

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

march 1998



Sunday - Is it MacTime?

When is war just? • Whoever sings prays twice • A vision for youth • Church directory

prayer

MARCH

- 21 Hugh and Hannah Price from Melbourne, missionaries with the Presbyterian Church of Japan.
- 22 Gunnedah parish, North Western NSW, including Boggabri, 120 communicants, 55 children and youth, 6 elders; Andrew and Macaulay.
- 23 Colin and Cathie McKay from Condobolin, NSW educational missionaries in Nigeria with Action Partners (the former SUM).
- 24 The Presbyterian Church of Canada (215,000 persons in 1025 congregations) and Christian witness and ethnic unity in a nation of 28 million (45% RC, 32% Protestant).
- 25 Swan Hill parish, Victoria, 30 communicants, 25 children and youth, 3 elders; Martin & Kaylene de Pyle.
- 26 Tocumwal-Finley-Berrigan parish, southern NSW, 13+56+15 communicants, 94 children and youth, 7 elders; David & Jenni Stone.
- 27 The gospel witness among Chile's 14 million people - 58% R.C., 28% Protestant (largely Pentecostal) including the small but recently united Presbyterian church.
- 28 Men's League (NSW) and Men's Brotherhood (Vic) and the growth of Men's activities and outreach in all parishes.
- 29 Macquarie parish, Marsfield, Sydney; 100 communicants, 20 children and youth, 12 elders; Rex and Beverley Swavely.
- 30 Presbytery of Bathurst NSW; 8

parishes, 2 home missions stations, totalling 29 congregations with attendance of 910, 6 retired ministers; William Stewart clerk.

- 31 Mitchelton parish, Brisbane 180 communicants, 170 children and youth, 15 elders; John and Lyn Nical, Maurice and Helen Cropper.

APRIL

- 1 Darwin congregation, NT, 20 communicants under the care of the PIM, lay preachers and visiting ministers.
- 2 Qld Committee on Training for the Ministry, and its talks with the Westminster Presbyterian Church; Guido Kettniss, convener/secretary.
- 3 Bible Society work in China (over 1200 million people, 142 languages - the work of the Amity Press, Nanjing, and Scripture distribution.
- 4 Scots Church, Melbourne including Flemington, 360 communicants, 12 children and youth, 35 elders; John Pilgrim.
- 5 Esk home mission station, Queensland including Coominya and Toogoolawah, 45 communicants, 16 children and youth, 3 elders; Paul and Linden Blake.
- 6 Junee home mission station, southern NSW, 55 communicants, 20 children and youth, 7 elders.
- 7 Bob and Beverley Harvey from Annerley, Brisbane, Missionaries in Brazil since 1967 overseeing WEC work throughout Latin America.
- 8 Presbytery of Flinders, SE Melbourne: 11 parishes, 2 home mission stations, totalling 20 congregations with attendance of 920, 5 retired ministers; John Ellis clerk
- 9 Pray for effective Christian witness over the coming weekend to fringe and "unchurched" people
- 10 Praise God for the atoning death of Christ; pray that the message of the Cross will lead many to repentance

and faith

- 11 Pray that this Passover many Jews will realize Yeshua (Jesus) is the true Messiah and Lamb of God.
- 12 Magnify God for our Master's glorious resurrection and pray for its power to be fully shown
- 13 Len & Wendy Pearce, ethnic workers in Melbourne with Red Sea Team.
- 14 Dungog parish, Hunter Valley, NSW, including Stroud and three other centres, 100 communicants, 30 children and youth, 13 elders; Kevin and Jenny Cooper.
- 15 Increased religious liberty in Cuba (population 11 million - 41% RC, 31% non-religious, 25 % spiritist) and the witness of the 2.8% who are Protestants, including 9000 Reformed Presbyterians in 63 congregations.
- 16 PIM Board, based in Brisbane; Jack Knapp, convener/superintendent, Gordon Dunkley secretary.
- 17 Colac parish, Victoria, 60 communicants, 12 children and youth, 7 elders; James and Fairlie Stewart.
- 18 Presbytery of Dubbo, western NSW, 7 parishes, totalling 22 congregations with attendance of 595, 1 retired minister.
- 19 (Redcliffe) Peninsula parish, northern Brisbane including Woody Point & Scarborough, 160 + 40 communicants, 60 children and youth, 9 elders; Gary and Pam Tosh.
- 20 Christian witness in primary and secondary schools by Christian staff and students, chaplains, RE teachers, SUPA clubs, ISCF etc.

PRESBYTERIAN PRAYER POINTS:

Please send your requests to Rev John Campbell, 53 Bristol Tce, Oakden SA 5086, Phone: (08) 8261 3045

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Third Age missionaries

Robert Benn finds that age does not weary those who want to serve.

Rev. Bruce Fraser retired from the Bicton congregation in Western Australia, and after some time offered his services through Action Partners to teach theology in Nigeria, also in West Africa. On his return, he had a passion to communicate that there is a new dimension in mission today.

Bruce notes: "We have the 'Universities of the Third Age' nowadays to cater for the retired people. There is an opportunity now for people of such age to be involved in the missionary work of the Church. Consider the world-wide church situation."

The time of pioneer missions (language learning, preaching and church planting in "unreached" areas) is nearly over although there are still many peoples in the world who have not heard the Gospel, he believes.

"The work of missionary societies in many parts of the world has resulted in strong national churches which have taken over the work of evangelism. The missions now work with and for the national churches. In many parts of the world these national churches are growing at a tremendous rate. However the churches are often in areas where there is great poverty and the churches are not able to fund the training and support of all the workers who are needed to take advantage of that growth.

"There is an increasing need in the world



for Christians from the first world to work with the national churches in a very wide range of ministries – teaching in schools, veterinary and agricultural workers, doctors and other medical workers, Bible and theological lecturers and more. There is a continuing need for younger long-term workers who will be able to give three, five, 10 or more years of service and who will need Australian Christian churches," Bruce says.

"With the growing tendency in Australia for men and women to have to retire earlier from work (say 55 years plus), and with the increasing good health and expected longevity of such people there is now in this country an increasing pool of active and skilled unemployed persons.

"Most of these people live on a pension or superannuation, probably own their own house and have no children at home. Many Christians in this category are now able to take part in the missionary work of the church at no cost to the poorer national churches of the world and without requiring financial support from Australian churches. With income from pension or superannuation plus that from letting their house they would be able to spend six-months or a year or longer and make use of their expertise or skills for the benefit of the national churches in overseas countries.

"Older people are respected in the developing nations and older Christians are warmly appreciated as they display the reality of their faith to help others when they could have been expected to be taking life easy. As the average life-span in many of these countries is very much lower than that in Australia, older people are a rarity and the experience they bring is gladly accepted," Bruce says.

"The personal benefits of being a Third Age missionary are enormous – God is no man's debtor."

(For further information contact the APWM, National Director, Rev Robert Benn.) 



Dr Jacqui McLeod (left) was a member of the Kogarah Presbyterian Church in Sydney South. When she retired as an anaesthetist at the St George Hospital, she offered to serve SIM International as a medical educator. She was placed at the Galmi hospital in Niger, where she worked for two years. She is now at the Dubbo hospital, and is prayerfully discussing the possibility with SIM of further service in Benin, West Africa.

ONE DAY CONFERENCE

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ALL WELCOME

Worship: a new order?

Robert Benn

The Public Worship Committee of our General Assembly has just produced a new guide to help us in the leadership of our congregational meetings – public worship, weddings, funerals, and other services such as ordinations and inductions. We appreciate their work.

From the 1940s to the 1970s most Presbyterian ministers used the Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland, which was first published in 1940, at least as a guideline for the conduct of public worship. In its preface we read of “liberty in the conduct of worship”, “constant variety” and “freshness”. It would be very interesting to know what the compilers of the Book of Common Order would think of the developments that have taken place in public worship in the last 3 decades.

In the field of hymnody, ‘Rejoice!’ has now almost replaced the Revised Church Hymnal of 1927, and such hymn books as Mission Praise, Scripture in Song, and song writers as Geoff Bullock and Graham Kendrick have introduced hundreds of popular songs. While many congregations still use the organ, a large array of instruments such as the clavinaova, guitar, flute, violin, sax and drums have found their way into our services, often pushing aside the organ altogether.

Many churches have dropped the term ‘Service of Divine Worship’ and have replaced it with the expression ‘Christian Meeting’ indicating a shift in our understanding of worship and a desire to make Sunday’s gatherings more user-friendly. In some cases, several worship styles happen within one building on a given Sunday.

Many more people are now involved in the leadership of Sunday worship, in which testimony, reports, open prayer times, musical items and talk-back have become the norm. Many churches have introduced skits, drama and dancing, as part of their worship repertoire, as well as the more

extraordinary slaying in the spirit, holy laughter and tongues-speaking.

As a result of some of these innovations, many Christians are left uneasy by what is now called worship. Worship in the 1990s often involves swaying bodies, hands held aloft, closed eyes, and the constant repetition of simple phrases that sound like an eastern mantra. Music seems to be the controlling element.

This is happening across all our cities. It seems to many that a certain vitality must be injected into worship at any cost. It must be exciting. If entertainment will draw the people in, then let’s entertain!

In many instances where these changes have happened, scripture reading is now regarded as optional, and sermons have been more psychological and pragmatic, and less theological and expository. Success is assessed by size, freedom, constant variety and freshness. These are the qualities that are high on the agenda.

But at what cost? Are these new emphases in worship derived from Scripture? Is all this resulting in new levels of faith, love, and devoted service? Is the Holy Spirit being honoured in respect to evidence of radical holiness? Do these new forms of worship help evangelism? Is the society in which we live more impacted by the church today than was the case in previous decades? Do these changes draw us nearer to God or are they really designed to pander to the human desire for change and excitement?

In this issue of *Australian Presbyterian*, we want to address some of these matters. We can only take the first step, but we hope to stimulate much thought and serious consideration of this vast subject. We will certainly not advocate a return willy-nilly to things of the past. We will call for our church to bring everything we are and do under the scrutiny of the Word of God, so that we will “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28,29).

Your journal

During January and early February, National Journal Committee members spent much time discussing the question of how best to produce a national journal for our church. We concluded that for at least this year we should try to produce the journal with a minimum of expenditure, through the contribution of many committed volunteers within our church. Therefore, for the time being we will not be employing a managing editor to handle the “whole” editorial responsibility for producing the magazine.

Instead, major responsibilities will be taken by the editorial team consisting of Stuart Bonnington (WA) Mike Wharton and Barney Zwartz (Vic), Guido Kettmiss (Qld), Peter Hastie and Robert Benn (NSW). Others have been asked to take their special part also, so that the production team now looks like this:

- Acting managing editor: Robert Benn
- Prayer Notes: John Campbell
- Issues Editors: Stuart Bonnington, Peter Hastie and Guido Kettmiss
- Features Editor: Barney Zwartz
- News Editor: Bob Thomas
- Missionwatch: Robert Benn
- Youth Page: to be announced
- Films, Videos and Culture-watch: Phil Campbell
- Church Directory and Year Book: Mike Wharton
- Production Editor: Barney Zwartz
- Administration: Robert Benn

Our administration office is still at 156 Collins Street Melbourne.

Australian Presbyterian is your national magazine, and we shall be delighted if you can help us make it excellent.

Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee



MacWorship - do you want fries with that?

The modern marketing approach to Sunday worship costs much more than it gains, Stuart Bonnington argues.

John H. Armstrong, the editor of the journal *Reformation and Revival*, recently described much contemporary Christian worship as "MacWorship". By this he meant that a revolution had taken place in the thinking of many Christians about the nature of worship services.

