mind at least, the atonement took place in Jesus' death.

**N**evertheless, we can hardly avoid Matthew's pointed statement that in some sense Jesus "took up" our infirmities and carried our diseases. What did he mean? I think Matthew meant two things: first, that these healings in Galilee were an instance in which Jesus actually took away sickness and death. There is no doubt that this is what happened in the city of



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Capernaum as Jesus performed his ministry of miracles. People were rescued from sickness and death. Like a championship weight-lifter, Jesus lifted some of the preliminary loads with which men struggled before he lifted the greatest weight of all on Calvary. In this sense every healing miracle is an instance of Jesus lifting the curse of sin off a crippled humanity.

But Jesus "took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" in another sense as well. We know, for instance, that Jesus was unable to approach sick people without great cost to himself. He sympathised deeply with the sick and sorrowing. We see evidence of this everywhere in the gospels. When the woman who touched the hem of his garment was healed, Mark tells us that "at once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him" (Mk 5:30). It cost him something to heal.

Likewise, the fact that Jesus broke down outside the tomb of Lazarus, even though he knew that he would soon restore his friend to life, is evidence that he bore the full weight of our sicknesses and sorrows. Christ's grief was a pledge that he would remove every infirmity that burdens our souls.

However, the real question is: when will this take place? Those who believe that healing is a blessing that flows directly out of the atonement are convinced that Christ has made it possible to experience full relief from physical and mental suffering in this present age. Are they right? I do not believe so.

While it is true that Christ is opposed to everything that afflicts us, such as sickness, they forget that salvation is a process which involves several phases. One of these phases lies in the future – that is, "the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5).

The writer to the Hebrews is even more explicit. He says that Christ "will appear a second time, *not to bear sin*, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (9:28). And what is this salvation? Why, it's the redemption of our bodies which will be liberated from their bondage to decay (Rom. 8:21,23).

**T**he complete removal of infirmity, sickness, and disease is something that will only happen with the return of Christ. To suggest otherwise is to deny this future phase of salvation when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 21:4).

However, rather than mount a case

against the faith-healers' claims on the basis of theological principles, we simply need to ask whether their views actually work in the laboratory of life. No theory of healing deserves any respect if it ignores or is inconsistent with human experience. For example, if we can find in the Bible any account where sincere Christians were allowed to be sick and were not miraculously healed, then the whole theory collapses to the ground. I can think of at least four examples in the New Testament.



***We can hardly avoid Matthew's pointed statement that in some sense Jesus "took up" our infirmities.***

The first one that comes to mind is the apostle Paul himself. According to his second letter to the Corinthians, he suffered from what he described as a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) Paul doesn't tell us what this thorn was except to say that it was in his "flesh". It was a physical ailment or pain of some kind. It definitely caused him severe suffering. Paul begged God to take it away three times (12:8). Nevertheless, the Lord replied: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). At this point Paul realised that it was not God's will to

heal him from his affliction because the sickness served the purpose of keeping him humble.

Again, another striking instance is the case of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:27. Here we discover that this model Christian worker became so dangerously ill that he almost died. Paul prayed for him, and so doubtless did many others. His illness ran its course and then he recovered. We read of no miraculous recovery. Instead, Paul says that "God had mercy on him" and his health returned. In this last expression, I believe that we have the New Testament position on healing in this present age: it is a mercy. It is not something that can be demanded as a right.

There are two other cases amongst Paul's fellow-workers that deserve comment. One is Timothy. According to Paul's first letter to him, Timothy suffered "frequent illnesses" (1 Tim. 5:23). He seems to have had a gastric problem. However, instead of recommending Timothy to attend a healing meeting, Paul gives him a common-sense prescription. Surely if there were healing in the atonement, Paul would have given him quite different advice. Again, if healing is one of Christ's gifts to the church in this age, why does Paul leave his trusted colleague and fellow-worker, Trophimus, sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20)? It doesn't make sense, unless of course healing is simply a mercy that God may choose to give.

And that, it seems, is how we should view healing today. It is mercy. We have no right to expect it, but every encouragement to pray for it because sometimes God does far more than we could ever ask or imagine. ap

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# Case history

*Most modern miracles may merely be in the eye of the beholder.*

**Some say that there's a natural explanation for Jesus' "miraculous" healings. Were they supernatural?**

I think they were. I always think it's good to come back to the raising of Lazarus. Martha said to Jesus: "He's been in the grave for at least four days." Although that may've only been a bit more than two full days by Jewish counting, he was certainly brought back to life to die once more. In my mind there's no doubt – there were lots of eyewitnesses – he must have been deceased and raised again. I haven't heard of any other so-called raisings from the dead that have been verified apart from those performed by Paul and Peter. And it seems to me that this speaks of something greater than ordinary, natural healing.

**There is an inscription at the Pasteur Institute that says: "I dressed the wound but God healed it". Is there a sense in which all healing is divine?**

Yes, I think there is a sense in which all healing is divine, even if it is not miraculous. Unless God healed us, there would be no healing even after the use of a drug like an antibiotic. An antibiotic destroys bacteria or allows them to be destroyed. After that, it's the natural mechanism of the body that clears the abnormality or inflammatory change that has resulted from the bacteria. Unless the body had this healing potential, it wouldn't recover. Now God has made us in such a way that this occurs. Of course, underlying this is the fact that we believe that God is con-



**Alfred Steinbeck  
talks to AP**

tinually upholding the world. Even after the creation, God remains active in the world. So all healing is divine in that it relies upon God.

Sometimes, however, healing is quite obviously divine. While a lot of clinicians might say it's difficult to assess some of Jesus' healings because we don't have enough information to diagnose the exact nature of the illness (for instance, what was the "leprosy" in Luke 5:12? And what was the cause of the paralysis in Luke 5:18? Was it a psychologically induced paralysis?), there are other cases where it's quite clear that extraordinary, divine power is at work. Has there ever been anyone who has been blind from birth healed? This, to me, seems miraculous.

*There is a sense in which all healing is divine, even if it is not miraculous.*

**What of the suggestion that people will be healed if they have sufficient faith in Christ?**

I think it's a heresy. Is there a promise that God will heal every sickness that we suffer? It's really not a question of us always having faith. The question is: faith in what? You can have absolute faith that you will be healed and when it doesn't occur faith can be lost.

Sometimes we can have a feeling that Christ has made a promise to heal us when, really, it is only our hope in that he has said what we hope he has said.

**What is the difference between remarkable and miraculous healing?**

We need to differentiate here between the terms "magic", "miracle" and "remarkable". I think some of the "faith-healers" deal more in magic than in miracles. Much

of their work seems to be an illusion.

For me, a miraculous healing means – and this is a very restrictive definition – there has been no human or natural intervention that could have possibly led to the end-result of a complete and instantaneous healing.

Of course, that's different to a remarkable healing. A remarkable healing would be one where doctors do not believe that a patient will recover and yet treatment that was regarded as having little likelihood of success is wonderfully successful.

Let me give you an example. Surgeons opened a man's abdomen. They went no further because it was evident that he had cancerous lesions. The doctors told the family that he would die shortly. Now, some years later he died from the various cancerous lesions that they'd seen. Now it could have been said that this was a remarkable healing. No one expected him to survive as long as he did. It was remarkable. I am not sure that it could be called miraculous. After all, it was not a complete cure like Jesus' miracles.

I think of a patient who was operated on for a burst aneurysm who then developed an abscess of the brain. Surgeons operated again but the woman did not regain consciousness for a year. During those 12 months the husband used to say: "I think my wife recognises me." Of course, no one believed him because the woman didn't recognise or respond to anyone else. Then, one morning, she suddenly opened her eyes and spoke. She recovered completely as far as I could tell.

Not so long ago, one of my patients, who was a Holocaust survivor and had serious health problems, fell out of bed, unconscious. The patient was taken to hospital and then to a nursing home and remained unconscious. The hospital's diagnosis was that the condition was probably psychiatric, but there was no way that anyone could relate to her. And the patient didn't respond. But then, many months later, she started speaking. And, of course she'd lost her memory, for the time being, but was quite amazed that she could have been unconscious for so long. Now I am sure that a number of people would say: "This has got to be a miracle." But things like this do happen.

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There's still a lot that we don't know about the brain.

### How reliable are patients' perceptions when they say they've experienced a miracle?

It depends on what they mean by a "miracle". Perhaps they thought they weren't going to recover. For instance, I have known of a family (they were not my patients, but I knew their history) whose young daughter had an unusual growth of lymph glands – a lymphoma. Their church was a charismatic church. The people prayed for a miracle, and the child actually recovered. Now the family claimed that their daughter had experienced a miracle! However, what people were not told was that the child had been given vitamin B-12. Further, there is evidence that VB-12, in this condition, can allow lymph nodes to return to normal. So, in this case, for the family to say it was a miracle is not really true. Yet you can understand the family saying it.

I think these problems are always present when people say they've experienced a miracle. Sometimes you may meet a person who says: "I know that I've had cancer of the stomach, but I've recovered." You ask them how they know they've had a cancer of the stomach: was there x-ray evidence? Was there other evidence? And they usually reply: "Look, I know I've had it." Now, in that instance, you have to say that the patient's perceptions are wrong in terms of diagnosis unless they have good evidence.

### How difficult is it to measure healing?

Personally, I think it's very difficult to measure some responses. Take, for example, measuring a leg. Sometime ago there was a "faith-healer" who was elongating peoples' shorter legs. The problem was that he was not measuring from "bony point to bony point". He was simply measuring between points that were capable of altering; so there was no definite reference point. In this case, it's impossible to claim a miracle.

### What's the difference between miracles and spontaneous remissions of a disease such as cancer?

Well, there are some diseases where remissions can occur and this is known. We always have to be careful here. Sometimes people confuse the two – such as the woman I knew of who said she'd had multiple sclerosis and been cured. When you ask questions about the diag-

nosis, it becomes clear that it would not stand critical scrutiny.

