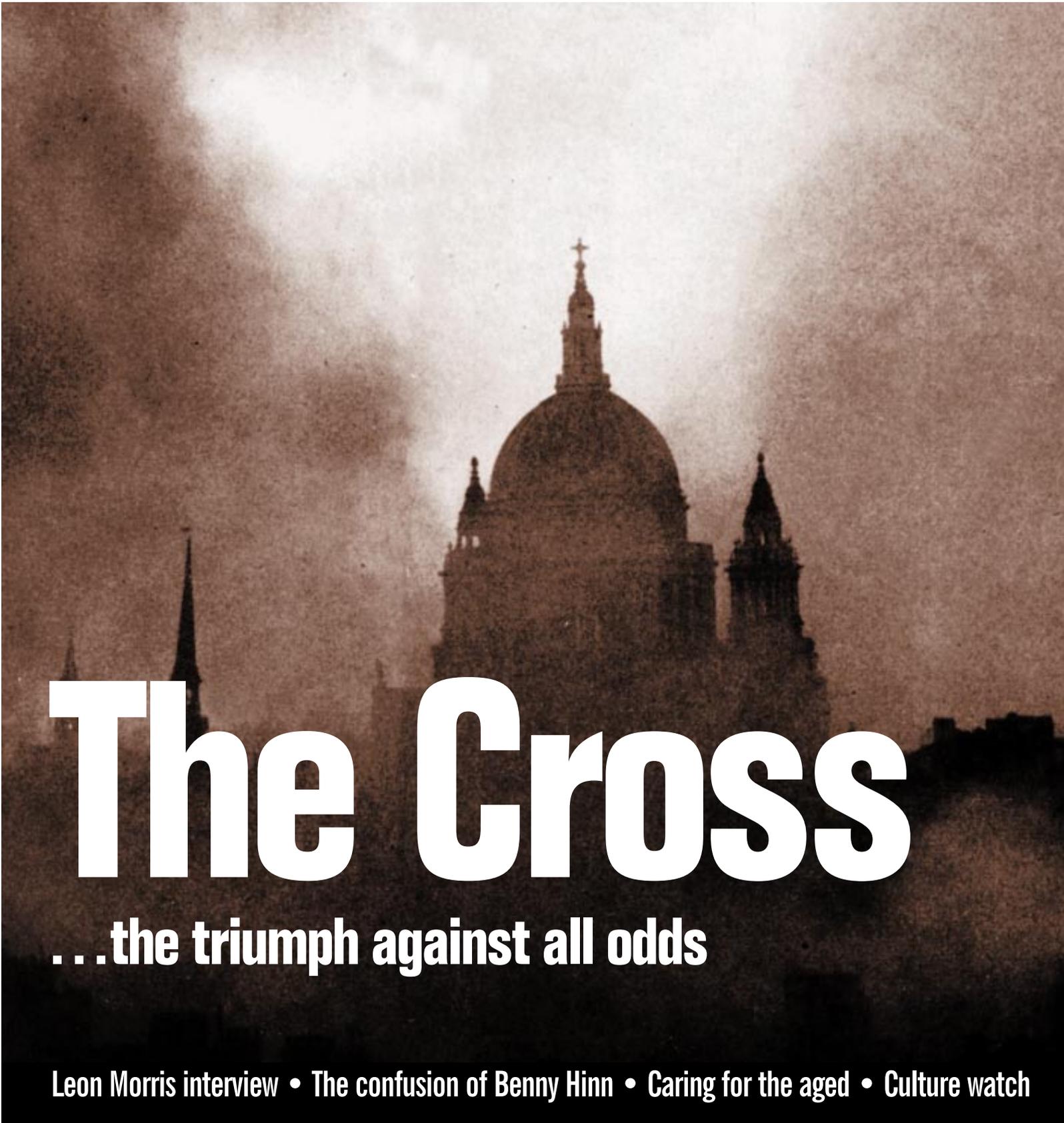


A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

APRIL 1998



The Cross

...the triumph against all odds

Leon Morris interview • The confusion of Benny Hinn • Caring for the aged • Culture watch

prayer

APRIL

- 21 Ian and Christine Case from Mitchelton, Brisbane, International Computer Consultant with WEC, England since 1985.
- 22 Ballina-Evans Head parish, northern NSW, including Wardell, 100 + 30 + 16 communicants, 90 children and youth, 8 elders; Grant and Susan Thorp, Paul McKendrick.
- 23 Kerrie Somerset from Queensland, missionary in Africa with SIM.
- 24 Presbytery of Mowbray, south Brisbane, 14 parishes, 6 home missions, totalling 28 congregations with attendance of 1900, 10 retired ministers, 1 professor, Keith Griffin clerk.
- 25 Greg and Rosemary Braid from Ulverstone, Tasmania, language workers in South Asia (India area) with Wycliffe Bible Translators.
- 26 Tweed Heads Parish, for northern NSW, including Kingscliff, 90 + 20 communicants, 100 children and youth, 5 elders; Stephen Taylor.
- 27 Margaret Price (in Borneo 1972-83) coordination of WEC work in Canberra.
- 28 Adequate preparation and powerful presentation of God's Word proclaimed by your minister and other preachers in your church.
- 29 Acacia Ridge parish, south Brisbane, 110 communicants, 40 children and youth, 7 elders; Stephen and Beate Teale.
- 30 South Australian Mission Committee – home and world mission, Rod Waterhouse convener.

MAY

- 1 Para Hills Home Mission, north Adelaide, 35 communicants, 15 children and youth, 3 elders; Don and Betty Brookes.
- 2 Christian work and ethnic peace among the 800,000 people of Fiji – 43 per cent Christian (mostly Methodists), 37 per cent Hindu, 9 per cent Catholic.
- 3 A relevant and effective work among the children and teenagers of your

church families, and those around.