The controlling factor in such thinking is not the Bible but a customer-based marketing philosophy that seeks to revamp the church's corporate gatherings in an all-consuming quest for "relevance". While the sincerity of those who seek to reach people where they are is not in doubt, it looks as if consumerism is now in control of many forms of Christian worship.

Examples abound of how this new customer focus is bringing radical changes in the corporate worship of the church. I know of one congregation in Perth where the minister appeared in best Fred Astaire style, complete with top hat, tails and cane, just to keep things "a-moving along". As the collection plate went round, he sang *We ain't got a barrel o' money!*

The *Telegraph-Mirror* in Sydney mentioned another example of MacWorship where a church invited a group of Christian body-builders to "pump iron for Jesus" in the hope of attracting a crowd.

We often speak of being culturally relevant, but if this comes by way of the introduction of MacWorship then the price being paid is far too high.

In April 1996, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals held a conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the US. Among other things, they discussed the whole issue of the influence of consumerism on Christian worship.

The conference — which included such leading theologians as David F. Wells, James Montgomery Boice and Sinclair Ferguson — declared: "The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful.



"We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success."

This statement should strike a responsive chord in Australian Presbyterian hearts, for we are a confessional and evangelical church. We have our roots in the Reformed Church of Scotland, which claimed to have true biblical doctrine (Westminster Confession of Faith), and worship (see the Directory of Public Worship).

We need to rediscover our confessional heritage if we are to resist the inroads of secularism in our worship services and meet

the advance of MacWorship head on.

First, we need to think again about the very nature of worship services. While it is true that worship is a comprehensive term that refers to the full range of activities in the life of a Christian, it is correct to use the word to describe our Sunday services.

The New Testament uses it of the Church on earth and heaven when it comes together into the presence of the living God (1 Cor 14:23-25; Rev 5:13,14). There are fellow evangelicals who would deny any necessary biblical link between church services and the worship of God. We are not persuaded by this view. It is simply not enough to see Sunday services as opportunity for fellowship, without recognising that

they also exist for worship (Heb 13:15). We need to have a full worship experience in our church services, which includes such elements as singing, preaching, confessions of faith and prayers.

Second, we must re-examine the focus of our worship services. Presbyterians believe in what is called "objective worship". When we begin our services by saying "Let us worship God", we mean it!

Sadly, I've been to worship services, both traditional and contemporary, where the Lord Jesus Christ has not been mentioned in a meaningful way. Oh yes, there is lots of talk about the church and its people doing this or that, but not much focus on the great saving acts of Jesus Christ.

We need to ask ourselves, how can this be? While secularism may come in different forms, it always makes us the focus of worship. The Bible on the other hand always focuses worship on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Third, we must reassess the content of our worship services. Today we have many human voices in our services but we simply need more of God's! We like to listen to the notices and hear about what other people are up to, but does this leave enough time for a meaningful Bible reading or do we just skip through a few verses?

And what about the preaching? We need preachers who will bring us the word of God, and not simply serve up some "pop psychology" with a text or two. A congregation that focuses on Christ-centred Bible teaching and practises genuine love has the potential for significant growth.

We need biblical praise in our services, where perhaps a few well-sung psalms complemented by classic and contemporary Christian songs clearly illustrate and teach the eternal truths of the Word of God.

Fourth, we need to reflect seriously on the style of our worship services. Too many think that any style, particularly of music, will do. What they forget is that God is interested in style as well as content. Style is not a matter of indifference.

The way we do things in a worship service can either prepare for the preaching of the word, or detract from it. Style, whether traditional or modern, is never neutral.

There is a curious belief in the evangelical church today that, as long as we have the truth, the form is irrelevant. But I wonder if a hip-hop musical rendition of Psalm 51 would really express the spirit of repentance that pervades it? To take another illustration, too many evangelical praise and worship sessions focus almost exclusively on a triumphalist tone, and exclude the variety of emotions that are found in the

Psalter. Does this enrich our worship, or flatten it to one dimension?

Last, we must review the Lord's Day as a significant time of Christian worship. In other words, should the Lord's day have a higher priority in our lives? When I was younger, I knew a girl who came from a very devout Roman Catholic family. I remember thinking how enlightened the Pope was when he allowed Catholics to go to Mass on Saturday night, so they could have Sundays free for other things. My friend could go to church early on Saturday night, then party late, knowing she could sleep in on Sunday morning, completely free from any church responsibilities.

While we might smile at this, it is sad that many believers have also taken leave of their spiritual and church commitments on the Lord's Day. In fact, for many the Lord's Day has become the Lord's morning or even the Lord's hour, given the speed at which they leave after the service is over.

There are many reasons for this, but the influence of MacWorship needs to be noted among them. Others think Wednesday night or Friday will do.

Dare I suggest that the spiritual weakness that plagues us may come from the widespread neglect of the Lord's Day and the worship of the Lord on his day? "MacWorship" is a poor diet to feed growing Christians for it produces serious spiritual weakness.

We need to take a more biblical approach to the nature of worship: we should worship God for who He is as well as what He has done for us through Christ, and we should seek to restore the essential elements of Protestant worship to their rightful place. Also we must be mindful that, whether the style is traditional or modern, it has a major impact on all aspects of the worship service.

Underlying all these issues, there must be a proper regard for the Lord's Day and its contribution to true worship.

Stuart Bonnington is minister at the Bicton Presbyterian Church WA and serves on several State and General Assembly committees.

ap

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Australian Presbyterian seeks a part-time advertising manager to lift the revenue of the Church's national magazine. Remuneration will be mostly from commissions on advertising sold, so applicants need to be energetic, imaginative and articulate. Experience of selling an advantage.

Please send applications or requests for further information to the convener of the National Journal Committee, Robert Benn, at 8 Sylvan Grove, Picnic Point, NSW 2213

Life of joy

Mike Wharton says emotion is a vital part of worship.

The first question of the Shorter Catechism asks "What is the chief end of man?" The answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Many have come to grips with the first half of this answer but neglect the second. Do we really enjoy our God as we should? What part does emotion play in worship? Created in the image of God, we are spiritual, physical, and, emotional beings. Is it proper to demonstrate emotion in the presence of God?

David, it would seem, was not afraid to show emotion in the presence of God. His emotions were stirred by a deep sense of adoration for God, an awareness of his holiness. He knew what it was like to fail God. He sinned and experienced the pain of separation from God, spiritually and emotionally. But, he was also a man who knew the joy of God in his life. He was a man who had learned to glorify God, and to enjoy him.

Jesus said: "Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." This is not a suggestion, it is a command. We should not be afraid to allow our emotions to be touched by God. He has created us with our emotions. It is good to cry in God's presence, to be deeply sorry for our sin. It is also good to express the joy of sins forgiven.

A word of caution. Don't allow this emotion to be the result of self-seeking. David's joy was the outflow of a heart touched by God. A heart that rejoiced in who God was and what God had done for him.

If we were to put our questions to David I feel certain that he would answer in the words of Psalm 33:1, "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright."

What is man's chief end? It is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Let's get more of the joy of the Lord in our lives and worship.

Mike Wharton is minister of Balaclava Presbyterian Church, Victoria.

ap

I'm never coming back if you don't sing the right doxology

There is no one, true, pure, reformed way to worship, suggests John Langbridge.

The lady was annoyed. For her, 709 *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* was true Presbyterian worship. Stifling a retort, I passed it off somehow. But she was touching a nerve that bothered me too. Over the years I have had to confront issues for *right* worship – a painful process at times.

My early Christian experience involved a number of denominations, theologies and worship styles, but in the Presbyterian Church, I found reformed theology, (accepting Presbyterian ways too).

At that time (before Church Union) “breakaway” groups were emphasising the “purity of worship”. Thus, I learned of the “Regulative Principle”, which means that only things specifically instructed in the Bible are to be condoned in worship. Some even took this to imply that only Psalms (without instruments) could be sung.

The “Regulative Principle” came up again at theological college. It was argued that this is the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21:1 – “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will not by the imaginations and devices of men ... or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”

While not accepting the “psalms only” extreme, I now believed not only in distinctively reformed theology, but also reformed worship. So I dedicated myself to lead worship in a traditional way with a sprinkling of Metric Psalms.

The realities of pastoral ministry brought unexpected challenges. Preaching and teaching reformed truths was straightforward, but I soon saw the need to enliven worship. How could it be done without endangering its correctness? “Innovation” was an uncomfortable word for me – a change or so, an instrument or two, fewer Psalms, a new



hymnbook – these changes were reactive, not based on conviction. Then the lady challenged me; and it was time to work through the issues.

The foundation of reformed doctrine is Biblical Theology. The Bible is a gradually unfolding revelation of God's great plan for salvation. So the Gospel of Jesus Christ is central. I now realise that this centrality must be reflected not only in my teaching, but in worship itself. If this sounds obvious to you, it was revolutionary to me.

The Gospel would undergird all of worship. Maybe some of the things being done were obscuring salvation to some, not illuminating it. Are there rules for this? I concluded that New Testament worship is not governed by laws – a right, pure, reformed way – but God's great master plan. So a wide variety of worship elements could be possible, depending on the background of the worshippers.

So what does Presbyterian “worship” mean to me now? Whatever promotes the Gospel message and edifies the people is good. What does not is bad. I minister to a large enough congregation to have three services on a Sunday, each diverse in style. None of them is better worship than another. Music, instru-

ments and songs may differ, as may the order of service, but provided what is done upholds Christ without compromise, and edifies, then it is biblical.

I do not know whether God will bless our Church with great increase. (Evangelism involves much more than the worship service.) But I do know we must not cling to one style and imbue it with a holy aura as the only true, pure “reformed” way.

Parents over the years have spoken to me with gladness that their adult children continue with the Lord; but also with sadness that it is not in the Presbyterian Church. Why? Sometimes, at least, because they found it outdated and lacking life. The style of Presbyterianism failed to communicate God's truth meaningfully to a new generation.

We can excuse ourselves, blaming them for not recognising pure worship when they see it, being attracted to “circus churches” or being spiritually immature. I can no longer accept that excuse. Our church has often been blameworthy in establishing a new legalism in worship, not communicating effectively the reformed truths of the Gospel that we rightly hold so dearly. Resisting Gospel-centred change is not a virtue.

Many disagree. Ministers like me have been accused of being “liberal”, “charismatic”, and “compromising”. I am not too bothered. My theology and acceptance of Scripture is as strong as it ever was. I reach and preach it as I always did. But for the sake of the Gospel, I can no longer be bound by the faulty thesis that there is a strict, reformed way in which things must be done. Far from honouring Christ, such thinking dishonours Him.

John Langbridge is minister at Ipswich Presbyterian Church, Qld, and has served in Aboriginal ministry at Ernabella in SA.

Heart and mind

Peter Hastie asks Bryan Chapell about preaching - and listening.

*After 10 years in pastoral ministry, Bryan Chapell became professor of preaching, dean of the faculty, then president of the Covenant Theological Seminary in St Louis, Missouri, in the United States. He is a noted author, and his ground-breaking book *Christ-Centred Preaching* was described by R.C. Sproul as "an outstanding tool ... the best I've seen on the subject." Dr Chapell has an active preaching and conference schedule around the world. Recently he visited Sydney for the Eliza Ferrie Lectures at the the Presbyterian Theological Centre, where he spoke to Peter Hastie.*

You say one of the preacher's main tasks is to help people obey God with the right motives. Why is motive so important?

Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is still wrong. And the reason is that God is the searcher of the heart as well as the examiner of the actions, so that if my heart is not right when I do the right thing, it is not holy – it's not even obedient. I may actually do God a disservice by doing a right moral action with the intention of serving only myself rather than God. The world may not know it, others may not see it, but God sees my intention. And because God knows my intention, it's necessary that my motives be right as well.

The other thing is that it's spiritually debilitating for people to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. People are ultimately damaged by thinking that if they are good, God will love them more. If that is the reason you're serving God, then you create a terrible and capricious God. It's destructive of the whole idea of grace.