Now it's possible, on the other hand, that if she had multiple sclerosis, she may have had one episode only. Sometimes spontaneous remissions do occur in some illnesses. I think scientists probably would tend to say that a remission occurred in an illness known to have spontaneous remissions, and it was due to that fact – no matter what the person believed. But the person who had undergone a spontaneous remission, if they prayed for healing, would believe it was a miracle. I expect it's simply the way you are looking at the same thing. Christians need to be careful here. I think we have to remember that

**You can have absolute faith that you will be healed and when it doesn't occur faith can be lost.**



there are critical people who examine our claims, and if you say that it was a miracle, then you can bring the Church, and by that I mean Christ's name, into disrepute.

I can think of a case where a woman refused a four-quarter amputation. This is an operation where you take off the whole arm and shoulder-blade because of cancer in her shoulder. She refused, saying that it would heal. Now, when the surgeon was told that she was still alive some 30-odd years later, he could not believe it. Her arm was still paralyzed, but she hadn't died. Now if that was a miracle it is not a healing in the sense of Christ's miracles because Christ's miracles return a person to formal health and to a normal state. This woman hadn't come back to a normal state.

### What should be the role of the Church in healing?

This is always a difficult one! I think that a group of Christian people can certainly pray for healing of one of the members of the church. I think the laying on of hands certainly does help people. After all, I think that James, the Lord's brother, implied that there was a role for that. I'm no Greek scholar – but I think the word that was used there was "asthenei" which simply means "weak". Actually, this term could be quite different from an organic illness although "asthenia" could be part

of an organic illness. I guess that I am a little upset that James wasn't more explicit. Perhaps it wasn't very important to the Church because healing wasn't the central message of the evangel. Christ came to save; I think the role of the Church in healing is probably supportive.

I think there are obviously people within the Church who have a gift of insight, especially in some psychological illness situations. They usually see more clearly than the sufferer what the problem is and then may be able to minister to the person.

There is another aspect of healing that we should always consider. Sometimes healing is trying to talk to and support people so that there is an acceptance of the illness that they have. To all of us who have been ill at any time, there is almost the unsaid question: why should it happen to me? Why did it happen to me? Why me and no one else? Or why me and not someone else? I think it's important that there is to be healing in the acceptance that this has occurred.

And if we believe in God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and we believe in the Trinity, then nothing happens in a way that means God is cruel or vindictive; or that it has been allowed, in some way, for God's purpose but not also for our benefit. And we need faith to accept that in eternal questions God has a reason. This means that an important role of the Church in the ministry of healing is to bring out this feature of illness.

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# Well-oiled

*It may be much-neglected, but it is a command.*

In the epistle of James we read: “Is anyone sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

The controversy over these words, especially the injunction to the elders to pray for the sick and to anoint them with oil, has been a long-standing one in the history of the Church. It is clear that the emphasis of the passage is on prayer and forgiveness, but it nevertheless true that James mentions that the elders are to anoint the sick person with oil. What do we make of this?

It seems that there are five possibilities.

First, James could be referring to the Roman Catholic sacrament of Extreme Unction, where oil is administered to the dying. Indeed, the Douai version of the Bible sees a “plain warrant” for the Roman Catholic sacrament in the words of James. At first sight, this might seem convincing but James calls for the elders (plural), not the priest (singular). Also, James expects the sick person to recover, so he is obviously not referring to any last rites.

Second, James could be underwriting the healing ministries of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. James seems to expect healing, so again this seems, initially at least, to be a convincing interpretation. But against this is the fact that the anointing takes place in private, not at a well-publicised healing service. Nobody is “slain in the spirit” in a crowded hall. Furthermore, it is undertaken by the ordinary officers of the Church, not by special healers. There is nothing in the New Testament lists of qualifications for elders which indicates that they must possess the gift of healing (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9).

Third, we might view this as a commandment for the apostolic age alone. Matthew Henry and John Calvin both adopted this view. It certainly would be convenient if it were convincing! It runs aground, however, because the call by James is to the ordinary office of the elders, not to the extraordinary office of



**Peter Barnes**

the apostles. There is nothing in the text as such to warrant its being confined to the life of the Church of the first century.

Fourth, the oil may represent medicine for physical healing while prayer is to be used for spiritual healing. Jay Adams suggests something along this line. This interpretation is no doubt eminently sensible, and seems to have more going for it than the first three possibilities.

Oil was used in the ancient world for medicinal purposes. The good Samaritan, for example, poured oil and wine on to the wounds of the battered Jew (Luke 10:34).

***Just as the laying on of hands is a kind of physical, acted prayer, so the oil is a physical symbol of God’s comforting presence.***



Galen, the great second century physician and, incidentally, an opponent of Christianity, declared that oil was “the best of all remedies for paralysis”. Pliny says that it was used for the teeth and the body, to neutralise all poisons, to restore vigour, to take away constipation, and to improve vision. That may be so, but it is hardly true that oil is suitable for all illnesses. We need more evidence to be convinced of this approach.

Fifth, the oil could be a visual aid to be used in prayer for the sick. When Jesus sent out the 12, it is said that they preached a gospel of repentance, cast out many demons, anointed many who were sick with oil, and healed them (Mk 6:12-13).

This surely is what really lies behind the injunction of James. Just as the laying on of hands is a kind of physical, acted

prayer, so the oil is a physical symbol of God’s comforting presence.

This fifth interpretation seems to make most sense. It takes the passage as it stands. Oil can have a calming effect on a sick person. It signifies healing, and it points us to Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One – anointed not with oil as the Old Testament prophets, priests and kings, but with the Holy Spirit.

When Francis Schaeffer was dying of cancer, he called for the elders of the church to anoint him with oil. This did not keep him from death, but it does seem to be obeying what the text is saying.

There have been a few occasions in my ministry when I have carried out James 5:14-15 in the spirit of the fifth option. On each occasion there has been a noticeable improvement in the health of the person who was seriously sick, although on no occasion could a miracle be claimed.

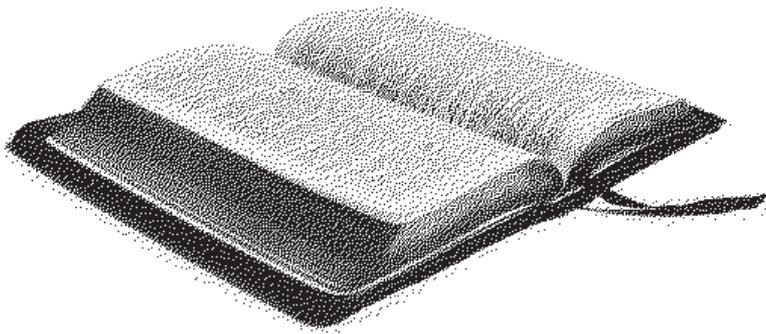
It may be that the appeal of Roman Catholic and Pentecostal claims to healing are at least partly due to evangelical neglect of God’s ordinary ministry to our health. We have no iron-clad promises of health and wealth. Paul suffered his thorn in the flesh despite his fervent and repeated prayers that it – whatever “it” was – be removed (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

James knows that the link between righteousness and health and wealth is hardly automatic. After all, he has just referred to the example of Job (James 5:11). Yet for all that, God has told us what to do in times of serious sickness. We are to call for the elders, pray for the forgiveness of our sins, and have the elders anoint us with oil. God has promised to hear us and to raise us up – which, in the context, surely is referring to a physical recovery rather than death and resurrection.

We may not fully understand this passage, but we are to trust and obey even when we do not fully understand. Church elders are to pray for the sick and to anoint them.

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

# Word for the wise



*The theme this month,  
following Easter, is ‘Come, follow me’  
(Mark 1-5).*

**P**salm 1 tells us that the truly happy man is one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, on which he meditates day and night.

Unfortunately, the pace of life in the 21st century means men and women have to juggle time between work and play and family and all their other commitments and the Lord. Many of us find it hard to put aside even a few minutes a day to read the Bible and pray. Getting the whole family together for any meaningful, regular family devotions is much more complicated again.

AP now publishes each month a set of 20 simple, daily Bible studies – a realistic target for the average person or family. The studies – prepared by the immediate past Moderator General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, **Bruce Christian** – are designed to be profitable in as little as five to 10 minutes a day.

Each is built around a small Bible **passage**, with a clear **point** to bring you to the heart of what God is saying. Some of the most important **particulars** are listed, with questions on which to **ponder** and **pray**. You can think about them during the day. We have provided a small box for you to tick each day, so you know where you are up to.

The editorial committee of AP is delighted to commend these to readers.

## DAY 1

### *A new beginning*

#### THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:1-8

**THE POINT** Jesus, God’s Son, has come into the world to bring us good news. His Kingdom shows us a completely different way of thinking – and John the Baptist will introduce us to it.

#### THE PARTICULARS

- God prepared the way for his Son’s coming by getting Malachi and Isaiah to predict it many centuries before it actually happened (verses 2-3, see Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3).
- John the Baptist was the ‘messenger’ God provided to introduce Jesus to the world.

John’s mission was to:

- challenge the Jewish nation with his radical lifestyle and message (like Elijah had done 700 years earlier);
- teach about true repentance, forgiveness and baptism;
- point away from himself to Jesus, the promised Messiah.

#### TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- ‘Jesus Christ’ in v. 1 means ‘Jesus, the Messiah’, whom God had promised all through the Old Testament. What does Mark want us to understand about Jesus and the Gospel he brought?
- How will John’s message challenge the way you live today?

## DAY 2

### *God with us*

#### THE PASSAGE

MARK 1:9-13

**THE POINT** Jesus, God’s Son, became part of our broken world in every way.

#### THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus was willing to let himself be baptised by John so that he would become one with us.
- God the Father, through the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, showed that Jesus was his beloved, accepted Son.
- God standing with us sinners was further demonstrated when Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan for 40 days.

#### TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- John’s baptism was a sign of true repentance from sin. Why did Jesus come to John for baptism? (see Matthew 3 : 13-15).
- Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus did not give in to Satan’s temptation (see Matthew 4 : 1-11, Luke 4 : 1-13). What does this tell us about Jesus as Man? How does this help us?
- Can you see a contrast between the first man, Adam, and God’s Son, Jesus? How were they different?