- 4 The Entrance Parish, NSW Central Coast, 110 communicants, 10 children and youth, 13 elders; Colin and Theresa Barwise.
- 5 Presbytery of Hawkesbury, outer western Sydney; 19 parishes, 9 home missions (including several ethnic congregations) totalling 32 congregations with attendance of 1680, 8 retired ministers; Mick Quirk clerk.
- 6 The Victorian Church and Nation Committee and wide and effective use of its publications on such subjects as gambling, homosexuality, euthanasia, and democracy; Greg Fraser convener.
- 7 Aka (and Dr Beth) Ranguira from Ashfield, Sydney, church planting with OMF in Manila slums, Philippines.
- 8 All those who work in the NSW Church Office, Surry Hills; Keith Mar, general secretary.
- 9 Praise God for the translation of at least some part of Scripture into nearly 2200 languages and pray for the ongoing work.
- 10 The General Assembly of South Australia meeting this week at Norwood, Wally Zurrer moderator; Rupert Hanna clerk; Bruce Christian, bringing Bible studies; all members and debates.
- 11 Guildford Home Mission, Perth, WA, 45 communicants, 45 children and youth, 3 elders; vacant.
- 12 Christian work among the 80 million people of Germany, 22 per cent non-religious, 37 per cent Protestant, 36 per cent Catholic, now far from its Christian past.
- 13 Susan Johnson from Rockhampton, Qld, missionary worker in Victoria with Operation Mobilisation.
- 14 Presbytery of Ballarat, Victoria, 9 parishes, 1 home mission, totalling 18 congregations with attendance of 460, 3 retired ministers; Bruce Riding clerk.
- 15 Neville and Lynette Heywood, APWM workers in Aboriginal communities of Armidale, Boggabilla and Toomelah on NSW/Qld border.
- 16 Scots Kirk Mosman, Sydney, 210 communicants, 20 children and youth, 14 elders; Richard and Audrey McCracken.
- 17 Nicolina Stock from Mitchelton, Brisbane, missionary nurse with husband Dale in Pakistan with Interserve.
- 18 The Board of Finance of the Presbyterian Church of Qld, Ron Pilkington treasurer; Gordon Dunkley general secretary.
- 19 Chalmers Church, Auburn, Melbourne, 20 communicants, 6 children and youth, 3 elders; Stephen and Linda Swinn.
- 20 Bankstown (Revesby) parish, south Sydney, 50 communicants, 15 children and youth, 4 elders; Graham and Janet Spence.

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Cover Photo: St Paul's Cathedral London during the Blitz, 1940.

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Beneath the Cross of Jesus

Robert Benn

It was Easter time. I was singing the hymn *Beneath the cross of Jesus*. Some of the words seemed strange like “fain” and “trysting place”. But I was focused and moved to the depths of my being. Indeed, I was always glad when RCH 691 was on the hymn board. Its imagery spoke to my soul.

As I sang the hymn, I imagined myself there. I was sheltered from the sun in the shadow of the cross, and being thus sheltered I could look into the eyes of the Son of God. In childhood I understood the reason why he was there. I didn’t need to look for someone else to blame. I knew it was for me. I wanted to take my stand there, to see him as my sin-bearer, my Saviour, my Lord.

Over the years the words of this haunting hymn embedded themselves within my soul. I have whistled the hymn. I have sung it. I have pondered it. Little did I realise the measure to which that cross was the greatest paradox the world has known; the measure to which Christ’s death upon it turned God’s wrath away from me; or the measure to which God was supremely glorified in this action.

But I did gain the impression of an awesome deed. A watershed. Something absolutely necessary to restore my relationship with God.

The hymn spoke to so many of my unsatisfied longings: a home, a rest, a shel-



ter, an appointed meeting place for God and me, a place where love and justice meet, a ladder to heaven. All these images are familiar to readers of the Old Testament.

But it was more than that. Beyond the pictures of the Old Testament, I as a penitent was brought face to face with the Saviour. “My smitten heart . . . the wonder of his love and my unworthiness.” It was easy to lose myself in a desire to respond to him in deep devotion.

That was why I always liked the final verse of the hymn, for it helped me to say in the hymn’s words that which I had difficulty saying in my own. “I take, O cross, your shadow for my abiding place; I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face. Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss — my sinful self,

my only shame, my glory all, the cross.”

Having come that far, you can imagine that when I read Paul’s letter to the wayward Corinthians, it touched me with its references to the cross. Paul talked about the “message of the cross”, and he “resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”. He could have launched into all kinds of strategies to address the Corinthians’ problems. But no. All of their wisdom and sign-seeking had seemed to lead them into a cul-de-sac. Christ crucified was the launching pad to deal with any and all issues which had raised their ugly heads. To view God through the lens of the crucified Christ was to view the God who will heal all the factions, dissensions, selfishness, greed and sinful insensitivity that was evident in this congregation. The cross has its own sharp pastoral cutting edge. It was the starting-point when speaking to the church’s problems, and it always will be!

The cross of Jesus is the subject of our April issue of *Australian Presbyterian*. Your Editorial Committee have worked hard to help you view the cross from many angles, and to see the effects in very practical ways. We pray that the issue will be edifying, and will stimulate you who teach the Word to greater vigilance in preaching the cross.

Robert Benn

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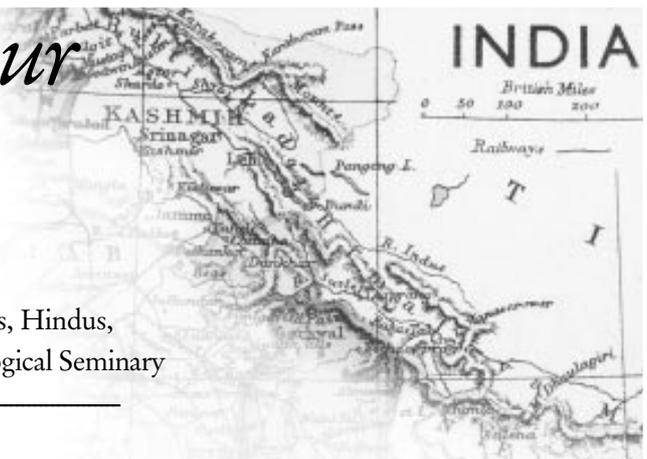
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Why the Cross?

Theologian Leon Morris explains why the cross is at the heart of history.

Serious students have never doubted that the cross is crucial to Christianity. The Gospels all lead up to it and find their climax there. The book of Acts tells how the first preachers proclaimed what God had done in the cross of Christ, while the Epistles with greater or less emphasis bring out the meaning of this great act of atonement.

Indeed, so central is the cross to Christianity that this fact has made its mark on our language. Whenever we say "The crucial point is this.." or "The crux of the matter is that..", we are saying in effect "Just as the cross is central to Christianity, so is this point central to my argument", for crux is the Latin word for "cross" and "crucial" is derived from it.

The centrality of the cross to the Christian faith becomes obvious when we look at the structure of the New Testament writings. For example, take the four

Gospels. They have well been described as "passion narratives with extended introductions". They are not biographies. In each one, the death and resurrection of Jesus take up such a disproportionate amount of space that it is quite clear that the author has no intention of giving an account of the life of our Lord. Everything is arranged to lead up to the climax of the cross. They are "Gospels", accounts of the good news of what God has done in Christ to bring about our salvation. The way the Gospels are put together shows that that means the cross.

In the modern world this is not always understood as clearly as it might be. Today it is not uncommon to be told that the essence of Christianity is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, in Jesus' ethical teaching generally, in the idea of liberation, in "peace on earth", in brotherly love, in newness of life, or the like. I do not wish to

denigrate such ideas. Christianity is a profound religion and its teaching has many aspects. But if we are to be true to the New Testament we must see the cross as at the very heart of it all. Why?

Sinners: Logically we must start with the fact of sin. This is the basic human problem because it is sin that separates us from God (Isa 59:2). People today often think that our problems are due to a lack of education, or wealth or resources or the like. The Bible says it is due to sin (1 Kings 8:46; Rom 3:23).