How has television altered the way we communicate? Has it affected preaching?

Virtually all studies today would say that television has lowered people's attention spans. We tend to focus more intensely for briefer periods. However, I don't believe that we think fundamentally differently. It's a mistake to believe that simply because television has come along, our culture is more "image" or visually oriented. It's real-

ly an ancient preaching saying that the ear should be turned into the eye for effective communication. Preachers should speak in visual images. And this idea long preceded the visual electronic media.

The human mind functions best by imaging or experiencing abstract truths. So while television may perhaps require of us more image-orientation, it's a mistake to say we have to preach visually now whereas we didn't have to before. All great preaching in previous times has made strong use of visual images and illustration. So it's not a capitulation to our own culture to include a strong visual component in our preaching. It's important to emphasise this, because some people think that the use of visual imagination in preaching is an innovation. It's not. It's actually an ancient biblical practice to include a visual aspect to the oral medium of preaching.

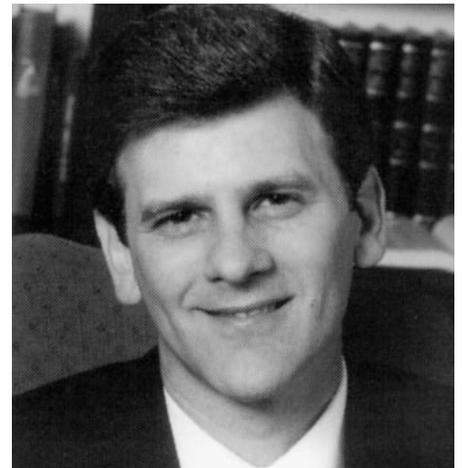
Are there lessons for preachers from television's dominance?

I'm sure there are. The notion of the shortness of attention span is critical. When I was in television news for a while, one of the things that we learned was that the image had to change every eight seconds for viewer attention to stay intense. That has now dropped to every two and a half seconds for American news broadcasts. However, I don't want to be totally ruled by that idea. People can be trained to pay attention for much longer periods. A church audience can be trained to think seriously for greater periods of time, but that is often not the type of audience we face right off the street.

In outreach, preachers must remember that in terms of the truths they are presenting, there must be a change of image or approach fairly consistently throughout the message. You don't have it here in Australia, but we have what's called the "two-minute warning" at the end of a football half. It's a time when everything speeds up, and a team no longer takes any "time-outs" because that half is almost over. I try to teach my students what I call the "two-minute warning". If preachers think that

they can stay in an exhaustive argument or explanation of a grammatical point for more than about two minutes, then they're kidding themselves. No one is listening anymore. People today don't have the state of mind in our culture to pay attention to intricate arguments for more than about two minutes. So we need to move from that argument on to the next one. The western mind doesn't take in intricate logic today when it goes much beyond two minutes. By the way, I'm not defending this state of mind. It's just where we are!

Bryan Chapell



Visiting Western Australia?

Information on the
Presbyterian Church, its ser-
vices and activities from:

Rev. Alan Perrie

(Convener of Mission and Evangelism Committee)

(08) 9447 1074

People sometimes say preaching is boring. Is this only a recent problem?

People say that preaching is boring because sometimes it is. However, there are times when the problem is with the listener. When people choose to disengage, that's their problem, not the preacher's. In other words, the demerit may be in the speaker or in the listener, or in both.

Has this become more of a problem recently? No. From our earliest records of preaching, and Eutychus (Acts 20:9) comes especially to mind, we know that there are people who can get tired of preaching. On the one hand, we want people to be more interested in content than style, but in saying this preachers can't be disinterested in presentation.

Let's face it, preachers themselves don't like listening to other preachers who are unconcerned about presentation. We believe that being dedicated to the Gospel means that not only do we rightly divide the Word of truth, but that we're diligent in preparation so that the content can be easily understood by the hearer. So presentation dynamics are a legitimate part of the ministry of the Word. And the reason is that if we neglect this aspect, the message is probably going to be boring.

Should seminaries focus on preaching in training pastors?

At our seminary, our primary orientation is to train people to preach for pulpit ministry. We have other courses, naturally, such as pastoral theology, worship and church administration, but they are not the focus. Because our own tradition teaches the primacy of the Word, which is God's instrument to spread and mature the church, I don't think our focus on preaching is a misplaced priority.

But there can be dangers with this approach. We need to remember that simply because we believe in the primacy of the Word, that does not commit us to an exclusive focus on preaching. Pastors need to be trained in other areas too because the Church needs worship, pastoral care and Christian education as well. In this sense, a seminary is not just a preaching school; it's more a place where people are trained to be pastors for whom the primacy of the Word is fundamental. So training preachers is the focus, but we must not forget the ancillary-functions. For this reason, I don't think that preaching has been overemphasised in modern seminary training. My own candid opinion is that it's probably been under-emphasised for the simple reason that it's hard to teach pastoral subjects in an academic setting.

Official guide to worship

After decades, the Church has a new common order

After years of work, thousands of draft pages and the scrutiny of hundreds, *Worship*, the book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, will soon be published.

A book of common order is a guide that may be used to help conduct public worship in conformity with the standards of the Presbyterian Church.

The genesis of this particular book began in 1979 when the General Assembly requested its Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee to produce a new book of common order. Up until this time the book of common order used in Australia was largely the *Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland* with a few minor Aussie alterations.

The draft book presented to the General Assembly in 1991 was a more Australian work – it even had wild flower drawings on its title pages. However, the General Assembly was not happy with its contents and it was rejected and sent back to the committee for complete revision.

After extensive consultation with pres-

byteries, the Public Worship Committee – under the convenership of Paul Cooper of the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney – presented a revised book which was approved by the 1997 General Assembly of Australia.

The book contains the usual collection of Lord's Supper, baptism, marriage, funeral and ordination services. It also contains some helpful orders for the commissioning of deaconesses and home missionaries as well as dedication services for Christian teachers, youth workers and the commissioning and decommissioning of missionaries.

Each book will be sold with a computer disk in the Acrobat format which will allow both PC and Mac users to have the book on computer. The advantage of this is that it will allow users to customise their own services, adding, altering and omitting as they feel best suits their situation.

Worship should be available by mid-May 1998 at a price yet to be fixed.

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St Andrew's

**Presbyterian
Church North Adelaide
South Australia**

Part Time Minister is required for the above Church.

St Andrews is the central Presbyterian congregation for the city of Adelaide. It has mainly an elderly congregation at present but there are many opportunities to increase size from among all ages and groups if the right person was active in the area.

Funds are limited at present and only a part time salary is available, however, travelling and accommodation expenses can be included in a package.

Applicants should have a bright, outgoing personality and be a good organiser.

The position would be suitable for a young minister wishing to pursue additional educational or vocational ends or alternatively it would appeal to an older minister with other means of support. Adelaide offers a quality of lifestyle without parallel in Australia.

Beautifully situated in extensive parklands, the city offers world class facilities in terms of education and recreation. There are three universities, major recreational facilities and easy access to wonderful beaches.

Applications in writing to:

The Session Clerk,
St Andrews Church,
92-98 Archer Street
North Adelaide, SA.

ap

A country practice

A visitor's tale helps Bryson Smith explain what makes for vital, contemporary services.

Stranger alert: Nervous? You bet! This was the first time I'd been to church in years. But as I walked through the wide double doors into the foyer, the welcome put me at ease. "Hi, I'm Bronwyn," smiled the young woman as she handed me a leaflet. "And I'm Kelvin," added the easy going guy beside her. "Take a seat where-ever you like. After the service we have morning tea back here in the foyer, and you'll find the toilets are just around the corner."

After chatting a bit longer, I slipped into a seat in the main auditorium, and took the chance to read through the leaflet I had been given at the door. It explained some of the church's activities, such as their small group network. On the back there was an outline of the morning's Bible talk.

My reading was cut short by a man at the front who announced that we were going to start the meeting by singing two songs, *Make way* and *Jesus, Name above all Names*. After the songs, which sounded great, another man stood up and introduced himself as Paul; he explained that this morning, we were going to think about what it means to live with Jesus as our King. Then he prayed, focusing on exactly that issue, and we sang again — *All hail the power of Jesus' name*. As we sang, I realised the words made exactly the same point Paul had just been praying about.

When we sat down again, Paul explained some of the important things mentioned in the bulletin. We prayed again, this time about the church activities, then we sang *Jesus is Lord*. While we sang a collection was taken and the children left the auditorium to go to Sunday School classes.

A young woman came forward and read from the Bible; the passage was 1 Samuel 24, and the way she read it made it sound a lot more interesting than I expected. As soon as she finished, another guy stood up, and spent about 20 minutes explaining 1 Samuel 24-26. By the time he finished, it was pretty clear that we should treat God's anointed king, Jesus Christ, with reverence, respect and obedience. At the end, he prayed, then interviewed two people who were serving King Jesus by going to Bible college. We prayed for them.

We sang one final song, *At the name of Jesus*, and then morning tea was served in the foyer. I guess the whole thing took about 70 minutes; but I didn't have a chance to get bored.

Why we do what we do: What you've just read really happened on Sunday, February 1 1998 — a pretty typical meeting at the Presbyterian Church in Dubbo, NSW. Some things that morning didn't go too well. The singing wasn't as good as it could have been. The Bible talk didn't really close as strongly as it should have. The interview was meant to happen earlier in the meeting, but circumstances prevented it.

Despite the imperfections of the meeting, what happened was very deliberate. In particular four key ideas shaped every meeting that happens at DPC.

First, church is a community not a meeting. For this reason the meeting is made as relational as possible. It is not dominated by one person. Different people from within the church family are all involved in reading, praying, leading the singing, playing in the music team, teaching the Bible and being interviewed. Many other people are also involved in activities surrounding the meeting, like serving morning tea, greeting people at the door, being on a welcoming team to help make visitors comfortable (as Kelvin was).

Second, worship is not confined to what happens at a Sunday meeting. Worship is a whole of life experience, it is the life of obedience (Romans 12:1). The church family is therefore encouraged to be active in serving one another throughout the week in a whole range of ways, in particular small group ministries. In this respect the bulletin and the announcements take on considerable importance.

Third, we encounter God through His Word. For this reason the Bible is our authority and it occupies a central place in our meetings. We read it aloud, and hear a Bible talk which helps us understand it better. The focus of the Bible talk is the focus of the meeting. Our prayers and our songs are all centred on the Bible passage being studied. In the above meeting, people who

were living out the truths of the passage were interviewed so we could all be encouraged.

Fourth, according to the Apostle Paul, we ought to be prepared to be all things to all men so that we might win some. Music style, liturgical patterns and ministry structures are all flexible. The main game is to help people know and follow Jesus Christ. In today's world it's important to be contemporary and relational. Being contemporary means having "user-friendly" meetings. Being relational means that people such as Bronwyn and Kelvin (who greet and welcome people) are absolutely critical to our church family.

Well, thanks for visiting our church. I hope this has given you some insights into what we do at Dubbo Presbyterian Church and why we do it. We certainly aren't perfect, as you'll notice the first time you visit. But we're trying to learn from our mistakes. We, like you, take comfort in the fact that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Bryson Smith is minister at Dubbo Presbyterian Church

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Wangaratta Ministerial Vacancy

There is a vacancy at the
Yarrowonga Presbyterian
Church in Wangaratta,
Victoria.

All enquiries in the first
instance to:

Rev. John Sutherland
Interim moderator
(03) 5831 6494

A godly heritage

Tending our children is like gardening: hard work. Marion Andrews has some advice.

In the mountains near Tamworth in New South Wales, there is a deserted goldmining settlement, with a large unfenced orchard. Most of the fruit trees have returned to root-stock, and the fruit is small and bitter. It is part of our history, but is useless.