**DAY 3** *Repent, believe & follow*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 1:14-20

**THE POINT** Jesus takes over from John, proclaiming the New Way of the Kingdom, calling ordinary people to follow him.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- John the Baptist was put into prison for speaking out against social sins and proclaiming the need for repentance. Jesus' statement of his mission was clear and simple:
  - Time is running out: The Kingdom of God is near;
  - Up until now we've been on the wrong track: Repent;
  - The right way is to trust him: Believe the good news.
- He chose ordinary people involved in their daily tasks and challenged them to leave everything to follow him. He promised to equip them for the Kingdom work of bringing others to follow him as well.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Have you really come to see how big a step it is to follow Jesus? What have you had to 'leave'?
- How do you think Zebedee and his hired men would have felt when James and John walked off with Jesus?

**DAY 4** *Demons, beware!*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 1:21-28

**THE POINT** Jesus displays absolute authority, above that of the religious teachers, and even over demonic spiritual powers.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus' custom was to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath.
- His authority as a teacher was recognised immediately by the people and contrasted with the formal teachers.
- Evil (lit. unclean) spirits recognised Jesus as God's Son, the promised 'Holy One' (see Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 41:14, 16, 20).
- The forces of evil are a spiritual reality, with physical proofs, but they were subject to, and overpowered by, Jesus.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you place a high priority on being among the Lord's people on the Lord's Day seeking to be taught by him?
- How much was the activity of evil spirits in the Gospels a personal attack on Jesus and a way of proving who he really was? Should we expect things like this to happen today?
- Are you keen to spread the good news of Jesus everywhere?

**DAY 5** *Work, pray, preach...*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 1:29-39

**THE POINT** Jesus left us a model for keeping the right balance in how we serve God in his world.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus had power to heal physical sickness.
- Jesus was full of compassion for all who were in need.
- As soon as Simon's mother-in-law was cured she served others.
- Jesus didn't let the pressing needs of others distract him from spending time alone with his heavenly Father in prayer.
- Jesus kept a balance between his devotional life, his healing ministry, and his preaching; and between preaching God's Kingdom openly & keeping his popularity in check so as not to short-circuit his true Messianic mission involving the cross.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are you a true servant of others in God's work?
- In your work for God, do you let things that will advance your popularity squeeze out things that will bring you closer to him and make you more sensitive to his will?
- Will you look for opportunities to point others to Jesus today?

**DAY 6** *Show and don't tell!*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 1:40-45

**THE POINT** Jesus' healing ministry was the true fulfilment of Old Testament teaching; it should have proved to the Jewish leaders who he really was, but it impressed the common people instead.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The man with leprosy did not doubt Jesus' power to heal him (he had true faith), but only Jesus' willingness (he was humble).
- Jesus' power to heal included diseases (like leprosy) that made people 'ceremonially' or 'religiously' 'unclean'; so in every way it was about reconciling man to God.
- Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders with proof of who he was.
- The cured man was excited about his experience!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- When your faith wavers, is it because you doubt God's power or aren't sure of his willingness? He understands!
- Have you really seen the true (spiritual) meaning of Jesus' healing ministry? (see Isaiah 53:4-5)
- Are you excited about the difference Jesus has made to your life? Enough to want to tell others?

**DAY 7** *More than he bargained for*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 2:1-12

**THE POINT** Spiritual healing is much more important than physical healing. Only Jesus, because he's the Son of God, can cure Sin's curse.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus was more concerned to preach than to heal.
- Jesus responded to the men's clear demonstration of faith.
- Jesus went straight to the heart of the man's problem: his need for forgiveness of sin, ie of spiritual healing.
- Even on the Jewish leaders' own admission, this act of healing was proof that Jesus was truly God's Son.
- In this case, Jesus drew a close connection between the man's physical condition and his spiritual need.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are you prepared to place your faith on the line in the public arena of your daily life?
- Is there always a direct connection between physical illness and spiritual need? (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-9).
- Have you acknowledged truly in your mind that Jesus was God the Son miraculously come in human flesh?

**DAY 8** *Only bad people go to heaven*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 2:13-17

**THE POINT** Jesus came into the world to save sinners; therefore, unless I see myself as a sinner I cannot know him as my Saviour; in this case there can be no place for me in heaven.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Contrary to the accepted religious custom of his day, Jesus mixed comfortably with outcasts and bad people; he eye-balled such people directly and called them to follow him.
- Jesus' main role is to save: 'Jesus' (Greek) = 'Joshua' (Hebrew) = 'One Who Saves' – see Matthew 1:21. Therefore, access to heaven can only be through him (see John 14 : 6, Acts 4 : 12).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- With whom would Jesus most likely mix if he came to live in your community today? Would you be comfortable with this? Would they feel welcome in your Church fellowship?
- How did the teachers of the law see themselves as righteous? Did Jesus agree with their assessment? Is it possible for anyone to get to heaven by being good? (see Galatians 2:21).
- Are you going to heaven? Are you sure? Why?

**DAY 9** *Not a bandaid job*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 2:18-22

**THE POINT** Jesus' way of thinking about God's Kingdom put him on a collision course with the Jewish leaders. A radical change was called for, not just a patch up of old ways.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- The shakers and movers of Jewish religion were mainly concerned about outward observance of ritual. They failed to recognise Jesus as the Bridegroom / Messiah their Scriptures promised and that his presence among them should be a reason for rejoicing (see Isaiah 61:10, 62:5; cf Jeremiah 33:11).
- Jesus took every opportunity to remind his hearers that his mission included suffering and distress.
- Any attempt at a merger between Jesus' teaching and Judaism would spell destruction for both. Jesus came to fulfil the true teaching of the OT (see Matthew 5:17) not the perversion of it the Pharisees had set up (cf Matthew 5:20, 21-22 etc.).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What warning is in this passage for the Church leaders today?
- Jesus' appearance in human form was a unique event. What particular care must we take in applying this passage today?

**DAY 10** *The use & abuse of the Sabbath*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 2:23-3:6

**THE POINT** God has provided us with a special Day each week for our benefit, not his: the way we use it is to be guided by Jesus' teaching and example, not rigid rules.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- In real life, having rigid rules about how to use our day of rest will always cause problems. We need to be sensitive, flexible and tolerant when we try to discover God's will about it.
- Jesus set us an important example in being among the Lord's people for worship every 'Sabbath'.
- In the Gospels, Jesus only 'broke' the Sabbath 'rules' (about rest from work) to do acts of mercy or necessity.
- It is easy to 'lose the plot' if we become too legalistic.
- Jesus did not teach that the idea of a day of rest has finished.
- Jesus described himself as 'Son of Man' to emphasise his divine authority on earth over all things.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Is Sunday a burden or a benefit for you? Are you missing out on the the Lord's blessing associated with a day of rest?

**DAY 11** *Vital combat strategy*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 3:7-19

**THE POINT** Jesus' confrontation of the spiritual forces of evil required a well-organised battle-plan.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Important elements in Jesus' strategy to confront evil included:
- Withdrawal from the crowd in spite of its genuine needs;
  - Taking practical steps (using the boat 'pulpit') to make the best use of resources;
  - Planning the right timing for the final battle (verse 12);
  - Choosing a small band of people in whom he could invest his time and authority to multiply his resources.
- Jesus healed many, which was the main reason for his great popularity, but preaching was higher on his agenda. The evil spirits recognised Jesus where the Pharisees failed to. One of the men Jesus chose was to be his betrayer.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Is the Church today serious about the spiritual conflict in which it is involved? How is this reflected in the way we plan and go about our task? Do we invest ourselves in others?

**DAY 12** *Clear but disturbing logic*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 3:20-35

**THE POINT** Wholehearted commitment to Jesus is clearly the most sensible step we can take, but others won't always see it this way!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus' family members were concerned for his sanity – because of his total involvement in his mission; and the Jewish leaders thought his strange behaviour meant he was demon-possessed.
- Jesus demonstrated by clear, undeniable logic that he could not possibly be demon-possessed.
- Jesus predicted his final overthrow of Satan's kingdom.
- Jesus warned very strongly against the 'unforgivable' sin of calling the Holy Spirit's ministry the work of Satan.
- Jesus warned that the work of his Kingdom can sometimes be more important than even our family responsibilities.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are you sometimes criticised for being too religious or pious or fanatical about your faith? How do you handle it?
- How can we avoid committing the unforgivable sin?
- How can we balance the Lord's work with family needs?

**DAY 13** *The 'Parable' parable*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 4:1-12

**THE POINT** Explaining the Gospel clearly to someone does not guarantee they will understand it. There are other factors, especially the need for God's grace to 'give' the 'secret' (v. 11) (see tomorrow)

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus had a good, simple, practical teaching method that the common, uneducated people found attractive. He used familiar word pictures to explain his point.
- Jesus reminds us that we have no excuse for failing to respond to his teaching (9).
- We need the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand spiritual truths. We are saved by grace alone (11 – cf Ephesians 2:8-9).
- This truth was revealed to the prophet Isaiah as he began his ministry so that he would not be discouraged by Israel's hard, unresponsive hearts (see Isaiah 6:9-10).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Jesus made the Gospel clear enough for even the least educated person to understand, but many still rejected it. What does this tell us about our true spiritual condition before God apart from his grace? Why is prayer so important in evangelism?

**DAY 14** *One gospel, many reactions*

**THE PASSAGE** MARK 4:13-20

**THE POINT** There is only one Gospel message, the Word of God, but people react to it differently, from total indifference to full acceptance.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Satan is actively at work to stop people hearing God's Word.
- For some, hearing God's Word has no impact at all – sadly, it is as if they haven't heard it at all.
- Some people respond keenly at first but soon lose interest.
- Jesus warns us about the danger of compromising with worldly things that can eventually destroy our spiritual life altogether.
- It should encourage us to know that, by God's sovereign grace, the preaching and spreading of his Word can be very effective and fruitful (see Isaiah 55:10-11).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you really want to see evidence of spiritual growth in your life as you read God's Word each day?
- How does the parable of the sower encourage us to be more enthusiastic and expectant when we spread God's Word, and less discouraged if people fail to understand or respond to it?

DAY 15

*Your kingdom come*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:21-34

**THE POINT** God wants us to look at things the way he does. He has shown us himself, his ways, and his will in the Bible, and he wants us to listen carefully and obey so we become more like him. This is how his Kingdom will grow.