This point should not be taken as obvious. In the ancient world generally people did not see themselves as sinners; that was a conviction of the biblical writers. And in the modern world it is not uncommon to find people who hold that deep down all people are good. How they do it in the face of the wars, crime, cruelty, selfishness, child abuse and violence is hard to understand.

However, what we must never forget is that sin has more serious consequences than earthly disorder. The Bible speaks often of "the wrath of God" (Rom 1:18, etc), and we should not forget that Jesus spoke often of hell (Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5, etc). Judgment is both a present reality (John 3:19) and a future certainty (Rom 2:12). We are people, and in due course must give account of our ourselves to God (Rom 14:12). We cannot dismiss the evil we do as the result of the way we are made, as our fate rather than our fault. That is not what the Bible says, and in our more honest moments it is not what we say either. In the case of any specific sin that we commit, we know that we need not have done it. It is our fault, and that is our problem when we stand before God.

The love of God: But the Bible reveals the astounding fact that in the face of our sin God keeps loving us. He keeps loving because He is love (1 John 4:8,16); it is His nature to love. In love He brings about the salvation of sinners (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). We should be clear about this. Sometimes people set the Father and the Son almost in opposition. They see the Father as a rather



stern judge, who sentences sinners to hell. Into this picture comes a loving Son who intervenes to save them. But any view of the atonement that does not see it as coming from the Father's love is wrong.

It is also unbiblical to understand the Father's forgiveness as operating apart from the cross. Modern sentimentalists often think of the Father as a kindly person who does not take sin seriously. "He will forgive; that is what love means" is the thought. But this is to overlook the strong moral demand that runs right through Scripture. The God who demands righteousness from his people is himself righteous, and he does not forgive sin in a way that might be understood to mean that sin does not matter much. God forgives sin by the way of the cross. The New Testament writers constantly hold out the cross as the way of forgiveness; they know no other way.

Great picture words: To bring out what the death of Christ has done, the New Testament writers use some great words, the exact significance of which we may miss since we do not share their thought world. Redemption is a case in point. Originally redemption referred to the

release of prisoners of war. A ransom price was paid and the prisoners were set free. The word came to be used for the release of slaves (again by payment of a price) and at any rate among the Jews for release from a sentence of death, again by the payment of a price (see Exod 21:28-30). Sinners are slaves to sin (John 8:34); they are under sentence of death (Rom 6:23). This way of looking at the cross sees it as liberty. It tells us that our salvation came at a cost and that now we are free, free with the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Propitiation means the turning away of anger, usually by the offering of a gift. The Bible is very clear that God's wrath is exercised towards all evil (Ps 7:11; Col. 3:6) — sinners face a dismal future. But Christ's death has turned away God's wrath and freed sinners from a dreadful fate (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). These days people don't like the idea of the wrath of God; thus most modern translations have something like "expiation" or "atoning sacrifice" (neither of which involves a dealing with wrath). But this is not the meaning of the Greek words; KJV correctly renders propitiation, and whether we retain that translation or use another we must safeguard the truth that the wrath of God, that terrible

wrath which is exercised towards all evil, is no longer exercised towards those in Christ.

Reconciliation is a homely word for making up after a quarrel. This is brought about by taking away the cause of the quarrel; unless this is done there may be an uneasy truce, but there can be no real reconciliation. In the hostility between God and sinners (Rom 5:10) the root cause, sin, was put away by the death of Christ and thus the way was clear for reconciliation.

A word that mattered very much to first-century Jews was covenant, for they saw themselves exclusively as the covenant people of God. Unfortunately the people persistently broke this covenant by their sin, and in time God through his prophet Jeremiah promised a new covenant, a covenant that would be inward (for God would write his law on their hearts) and which would have as its basis the divine forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34).

The covenant was at the heart of Israelite religion, for it meant that the people with whom God had made the covenant were his own people; they stood in a relationship to him such as no other people did. When Jesus spoke of his blood as inaugurating the new covenant (Luke 22:20), he

Cross words — the only way pe

Leon Morris tells Allan Harman what

In his writings and in a recent interview Dr Leon Morris — an Australian who won world renown as a theologian — has spoken about the cross in Christian theology and experience. Here is a summary of his thought on this vital subject.

Dr Morris, why has so much of your writing focused on the cross?

Because the cross, in my judgment, lies right at the heart of the Christian faith. Salvation centres on the cross. Take away the doctrine of the atonement, and what you have left is not worth worrying about. I find it interesting that Paul could sum up the early Christian message by saying "we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). Likewise, he told the Galatians that when he came among them "Jesus Christ was openly set forth (or 'placarded') as crucified" (Gal 3:1). Each of these passages shows us that the crucified Christ was primary in Paul's preaching. In each case, "crucified" is the perfect participle, which means that Paul preached that not only was Christ once crucified (which would be aorist tense), but that He continues in his character as the crucified one. The crucifixion is a fact of permanent significance and not simply a historical curiosity. That's why Martin Luther is right when he says "This text — 'He bore our sins' — must be understood particularly thoroughly, as the foundation upon which the Gospel stands". This is what distinguishes us and our religion from all other religions. The cross is literally crucial. It is what matters most.

Your first studies on the cross focussed on words like 'blood', 'propitiation', 'covenant' and 'redemption'. Why?

A lot of these words in the Bible are terms which the man in the street doesn't use very often. Sometimes, he doesn't understand them at all. And there's always the possibility that Christians don't understand the words properly either. Sometimes the Greek word that we translate by a given English word does not convey exactly the English equivalent.

So if we are going to understand the message of the New Testament, it's important to get the language right. We need to understand the words.

Take redemption, for instance. Some people practically equate it with deliverance; others see it as referring to some sort of substitutionary act; while others use it as a broad term to describe the whole of Christian salvation. So what does it mean? Does it refer to the satisfaction for sin on the cross, or is it forward-looking and refer to the freedom we have from sin's bondage which enables us to live the Christ-like life? Now you can see why the "word-studies" are so important. That's why I have given attention to a specific number of words that relate to the atonement.

As you look back to your early years as a Christian, do you think there has been a change in the preaching of the cross?

In many ways I think it depended on the preacher. From the time I was a university undergraduate, I can remember people who passed over the cross when they were talking about the Christian faith. What really matters, they would say, is that we love one another. Now that is important, but the cross is central. I have studied it right through the

was saying in effect that a whole new way of approach to God would be opened up by the death he was about to die. He was saying that not physical Israel, but the church, was the true covenant people of God.

Justification was a legal concept. We see its meaning in the instruction that in the settlement of legal disputes the judges are to “justify” those in the right and “condemn” the wicked (Deut 25:1). Paul makes extensive use of this imagery. He sees sinners as facing condemnation when they stand before God. But he also sees God as taking action in the person of his Son whereby all legal claims on those sinners who are in Christ are fully met by his death. There is no further claim. They go free.