Contrast this with a garden from the same era that has been maintained and worked, and is a heritage showpiece. It gives both fruit and pleasure. The difference between the two is the continuous care that has gone into one, and the lack of it in the other.

One young mother wanted her family to be like a heritage garden. She wrote in the front of her Bible: Genesis 7 verse 7, "I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your seed after you ... for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you." Lord, I beseech you, give me grace to take this promise, and to trust it with my whole heart ... As I accepted Your promise for myself, I accept it for them. Give me grace now to look on them as You do, as children of promise ... May this be what gives me courage and hope for their training on earth and their portion in heaven. They are the children of the covenant, children of the promise ... "Faithful is He who has promised, Who also will do it." Amen.

This woman's grandchildren and great-grandchildren treasure this as their spiritual heritage. The grace of God is the best inheritance. How can we commend spiritual reality to our children, so that they long for Christ more than any earthly legacy? By caring for those in our home, as an expert gardener cares for his rarest, most fragile plants.

Feeding young faith with the Word of God and watering it with prayer and sometimes tears, is basic to Christian parenting. However, you need more than spiritual food and water. You need wisdom in dealing with the unexpected. Pests, harsh conditions and choking weeds attack the "little shoots around the table", Psalm 128. Dangers seen and unseen prey on our children, destroying the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

One year, I thought I had a wonderful

persimmon crop. Then, when the fruit were half-grown, all but three fell off. I asked my father why, and next year I was ready for the invisible bugs that caused the immature fruit to fall. Beware of pests, even two legged ones.

Frost in spring-time is another threat. The amateur gardener may lose tender plants to frost. Be careful of the sort of cold, critical conversation that will shrivel and blight the tender faith of a child.

Then there are the weeds, thistles and thorns. Be on the look out for the weeds of worldliness that can choke out the life of faith. Good books and movies can be used to mulch out the bad influences that are all around them.

Cultivation is tough work, but the best gardeners are those who love their gardens. My garden suffers most when I don't spend

time in it. Don't let your family suffer for the same reason. Be there to cuddle a frightened toddler in a storm. Be there to do the washing up for your student who is struggling with an assignment.

As parents, we will not automatically pass on a godly heritage to our children. We must be good workmen and women, drawing heavily on the wisdom that "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits..." James 3:17,18.

Marion Andrews – wife of Stuart; mother of Stu, Katy, Laura and Duncan – has been a member of St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Tamworth, NSW, for 11 years. She is the author of Recover the Family and publishes a regular women's newsletter with a mailing list of 170.

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THE REFORMED CHURCH OF BLACKTOWN RETIREMENT HOME LIMITED

Euroka Homes

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Euroka Homes, Blacktown, are seeking to employ a caring Christian couple in their late 40s early 50s, who are committed to care for the elderly.

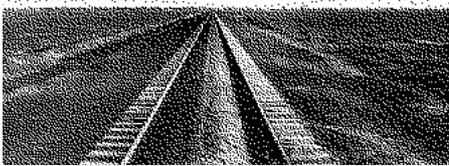
The couple will be required to live on-site in a comfortable cottage and will be employed on a full-time basis.

The duties will include garden maintenance including mowing, cleaning or common facilities, minor repairs, security and minimum care for residents when family is unavailable; eg, obtaining doctors prescriptions, etc.

Appropriate salary, accomodation, holidays, superannuation, etc. is offered and written applications setting out personal details and job skills should be submitted to:

The Secretary
The Reformed Church of Blacktown Retirement Home Limited
Mr T Hudson
2 Andrew Lloyd Drive
DOONSIDE, NSW, 2767

across australia



Presbyterians at the Constitutional Convention

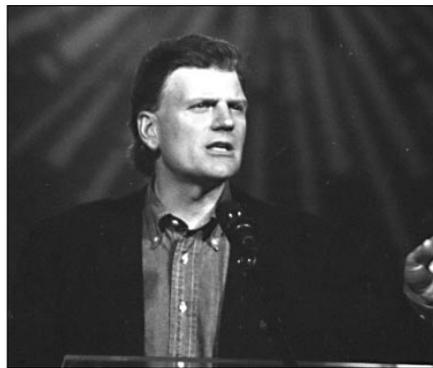
At least three members of the recent Constitutional Convention were Presbyterians: the Rev Dr David Mitchell of Hobart, Mr Alasdair Webster of Springwood (NSW) and Mr A.K. Gifford of Melbourne. Alasdair Webster, who represented the Christian Democrats, and supports a 'minimalist monarchy', said that debate had been robust but of a very high level. He was pleased to report that each day began with a prayer, with most delegates joining the chairman in saying the Lord's Prayer. He was also pleased with the convention's decisions to retain the title Commonwealth of Australia and to remain in the Commonwealth of Nations.

Dr David Mitchell, who has recently published a book, *Republic? The Hidden Agenda*, felt that he had been enormously privileged to have been a delegate at the convention, where overall there had been a good spirit of cooperation. Dr Mitchell is concerned that the push for a republic represents a tearing away from the Scriptural basis of our system of government, going back as far as Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, which were under-girded by Scripture.

Festival SA with Franklin Graham

Festival SA with Franklin Graham saw large congregations gathered at Adelaide's Football Park on the evenings of 30 and 31 January and 1 February to hear the Gospel preached by Franklin Graham, with thou-

sands making first-time commitments to Christ and thousands more making commitments. This was personal evangelism on a mass scale, with hundreds of Christians, including Presbyterians – encouraged by their Moderator, the Rt Rev Michael Grieve – involved in counsellor training, school of evangelism, Operation Andrew, prayer triplets and related activities. A number of Presbyterian youth from the south-east travelled to Adelaide for the youth night. Franklin Graham's message was clear and definite, upholding the truth and authority of the Bible.



SPCK Turns 300

SPCK (the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) is celebrating its 300th anniversary. It was founded in London nearly 100 years before the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove, when 4000 volumes donated by SPCK arrived on the Sirius to help the ministry of the first chaplain, the Rev Richard Johnston. SPCK has been actively involved in the life of the church in Australia ever since. Many ministers and students will have such SPCK books as *A New Eusebius* and *Fathers and Heretics* on their shelves.

Anglican paper folds

After 26 years, *Church Scene*, the national Anglican weekly newspaper, published its last issue on 26 December 1997. An insufficient capital base and the need to repay a loan from the General Synod, together with a seasonal excess of expenditure over income were cited as reasons which brought about the paper's demise. *Church Scene* became known for its even-handed approach in the reporting of controversial issues and its independence of officialdom as it sought to be an instrument

for unity in the multi-faceted Anglican Church.

1998 National Church Planting Conference

The UEC (United Evangelistic Council) of NSW will host a national church planting conference in May with the objective of reaching Australia with the Gospel. Speakers will include the Rev David Jackman, director of the Cornhill Training Centre in England, and Frank Retief, who has had 25 years of church planting experience in South Africa

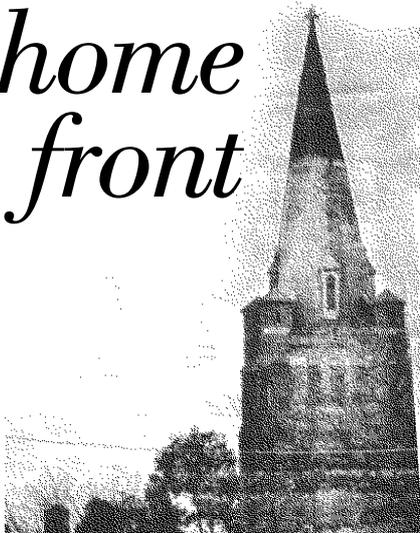
The conference will focus on church planting, but it will also address the broader objective of communicating the Gospel to all Australians. It will be held at the Salvation Army Function Centre, Elizabeth Street, Sydney from 4 to 7 May. Further details are available from UEC on (02) 9697 9451.

The Rabbi from Tarsus

The Dramatic Fanatics, a drama group from the Melbourne suburb of Preston, is presenting the full-length drama *The Rabbi from Tarsus*, a portrayal of the life of Paul the Apostle. While the play has a deep message for Gentiles, it explores in depth just what it is to be a Jew. Performances are scheduled for 26 to 28 February at Doncaster Playhouse, 1 March at Caulfield Theatre, 6 and 7 March at Mt Evelyn Christian Centre, and 13 to 15 March at the Gasworks Theatre, Albert Park. Enquiries: (03) 9570 5582.



home front



Robert Benn speaks at Aboriginal conference

Robert Benn, the National Director of the Australian Presbyterian World Mission, was the speaker at this year's conference of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. The theme was "If My People" (2 Chronicles 7.14). Since 1970, when the Aboriginal Church of Australia was formed with Pastor David Kirk as its first president, there have been 25 AEF annual conventions in South Australia.



Robert Benn with Harley Haywood – newly appointed president of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship

SA news roundup

Para Hills Presbyterian Church, in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, will present the South Australian Police Choir in a concert at the church on Sunday 19 April at 2pm. Afternoon tea will be provided.

The SA General Assembly will be held in St Giles Presbyterian Church, the Parade, Norwood on 11 to 13 May 1998. The Rev Wally Zurrer, Minister of Seacliff-Mt Barker, will be inducted as moderator.

More services are being held at Murray Bridge Presbyterian Church. Services are now held on the first, second and third Sundays of each month at 5pm in the Masonic Hall, Mulgundawah Road, Murray Bridge. Mr Tom Haig has been elected as an elder. He was ordained and inducted on 25 January. An inspiring service for Christmas was held on Sunday 21 December, with a children's play and presentation of awards, followed by a celebration dinner.

Ministerial movements: Murray Paton and his wife Merilee, from NSW, have begun a supply ministry at Penola; Ken Lowe and his wife Adrienne, from Queensland, are soon to take up their appointment in the new parish of Port Augusta-Whyalla; Bryan Crawford has resigned from his appointment at Seaford, which becomes part of the Seacliff-Mt Barker Parish.

'Bible teach-in' at St Kilda

The Moderator General, the Rt Rev Bruce Christian, will be the speaker at the 1998 Bible teach-in at St Kilda Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Alma Road and Barkly Street, St Kilda, on the weekend of 27 to 30 March.

Mr Christian's theme is "Overcoming the World", based on Ephesians 6:10-20. Sessions will be held at 7.30pm on Friday 27 March, 5pm and 7.30pm on Saturday 28 March, 11am and 7pm on Sunday 29 March and 6pm on Monday 30 March.

This will be the first opportunity for Presbyterians in Victoria to meet the Moderator General and benefit from his astute Bible teaching. For enquiries telephone: (03) 9537 1642.

Mercer publishes biography of Searle

The biography of Rev John Searle, *In the Faithful Hands of Another*, written by Rev John Mercer, is now available.

John Searle migrated from Scotland to Australia in 1925. Studies at the Melbourne Bible Institute stood him in good stead to retain his evangelical faith during years of study for the Presbyterian ministry. After a

short but effective ministry in Queenstown (Tasmania) he was called back to MBI as lecturer, then vice principal and finally as principal, a position he held from 1944 until 1965, when ill-health set in. Great development took place during this time, both at MBI and beyond, under John Searle's guidance, and his influential life is well chronicled by Mr Mercer, who draws many helpful lessons to be learnt from John Searle's example by those who seek to serve the Lord today.

An attractive paperback book of some 200 pages, with numerous illustrations and some of Mr Searle's papers reproduced, *In the Faithful Hands of Another* makes inspiring reading. It is available from Onesimus Press, PO Box 6456, St Kilda Road Central 3004 for \$12, plus \$3.50 postage (\$15.50) for one copy or \$10 per copy plus \$5 postage for two or more.