THE PARTICULARS

- The light of the Gospel message should be out in the open. We don't belong to a secret society with secret rituals.
- In Jesus' Kingdom, blessing comes to those who generously use their resources to serve others.
- From very small beginnings God continues to grow his Kingdom even while we are asleep. We are not totally indispensable!
- God's Kingdom is concerned both with growth – and the final harvest when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How much of each day do you set aside for getting to know God better and becoming more familiar with his ways & will?
- Are you generous in the use of the resources God has made you responsible for? Do you long to see God's Kingdom expand?

DAY 16

*'Mother Nature' myth exposed*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 4:35-41

**THE POINT** Jesus further demonstrated that he is God by his control over the weather. He challenges us, in the light of this, to trust him with every part of our lives.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus took 'time out' for rest. His need for sleep shows he was truly and fully human. His power over the wind and waves proves he is truly and fully God. He is not part Man, part God.
- The personal God of the Bible, to whom we all must one day give account, the God of Creation, controls the weather – not an impersonal 'Mother Nature'. We can pray for rain!
- Jesus challenges all of us to trust him for everything.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- The Bible in many, many places tells us not to be afraid but to trust God. Do you ever think you are sinning when you're afraid? How can we overcome the sin of fear?
- Do you really recognise Jesus as the divine Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who became a true man?
- If Jesus is God the Son, can other religions be true without him?

DAY 17

*In enemy territory*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:1-13

**THE POINT** Jesus' recognition by, and power over, unclean spirits was not limited to Israel but extended to Gentile regions too. He could cure fully a demon-possessed, uncontrollably deranged man.

THE PARTICULARS

- A trip across the lake into pagan territory, a life-threatening storm on the way, and an encounter with a deranged man, were all reminders to the disciples of the force of evil in the world. Jesus' power over all these things, and Legion's cry of distress when confronted by Jesus, showed clearly his true divinity.
- Legion accepted defeat without a fight – he knew he was beaten.
- The Gerasenes saw the pig as a sacred animal and the lake as an abyss; Jesus' action proved to them his power and authority.
- Satan's intention is always to harm us (see verse 5); Jesus' healing is thorough and complete (see verse 15).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is there a need for greater 'fear' of God's power in our society today? Have we become too 'familiar' with God?
- Does this passage encourage you to see your neighbourhood as a fertile mission field rather than a spiritually barren desert?

DAY 18

*Go home... and tell...*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:14-20

**THE POINT** Evidence of Jesus' power at work in the lives of ordinary, needy people has a two-fold effect: bringing some to faith in him, but causing others to react strongly in opposition.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' exorcism caused great excitement in the area.
- Some (with vested interests? the pork trade? other religious practitioners? people comfortable with their present lifestyle?) were keen for Jesus to go away.
- The man who had been demon-possessed felt uncomfortable staying among the people who had known all about his past.
- Jesus insisted that the healed man's first task was to witness among those who knew him; his 'missionary training' consisted only of his personal experience of the Lord's power and mercy.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your life as a Christian cause people discomfort about their own to the extent that they'd rather not have you around?
- Can we spend too much time going to teaching rallies yet lack enthusiasm for just telling people what Jesus has done for us?

DAY 19

*Interruptions!*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:21-34

**THE POINT** Jesus turned interruptions into opportunities for extending his work to other areas. The crowd at the lake (including many in need) had to wait while he attended to Jairus. Jairus (with an urgent need) had to wait while he dealt with the sick woman.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jesus' ministry attracted great crowds but Jesus was willing to divert and devote his attention to just one – or two!
- Jairus and the woman were both confident of Jesus' power to meet their need. He was prepared to make his faith public but she wanted to remain anonymous. Jesus accepted them both.
- The woman's faith, and the action inspired by it, achieved her purpose even without a verbal request to him; he knew that she had touched him in a special way and had been healed; there is a strong link between spiritual forces & their physical effects.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your faith 'public' in your daily life? Do you reach out in faith to Jesus in times of need?
- Are you sensitive to 'interruptions' to your daily routine that might present opportunities for ministry to others?

DAY 20

*Never too late*

THE PASSAGE

MARK 5:35-43

**THE POINTS** Jesus' power gives us a new perspective on death. God sometimes delays in answering our prayers. Our trust in him must include patience to leave the timing with him as well.

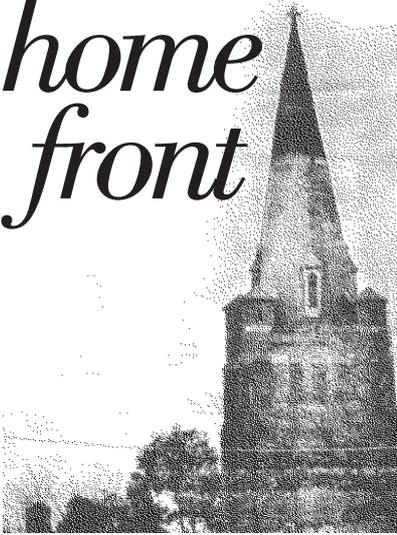
THE PARTICULARS

- The delay caused by the sick woman seems to bring a note of sarcasm to the report that it was too late for Jairus' daughter.
- Jesus challenges us to trust him in spite of the circumstances rather than because of them (cf John 20:29).
- With the touch of his hand and a spoken word Jesus has power even to raise the dead.
- The disbelieving crowd had to wait outside when Jesus raised the girl in response to her father's faith.
- Jesus was concerned with even the ordinary, practical detail of the girl's need for food.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Can you keep trusting God even at times when it seems that the opportunity for your prayer to be answered has passed?
- Are you trusting Jesus for eternal life? ... for today's dinner?

# home front



## Tasmanian triumph

The youth group at St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Ulverstone, has won the 2001 Bible Society's young video-maker's competition. Their winning entry, *Gone in 40 days*, was based on the biblical account of Noah and the flood from the book of Genesis. The video combined real-life drama with animation which the judges commented gave it a Monty Python/Oliver Stone feel. The prize, presented by Tasmanian Bible Society representative, Alan Harris, is a weekend for six young people at a Christian campsite.

Youth group leader Rosemary Braid said that the video project had been a wonderful means of drawing the young people together and had unearthed some considerable creative talent in the group. They are already planning their entry for this year's national competition.



Alan Harris with Rosemary Braid, Elizabeth Braid, Tim Auty, Adele Auty, William Auty, Sam Braid, and Bonnie Hendriks. (Absent: Elise Blades)

## Port mission

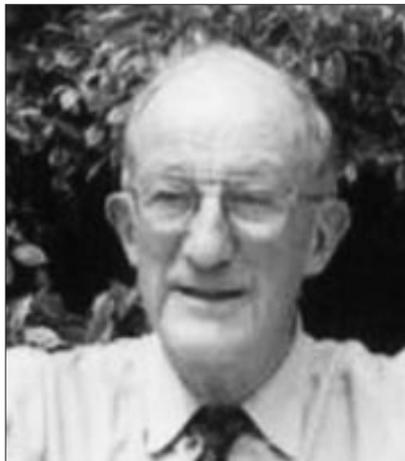
Melbourne East presbytery has approved opening a new home mission station in the rapidly developing area of Port Melbourne, supported by people from St Kilda and South Yarra Presbyterian churches. A small but enthusiastic congregation has been meeting in the Fishermans Bend Community Centre since late January. A holiday club has been held and door-to-door visitation is being conducted regularly.

## Deaf ministry

Tony Salisbury was licensed to preach the gospel at a service held at the Surrey Hills church, Melbourne, on 1 February. Tony is ministering part-time to the Deaf Christian Fellowship which meets in Balwyn. Melbourne East presbytery, Tony and the fellowship are exploring ways to strengthen and develop Christian work among deaf people.

## Rev. Jim Stewart

1925 - 2002



On 5 January the Presbyterian Church lost a much loved and effective pastor with the death of Jim Stewart. He entered the ministry after a career - like his father and grandfather - as a solicitor in Tatura and district, following a profound spiritual experience that changed the direction of his life. He came into the Presbyterian Theological College as a mature student, and served as the janitor at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Camberwell, during his studies.

His exit appointment was to Smeaton/Carisbrooke, after which he and his wife Fairlie moved to Colac, where they spent eight happy years of very effective service. On retirement they moved to Anglesea, and he became a part-time Presbyterian chaplain to hospitals in Geelong, and preached widely in various congregations.

He also began in particular to supply the congregation of Geelong West, and late last year he and Fairlie moved into the manse so that they would be better able to minister to the congregation. They intended to return to Tatura, where a unit was being built.

Last year Jim developed pneumonia. After some weeks he was able to return to the work he loved, but just before Christmas he became unwell and his last service was on Christmas Day. His stays in hospital and then in the West Geelong manse were times of blessing to him, to his family, and to visitors. Suddenly he passed into the presence of his Lord on the morning of 5 February.

The funeral service was at Scots, Geelong West, and the interment at Murchison East. Very large crowds attended both services.

Jim had a lovely open personality, and the coming of God's grace into his life brought an infectious exuberance of living for the Lord. He radiated the Gospel, and in preaching and pastoral ministry he sought to exalt his Saviour. He loved music, and had a wonderful sense of humour.

Jim and Fairlie had been married for 51 years, and their five children and all their grandchildren were able to be present at the funeral. He leaves behind many who were touched by his life, especially those who were influenced by him in his pastoral ministry and his hospital chaplaincy.

Alan Harman

## Arabic ministry

**Rev. Dr. Botros Abedalla**, home missionary at the South Yarra Arabic Presbyterian Church, has completed all the requirements to be received as a minister of the PCA. The Melbourne East presbytery has invited Dr Abedalla to address it on how to bring the gospel to Muslims.

## New charge

Sydney presbytery has declared the **Botany-Mascot** charge a pastoral charge, and issued an edict of vacancy. **Rev. Johnnie Li** was appointed interim moderator and the Ministry and Mission Committee was requested to continue the appointment of the **Rev. Noah Nam** to Botany-Mascot for the time being.