Sacrifice was a term that had a universal appeal in the first century. Right through the known world, people stood by their altars in solemn awe before a religious ritual that saw animals slaughtered in their stead. They watched as the offering went up in the fires of the altars to the gods they worshipped. For Christians, such sacrifices could never put away sins (Heb 10:4), but they formed a vivid picture of what Jesus did when he offered himself as a sacrifice (Eph 5:2). Sometimes they thought of a particular sacrifice such as the Passover (1

Cor 5:7), or the ceremonies on the Day of Atonement (the letter to the Hebrews uses this symbolism). But mostly they leave it quite general. The sacrifices could not effect atonement themselves, but they pointed to the death of Christ which could.

There are other ways of looking at the cross. I am not trying to give a complete list, but simply to bring out the point that the first Christians saw the cross as many-sided. In more recent times there has been a tendency to view it from one standpoint only; I cannot but see this as mistaken. The human predicament is complex, and God’s saving act that deals with that predicament is correspondingly complex. But, view the human predicament as you will, it was in the cross that the New Testament Christians saw deliverance.

Christ our substitute: One of the most important strands in the New Testament’s teaching about the cross is the fact that Christ in some way stood in our place and became our substitute. This is strongly denied by some scholars, and it cannot be said to be a widely popular view in modern times. But consider the evidence for it. Substitution took place already when Jesus accepted John’s baptism, a baptism that numbered him with sinners (Matt 3:15)

and pointed forward to the death he would die for them. Most agree that the Gospels see Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who stood in the place of others. Jesus himself said that he would be “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), where the word for (anti) means “in the place of”; it is a substitutionary word.

Substitutionary thinking is clearly in Paul’s mind as well. He speaks of Jesus as having been made “a curse” for us (Gal 3:13) and tells us that “he who knew no sin God made sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). He says, “one died for all; therefore all died” (2 Cor 5:14). More could be said, but these passages surely demonstrate that one strand of New Testament teaching insists that Christ took our place when he died for us.

No other way: Was the cross necessary? Was there no other way of salvation? It is shallow thinking to maintain that we can live good enough lives. Indeed the heroes of the modern world scream a protest against the idea that we are basically good. And it is not much better to interpret the meaning of the cross in terms of its effect on us (in our own strength, our response is pathetic). Nor can we take refuge in the

people can understand the Gospel

has been crucial to his life and ministry.

years and after years of studying I think I know more about it than I did when I first started. At different times I may well have given different emphases, but I don’t think there was ever a time since I started writing when I have seen the cross as anything else than central to the Christian faith, and I have tried to make it clear in my own books.

Many Christians would think of the cross mainly in terms of forgiveness of sins. Are there wider implications?

Indeed. We are, for example, to take up the cross. The cross is important for Christian living as well as for Christian forgiveness. We start as Christians because Christ has died for us, but then as we understand the significance of the cross we are able to render more meaningful service. What we do as Christians, then, has greater depth when we understand the cross more. This is particularly relevant when we are thinking about the power we need to live the new life in the Spirit. Paul tells us that the message of the cross is a message of power (1 Cor 2:4,5). For Paul it is important to be clear that Christ not only tells us what we ought to do, but He gives us the power and strength to obey Him. This comes through believing in “the message of the cross”. So the cross is very relevant to successful Christian living.

You took a strong stand against the movement known as the New Morality. Why?

Because for some people the New Morality is simply an out. They

want an easy way in life, and they use it as an excuse for doing whatever they want to do when deep down they know it’s wrong.

Other people think that the Bible is out-dated, and they don’t like it as a standard. So the New Morality poses the whole problem of where do we find our authority? Are we to regard the Bible as simply giving us some nice thoughts from ancient writers, or as the very revelation of the Living God Himself. These are very serious issues, and so I spoke out.

The mistake of people like Bishop John Robinson and Professor Joseph Fletcher was that they seriously misunderstood the teaching of Jesus. Jesus never meant that as long as you love God you can do as you please. He said “he who loves me will obey my commandments”. He also said that He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it. It’s just too easy, in my judgment, to say that Jesus taught an ethic of love and then to put a full stop. He did teach love but he also had a very high place for Law.

For instance, He takes the commandment “You shall not commit adultery”, and He doesn’t say “Let’s do away with that and from now on anybody who wants to can commit adultery”. Rather, He says, “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”. You see, He takes the Law; He says that this is a good commandment; it ought to be kept, but it ought to be taken further. There is no idea here of loving God and doing whatever you like. If you love God, you do what He likes. The New Morality is wrong.

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idea that the cross defeats evil or gives us power over evil, for that amounts to saying that in the last resort might is right. In the end, we are forced to say that evil is a reality and that if it's to be overthrown the right must be vindicated.

The deepest thinkers among mankind have always thought that real forgiveness is possible only when due regard is paid to the moral law. C.A. Dinsmore examined such diverse writings as those of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, George Eliot, Hawthorne, Tennyson, and others and came to the conclusion that it is an axiom in life and in reli-

gious thought that there is no reconciliation without satisfaction. Should we not see this as something God has implanted deep down in the human heart? Faced with a revolting crime, even the most careless among us are apt to say, "that deserves to be punished!"

While the New Testament writers do not say this in quite the same way as we do, they do emphasise the moral law and they insist that Christ has brought about salvation in accordance with what is right. Christ stood in our place and endured what we should have endured. If sinners are to be

saved, the fact of that broken law must be taken into consideration. It is the witness of the New Testament that Christ saves us in a way that does take that law into consideration. And there is never the slightest indication that anything else other than Christ's atoning work can deal with the problem of the evil that is so much part of the human situation.

This is an edited excerpt from Chapter 1 of The Cross of Jesus, Paternoster Press, 1988. Used with permission.



Living with a paradox

Margery Geddes is inspired by the Puritans.

Recently, I came across a Puritan prayer called *The Valley of Vision* which spoke to my heart. It goes like this:

*Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision.
Let me learn by paradox
That the way down is the way up,
That to be low is to be high,
That the broken heart is the healed heart,
That the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
That the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
That to have nothing is to possess all,
That to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
That to give is to receive,
That the valley is the place of vision.*

As I reflected on this prayer, it made me realise that we run into paradoxes at all levels of life. I was reminded of this when I moved into our present home with a beautiful garden full of many different plants. Some of the plants that I liked were hidden under tree branches. I brought them out into the sunlight where I could see them better; but they quickly began to shrivel and die. So I had to move them back into the shade. With some I wasn't quick enough. They were already dead. I'd lost them.

I moved other plants that were in the blazing summer sun, back into the shade. But they soon looked sick and produced no more flowers. Yes, it was my garden, I controlled everything in it. Nevertheless if I was to bring out the garden's beauty I had to learn the rules and submit to them. I couldn't force a plant to live against its God-given nature.

The paradox which I learned from my gardening experience is that if I am to conquer and rule in this domain, I have to learn



that submission is the key to conquest. As I read the opening words of Jesus's Beatitudes, I find Him saying exactly the same thing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt 5:3-5).