On 20 March, when John and Phyllis Mercer will be passing through Melbourne, there will be a service of dedication for the book at 8pm in St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Surrey Hills. A number of those associated with Mr Searle will reminisce briefly. For further enquiries telephone 0411 084 970.

Busy year for college

The Principal, Allan Harman, reports that the Presbyterian Theological College in Box Hill, Melbourne, has embarked on a busy new year of training for ministry.

At the end of last year the college houses in Surrey Hills were sold, enabling a more flexible approach to housing lecturers and students. Dr Tony Bird and Rev John Wilson and their families have moved into their own homes in Mitcham and Greensborough respectively.

Mr Wilson was appointed to the new full-time position of lecturer in pastoral theology by the last Victorian General Assembly, and was installed into that position at the college commencement held in Canterbury Presbyterian Church on 16 February. At that service, degrees and awards were conferred on a number of graduates of the college, including a Doctor of Theology to Rev Sang Gyoo Lee, who travelled back from Korea to receive the degree.

Rev Peter Barson, minister of Camp Hill, Brisbane, and business convener of the General Assembly of Australia, spoke on the crisis of leadership. He called upon those in ministry to give sound leadership to their congregations, not allowing them to drift but setting a vision before them and enabling them to fulfil it.

Mr Barson also spoke at a college family day the Saturday before at Somerville,

south of Melbourne. He based his message on the lowering of the paralytic to the feet of Jesus for healing, and urged the students to do everything possible to take opportunities as they seek to bring people to Jesus.

Academic highlights

A larger than usual contingent of overseas visitors will speak at the college during the year. Rev Iain Murray, who recently retired as general editor of the Banner of Truth Trust, will lead the in-service course for ministers in the week from 31 March, along with Professor Douglas Milne. Dr John Currid, Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, will speak in May, when he visits Melbourne under the auspices of the Institute of Archeology. Rev David Searle, director of Rutherford House, Edinburgh, will be delivering a series of lectures for ministers later in the year.

Student enrolments to date are encouraging overall, but enrolments of actual candidates for the ministry are small.

Enquiries about the wide variety of courses of study available at the college may be made to the principal at 684 Elgar Rd, Box Hill North, 3129, phone (03) 9898 9384.

Victorian inductions

Rev Robert Duncanson was recently inducted as minister of Rochester by the Presbytery of Bendigo, and Rev Wally Gear was inducted as minister of Heidelberg (Vic) by the Presbytery of Melbourne North on Friday 6 February.

The Rev Chris ten Broeke will be inducted as colleague and successor to the minister of Warrnambool, Rev Ivan Barker, by the Presbytery of Kilnoorat on Friday 20 March.

Townsville stages musical Ruth

St Andrew's, Townsville, is planning to present a full-scale musical called *Ruth*, written by Nathan Alison, a member of the congregation. *Ruth* is about belonging to God's Kingdom and faithfully tells the well-known biblical story of Naomi and her Gentile daughter-in-law Ruth, who was faithful and found a wonderful home with Boaz, becoming part of the line from which the Lord Jesus is descended.

Glenys Perry will direct, Dell Stevenson

will coordinate music, Nathan Alison will conduct and Jim Ward will be the producer.

The play is to be presented in the church on Friday 8 May and Saturday 9 May at 7.30pm.

Clayfield prefects profess faith

At the induction of prefects held recently at Clayfield College, Brisbane, Sarah Joliffe (captain) and Sallyanne Christiansen (vice captain) were each presented with a Bible by Mrs Carolyn Hauff (principal) and Rev Guido Kettmiss (chairman of council). Before being offered the position of prefect, each student is required to make a profession of her Christian faith, so that the leaders of the school are able to live out their motto: "Let Your Light Shine." Clayfield College, with a record enrolment this year of 750, recently opened a \$4.2 million physical education centre.



Mrs Carolyn Hauff, School Captain, Sarah Joliffe and Vice Captain Sallyanne Christiansen with Rev. Guido Kettmiss

Queensland Theological Hall commencement

The opening service for the Queensland Theological Hall was held on 13 February, with Rev Kim Dale of Mt Tamborine challenging the faculty not to follow the strange ideas of the world, but to remain faithful to the truths of the Gospel, which alone is the power of God unto salvation. The Queensland Moderator, Rev Andrew Gardiner, gave a charge to the faculty and led in a prayer of dedication.

Among those studying at the hall are four students for the ministry. Evening lectures have begun, offering greater access to theological study to the church at large. Facilities at the hall, located at Emmanuel

College on the campus of the University of Queensland, have recently been upgraded, including air conditioning in the library following a donation of \$16,000. The hall is carrying out a feasibility study on the establishment of a bible college to be run in conjunction with the hall.

New PLC principal focuses on future

Mrs Elizabeth Ward, installed as Principal of PLC Burwood (Victoria) on 6 February 1998, is committed to a dynamic educational program which will equip the students of PLC to live in the world beyond the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Mrs Ward has pledged to be diligent in encouraging best teaching practices among the staff and the highest possible achievements for all students; in patiently supporting those with particular learning difficulties and personal problems.

News from WA

Ross Fraser has become a candidate for the ministry of the PCA. Ross and his wife Sue are members of Bicton congregation. Stuart and Sharon Bonnington are delighted to announce the arrival of Rebecca.

Balga, Joondalup, Guildford and West Leederville are all vacant and prayer is asked for the ongoing witness of these charges until the Lord sends ministers to them. Bassendean Church is progressing with the building of its hall.

A Chinese congregation meets on Sunday afternoons in Scots Church, Fremantle, under the ministry of Rev Dr Samuel Huang. The Korean Church has settled into premises at Murdoch University, and the Portuguese congregation meets in the evenings at West Leederville.

Rob and Jeanette Duncanson have returned to Victoria and their place in the Shearer Patrol in the south has been taken by Ray and Trudi Rutland.

Whitfords Church is growing in numbers and enthusiasm under the ministry of the Rev Alan and Lem Perrie.

With Christ

Mrs Jenny Portlock, a member of Seacliff (SA) passed on suddenly on 8 November 1997, aged 39. Jenny had many talents, especially in music and work with children in the Sunday school. Heart-felt

sympathy is extended to her husband Brenton, children Bradley and Jessica, brother Stephen and parents, Rev Doug and Nancy Murray, of Sydney.

Kenneth Crawford McLennan passed away on 2 August 1997 aged 93. Born at Albury, he grew and began his working life at Lockart, moving to the West Wyalong district in 1926. Ken was ordained an elder in 1947 at Ungarie. Following church union he transferred to West Wyalong where he served as an elder until 1996 when he was made elder emeritus.

Clarence Reginald Gilbert was called Home suddenly following a severe heart attack. An elder of West Toowoomba, he had worshipped and served in St Andrew's Church, Newtown Park Church and Glen Vale Road Church. He was a cheerful soul who devoted himself to the service of the church and community. Rev Roland Sondergeld conducted the funeral service on 23 September 1997.

Commissioning service at Warburton

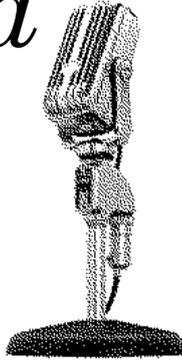
St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Warburton was the venue for Philip, Sandra, Andrew, Katherine, Anna and Matthew Burns on the afternoon of 18 January 1998. The service was led by the moderator of Maroondah Presbytery, Mr Colin Morrow, while Rev Len Pearce preached from Genesis 12:1-5. After the service members of the Upper Yarra Parish spoke warmly of Philip and Sandra's ministry over 12 years in the parish. A huge "signature quilt" was presented as a farewell gift.

The Burns family have now begun their appointment at Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu.



*Presbyterians are invited to send items of church news to the news editor, Rev Bob Thomas at:
PO Box 6456
Saint Kilda Road Central
VIC 3004*

world news



Pakistani Presbyterian pastor murdered

The Rev Noor Alam, 58, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church in Shaikhupura, near Lahore, was stabbed to death on the night of 28 January at his manse on Mereekday Road in Sultanpura.

His wife and daughter reportedly witnessed the murder and filed accusations against a local Muslim cleric and two other people. The Muslim cleric is said to have been arousing local Muslims against the construction of the Presbyterian Church for some time, the partly completed church building having been ransacked and demolished by a Muslim mob on 5 December.

Lesslie Newbiggin dies

Lesslie Newbiggin – ecumenist, preacher, writer and theologian – has died in England aged 88. One of the first bishops of the Church of South India, he gained prominence for his strong ecumenical stance. In retirement he ministered with the United Reformed Church of England in a small inner city church in Birmingham, later serving as Moderator of the URC.

New seminary for Turkey

What could be the first Presbyterian Church in Turkey since the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 (depending on one's interpretation of church government displayed in Scripture) is operating in the historic district of Chalcedon.

David and Ann Winch, of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, have moved to Istanbul Reformed Seminary, based at the Turkish Presbyterian Church there, where David is teaching. The faculty also includes two men from Korea and one from America.

The intention is to train leaders for the growing Christian Church in Turkey, which faces the challenge of Islam every day. Gifts in support of the Winches may be made payable to Durham Presbyterian Church, c/- Mr Brian Norton, 23 Orchard Drive, Durham City DH1 1LA, UK.

Progress in Cyprus

Newly appointed Australian missionary Veronica Hart is excited by what she has so far seen of the work of the Middle Eastern Reformed Fellowship in Cyprus, where she has been appointed to set up the library at the John Calvin Study Centre in Larnaca.

Veronica reports that she quickly became part of a warm local Christian fellowship which reaches out with the Gospel and caters for the spiritual needs of those associated with MERF.

Threats in Tajikistan

The Bible League's representative in Tajikistan, Wally Kulakoff, reports that Christian workers in that former Soviet country have been threatened with death by Muslims. Originally said to have been evangelised by the Apostle Thomas, the Tajiks were forced to convert to Islam in the 12th century. "We are Muslim because of the axe," they say.

Wally reports that in 1991 Tajikistan became an independent country and many Russians moved back to Russia. In the mid 1990s children of mixed marriages became interested in Christianity, and today the Lord is pouring His grace and mercy upon the Tajik people as Bible League church planters bring the Gospel to the Tajiks and Russians.

Two Bible League workers were recently visiting people's homes when they were apprehended by two armed Muslim extremists, members of a party of violent militia who are trying to make Tajikistan a Muslim state. They were taken to an empty field where the extremists stepped back and took aim with machine guns. The Bible League workers closed their eyes and prayed aloud, as Stephen did, to the Lord Jesus to receive their spirits. Nothing happened, and when they opened their eyes they saw the extremists fleeing, terrified.

The Lord's miraculous intervention encourages them to believe that He has spared their lives for a purpose. They need Bibles for church planting. Contact the Bible League, PO Box 71, Werrington 2747 or phone (02) 9673 3055.

The Power of Song

Marchiene Vroon Rienstra provides a remarkable testimony that whoever sings prays twice

It is grey and cold outside. I sit by the fire inside, listening to my sister Judy sing. She died on a golden day in October, as the leaves outside her window dropped into a shining stream that carried them away.

In the long silence since then, I have listened to her voice and her songs, recorded years and years ago before she was afflicted with the multiple sclerosis that took her life. I am amazed at the songs she chose to sing at that church program in 1973, which some one, thank God, recorded and passed on to our family. She had an extraordinary, beautiful voice. It carried her deep feeling and faith so clearly and gave it to all who listened. She sang from her heart. This is one of her songs:

*Oh, every night when the sun goes in,
I lay down my head and mournful cry.
I wish to the Lord that my train would
come,
and carry me back where I come from.
True love don't weep, true love don't mourn,
True love don't weep or mourn for me,
I'm going back home where I come from.*

It seems so prophetic. It makes me wonder if, somewhere deep within her, she knew where her life was going to go. In any case, I hear her words now, and they speak directly to my heart, just as her singing always did when we were young together. "I can't help it, Judy," I think. "I do weep and mourn. For you, because of what you had to endure before you went back home where you came from, and for me and all of us who were robbed of your marvellous gifts by disease and death."