## Seeking Charlie

**Pastor Allan Grant** of Charleville is trying to contact **Charlie Nash**, a former student at the Queensland Theological Hall who served in a supply capacity at **West Wyalong** (NSW) and **Bort** (Vic.) and was last heard of in Melbourne. Please contact: Pastor Allan H. Grant, P.O. Box 228, Charleville Q.4470 Ph. (07)46543100 Email: pastor-al@bigpond.com

## Women's ministry

**G A of A Committee on a Positive Approach to Women's Ministry** invites submissions from any member of the PCA. In particular, the committee would like to hear from people who have expertise in the psychology or the physiology of men and women or who have done women's studies at university. The committee's task is to investigate the contem-

porary concept of "gender" and provide a biblical response; analyse ministries in the Presbyterian Church and report on unnecessary exclusion of people on the basis of gender; provide biblical models on how leadership within the congregation may be shared; and consider how to recognise and make available more ministry opportunities for women.

It next meets on 2 May, but submissions can be received after that. Contact the secretary, 28 Caltowie Place, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450, or email: moores@turboweb.net.au

## Missionaries commissioned

**Dr Granville Pillar** was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament by the Presbytery of the **Central Coast** at the **Gosford Presbyterian Church** on 23 February. He and his wife Denny were then commissioned as missionaries with the **International Institute of Christian Studies** through **Australian Presbyterian World Mission**.

More than 200 people attended the service. **Rev. Robert Benn** preached, and **Rev. Dr. Phil Paul** gave the charge to Granville. **Rev. Bill Lutton**, national director of APWM prayed. The Pillars travel to Hungary in May to begin ministry in one of the universities in which the International Institute of Christian Studies is involved.

## New general manager

**F**ollowing the resignation of **Keith Mar** last July as general secretary of the church in NSW, **Wayne Richards** has been appointed to the newly created role of general manager. He will also fulfil Keith's role as general secretary.

Wayne served for many years as a

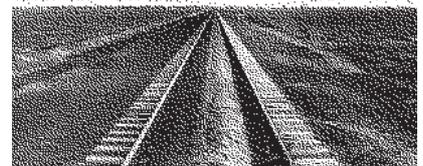
senior executive in the insurance industry, and is also director and deputy chairman of the Intellectual Disability Foundation of St George, past director and chairman of Sutherland Shire Christian School, and is a member of Engadine Congregational Church.

The **Chairman of Trustees, Mr Jeof Falls**, recognised the tremendous contribution Keith made, and expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation.

## College commencement

**S**ome 200 students joined staff, family, friends and councillors for the commencement service of **St Andrews Christian College** at **Canterbury Presbyterian Church**, Melbourne, on 15 February, reports *Kirsty Mills*. The acting chairman, and principal, **Mr Bob Speck**, welcomed the gathering. The address was delivered by PCV moderator **Rev. Bob Thomas**, while **Rev. Grant Lawry** closed with prayer and the benediction. For information about the school, contact Mr Speck, Private Box 400, Burwood, Vic 3125, or phone (03) 9808 9911.

# across australia



## Shaping Australia's future

**A**t a time when the erosion of family values, ethics and morality continues to undermine Australian society, Christians have the opportunity to join together and influence social and political life like never before, according to **Australian Christian Lobby** chairman **Jim Wallace**.

Christians can not only enter the political arena but decisively influence it if they are prepared to unite and commit to the cause of Christ. "Because politics sets the agenda of life these days and shapes what the world is going to look like, it is ridiculous to think Christians shouldn't be involved," Mr Wallace says.

The Australian Christian Lobby is a

## Encourage the Church

*To all presbytery & session clerks, parish secretaries, church workers and GAA committees: we'd love to receive all your news (in no more than 250 words) and photographs to share with our 12,000 readers.*

*The photographs can either be character or action shots, but please ensure the faces are clearly visible.*

*(For return of photos, please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope.)*

*Please sent all news to:*

*The News Editor*

*PO Box 375 Kilsyth VIC. 3137; fax (03) 9723 9685;*

*Email: austpres@bigpond.com*



Jim Wallace

coalition of Christians from across the denominations who are committed to making a difference in Australia. The ACL is not aligned with any particular political party or church denomination.

It was the challenge to realise the potential influence for Christ that drove the former commander of the Special Armed Services (SAS) and 1st Brigade to leave a flourishing Army career and take up the position with the lobby in October.

He says highly organised lobby groups have aggressively lobbied anti-Christian and anti-family agendas to the point where they have moved community standards beyond where most Australians would like.

There are many ways in which individual Christians can influence the political, social and spiritual future of this nation. For ideas, and for ways to support ACL's work, contact Jim Wallace (02) 6259 0431 or 0402 341 755; fax: 02 6259 0462; Email: executivechairman@acl.com.au. ACL's website is www.acl.com.au

## Gras exaggeration

There were definitely *not* 500,000 people at the Sydney mardi gras last month, report Peter and Jenny Stokes, of Melbourne Christian group Salt Shakers. "We were there," they say, and walked along the whole two-kilometre route while the parade was in progress.

The financial impact study that claimed the mardi gras is worth \$100 million to Sydney was based on the organisers' ludicrous claim in 1998 of a crowd of 700,000. This figure would require 174 rows of people lining the route: an impossibility.

## A small taste

Hundreds of thousands of committed Australians, most of them teenagers, will again go without food for a weekend in **World Vision's 40-hour famine 2002**. The fast will take place this year on the weekend of 17 to 19 May. Last year the 40-hour famine raised almost \$5.5 million to help alleviate global poverty. Organisers hope this year to raise \$6 million. Funds will go to pro-

jects such as health care in Sudan, agriculture in Afghanistan and reconciliation and disease control in Somalia. Money raised also goes to emergency relief projects.

For more information, call 13 32 40.

## True Love Waits

Hundreds of young people of all ages and young families associated with **True Love Waits** marched in Sydney on 10 February declaring their message of abstaining from sexual acts until marriage.

The event was organised by **Generation Now**, in conjunction with **True Love Waits** of Adelaide and **Straight Talk Australia** of Toowoomba, who hope it will become a national, annual campaign.

As the marchers arrived at the Wesley Centre, they were asked to sign the giant banner which contained the wording of the True Love Waits pledge: "By the grace of God and believing that true love waits, I make a pledge to God, myself, my family and my future spouse, to be sexually pure until marriage."

This banner will now be taken around Australia, to churches, schools and youth clubs, where others can also sign – encouraging young people to realise they are not alone or unusual in wanting to wait and remain chaste until they are married.

## Missionary conference

**Around the Tables** is the new name for the fellowship conference for home and overseas missionaries. It will be held in Sydney on 15 and 16 November, with the third Friday-Saturday weekend in November established as the annual date.

The conference theme builds on a philosophy of listening to each others' stories, around tables of six couples with as many tables as required. Churches are invited to sponsor mission couples (home or overseas). It costs \$160 a couple, with all meals and facilities (but not accommodation).

Around the Tables convenor **Dr Mark Tronson** (the Australian Cricket Board chaplain from 1984 to 2000) says: "We're working on making it known to every missionary in Australia, from those ministering in high schools to missionary organisations' national administrators."

For more information please ring (02) 4474 3554 or email [bushorchestra@acr.net.au](mailto:bushorchestra@acr.net.au).

# world news



## Russian mafia threat

A Russian Christian leader, whose grandfather was in prison for 17 years for his faith, whose father was a famous underground church leader, and who himself was constantly harassed for two years by the authorities for preaching on the steps of the Museum of Atheism in St. Petersburg, is now facing the greatest threat of his life – from the Russian Mafia who are trying to take over his church.

**Dimitri Shatrov Jr.** said that the Mafia has "persuaded" the local St. Petersburg council to seize the property so they can use it for their "businesses". Shatrov said that he has already received many death threats from the Russian Mafia who have been trying for years to take over the huge Good News Mission Church he is building in a prime spot in the city that spawned the 1917 Russian revolution. Upon completion, it will be the largest Protestant church in Russia.

*ASSIST News Service*

## Mormons on rise

For the first time, the **Mormon** church has been listed among the top five largest churches in the United States.

The Salt Lake City-based church ranked fifth among the 25 largest US churches, according to the 2002 Yearbook of Canadian and American Churches, compiled by the **National Council of Churches**.

The **Roman Catholic Church** maintained its No. 1 spot, with 63.6 million reported members. The largest Protestant church, in the No. 2 spot, remains the **Southern Baptist Convention**, with 15.9 million reported members. The **United Methodist Church** placed third, with 8.3 million members in the United States. In

the No. 4 spot is the **Church of God in Christ**, a predominantly black Pentecostal church with 5.4 million members. The Latter-day Saints, with 5.2 million members, placed fifth.

The Latter-day Saints bumped the nation's largest Lutheran body, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church** in America, to sixth place, with 5.1 million members. That move leaves the Methodists as the only mainline Protestant church among the top five. In 1970, three of the top five churches were mainline churches.

### Designer science

Supporters of the intelligent-design movement, which challenges Darwin's domination in the science classroom, have argued for equal standing in the US state of Ohio's new teaching curriculum, to warnings by critics of the dangers of including "speculative theories of some ultimate agent underpinning evolution" as "true science".

Hundreds of people sat for more than two hours at a hearing on the issue by the State Board of Education, listening to obscure arguments about the bacterial flagellum and the peppered moth, waiting for the arguments about the inclusion of God in the discussions.

"The real danger is in trying to put God

in the gaps," said Dr Lawrence Krauss, the physics chairman at Case Western Reserve University. He argued that while much remained to be discovered about natural selection, Darwin's theory had only grown in strength through decades of repeated experimentation and discovery to which intelligent design had not been subjected.

Members of the school board, which will vote this year on a new curriculum, the old one having come up for routine review, asked for the hearing despite a strong endorsement of evolution teaching from the board's curriculum advisory panel.

*New York Times*

### \$100m bill for abuse

The Boston archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged that its insurance policies will not cover an estimated \$US100 million in settlements of lawsuits against priests accused of sexually abusing children. It will have to sell church property, take out loans and ask for special donations from wealthy benefactors to cover those costs.

**Kenneth Hokenson**, director of development for the archdiocese, acknowledged the problem, but reiterated a promise by **Cardinal Bernard F. Law** that none of the money for the settlements

would come from a \$US300 million fund-raising effort under way, the biggest such campaign ever by an American diocese.

Nevertheless, the acknowledgment is the clearest indication yet that the unfolding scandal is starting to hurt the archdiocese financially.