It's interesting how Jesus presents truth to us in the form of paradox. It seems nonsensical that poor people should take control of a kingdom, or that submissive types should end up owning the earth. In our view it's the movers and shakers who rule kingdoms, and the go-getters who put their hands on the title-deeds. People who are not well-heeled or don't throw their weight around usually get nothing. The others beat them to it. Nevertheless, in the kingdom of heaven, the truth is otherwise than it seems.

One of the things that we have to get used to in reading the Bible is that the truth is revealed in paradox. The king is born in a cattle-feeding trough; the Master becomes a slave; the first are last; we gain our lives by losing them; the Lord reclaims His city while seated on an ass.

But of all the paradoxes in the Bible, none is greater than the paradox of the cross. Here, in the most dramatic setting of all, we learn that God works through opposites. As Jesus contemplated the shameful and humiliating nature of His death, He said: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). What possible glory could there have been in crucifixion? To the eye of reason, it was an act which achieved the very opposite. It degraded and defiled a person.

Yet, while the cross is a symbol of all that is shameful, weak and foolish, it was the instrument by which Jesus showed His strength and glory. He was never overcome by it. In His dying moments, He cried out with a loud voice, the voice of a King, of a Conqueror, of One who was in complete control.

To be a Christian is to follow Christ and to learn to live by paradox. The world can't understand it, but if we can see into the deeper meaning of the cross, we will realise that the principles by which we live are essentially paradoxical. The paradox is that when we are weak, then, and only then, are we strong; that it's only when we lose our lives for Christ's sake, that we truly find them; that it's only when we are abused that we are truly exalted.

Of course, all of this cuts across self at every turn. It goes absolutely contrary to what the world shouts so loudly at us. We need God's constant grace to live out this paradox of the cross; to take up our cross and to discover an abundant life in doing so.

Margery Geddes is a member of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney.



A call to suffering

Only one of the 12 disciples died a natural death. Today, too, the cross is often a guarantee of persecution, Michael Safari reports.

As an Iranian, I have a rather special interest in crucifixion. And not because I have a morbid curiosity in violent forms of death. The reason for my interest is simple: the cross was first used as an instrument of execution in Persia, the land of my birth.

Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian who wrote a lot about the Persian wars, tells us that the Persians were the first ones to use the cross as a means of killing their enemies. For example, he relates how Darius, the Emperor, once crucified 3000 inhabitants of Babylon.

So when Christians hear Jesus's call to "take up the cross", we know only too well what this means. The cross is part of our history, and for believers in Iran today, it reminds us of the call to suffer for Jesus.

For many Christians in the west, the cross is simply a religious symbol or a piece of jewellery. Church buildings often feature a cross as a sign that Christian worship takes place there. It's not unusual to meet people who like to wear crosses around their necks or as earrings. For them, the cross has been sanitised so that it's nothing more than a decoration.

But for Iranian Christians, the cross reminds us of the reality of persecution and death that awaits us in fiercely Muslim countries like Iran. Jesus never promised an easy and comfortable life but said: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Mk 13:13). It is good to remember that of Jesus' 12 disciples, only one died a natural death.

In recent years, many Christian leaders in Iran have discovered the reality of the cross as a sign of death. Here are a few examples.

Rev. Arastoo Syah, an Anglican pastor, was killed in his office in February 1979. Bahram Dehqani-Tafti, 24, son of the Anglican Bishop of Iran, was assassinated on May 1980. Rev. Hossein Soodmand, a pastor from a Muslim background, was executed for apostasy by government order in December 1990. He had converted from Islam to Christianity 24 years before. Rev. Haik Hosesian Mehr, 49, was the bishop of the Assembly of God churches in Iran. He disappeared on 19 January 1994 when he went to the airport. Later he was stabbed to death and his body found in the street.

Rev. Tateos Michaelian, 62, was the general secretary of the Iranian Bible Society, former head of the Presbyterian Synod of Iran and a Presbyterian minister. He disappeared after leaving his home on 29 June 1994. Three days later, his family members were asked to come and identify his body. He had been shot three times, at least once in the head. Michaelian translated more than 60 Christian books into Persian. In his last sermon, which he spoke at Haik's funeral, he stressed that the Christian church has given martyrs throughout its history, that Iranian Christians should neither be perplexed about nor be afraid of martyrdom but rather be prepared to face it.

Rev. Mehdi Dibaj, 60, from a Muslim background, was imprisoned for nine years. He spent two of these nine years in solitary confinement in an unlighted cell measuring three feet by three feet. He was murdered in July 1994, six months after his release. In 1992 he wrote to his son, "What a privilege to live for our Lord (Jesus Christ) and to die for Him as well." Dibaj had converted 45 years ago.

Rev. Mohammad Bagher Yusefi, 34, from a Muslim background, left his home at 6am on 28 September 1996 for a time of private prayer, and never returned. His body was discovered hanging from a tree in the forest.

These martyrs knew well what was ahead of them, since they were told what will come to them as the result of their faith or conversion. "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31).

In spite of all this, since the Islamic Republic has come to power following the downfall of the Shah, more Muslims have come to Christ than in the previous 150 years. The church in Iran, seems to grow during times of suffering. To that extent, persecution and Islamic fundamentalism are the unwilling "friends" of the gospel.

Living as a Christian in a Muslim country is quite difficult. It is not uncommon to be physically beaten on the street. You cannot get a government job. Not even a nominal Muslim will employ a convert from Islam. As a convert you will live a life of constant uncertainty and fear. Converts cannot marry according to the Christian

law but must marry under Islamic law. Sometimes a convert has no one to go to for help. Muslims reject him and Christians do not trust him or they are afraid to help.

The Bible never promises that we will have an easy life but says: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). When I was leaving Iran in 1986 I had to give my passport to the authorities three days before my departure. The regulations during that time were that I could only get the passport back at the time of my departure at the airport. I had to fill a detailed form about myself including my religion. This was a very difficult situation for me. If I wrote I was a Christian they could easily find out that I was a convert from Islam and they could have easily arrested me. On the other hand I knew that if I wrote that I was a Muslim it would be a lie, and my conscience didn't allow me to choose this option. So I decided not to answer that question and left the space blank. God helped me to leave Iran without any problem. While on board I knew I might never see my parents, brothers and sisters again and still I haven't.

There is a tendency to think that only in Muslim countries there is no freedom to speak about Jesus. But we have to consider that there are also many places in Australia where we are not supposed to speak about Jesus, and there are many places where we need special permission if we want to share the Gospel. Of course the freedom is so much greater, and the suffering for the Gospel seems to be so much less in our western world, but wherever we stand up for Jesus there will be opposition in some way or another.

It costs something to be a true Christian. To be a mere nominal Christian, and go to church, is cheap and easy work. "So likewise, whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:25-33). Jesus in these words makes it clear what it cost to follow him. It costs "all". So, if you are a faithful and uncompromising believer you will suffer.