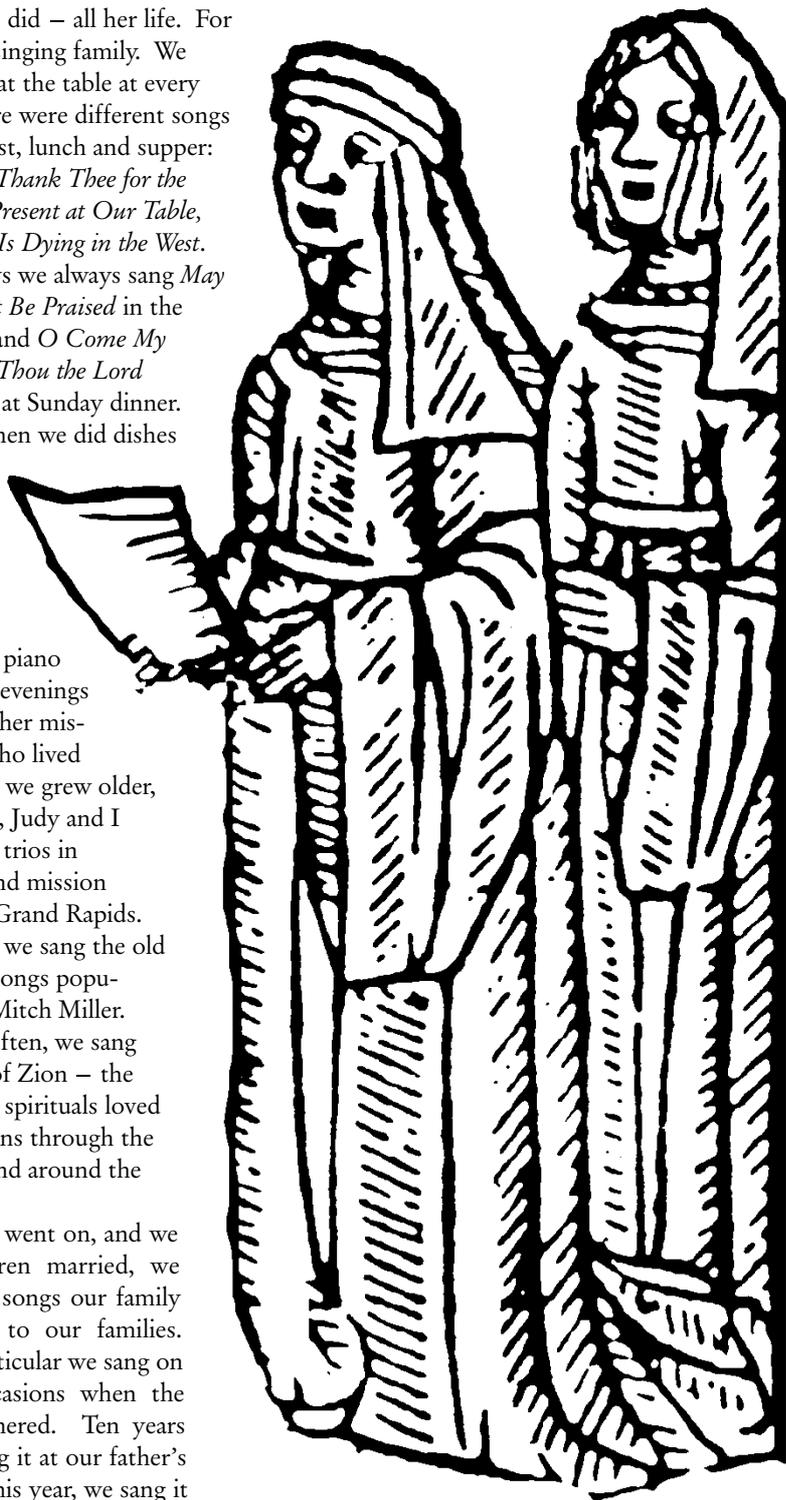
And I remember how when Judy was little and in boarding school, I, her big sister, would hold her and try to comfort her as she cried, so homesick, wishing the train would come that took us home each year at Thanksgiving. I wonder if she was remembering at some level when she chose and sang that song.

*I'm going to sing when the Spirit says
'sing' and obey the Spirit of the Lord.*

And she did – all her life. For we were a singing family. We sang grace at the table at every meal. There were different songs for breakfast, lunch and supper: *Father, We Thank Thee for the Night; Be Present at Our Table, Lord; Day Is Dying in the West.* On Sundays we always sang *May Jesus Christ Be Praised* in the mourning and *O Come My Soul, Bless Thou the Lord Thy Maker* at Sunday dinner. We sang when we did dishes and went places in the car together.

We sang around the piano on Sunday evenings with the other missionaries who lived nearby. As we grew older, my mother, Judy and I would sing trios in churches and mission chapels in Grand Rapids. Sometimes we sang the old fashioned songs popularised by Mitch Miller. But most often, we sang the songs of Zion – the hymns and spirituals loved by Christians through the centuries and around the world.

As time went on, and we four children married, we taught the songs our family had loved to our families. One in particular we sang on special occasions when the family gathered. Ten years ago we sang it at our father's funeral. This year, we sang it at Judy's funeral:



O come my soul, bless thou the Lord thy maker, and all within me bless God's holy name (Ps 103).

Every time we sing it, the words and music have a powerful effect. They express praise and joy on glad occasions, helping our hearts take wing together and uniting us with God's people across the boundaries of time and space. In sorrow, they bring comfort and fix our minds and hearts on what really matters and makes all the difference in the world. We remember all the other times we have sung together, and we are bound together again.

The words are very much like the Jewish Kaddish, which is said in memory of the dead. It is a prayer of praise and blessing. In the face of death and loss, what better thing is there to do than sing God's praise? What better thing is there to cling to than the remembrance of God's blessing and the hope of blessing to come? What is better than blessing God in life and in death? All this, and more, this song has taught us, shaping our gathering and parting, our living and dying, in powerful and profound ways.

*Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into
campground.*

*Oh, don't you want to go to the Gospel
Feast,
that Promised Land where all is peace?
Deep river, Lord, I want to cross over into
campground.*

Once again, the words seem profoundly prophetic. They capture Judy's longing for her eternal home. It was a longing that grew in her as MS made her life here more and more painful and difficult. When she lay dying, and the family was gathered around her bed for a special prayer service, we listened to the recording of her singing this song that she loved. The words reminded us that her home was also ours. I realised as I listened to them that I was not as ready as I thought I was to let her "cross over into campground".

It was all the singing I did with her and the family that helped me let her go. The songs became for me a bond that I felt even death could not break. Watching her die was terribly difficult, but the experience of singing her into heaven made it bearable.

She sang with us until she was too weak to make a sound. Then she moved her lips to mouth the words with us, and we knew she was joining us with her heart. In this way, we were deeply connected with her and each other right until the end. And

deep connection was what we most needed. It was a connection deeper than blood ties or shared history. It was the connection of a shared faith in our faithful Lord and Saviour to whom Judy and we belonged in life and in death. There was no better way for us as a family to abide in that faith than to sing the songs of the faith that had woven our lives together through all our differences and separations.

"How can you keep on singing?" a family friend asked in amazement near the end of our 10 days of waiting and watching with Judy as she gradually let go of her earthly life.

"Singing is what keeps us keeping on," I said. And it did. We sang morning hymns every dawn with Judy, and evening hymns when darkness fell, and all the favourite hymns and spirituals we could think of in between. When we grew too weary to sing, we played tapes and CDs of her favourite songs of faith. We did not know when Judy would die, but we were determined to bear her on wings of song, just as her life had been a song to God and for us all.

On the Sunday morning she finally left this life, a CD my brother had given her only a short time before was playing softly in her room. It was a collection of many of Judy's favourite spirituals entitled *Steal Away*. As the songs of God's family had shaped and expressed the heart of our family's life and Judy's life, so they now shaped Judy's death in a remarkable way.

In the hour of her death, the first song was *Standing in the Need of Prayer*. Indeed, we were. We were all bone weary, emotionally exhausted from our long death vigil. Our focus had been on Judy. The song was a reminder that we needed prayer too.

Next came the song *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*. What an appropriate expression it was of Judy's long struggle with the terrible disease that took so much away from her. In the words of the song, "sometimes she was up, sometimes she was down, sometimes she was almost to the ground" and so were those who loved her, especially during the last days of her life as she wasted away.

When Judy finally died, and we all gathered around her bed, the song *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* was playing. We had sung it together with her often through the years and during her Hospice stay.

*Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to
carry me home.
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,*

*coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels a comin' after me,
coming for to carry me home.*

We looked at each other in amazement that this should be the song with which her soul departed. It seemed more than coincidence.

The music did not stop when she died. As Judy's children wept at her death bed, we heard *Sometimes I Feel like Motherless Child*. Once again, a song of faith gave shape and expression to our experience. Gently, strongly, we were held together and embraced by the songs of God's people.

Where would we be without them? I understand why a friend of mine said that if she were stranded on a desert island, she would be hard put to choose between the Bible and her favourite hymnbook. I agree with St. Augustine who is reputed to have said, "Whoever sings prays twice."

God's people have always sung and so prayed their faith, their hope, and their love. There was a time when the family hymnbook was an important and much used devotional resource. Because it contained hymns and songs based on Scripture and the faith of many generations, it connected Christians to the faith of a great variety of God's people. A good hymnbook still does this, along with other oral and written resources of faith in song.

I am eternally grateful for the presence of this rich heritage in my and my family's life. Christians who do not know a great variety of hymns and spiritual songs by heart are seriously and grievously impoverished. I am convinced that one of the most important treasures our generation has to pass on is our songs of faith. For they have the power to shape, expand, express, and deepen our life in Christ and give voice to the hope that is within us.

Even more, the songs of faith, both old and new, have the power to unite our hearts with all the host of heaven; the stars and angels that sang with joy at creation; the angels and saints who unceasingly sing the praise of God in heaven; and the great multitude that no one can number who will sing at the end of time when all God's promises are fulfilled, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and give God the glory. Amen."

*Reprinted with permission from
Perspectives: page 68 February 1997.*

Heaven's perspective

Without a vision, God's youth group will perish, writes Adam Lavery.

Vision is one of the most important factors in the success of a youth group. If a group is to lead young people to Christ and help them grow in their experience of God, then it needs to have a clear vision that this is its purpose. But it's hard work to establish that vision and keep it clearly before the group.

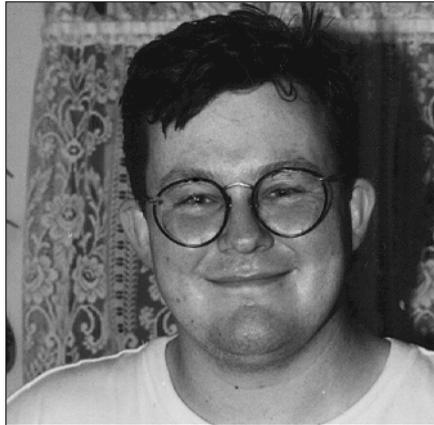
The first few weeks back are almost always a stressful time for all those involved in youth group. The youth who belong to the group are just getting into school. The leaders are still working out some of the kinks in the program that they've spent the last couple of weeks putting together. It's then that you start to lose perspective a little in the mad rush to get tasks done. For the first couple of nights, it can seem like the whole thing is riding on a wing and a prayer.

I have noticed that when things are going well in a youth group, there seems to be a correlation to the prayer life of the people involved. A healthy prayer life is essential if the group's vision is going to transform it. And at the heart of the vision must be the conviction that God's plan is to bring youth to Christ. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain." If a youth group is going to work effectively, it cannot have too much prayer support. After all – supporting the church's youth is an investment in the future.