The church's latest financial agreement is to pay \$US15 to 30 million to 86 victims of a defrocked priest, **John J. Geoghan**. Documents released in these suits show that Cardinal Law and other church officials shuffled Geoghan, 66, from parish to parish, though they knew he had been accused of sexually abusing a number of boys over the years.

### Indian campaign

As part of a joint Gospel Festival involving 12 worldwide evangelists, Virginia-based **Bob Boyd Ministries** (BBM) recently completed two-weeks of evangelistic campaigns in Madurai, South India. The Bob Boyd Ministries Team spoke to more than 11,000 people. More than 1200 prayed to receive Jesus.

A vital part of each campaign message was the assignment of Indian Christian nationals to personally contact each new convert. "Our goal is the salvation of a nation," said **Dr Bob Boyd**, president and team leader for Bob Boyd Ministries.

*Source: Assist News Service*

## Presbyterian Aged Care

The Board of Presbyterian Aged Care, Sydney, is seeking to appoint a full-time Chaplain to work in the four facilities under its care. The applicant should be a person who has relevant theological and pastoral qualifications for such a position and also preferably an ordained minister of a Protestant/Reformed denomination.

The applicant, who should possess excellent interpersonal skills, will be part of a multi-disciplinary health-care team under the day-to-day supervision of the CEO. The successful candidate will have strong preaching and counselling capabilities and will be expected to conduct regular public worship and specialised services such as funerals, as well as engage in systematic Bible studies and visitation of the residents.

Applicants should have a thorough knowledge of Christian bio-ethics so as to be able to contribute to the staff education programme. Musical skills and a Class 3 driver's licence would also be an advantage. There may also be opportunities for a suitably qualified spouse to share in chaplaincy responsibilities and/or diversional therapy activities.

This is a demanding and challenging role that requires physical and spiritual energy. A Manse will be provided and salary will be by negotiation in line with the NSW Presbyterian Assembly's ruling on ministerial stipends.

#### Applications should be addressed to:

Pastoral Care Committee, PAC Sydney, Private Bag 15, Ashfield NSW,  
email: ceo@pacsyd.com.au

**by 30th April 2002.**

## Mission Statement

Presbyterian Aged Care, Sydney, is a Christian ministry providing care to the aged with values based on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly compassion, justice, the preciousness of human life, the dignity of the individual and a commitment to excellence in ser-

# A thirst for God

*The godly always yearn for more of Christ, says Jerry Bridges.*

**T** rue godliness engages our affections and awakens within us a desire to enjoy God's presence and fellowship. It produces a longing for God himself. The writer of Psalm 42 vividly expressed this longing when he exclaimed, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

What could be more intense than a hunted deer's thirst for water? The psalmist does not hesitate to use this picture to illustrate the intensity of his own desire for God's presence and fellowship.

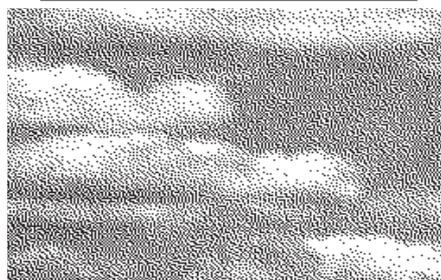
David also expresses this intense desire for God: "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

David yearned intensely for God himself that he might enjoy his presence and his beauty. Since God is a spirit, his beauty obviously refers not to a physical appearance but to his attributes. David enjoyed dwelling upon the majesty and greatness, the holiness and goodness of God. But David did more than contemplate the beauty of God's attributes. He sought God himself, for elsewhere he says, "earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you" (Ps. 63:1).

The apostle Paul also experienced this longing for God: "I want to know Christ" (Phil. 3:10). The Amplified Bible forcefully catches the intensity of Paul's desire in this passage: "[For my determined purpose is] that I may know him – that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with him, perceiving and recognising and understanding [the wonders of his person] more strongly and more clearly."

**T**his is the heartbeat of the godly person. As he contemplates God in the awesomeness of his infinite majesty, power, and holiness, and then as he dwells on mercy and grace poured out at Calvary, his heart is captivated by this One who could love him so. He is satisfied with God alone, but he is never satisfied with his present experience of God. He always

## IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



yearns for more.

Perhaps this idea of a desire for God sounds strange to many Christians today. We understand the thought of serving God, of being busy in his work. We may even have a "quiet time" when we read the Bible and pray. But the idea of longing for God himself, of wanting to deeply enjoy his fellowship and his presence, may seem a bit too mystical, almost bordering on fanaticism. We prefer our Christianity to be more practical.

Yet who could be more practical than Paul? Who was more involved in the struggles of daily living than David? Still, with all their responsibilities, both Paul and David yearned to experience more fellowship with the living God. The Bible indicates that this is God's plan for us, from its earliest pages right through to the end. In the third chapter of Genesis God walks in the garden, calling out for Adam that he might have fellowship with him.

In Revelation 21, when John sees the vision of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, he hears the voice of God say, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (verse 3). For all of eternity God plans to have fellowship with his people.

And during our present day, Jesus still says to us as he did to the church at Laodicea, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). In the culture of John's day, to share a meal

meant to have fellowship, so Jesus is inviting us to open our hearts to him that we may fellowship with him. He desires that we come to know him better; therefore, the desire and yearning for God is something that he plants within our hearts.

In the life of the godly person, this desire for God produces an aura of warmth. Godliness is never austere and cold. Such an idea comes from a false sense of legalistic morality that is erroneously called godliness. The person who spends time with God radiates his glory in a manner that is always warm and inviting, never cold and forbidding.

This longing for God also produces a desire to glorify God and to please him. In the same breath, Paul expresses the desire to know Christ as well as to be like him. This is God's ultimate objective for us and is the object of the Spirit's work in us. In Isaiah 26:9, the prophet proclaims his desire for the Lord in words very similar to the psalmist's: "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you."

**N**ote that immediately before this expression of desire for the Lord, he expresses a desire for his glory: "Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts" (verse 8). Renown has to do with one's reputation, fame and eminence – or in God's case, with his glory. The prophet could not separate in his heart his desire for God's glory and his desire for God himself. These two yearnings go hand in hand.

This is devotion to God – the fear of God, which is an attitude of reverence and awe, veneration and honor toward him, coupled with an apprehension deep within our souls of the love of God for us, demonstrated preeminently in the atoning death of Christ. These two attitudes complement and reinforce each other, producing within our souls an intense desire for this One who is so awesome in his glory and majesty and yet so condescending in his love and mercy.

*This extract is taken from The Practice of Godliness by Jerry Bridges (Navpress, 1983).*

ap

# The better way

*Like Robbie Williams, you can't help yourself.*

**H**e was the bad boy of British pop. Now Robbie Williams is doing all he can "to be a better man". At least that's the sentiment of his recent chart single.

Williams came to prominence in the early '90s as a member of the British boy band *Take That*. At 16, he answered an ad in the newspaper and became the fifth member of the band. They were groomed for stardom and attracted an enormous fan base of teenage girls. They blazed a trail for similarly manufactured groups, including the *Spice Girls*.

While their management attempted to keep a tight rein on the five young guys, Williams bucked the system. In his own words: "I was a teenager. If I hadn't taken drugs and slept with lots of girls when I was in a pop group, then I would be abnormal." After a drunken performance alongside the rock band Oasis at the '96 Glastonbury rock festival, it wasn't long before Williams was out of the band and on a downward slide to potential rock oblivion.

However, through family support and therapy Williams got his life and career back on track. Again in his own words: "The problem was me. It wasn't the drink and drugs, they were a symptom. It's the same with any addiction, like an eating obsession, it's not the food that's the problem but the person. So I checked into rehab to sort my head out. I've learnt to be comfortable with myself and I feel proud of what I've done."

Which brings us to his recent chart success, *Better Man*. The lyrics express something of Williams' journey. It's an intriguing song.

*Send someone to love me  
I need to rest in arms  
Keep me safe from harm  
In pouring rain*



**Colin Spragg**

*Give me endless summer  
Lord I fear the cold  
Feel I'm getting old  
Before my time*

*As my soul heals the shame  
I will grow through this pain  
Lord I'm doing all I can  
To be a better man*

*Go easy on my conscience  
'Cause it's not my fault  
I know I've been taught  
To take the blame*

Williams expresses a longing for companionship and security. As his youthful years pass, he recognises his fear of being alone. Williams' solution is to pursue personal recovery and growth. Where God fits into this is hard to assess. The healing Williams has in mind apparently comes from within, as does the attempt to be a better man.

**W**hile we can identify with Williams' desire for healing and personal growth, it is not the path we find in Christ and his gospel. Healing from shame is not something we can bring about ourselves. Only through Christ's death for our sin can we know forgiveness and freedom from shame. The healing of our souls is a gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus. Without that, any attempt to be a better man or woman is a lost cause. It fails to deal with our guilty conscience before God.

In his lyrics, Williams expresses his struggle with his conscience. His solu-

tion is to shield himself from blame. It's a popular sentiment. For almost a century, popular psychology has characterised a guilty conscience as the product of parental conditioning that teaches us to "take the blame". Yet in reality, a guilty conscience cannot be so easily dismissed. Williams' plea is evidence of that.

Where do we find healing for a guilty conscience? The solution is not in denial, it is in confession of our guilt before God. In Christ there is healing for a guilty conscience. The writer to the



**The healing of our souls is a gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus.**

Hebrews encourages us to "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22).

If, like Robbie Williams, you long to be a better man or woman, there is a better way than self-help. The someone we need has already been sent. The arms we need to rest in are the arms of the one who bore our shame in those arms upon the cross. It is Christ who makes a better man.

*Colin Spragg is director of training development for Presbyterian Youth New South Wales.*

ap

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# Movie Watch

## A Beautiful Mind

Reviewed by Phil Campbell



Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*

Let's be honest. The fact that Russell Crowe wasn't actually born in Australia is more a relief than a regret. Hailed as an Aussie made good in Hollywood, Crowe's smirk lurks behind every turn of the newspaper page, every flick of the TV remote control, every award ceremony – he's even at the footy ringing the bell for Souths. Enough is enough.