Michael Safari holds a Ph.D in Linguistics. He is an APWM missionary assigned to Operation Mobilisation and worships at Burwood Presbyterian Church in Sydney.

ap

Why preach the Cross?

It's scandalous, absurd – and utterly essential, writes John Wilson. 1Cor 1:18

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

(1Cor 1:18)

Preaching the cross is absurd. It doesn't make sense to most people. In the first century, Justin, the Christian apologist, tells us that unbelievers thought it was a message of “madness” (mania). Pliny the Younger called it a “perverse and extravagant superstition”.

The thought of putting your life and destiny in the hands of a man on death row sounds more than a little crazy to the average person, especially if he's ignorant of a higher level of meaning behind the gruesome details of Jesus' death. Massive defeat is not something to glory in, so there must be more to the cross than meets the eye.

But finding a level of higher meaning in tragic defeats is not as strange as it may seem. Cricket's battle of the “Ashes” is a case in point. It's absurd to think that England and Australia launch themselves against each other every second year to win a little burnt wood. In a hallowed English cabinet is a pottery urn. Australia's national pride depends on it, young men put their lives on hold for it, newspapers fill the back pages to write about it – the honour of holding a cremated cricket ball, a relic from the great Australian cricket victory at the Oval in 1882. And the “Ashes”, as they're called, are only figuratively taken home by the victors, for the real urn remains in the cabinet.

To the ordinary person it doesn't make sense. Why do the English fight so hard for what is for them a symbol of defeat? Because there's a higher level of meaning if we can only see it.

Nor does it make much sense to preach the cross. Even as I preach, I am plagued with nagging doubt. The whisper says: “Why preach defeat?”

The televangelist I flicked on early one morning was preaching success, that the love of Jesus will brighten your day and revive your business. As he preached, they all loved it. The church was overflowing with good-looking people. So, what mileage is there in death?

Books I saw last week on the top 10 shelf of a leading Christian bookshop entice me to preach on how to grow a church; best tips for today's leaders; how to develop



your leadership style successfully. Suddenly, it seems melancholic and dreary to preach about blood and atonement as the foundations for growing a church.

My congregation tell me how lovely the preacher was while they were on holidays; how he preached to them about healing the heartaches and coping with stress. Is it an archaism to hold out to these folk a crucifixion as a means to healing their deepest hurts? “It empties the pews!” the whisper goes.

It empties the sofa too. On a pastoral visit, I was once asked to leave – evicted from the lounge room and escorted from the property. The husband, who was listening from the next room, overheard me talking of sin, the cross and the need to seek forgiveness for our sins. With the mention of the cross and of sin barely leaving my lips, I found myself leaving the property and heading for the gate earlier than I'd planned. To those who are perishing, the cross is scandal. It's an affront that trips and hinders.

It's always been that way. Philip Yancey reminds us that the ancient Romans, born and bred on stories of might and power, of supergods such as Jupiter, “could recognise little godliness in a crumpled corpse hanging on a tree”. The devout Jew, raised with the great accounts of a powerful Jehovah, “saw little to be admired in this god who died in weakness and shame” (*The Jesus I Never Knew*).

For the average Aussie we meet at a barbeque, the cross has little appeal or relevance. In fact, it's an offence because it speaks of a serious penalty for sin. It tells us of things we don't want to hear: that God is holy, that he is angry about our sin and that

his holiness demands that our sin be dealt with. It also tells us of a love we don't deserve and of a debt we cannot pay.

The extraordinary thing is that the Gospels focus on Jesus' death more than anything else. It's not how Jeffrey Archer writes. Any of today's biographies reserve about 5 per cent for the final days and the death. Our gospels spend a third of the account on the last week of Jesus' life.

So, why preach the cross? First, the cross awakens the sleeping Australian in a way that no other message can. The cross tells us what the problem is. The world thinks it's ignorance which can be fixed with education. Others think that we have a genetic problem that can be adjusted through medical science. But the cross is God's way of dealing with the real problem – that of our corrupt nature.

Through the spoken message of the cross, God brings his truth home to the conscience in a way that all of our pleading and clever words will not. Preaching the death of Jesus as the atonement for sin is God's appointed means for stirring the heart and reviving the soul.

Second, preaching the cross encourages hearers to trust in God. It leaves us with no glory for ourselves, but rather gives all the glory to God. Preaching and persuading someone to trust in the death of Jesus to cover their sin means we are pointing away from ourselves to another. This is the security for the one who comes to faith – that it is the Lord who will keep him, it is all dependent on him; there is to be no attachment to the preacher. Preaching the cross is self-effacing for the preacher, it is pointing people to the Infinite One – to the only one who can save.

Third, preaching the cross helps our hearers to understand God. The cross speaks to us about our Creator. It reveals something of Himself: that He is full of love for mankind; that He was willing to enter the race, and to suffer the most barbaric form of death, out of commitment to us. Here is the all-powerful God suffering for us. Preaching the cross edifies our hearers as they learn and appreciate the infinite love and mercy of our God.

The cross remains utterly scandalous, but this is God's way, and preach it we must.

John P Wilson is lecturer in Pastoral Theology at the Presbyterian Theological College, Victoria, and is convener of the Victorian Theological Education Commission

4P

The cross alone is our theology

Martin Luther's greatest insight was the way the cross reveals God, suggests Allan Harman

It would be interesting to survey members of the Presbyterian Church as to what they thought was Martin Luther's most significant insight into theology. Most would probably identify his doctrine of justification by faith alone – the truth that inspired him to hammer his Ninety-Five theses onto the cathedral door in Wittenberg in 1517.

However, one year later, at a rather low-profile gathering of Augustinian monks called the Heidelberg disputation, Luther unveiled what Alistair McGrath has described as “one of the most powerful and radical understandings of the nature of Christian theology which the Church has ever known”. I am referring, of course, to Luther's theology of the cross.

What is this “theology of the cross”? Luther knew that many people were meditating on the death of Jesus in order to produce sentimental sorrow for him, not a sorrow for their own sins which put him there. Essentially, it became his belief that the cross holds the key to understanding the character of God and the nature of the Christian life. Luther expressed this conviction in a number of pithy statements, such as: “the cross alone is our theology,” “without a theology of the cross, man misuses the best things in the worst way,” “true theology and knowledge of God are in the crucified Christ,” and “the cross puts everything to the test”.

Central to Luther's understanding of the theology of the cross was his belief that the cross was not only the means by which we are saved, but it was also the means by which we know God. Let me explain. As Luther thought long and hard about the way we may come to know God, he realised that the apostle Paul was pointing to the cross as the key which opened up the mystery of God's character.

But how? As Luther reflected on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he was struck by the fact that “the message of the cross” (1:18) was a completely new and unexpected way of knowing God. Other methods, such as philosophy or spectacular signs, hadn't succeeded. The world's ways of trying to know God had ironically resulted in a not-knowing. But “the message of the cross” was God's way of revealing Himself, despite the fact that ideas of “Messiah” and “crucifixion” seemed mutually contradictory.