In my own life I have noticed a similar correlation between my prayer life and day-to-day life. When I'm talking to God as well as listening to him in my Bible study and quiet times, things are clearer. My problems don't all vanish, but there is a greater sense of perspective. Vision returns once more.

Perspective is a great thing to have, and when it's tied to youth work, then it's a double blessing. Sometimes it can seem as if there's too much to do.

This term was close to a nightmare for me – I was already tired enough without



adding to the things I was trying to do. Our youth group newsletter had to go out, so all the articles had to be gathered in. Our yearly camp had to happen – transport, money, programme, all had to be organised. The studies had to be decided upon for the term. Letters had to be sent out to the kids. That's when perspective needs to kick in so you don't get lost in the details.

Suddenly you realise, "we only have camp once a year!" You think, "with all the ideas we came up with this term, we could get the Sunday School kids to put the next term's program together!" You know that putting Bible studies together will be a little easier once you're back into the swing of things. Those things you picked up at the Youth Leader's Convention will have settled a bit more, proven themselves to you over the last term. Still, that's only the practicalities.

When you get down to the bottom of it all, you realise that vision is crucial because vision reminds you of why you are doing it. Why you lead youth group, why you go to youth group, why you witness and reach out at school. We heard at State PY Summer Camp that the Lord says "I have loved you", and as you lead a youth group you see it proven again and again. God lends you the perspective that reveals the cycles he put into place in nature, in the heavens, in the atom – he shows you the future leaders of the youth group, the

future leaders of the church.

Perspective is a great gift from God. He blesses some people richly with this gift, while others he affords only glimpses. When God shows me glimpses of how His word works, I know he's showing me glimpses of heaven. He shows his own hand in creation around me, and in the work of the new creation that He's undertaking in our youth group.

God gives us many things but the gift of His perspective, His visions – of being able to see through his eyes – is the best of all. What a great encouragement to the youth leader!

Adam Lavery is a member of St Giles Presbyterian Church in Hurstville, NSW, and a member of Presbyterian Youth

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AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian World Mission

Expressions of Interest are being sought from suitably qualified persons for the following teaching positions in 1998 at Onesua High School, Vanuatu

- Agriculture Teachers (2)
- English Language Teacher (1)
- French Language Teacher (1)
- Social Science & History Teachers (2)
- Industrial Arts Teacher (1)

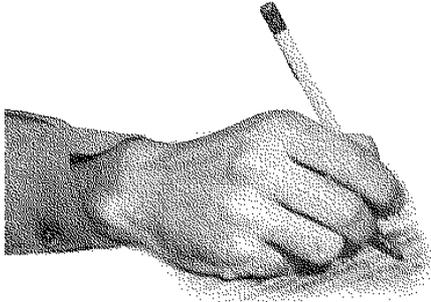
Preference given to married couples because of availability of accommodation. However, single applicants welcome.

In the first instance contact the National Director APWM;

8 Sylvan Grove,
Picnic Point NSW 2213.
Ph. (02) 9792 1373
Fax (02) 9792 1374



letters



Living with tension

December's issue contained some interesting contrasts. On the one hand there were articles embracing change and a focus on what is meaningful to the unbelievers of our age, on the other an article pursuing doctrinal purity and the need to focus on getting it right on the inside. These are two ideas in tension in our church today, but who should we listen to?

The interpretation of words is contextual and a matter of perception, words cannot convey perfect meaning. This problem is further exaggerated in a postmodern world where the context has changed considerably.

We often find our interpretations in tension between two or more meanings. People seem to prefer to stake a position somewhere on the continuum between the extremes rather than live with a tension. Yet the Gospel is all about living with this tension. In it we find a person who is God and Man, God who is one and three, believers who are sinners and righteous, a book which is the Word of God and the words of men, predestination and moral responsibility, election and choice, neither male nor female but women who may not lead men, multiple perspectives on the second coming, and so forth.

Is there any wonder there is so much difference in doctrine within the Christian Church? Doctrinal purity is impossible, yet we already have it.

In the Gospel, God has taken away every remnant of self-righteousness that we can muster and replaced it with a complete and self-contained solution. This solution transcends all ages, all doctrines, all philosophies, all uncertainties and even all our certainties. All we have left are faith, hope and love. Faith to trust the God of grace, hope in the promises of life and love to live by.

Trevor Smallwood

The free gospel

Sometimes, as Christians, we sit back and hope that the church will grow by people walking into our churches, uninvited.

Sometimes we do see new people come in that way, but more often people come to church because they've been invited by somebody from the church. I have been encouraged to share with your readers one of the activities that we have undertaken at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church over the past few years as attempts to reach out to unchurched people.

Several years ago, we targeted a new residential estate within our area. This area is known as Kings Park at Keperra. Our first activity was one for children, and it centred around what we called a "Giant Banana Split" (a piece of PVC pipe several metres long filled with ice-cream, bananas, nuts and cream). The afternoon began with various games in the park, included a Bible story, and concluded with the banana split. This was very well attended, and broke down barriers with some people.

Our second activity at Kings Park, in the same year, was a bush dance, also held in the park. While many people danced, elders and other members of our congregation circulated amongst those who were sitting down. The overwhelming comment from non-church people was: "How come this is free? In our experience the church is only ever out to get your money!" Everyone enjoyed the evening, and no-one felt threatened by an activity organised by a church.

We believe that these activities were very worthwhile and I would commend similar outreach activities to your readers.

*Rev John Nicol
Mitchelton, Qld*

Five minutes of power

'My house shall be called a house of prayer', says the Lord. If Anglicans pray before the service why do Presbyterians not pray also instead of chattering? Everyone should come to church with the intention of doing something for the Lord, one of which should be prayer. If people do not pray, it shows they have no concern for the things of God.

If a congregation of 60 each spent five minutes in individual prayer, firstly in praising and thanking God and then in prayer for the minister that would total five hours of praise and prayer ascending to God before the service began. It would not be a dead church.

Laziness accomplishes nothing and a prayerless Church has little reason for existence but a praying church changes the nation.

*Neil Colman
Norman Park, Qld*

Land and justice

We as owners of a pastoral grazing lease in western NSW would like to tell Christians that there is a lot being said in the media by prominent church leaders that is untrue of the situation we face here as farmers in the western division.

We rent our lease from the Government, we pay commercial freehold prices for these leases. We see no shame in entering a business deal to rent property – many of you rent too. What we do see as shameful, and we object to most strongly, is our landlord suddenly telling us he's going to give the premises we are paying for to another tenant while we are still renting it.

At present there are five claims over our farm including the water in the creek that runs through freehold around our homestead.

Aborigines have a common law right, as do all citizens, to purchase and hold property titles, either freehold or leasehold. In fact they have more than equal right. Other Australians usually have to borrow money to do so whereas Aborigines have had since 1983 as per the Aborigines Land Rights Act access to a land fund (now more than \$400 million), to help buy property.

The state land fund is further strengthened by a national fund of more than \$1.2 billion created under the Native Title Act of 1993. To imply that Aborigines can only gain property rights via native title is highly misleading. Aborigines have bought several properties neighbouring us for cash in recent years.

Aborigines are first and foremost citizens of this nation. But I don't believe it is right for our Government to attempt to correct an injustice of the past by imposing an equally unjust solution on another innocent group in the present. If we, the people of Australia, owe a debt to the Aborigines, it is a debt owed by all Australians equally, not only pastoralists.

*Frances M. Parker
Hazelwood Station,
Balranald 25d, NSW*

Time for dirty hands

No one can argue that the Aboriginal people have not been dealt with poorly in the past. The problems of unemployment, poor health, and imprisonment, are well above the average in their community today.

But we, as the church, need to tread carefully in taking sides in the current Wik debate, as we could be simply isolating another minority group, the farmers who own and operate the disputed pastoral leases.

These folk have suffered severe drought, low commodity prices, ever-increasing reg-

ulation, high interest rates and now the uncertainty of Wik.

These people are not rich and yet are called on to defend their properties in court against a government-funded attack. They work hard for little reward, yet love what they do. They love where they live, wanting above all to share it with their children. They too have a spiritual connection with this land. They too see their youth committing suicide. They too have no doctor. They feel that in Wik they are the sacrifice so that the rest of us can feel better about the past.

We as a church must have compassion for them as well. Rather than take sides in the debate, we should be ministering the hope of the gospel to both groups. That is the solution, not Wik or the 10-point plan.

We must get in and get our hands dirty, and work to address the problems in the rural and aboriginal communities, rather than pass comment about divisive political debate. What are we doing to help the Aboriginal people overcome health problems? What are we doing to stop our rural youth killing themselves? Dealing with these issues would better serve the gospel of Christ.

*P.N. Hooper
Mackay, Qld.
Oxley, ACT*

Letters should be no more than 250 words, and must include the writer's full name, signature and address. Shorter letters will be preferred. A letter may be edited for reasons of space or clarity.

To recognise mothers' day, readers are invited to submit letters or articles for the May issue about the influence – on them or others – of Christian mothers. Articles should not exceed 600 words, letters should not exceed 250 words.

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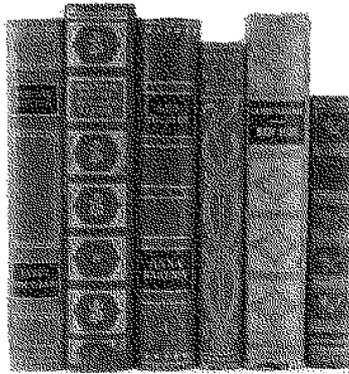
Wangaratta Ministerial Vacancy

There is a vacancy at the
Yarrowonga Presbyterian
Church in Wangaratta,
Victoria.

All enquiries in the first instance
to:

Rev. John Sutherland
Interim moderator
(03) 5831 6494

books



Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell

By Thomas F. Torrance,
T & T Clark 1996

Reviewed by Wayne R. Spear

Professor Torrance taught Christian Dogmatics at Edinburgh from 1952 to 1979, and is well known as an expositor of the theology of Karl Barth, an ecumenist, and a creative thinker in the area of the relationship between theology and science. Therefore a volume from him on the history of Scottish theology warrants careful attention.

The purpose of the book is to give 'brief soundings in the thought of some of the most notable and influential theologians in the Kirk.' The nine chapters present reflections on such writers as John Knox, John Forbes, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Leighton, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, Thomas Erskine and John McLeod Campbell.

The author selected the theologians to be discussed partly by the books which were on his shelves. More significantly, the choice was made because of his interest in the particular issue which shapes the discussion in every chapter: the doctrine of limited atonement, and its relation to the gospel offer and assurance.

The central perspective of this book is that the history of Scottish theology was characterised by conflict between two traditions: the older, evangelical Calvinism brought from Geneva by John Knox, which was dynamic rather than scholastic, which began with the infinite, unconditional love of God for the whole of mankind as revealed in Christ, regarded assurance as belonging to the essence of faith, and 'wedded evangelical passion with the sacramental life of the Church'.

This was soon eclipsed, according to Torrance, by a form of Calvinism derived from Beza, 'a rigidly scholastic and rationalistic form of Calvinism'. Belonging to this new form was the federal theology which was later incorporated in the Westminster Standards.

Professor Torrance's hostility toward the Westminster theology is evident throughout the book. It is that theology, along with the influence of the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant, which is responsible for the 'divisive elements and unfortunate features in Scottish theology'.

What is particularly offensive is the Confession's doctrine of limited atonement, with the associated notion of double predestination. This stems, in the author's view, from a sub-Christian view of God. On the other hand, theologians who advocate the universal scope of the atonement, and God's unconditional love for each and every sinner, are hailed as those who are returning to the good old ways of the original Reformers.