With that in mind, I wasn't expecting to be impressed by Crowe's much feted movie, *A Beautiful Mind*. Surprise! Here's a movie that – in spite of Crowe's off-screen persona – is genuinely moving.

The beautiful mind in question belongs to Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Nash. According to some newspaper reports, the real Nash is a flawed hero, thoroughly sanitised by the movie. No matter. The art of storytelling always involves simplification – and the fact is, the on-screen Nash is far enough from perfect too. This is a story cleverly told.

It begins at Princeton University in September 1947. In this hot-house environment, mathematicians are a celebrated race. Code-breakers were credited with helping to win the war, and anyone in the class could prove to be the next Albert Einstein. Nash, winner of the prestigious Carnegie scholarship, wants it to be him. Dismissive of the derivative work of his class-mates, Nash is determined to break new ground. "I must find a truly original idea," says Nash. "It's the only way I'll distinguish myself."

Simply being a genius isn't enough. "What's the difference between genius, and most genius?" asks a friend. "Quite a lot," says Nash, who describes himself as having two helpings of brain but only half

a helping of heart. "The truth is," he says, "I don't much like people and they don't much like me." But from here – through many trials – the story of a beautiful love begins to unfold.

This is a movie you'll want to see twice. Inspired a little by *The Sixth Sense*, the viewer is drawn into the very believable world of Nash's delusions as he develops paranoid schizophrenia. I'm not sure it's a movie I'd want to see with any of my friends who suffer from mental illness – the impact is immediate and unsettling, and opens the door to a deeper appreciation of the very mixed blessings of shock treatment and medications that offer a degree of stability at the cost of a large slice of personality and ability. And you can only begin to imagine the trauma, so well put by Nash's psychiatrist, of discovering that so many of the moments and memories most dear to you not gone – but worse, had simply never been.

Ultimately, the beauty of Nash's mind may be a frustration to other sufferers of mental illness. As a brilliant mathematician, Nash applies logic to his mental illness. "This is a problem," he says. "I solve problems. I can do this. All I need is time." And to some extent, he achieves what so few can – his delusions are repeatable and recognisable, so he learns to shut them out. No cure – but a functional balance that many less gifted minds would love to achieve.

The film concludes with Nash on the podium at the 1994 Nobel Prize awards. His equilibrium bargaining theorem – conceived as an exercise in group bartering while picking up girls at the bar – has revolutionised economic theory.

But in the midst of all that, Nash wants us to know that his story is all about love ... because through it all, his wife Alicia has remained committed through good times and bad. "My quest," says Nash, "has taken me through the delusional and back. And I want you to know that it's only in the mysterious equations of love that any reasons can be found."

Wiping the tears from our eyes, we'll say a resounding amen to that. *A Beautiful Mind* is quite a beautiful movie – some coarse moments may be disturbing, some answers may be too glib, but here's a slice of an exceptional life that may make a small difference to the way you look at the world. Russell Crowe – all is forgiven.

Phil Campbell is AP's Culture Watch editor. ap



### Queensland Presbyterian Theological Hall/College Recognition of Prior Learning

During the last five years, the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College (now known as the Reformed College of Ministries) has taught its own accredited award, the Advanced Diploma of Theology. It is possible that the accreditation of this award will not be renewed when due in October.

Past graduates of the College are therefore advised that they must apply

by 30 June 2002 if they wish to receive this award through

Graduates who apply for & receive the Advanced Diploma may be eligible to receive two years credit towards the BTh degree at the discretion of the Australian College of Theology, and

upon satisfactory fulfillment of that College's requirements.

# An Islamic dialogue

*How to explain the crucifixion to a Muslim.*

**T**he word of God says: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23,24).

Even for the disciples themselves, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the crucifixion of Jesus was hard to accept (Mt. 16:21,22). Likewise, the death of Jesus, particularly on a cross, has been a big stumbling block to followers of Islam since its very beginning. Mohammed himself said that when Jesus comes for judgment in the last day, he will break the cross. The death of Jesus is the major theme that has been debated, time after time, between Muslims and Christians and between Muslim scholars themselves.

The Lord Jesus has commanded us to preach his gospel to all creation (Mk 16:15). We preach Christ crucified to Jews and Gentiles. To every one, including our Muslim friends, we must proclaim the essence and necessity of the sacrificial death of Jesus. "God lives in unapproachable light, Whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). We cannot know God by our imagination about him, otherwise, he would not be God. The death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice has revealed to us that God is the most righteous, just and merciful. In the cross of Jesus, mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed (Ps. 85:10).

Upon hearing of the death of Jesus, your **Muslim friend** may say: The Qur'an says, "They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them." Our *Ulama* (scholars and commentators) say that Allah cast Jesus' likeness upon one of *Al-Hewaryeen* (his disciples) whom the Jews crucified thinking

that he was Jesus, while Jesus was taken alive to heaven.

You, **Christian**, can say: In the Qur'an, Jesus says, "Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)." So, it is clear that Jesus did die. After his resurrection from the dead, he was taken alive to heaven.

**Muslim friend:** No, Jesus did not die. He was taken alive to heaven and will come again on the day of judgment and stay on earth for 40 years. Then he will die and be buried by Muslims.

*It is clear from the Qur'an that Jesus did, physically, die in the past, not in the future.*

that he will be raised up to life (again)." We know that *Yehia* died like the others. According to this verse, Jesus died like *Yehia*.

**Muslim:** But our *Ulama* tell us that Jesus will die in the future when he comes and stays on earth for 40 years.

**Christian:** My friend, it is clear from the Qur'an that Jesus did, physically, die in the past, not in the future. It says: "Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee (causing you to die) and raise thee to myself' and

'I (Jesus) was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when thou didst take me up (caused me to die) thou wast the Watcher over them'."

God spoke many times in the past, in the Torah, that Christ would come and die as a ransoming sacrifice for every one who would believe in him.

**Muslim:** But why do I need someone to die as ransom for me? Allah is omnipotent and can forgive me without an atonement sacrifice.

**Christian:** The idea of the atonement sacrifice is in the Qur'an. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. In order that his son not be sacrificed, God ransomed him with a lamb. Even in the Qur'an, Allah said, "And we ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice." Accordingly, Muslims celebrate *Eed Ul-Adha* (the feast of Sacrifice). The Qur'an also says: "Allah has already ordained for you (O men) the dissolution of your oaths." The Qur'an commentators state that the dissolution of an oath is by a ransoming sacrifice.

**Muslim:** But we forgive people who trespass against us by just forgetting what they do to us. If we, human beings, can do that, cannot the almighty God do the same?

**Christian:** Firstly, when we forgive those who trespass against us, this does not mean that God will automatically forgive them. To be forgiven by God, they themselves have to confess their sins and ask God to forgive them. If I sin against you, my sin will be, first and foremost, against God.

The Torah tells us that the wife of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, asked Joseph to sleep with her. He refused and said to her; "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). David, the king and prophet, committed adultery and killed. In *El-Zabour* (Psalms) we read that he confessed to God and said: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps. 51:4).

Second, God cannot sin, and cannot forgive sin by just forgetting it. The *Injil* (New Testament) says "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Yes, he is a

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merciful, compassionate and loving God. He is, also, holy and just. Therefore, he cannot, and his nature and essence do not allow him to forgive sinners without dealing with their sin.

**Muslim:** Why shedding blood? Can't we offer God any gift without killing an animal or a man like Jesus? Is God bloodthirsty?

**Christian:** When God permitted man to eat meat, after the flood of Noah, God commanded man not to eat meat that has its lifeblood (Gen. 9:4). In the book of Leviticus, God also says: "Any person who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Lev. 17:10,11).

God is not bloodthirsty but we know that there is no one who has not sinned, and the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Accordingly, all the unforgiven sinners will be punished by eternal death, in hell. Because all of us have sinned, all of us deserve death, and nothing can make atonement for man's death but man's death. Because man's life is in his blood, therefore, his blood must be shed unless a substitute can be found.

In the past, in the Torah, God com-



**God is not bloodthirsty, but there is no one who has not sinned... The wages of sin is death.**

manded his people to offer sacrifices as a substitute for their own blood. When they slaughtered a living creature, animal or bird, they could see it suffering and dying. Then, they would know how sin is utterly sinful. But, at the same time, animal is not equal to man. Therefore, blood of animal sacrifices could not and cannot forgive sins or make atonement for man. That is why Jesus sacrificed himself for us.

**Muslim:** Why is it specifically Jesus who dies for people? Why does not God sacrifice another man or an angel and not Jesus, his righteous prophet?

**Christian:** The person who can make atonement by his death for man, before God, has to be:

- A man, so that he can be equal to man and redeem him.
- Sufficient for all people, every where, and throughout the history. Otherwise, each believer would need a man to die as a ransom for him.

- An uncreated person. Otherwise, he would be owned by his creator, God. Consequently, he would not be able to offer himself to God because he already belongs to God.

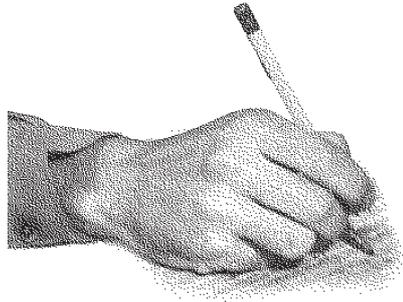
- A sinless one. Otherwise, he would need someone else to die for him.

- Unlimited in his greatness for sin is against God who has no limit in his greatness and the redeemer has to be sufficient for the requirements of the holiness and justice of this great unlimited God.

If God offers to put to death a sinless or righteous one instead of sinful people, he will be unjust. But if he punishes people because of their sins, and takes their punishment upon himself instead, he will be a just, merciful and loving God; he will show people the deepest and greatest love ever. That is what God really did. The Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, the Holy One, the unlimited one in his greatness, came to us and lived amongst us as a normal man, but without sin. He sacrificed himself as the atonement for us. Any one who believes in him, will not perish, but have eternal life.