So how does God reveal Himself at the cross? In Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther tells us that when we look at the cross and Christ's sufferings, we get a glimpse of God in the same way as Moses did (Exod. 33:23). While common sense might suggest that we could learn more about God from the silent beauty of a snow-capped mountain or a golden sun-

set, the cross tells us that God reveals Himself in a way that is totally unexpected and which the world rejects as madness.

While reason may be a useful tool in many areas of human inquiry, when it comes to the knowledge of God, it is simply unreliable (1 Cor. 1:21). God has mocked the world's wisdom by revealing His glory in the shame of an execution. He shows Himself in lowliness and humility. There are several lessons from this.

First, this means that we don't know God through watching the stars or reading crystals or hugging trees in the forest! We know Him because in the death of Jesus we see God's Son dying at the hands of sinful men. In a seemingly foolish way, God showed the greatness of his power by doing the unthinkable and dying on the cross. This is a reminder to us of the limitations of our reason in doing theology. The cross teaches us to accept God as He reveals Himself, and not to refashion Him in a way that fits more easily with what we think is reasonable. God explodes our ideas of what is normal and rational for deity.

Second, the theology of the cross is a warning to us not to put too much store on

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our own experience. We often meet people today who interpret everything in the light of personal experience. When they reject Christian truth, they will often say: "That might be all right for you to believe, but I can't say that I've ever felt that way." Experience is all that matters to them.

But consider this: did anyone among the disciples on Good Friday feel that God was powerfully present in the crucifixion? Wasn't the opposite the case? Didn't the disciples flee because they felt abandoned and helpless? Yet in the light of the resurrection, we know that while God was hidden in the tragedy of Calvary, He was still present and active. But not every disciple saw this. Thomas particularly, was living by his feelings on Good Friday rather than his faith in God's promises. He made the painful discovery on Easter Sunday that feelings are a very unreliable guide to truth. We may not feel God's presence, but that doesn't mean He is not with us. We have to come with empty hands to the foot of the cross for it's in that way we come to know God and find the reality of sins forgiven.

Third, what happened to Jesus on the cross helps us understand our own life of suffering. Believing in Jesus does not exempt us from pain and distress. We are called not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer for him (Phil. 1:29). The pattern that Jesus sets his disciples is one of humiliation and then exaltation (Phil. 2:1-11). The norm for a true Christian experience is one of suffering. This is an important insight of the theology of the cross. When Paul says that "we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10), he is reminding us that suffering rather than health or wealth is a sign of God's presence and blessing. The cross calls us, not to a smooth and trouble-free life, but to one of pain.

Finally, the theology of the cross has to be applied to all of church life today. One of the characteristics of our age, even in the church, is a strong belief in personal rights and the practice of individualism. People look at themselves as customers who have a right to be indulged and satisfied. But the cross is a direct challenge to everyone who sees Christianity as a "what's-in-it-for-me?" religion. The cross proclaims that you gain life by losing it. This does not sit comfortably with self-interested religious consumers. Nevertheless, it is true.

Where do we begin the search for spiritual renewal in the Presbyterian Church of Australia? I think Mark Noll, the American church historian, points us in the right direction when he says: "Ultimately, the greatest hope for evangelical thought lies with the heart of the evangelical message concerning the cross of Christ." In trying to understand what this means for us, we can select no better guide than Martin Luther to help us appreciate the vast dimensions of the cross of Jesus.

Dr Allan Harman is the Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College at Box Hill North, Victoria. He is Professor of Old Testament on the faculty, and is the author of a commentary on the Psalms and joint-author with Dr A.M. Renwick of The Story of the Church. He has two more books in preparation, and is the senior editor of The Reformed Theological Review.

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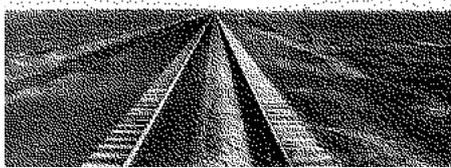
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NSW churches resist increased gambling

The New South Wales Council of Churches (Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed and Salvation Army) is opposing the NSW Government's proposal to increase the size of jackpots, lifting betting limits and allowing the use of betting tickets instead of actual money.

The council's president, John Edmonstone, said that NSW was already in the grip of gambling fever, with many families and elderly people directly affected, and the Government should not renege on its election promise not to increase gambling facilities just to gain a quick fix for its budget deficit blowout.

Real men eat Bread of Life

Building Real Men was the theme of the 1998 Men's Katoomba Convention on 27 and 28 February. A capacity crowd of 4100 men heard expository talks and down-to-earth illustrations from personal experiences from top Christian speakers Don Carson, David Mansfield and Ian Powell. Colin Buchanan, one of Australia's leading Christian musicians, presented several musical items, while the meetings were chaired by David Cook, a Presbyterian minister and the principal of the Sydney Missionary and Bible College.

This year's meeting was such a success that next year's conference will be run over two weekends of identical programmes to cater for the numbers wishing to attend.

On 19 and 20 February and again on 26 and 27 February Dr Roy Clements, the well-known British Baptist pastor and author from Cambridge will be the key speaker on 'Men, Love and Leadership,' studies in 1 John.

Reformed Churches show wisdom of Solomon

The Synod of the Reformed Churches of Australia is planning to establish a mission in the Solomon Islands. *Trowel & Sword*, the denominational journal, reports that the mission will centre around developing infrastructure in the islands as a means to sharing the faith. Christian Education will be the other priority so that pastors and youth leaders in local churches will receive help in more effective teaching to overcome nominalism and to help people understand the Gospel through sound teaching.

Sir Cliff affirms Bible work

During his recent visit to Australia, Sir Cliff Richard, who is a vice president of the British and Foreign Bible Society, affirmed the work of the Bible Society in Australia. Sir Cliff is one pop star who

Dudley Ford, Don Carson and David Cook (right) and the throngs at the Building Real Men conference



makes a strong commitment to Christ. "My daily Bible reading is very much an integral part of my life," he says.

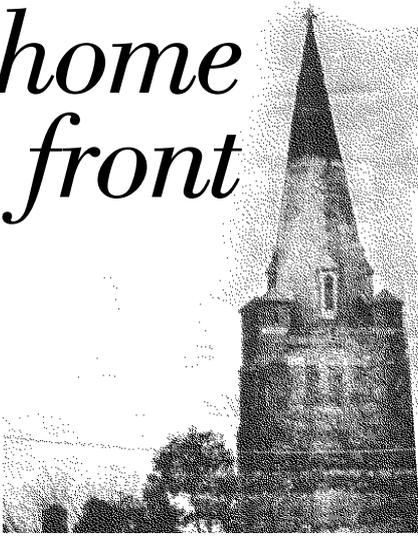
Mardi Gras witness

During the recent Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the Uniting Church and Fred Nile's Christian Democrats received most of the media coverage given to Christian opposition. Less heralded yet just as important was the contribution of Exodus South Pacific – a ministry dedicated to helping people out of homosexuality – which maintained a quiet but faithful testimony. Members prayed against the impact of the parade, distributed tracts and offered support to those seeking to leave homosexuality. Further information is available from the Brisbane office on (07) 3371 4705 or the Melbourne office on (03) 9699 2254.