It is not to be expected in a book of this kind that interpretation of particular theologians would be supported by extensive evidence, but the evidence which is given ought to be accurate. It is surprising to read here that Calvin rejected double predestination and taught universal atonement!

Several examples could be given of the misunderstanding or misuse of quotations by the author in his zeal to defend his belief in unlimited atonement. His description of the theology of Calvin, Knox, and Westminster should be treated with great caution.

The primary value of *Scottish Theology* is in the introduction it provides to several little-known Scottish theologians. It is also valuable in showing how a theologian deeply influenced by Barth uses that perspective to interpret the history of theology. Professor

Torrance gives us more understanding of contemporary Scottish theology than he does of the theology of the First and Second Reformations in Scotland.

Reprinted with permission from the Reformed Theological Journal

If I Should Die before I Wake: Help for Those Who Hope for Heaven

By K. Scott Oliphint and Sinclair B. Ferguson
Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.

Reviewed by Robert A. Peterson

Oliphint and Ferguson have written to fill a real need. There are few books in print on the subject of heaven. This is a clearly written book, whose illustrations and applications will keep lay readers' attention.

Furthermore, it is a book undergirded by careful Bible study and theological reflection. It doesn't skirt questions Christians are asking: will believers recognise one another in heaven? If we won't be married in heaven, will we feel a sense of loss? How can we be happy in heaven knowing others are in the torments of hell?

The authors seek to answer these questions directly, but they aren't afraid to acknowledge the silence of Scripture on some points. There are a half dozen end-notes and no bibliography. There is a 15-page appendix that competently deals with annihilationism.

A few quotations will illustrate the book's utility. "There is a clever saying that people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly use. That is quite false. Scripture gives us a completely different perspective. Our real problem is that we are not sufficiently heavenly minded."

Concerning the godly Puritan Richard Sibbes, Izaak Walton wrote in the 17th century, "Of that blessed man, let this just praise be given; that heaven was in him before he was in heaven."

Concerning a lost art, "We will not, ordinarily, learn in a day the spiritual skills we need to depart this world. We die but once; but the art of dying well is one that must be learned through practice."

I highly recommend this book for those

who need an accessible book of substance on this neglected topic.

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Jesus and the Logic of History

By Paul W Barnett
Leicester: IVP, 1997

Reviewed by Gerald Bray

This short book is an examination of the historical evidence for the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, relying to a greater extent than is usual on the testimony of the New Testament epistles, as well as the gospels and sources outside the Bible.

Dr Barnett's main contention is that the Christian Church would not have come into being or lasted in the way that it has if

Jesus were not substantially the figure that orthodox Christians have always claimed him to be.

An eccentric rabbi who performed miracles would not have been able to transform the ancient world by his teaching, even if he had acquired a sizeable following. There was something unique about Jesus which allowed the claims made about him to stick – and to spread.

This book is a welcome restatement of the case for traditional orthodox belief in the light of the challenges which have been made to it in recent years. It is well written and easy to digest. It will appeal to a broader audience than is customary for scholarly works.

Dr Barnett is to be congratulated for having provided the Christian public with a reasoned and balanced presentation of the Church's traditional beliefs, backed up with the weight of the most recent and responsible scholarship.

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Looking for a tour that is different?

Off the beaten track

In September 1998 is an exciting journey into Australia's out-back and regions beyond the normal limits of most tours.

Fly to Cairns from any Capital City on September 13 and spend 16 days travelling by luxury coach to Chillagoe Caves, Undara Lava Tubes, Cobbold Gorge, Gulf of Carpentaria, Burketown, Lawn Hill Gorge, Mt Isa, Boulia, Birdsville, Marree, Arkaroola, Wilpeena Pond, Broken Hill, and Mildura to Melbourne.

The tour is accommodated apart from camping two nights in the beautiful Lawn Hill Gorge National Park. One tour is already full, don't miss your opportunity to be part of this unique experience.



Bugged by the year 2000

One of the Western world's great fears might be a blessing in disguise, suggests Phil Campbell.

If you're the type who stops to celebrate when your car odometer clicks over each new "000", then you're probably already fascinated by the prospect of a whole new millennium. The year 2000 is just around the corner – and with it a truckload of genuine problems.

Apart from the usual bunch of millennium-inspired religious cranks, a growing band of techno-prophets are predicting a new kind of doom – come midnight 31 December 1999, they say, and the computer systems we rely on for almost every aspect of daily life will come to a grinding halt.

Don't be too quick to dismiss the predictions. To a degree, they're well founded – and ironically, the dreaded Year 2000 bug (affectionately known in computer-speak as "Y2K") is one computer glitch that's easy to understand. Neat! The most serious computer problem in 30 years, and anyone who's mastered Grade 3 maths can figure it out.

Here's the hitch. Most of the huge computer programs that look after your bank accounts, calculate your life insurance benefits, and control the stock in your local supermarket are getting old. In fact, they may well have been written back in the '70s, when the new millennium seemed remote. To record the date of a transaction, or an interest payment, or your date of birth, programmers typically abbreviated the year to the last two digits – like most of us do all the time. The year 1972, for example, was simply recorded as "72". No problem. Until, of course, the year 2000 rolls around. Figure this. To work out the age you'll be due to receive your superannuation, it's a simple matter to deduct the year of your birth from the current year. Born in 1932? Easy. 98-32 is ... um ... 66. But what happens when 98 rolls around to 00? Quite simply, your age becomes -32. Not a bad thought, in some ways – instant rejuvenation. But you'll be waiting quite a bit longer for that first superannuation cheque.

The problem is simple enough. But it's a nightmare when it comes to the millions of computer calculations that go to make up

our daily lives. And it's not just banks and supermarkets. Traffic signals, lifts, printing presses – things you've never even thought of – are all at the mercy of the dreaded two-digit date.

If you think it's all just hot air, think again. The Woolworths retail chain has already spent almost \$17 million on upgrading, testing, and replacing software systems to cater for the date click-over, and the job is still far from finished. And according to Woolworth's Y2K Project Leader, companies that haven't already started a similar process have left it too late. With millions of lines of program code to sift through and correct, there simply aren't enough man-and-machine hours in existence to do the job.

Doom all round? Financial markets in crisis? The end of Western Civilisation? Well, maybe. And – in true apocalyptic style – those are certainly the claims of many fringe religious groups. Historians point out that the approach of the year 1000AD caused an unprecedented stirring of end-time expectations; the Y2K phenomenon simply heaps fuel on an already smouldering fire.

So just how anxious should thinking Christians be? As we've seen, on one level, there are grounds for genuine concern. Most companies, and even governments, have been a little too complacent about a very genuine problem.

But let's imagine for a moment that the worst comes to the worst, and our precious economic systems do come crashing down; imagine banks with invalid account data, stock exchanges in turmoil, pensions unpaid, traffic in chaos. Unpleasant, certainly. Democratically destabilising, for sure. But in terms of the gospel, how much do these things really matter? What we're facing is really just a vivid demonstration of the fact that moths and rust really *do* destroy the things of this world – even computer data is subject to the corruption and decay of passing time.

In short, it's only our materialistic cocoon that's at risk. It's a pleasant cocoon, and one we've called "home" for so many generations it's hard to imagine life going on without it. But is there still a need for the gospel in a world without banks? For sure. Will there still be the need for a saviour in a world where the superannuation system has fallen in a heap? Absolutely. In fact, maybe a good dose of the Year 2000 bug is just what our affluent society really needs – after all, in the words of Jesus, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle... than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

Phil Campbell is the pastor of Maclean Presbyterian Church, and has been a regular contributor to the computer section of the Sydney Morning Herald.

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When is war just?

As Australia sends troops to the Gulf, Greg Perry asks, "Where Are the Peacemakers?"

In many churches across Australia, Europe and North America, memorials list the names of those who went from those congregations to fight and to die for their countries, and we should never forget them.

It is in remembering them now, as others like them are sent to the Persian Gulf, that we as Christians ought to ask the hard question, "under what conditions, if any, is it right for Christians to employ violence in defence of justice?"

While there is little question of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's hard-earned reputation as a brutal tyrant who has used chemical weapons even against the Kurdish people of Iraq and, let's not forget, who invaded his Arab neighbor Kuwait in 1991, nevertheless, the question remains of how we should respond, not just as Australians, Britons, or North Americans, but first and foremost as loyal subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Very early in the biblical record, things turn violent. Cain slays his own brother Abel (Gen 4:8) and in short order we read that the whole world is "corrupt and full of violence" (Gen 6:11). God's judgment is also violent as the waters of the Great Flood sweep away "every living thing on the face of the earth" (Gen 7:23).

But, the story of Noah and those who escaped with him in the ark must have given great hope to its first hearers, whom God would also deliver through the waters, but this time from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea.

In celebration of their salvation, Moses and the Israelites sang: "The Lord is a warrior, the Lord is His name ... The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea" (Ex 15:3, 15). Indeed, when God's rules of engagement were followed under Joshua at Jericho, victory for Israel was assured (Joshua 5:13-6:27).

There can be no doubting the fact that those rules, which many biblical scholars refer to as a pattern for "holy war", affords little mercy to God's enemies, but insists that Israel not take matters into its own hands (see Deut 20).

As the sins of Achan (Joshua 7:1-26) and Saul (1 Sam 15:7-29) clearly show, to

do so is to invite God's judgment upon one's self and one's people, usually in the form of a military defeat. Moreover, with the sins of David, his sons, and those of rival kings who rise in Israel's divided kingdom, God's anger is turned again toward his people through the "the king Assyria" (Is 8:4; 10:5), who like a mighty floodwater "sweeps over Judah" (Is 8:7-8) and "the once faithful city" (Is 1:21) of Jerusalem, whose very name means "peace".

But even Isaiah's bleak description of Israel's sin and resulting exile gives way to a hopeful vision of Israel's return and to the future rule of "the Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6). "In the last days ... He [the Lord] will judge between the nations ... they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more" (Is 2:4).

It is as a counter-cultural witness to this yet to be fully realised reign of God that Jesus repeals the "eye for an eye" legislation (Deut 19:21) to require a higher righteousness, which "exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mt 5:20), from his followers: "But I say to you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also....Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (see Mt 5:38-48).

Also, in John's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that His Kingdom is not of this world, "for if my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (John 18:36). Indeed, when Peter does fight, Jesus rebukes him saying, "Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Mt 26:52). Paul the apostle explains the other-worldly nature of the Christian's warfare as "spiritual, not fleshly": "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to

make it obedient to Christ." (2 Cor 10:3-6)

Even to Christians who were suffering harsh persecution, Peter offers the example of Christ, who "when they hurled their insults, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to the One who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:19-25).

Even the passage which affords the government the power of the sword as "an agent of God's wrath to punish evildoers" (Rom 13:4) is prefaced by the command to Christians: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

Time and time again, as we've seen, the New Testament sets the clear expectation that faithful followers of Jesus, like their Lord, should offer no violent resistance to tyranny or injustice. As John's Revelation shows finally, God's saints conquer the power of evil through "the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11).

It is a testimony in life and death to the real reality of God's reign of peace, a peace brought about not by the violent overthrow of Roman or Iraqi tyranny, but by Jesus' death and resurrection, which has "broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14) between God and people from "every tribe, language, people and nation" (Rev 5:9), and so "making peace" (Eph 2:15)!

So, in asking one hard question, many more are raised. Where are the memorials in our churches to those who have gone out from our midst to Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, yes, and even to the Persian Gulf region, who gave their lives to bring the good news of the Prince of Peace?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Mt 5:9).

Greg Perry is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America, who is currently lecturing in Bible and Ethics at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Sydney. He also serves as the Convener of the Joint Task Force for Church Planting under the Ministry and Mission Committee in New South Wales.

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