*Fayek Iskander was ordained a Presbyterian minister in Egypt in 1978 and came to Australia in 1992. Now a minister of the PCA, he works as a missionary of the Australian Presbyterian World Mission. <sup>ap</sup>*

## letters



### Mind the Bible

As a new reader of *AP*, I have been very pleased to see articles from the leaders of the biblical counselling movement. Dr Powlison has hopefully stimulated some to look further into his valid claim for the sufficiency of Scripture in counselling. Professor Welch's article on depression presented a rational and biblical view. It

seems to me that by and large the Church in Australia remains under the impression that the important answers to problems of living, including most depressive symptoms, are found in the medical model or the various secular psychologies.

The main difficulty with Welch's correct conclusion that biblical counselling should be used in all situations, with medication as a possible "aspirin" for unpleasant feelings, is that such counselling is difficult to find here. While some Christians who counsel are more in line with the Word of God than others, few have taken Scripture as their foundation for understanding people. As a result, many pass off the wisdom of the world as the truth without knowing how far they are from what God has revealed.

Going by the listed qualifications that I see, most Christians who counsel have low-level theological training, if any, compared with psychology. It should be no surprise that all too often a theory of psychology ends up distorting biblical interpretation. Many times I have seen psychology displace beneficial scriptural teachings due to a basic incompatibility.

Surely how we live life and deal with problems such as worry, fear, anger and unhappy marriage is a central concern of the Bible. There is much more to the evangelical and reformed gospel than salvation in heaven. That doctors can prescribe medication to deal with possible brain problems may well be a blessing. But having the world define the content, methods and goals of counselling has been a blight on the church for too long.

*Karl Hood  
Warragul, Vic*

### Thanks from Africa

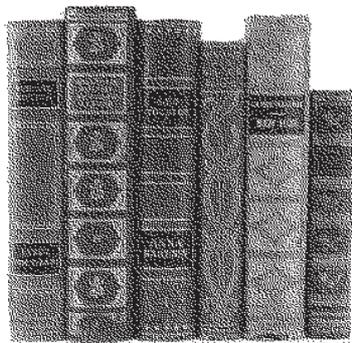
The magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Australia has been so encouraging, uplifting and edifying to me and many brethren in Kenya. The spiritual food we are receiving is beyond description. Please continue to send me every issue.

May God bless you, your family and Ministry.

*Rev. Robert Makona  
Kitale, Kenya*



# books



## God and Cosmos: A Christian view of time, space and the universe

John Byl  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001  
Reviewed by Luke Barnes

In 1616, the Catholic Church infamously declared false the work of Galileo Galilei. He had proposed a model of the universe which did not place the Earth at its centre, contrary to the then interpretation of the Bible. The decision was reversed by the church in 1992. In 1951, Pope Pius XII seized on the big bang model of the universe as proof of a creator, as it proved that the universe has a beginning.

At first glance it may appear that the Church's actions in 1951 were much wiser than its actions in 1616. However, this case provides a clear example of the hazards of putting science before the Bible, a central theme of *God and Cosmos*.

In 1616, the church ruled against Galileo because his model only reflected an easier way of thinking about things, not necessarily the truth. Thus the church chose to trust the model which it saw as more in keeping with the scriptures. Even today, the church's decision is justifiable, due to the realisation that all motion is relative – only God can state whether the sun or the earth is truly still.

However, the church's acceptance of the big bang model in 1951 poses more significant problems. While a solar system where the earth revolves around the sun does not directly oppose Scripture – only its medieval interpretation – the big bang model severely undermines biblical authority. Most importantly, it removes the need for a personal, loving God.

The god of a big bang is the god of deism. Ten to 15 billion years ago God is

supposed to have grabbed a whole bunch of nothing, exploded it and left it to work itself out. Other varieties of the big bang model require no God at all. The big bang also has philosophical baggage, most notably the theory of evolution.

When the big bang model is replaced by a better model in the future, the Catholic Church will be forced to either hold on to an outdated model and put itself at odds with current scientific knowledge, or change its stance, which gives the impression that science is a more reliable source of truth than the bible.

This book is a comprehensive look at the current state of cosmology and especially its theological implications for Christianity, Protestant or Catholic. It is considerably more extensive, although a little harder to read, than Stephen Hawking's bestseller *A Brief History of Time*, which only really details Hawking's particular brand of the big bang theory. Byl's thoroughness means that he does not shy away from exposing problems, even with Creationist attempts to find a working cosmological model, and common arguments for God's existence from design. At the same time, this book provides a powerful weapon for those who have been intimidated by science into doubting a literal reading of Genesis 1.

Luke Barnes is a physics student at Sydney University.

## The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals

Iain Murray  
London: Banner of Truth, 2001  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

We live in an age when words are often evacuated of meaning, but it is sad indeed that *evangelical* has come to mean whatever one chooses it to mean. Back in the 19th century Charles Hodge warned that "to say that a man may be a Christian, without believing the doctrines of Christianity, is a contradiction. A man may be amiable and benevolent, without any definite form of faith, but how is he to be a Christian?"

Yet this is what we have seen in recent times. The retiring Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, wants Catholics, evangelicals, charismatics and liberals to fellowship together in the one church "in joyful harmony".

He writes of liberalism: "For many of us in the Church, liberalism is a creative and constructive element for exploring theology today ... It would constitute the end of Anglicanism as a significant force in world-wide Christianity if we lost this ingredient."

There are still some of us who believe that the Church would be better off if it did not tolerate clergy who do not believe in the resurrection of Christ or the existence of heaven and hell. Liberalism is just unbelief cloaked with some "God" words. Iain Murray's little booklet deserves to be read and its message taken to heart. It is sharp without being uncharitable.

## Burial or Cremation: Does It Matter?

Donald Howard  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

To many, the issue of burial or cremation for the dead is a non-issue. In burial the body rots slowly whereas in cremation it is burnt up quickly – what is the difference? Historically, there has been a difference – Christians and Jews have traditionally buried the dead out of respect for the body and a belief in its physical resurrection. Religions which reject those tenets have tended to cremate the dead. The modern Western mania for what is sanitised and convenient has also played its part.

Donald Howard has written a thoughtful treatment of the subject, and one that is not lightly to be dismissed.

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# As to a little child

*It should be simple, memorable, and aim to save.*

**T**here is a mystery involved in teaching, a mystery which is compounded when it comes to teaching children. It seems to me – although I hardly rank as an expert, or even as a competent amateur – that we often fail in a number of different ways.

First, we can fail by teaching in an inappropriate way. What we teach is to a considerable degree determined by the capacities of those whom we are teaching. Mark tells us that Jesus spoke the word of God to his disciples in parables “as they were able to hear it” (Mk 4:33). Our Lord did not pour too much into the cup.

Similarly, on the night before the crucifixion, he told the 11: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (Jn 16:12). The apostle Paul, too, fed the Corinthians with milk rather than solid food because they were not able to receive it (1 Cor. 3:2). One finds the same image used in Hebrews 5:12-14, as the Hebrew Christians are criticised for not being more mature in their Christian understanding.

The implications should be quite obvious for the teaching of children. We have all heard the jokes about the child who recites the Lord’s Prayer, and thinks that God’s name is Harold, and that trespassers are asking for forgiveness. The general principle is: if I do not understand what is being said, I cannot be edified (see 1 Cor. 14:1-19).

**T**here is no point in reading to your Sunday School class volume 10 of John Owen’s tomes. Truth must be accurate but also appropriate. There is an understanding which belongs to a child and that which belongs to an adult (1 Cor. 13:11). Some of my most disastrous efforts in teaching children have come about because I have forgotten whom I am addressing.

Second, we can fail by not aiming at the conversion of a child. The Bible says that God’s covenant is extended to the believer and to his children (Gen. 17:7, 10-11; Is .59:21; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:16). In Ephesians 6:1-3, Paul specifically addresses children. He expects the children in the church at Ephesus to read this



**Peter Barnes**

epistle or to have it read to them.

John also addresses different groups within the church – little children, fathers and young men (1 John 2:12-14). We are told to remember our Creator in the days of our youth before the difficult days come (Eccles. 12:1). If God’s word is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:13), if it shall accomplish what God pleases (Is. 55:11), and if the Holy Spirit can be at work even in the child in the womb (Lk 1:15), then we ought not to be surprised when God calls children to saving faith in Christ.

In 1734-5 revival broke out in Northampton under the direct but unadorned preaching of Jonathan Edwards. One of the hundreds who was converted was Phebe Bartlett who was only four at the time. She has become well-known for her exclamation to her mother: “Mother, the kingdom of heaven is come to me.”

God’s covenant, the addresses in Scripture, the power of God’s word, the sovereign work of the Spirit, and examples from history all teach us that God may well bring children – even young children – to repent and believe the gospel of Christ. In fact, we read that the Saviour welcomed little children to himself, declared that the kingdom of heaven belonged to such as these (Matt.19:13-15), and said that unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:1-3).

Third, we can fail by being overly concerned with immediate results. If there is a danger in failing to speak simply to children, there is also an opposite danger. There is a tendency today to reduce everything to the level of the child. For example, Scripture teachers may use the distinctly unmemorable translations – the Good News Bible, the Contemporary English Version or even racier efforts. The songs taught to children, in the name of

relevance, may be more childish than child-like.

C. S. Lewis maintained that the best children’s books were those which can be re-read with appreciation by adults. The same can be said of children’s songs.

No doubt the best of intentions can be at work in reducing everything to what one thinks is the level of the child, but damage can be done. In Deuteronomy 6, God tells his people to teach their children of what he has done for Israel (Deut.6:7). Further on, in verses 20-21a, we read: “When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son ...”

**G**od himself clearly envisages that children will learn for some time without fully understanding. That does not mean that the original time of learning was a waste. The mother of John Newton died when he was only seven, but years later, his life under threat in a storm, Newton remembered much of what she had taught him. It is a case of “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days” (Eccles.11:1).

When Jesus spoke of the temple being destroyed and then raised up in three days, he showed no immediate interest in explaining to his disciples that the temple was his body. Three years later the disciples understood (John 2:19-22)!

I may be atypical – and I may have forgotten what I have forgotten! – but the only thing I can recall from Scripture lessons in my primary school days was a song the Presbyterian minister taught us. It was from John 4, and was about living water and not thirsting again. I did not have the faintest idea what it was all about but I remembered it. The point is that God’s word found its way into my memory although not immediately into my understanding.

It is good to be simple and relevant; it is also good to be deep and memorable.

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