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



home front



Extension to Hamilton ministry

A valuable adjunct to the ministry of Rev J.E. Webster in Hamilton (NSW) is that church's Pastoral Care Committee. Chaired by elder Bill Davies, the committee's work is an enormous help to Mr Webster in Newcastle's largest and most widespread parish. Activities during the past year included regular visits to 12 "shut-ins", hospital visits, transporting people to church, sending cards to parishioners, supplying food parcels to those in need, sending a letter signed by the minister to those couples married in Scots Kirk on their first anniversary, maintaining a "cradle roll" of children baptised over the past three years, holding an annual parish dinner, conducting an annual Remembrance and Thanksgiving Service for those recently bereaved, maintaining a prayer list and praying for those in particular need. It sounds like a fine example.

Peakes on patrol in SA

Laurie and Gwen Peake have bought a house in Quorn, a small country town with a population of 1100 some 40 kilometres north-east of Port Augusta, as home base for their work on the Flynn Patrol. They have already patrolled most of the pastoral area of SA, visiting about 220 properties. "It takes time to get to know people," they say in *New Directions*, newspaper of the PCQ, "and we look for any and every opportunity the Lord brings our way to get to know people and help them. The video-lending library and Challenge newspaper, which is

left at each property, are real assets."

Queensland moderator-elect

Rev David Secomb, minister of South Toowoomba, has been elected moderator of the Queensland General Assembly which will convene in St Paul's Church, Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, on Monday 18 May at 7pm. Business sessions will then continue in Ann Street Church from 19 to 22 May. Mr Secomb's aim as moderator will be to keep the church focused on its primary task of preaching the Gospel without being distracted by side issues.

NSW moderator-elect

Rev David Tsai, minister of Epping, has been elected moderator of the NSW General Assembly, which will meet at PLC in the Sydney suburb of Croydon on Monday 6 July at 7pm. Mr Tsai has served at Clunes-Dunoon-Bangalow, Ku-ring-gai and Launceston before his induction at Epping. His father, David, was minister of the Chinese Presbyterian Church in Sydney for many years and his brother, Robert, is minister of Springwood (NSW).

On the move

Recent Queensland home mission appointments include John Tucker to Maryborough, Don Kennedy to Logan, and Stephen Kim to Ann Street Korean.

Alan and Marion Shanks, of Mitchelton (Qld) Church were commissioned for work with OAC Family Life Programs on 30 November.

Recent retirees include the Rt Rev Lindsay Ferrington, from St Andrew's Wollongong, Rev Doug McKean from Bowral-Mittagong and Rev Charles Abel from Armidale.

Rev Neil Ericksson has resigned from the ministry of the PCA.

Rev Daniel Combridge has been inducted as minister of Ulverstone (Tas).

Rev Andrew Macaulay has been inducted as minister of Gunnedah (NSW).

Rev Anthony Adams has been translated from Cessnock (NSW) to Gilgandra (NSW).

Youth workers busy in SA

Summer holidays were a busy time for the young people of the church in South Australia. From 19 to 22 January the state youth camp was held at Karnkendi Presbyterian Youth Camp at Nelson, just over the border in Victoria. More than 20 young people shared in an enjoyable week-end of fun and learning. Discipleship was the theme chosen by Andy Hogarth of Campus Life in Adelaide, who devised a number of activities to reinforce studies in Jesus' encounters with His disciples. A blindfold exercise taught the value of trust in the Lord as guide, while escapades at the Glenelg River brought a challenge to "launch out into the deep" with Jesus. Many campers committed their lives to the Lord Jesus, and at a service the next Sunday in Mt Gambier Church several young people testified to what the camp had meant to them.

During the same week the annual Vacation Bible School at Mt Gambier saw more than 50 primary school children enjoying the ministry of Sharon Daffy, one of the ministers' wives, who led a very able team. VBS is now a regular part of life for Mt Gambier Church. "It's a great way to begin the Sunday School year and reach out into the community," says the minister, Rod Waterhouse.

People in the news

The OAM was awarded to Mrs Olive Paull, of St Andrew's, Townsville, in the Australia Day Honours. Mrs Paull has worked tirelessly for many years as the director of St Andrew's Meals on Wheels service. She was particularly busy after Cyclone Sid hit Townsville, where the Meals on Wheels kitchen was flooded with mud. Mrs Paull led a quick clean-up so that the elderly who depend on this service and were completely shut in by the rain and floods could still receive their meals.

Amberley RAAF Base (Qld) has asked Chaplain Peter Playsted to compile a social history of the base and collect memorabilia to put in a museum. Anyone who can help should contact Mr Playsted on (07) 5461 3283 or (02) 6621 3017.

Adrian Lamrock has been appointed principal of the Scots School, Bathurst (NSW). A graduate of Sydney and Macquarie Universities, he also holds the A.Mus.A in organ from the NSW Conservatorium of Music. He is a teacher

of Latin, ancient history, English and music.

Congratulation to **Mrs Jean Sticpewich**, an elder of Chatswood/Lane Cove (NSW) and former member of the National Journal Committee, who turned 90 recently. Jean has been actively involved in the life and work of the PCA from local to national level for many years, but is best known for having been state president and national president of the PWA, and a member of the NSW Social Service Committee.

Aboriginal ministry expands

Colin Llewellyn, director of social services in NSW, has secured a government-funded position for a part-time Aboriginal chaplain to the Juvenile Justice Centre in Western Sydney. **Rev Rick Manton**, our minister to Aboriginal people in the western suburbs of Sydney, has been appointed to this position and will work with the senior chaplain, **Rev Morris Key**.

Improving the fabric

A number of church buildings have been upgraded recently, including:

Greenwich (NSW), where the church has been completely repainted inside, new lighting and heating installed, while the floor and pews have been sanded and coated with Estapol and a Celtic cross has been placed on the wall above the pulpit. Plans are in hand for an overhaul of the organ and the building of a new church hall.

The church at **Boomi (NSW)** near Moree has been repainted, and reportedly "looks wonderful".

The fence and exterior of **St Kilda (Vic)** church has been repainted, while inside, the pew cushions have been replaced.

Young Nak Korean Presbyterian Church, Sydney, which has worshipped in Burwood Church since it began some 17 years ago, has now bought its own property in Manson Street, Telopea, formerly known as Telopea Christian Ministry Centre. Under the ministry of the **Rev Charles Kim**, Young Nak has grown into one of the largest churches in the PCA.

PLC Sydney opened and dedicated the Freda Whitlam School of Science on 6 February, which commemorates the principalship of Miss Whitlam from 1958 to 1976.

Canterbury (Vic) church has been extensively renovated, with a new lighting system and repainted interior.

Centenary at Springvale

Springvale Immanuel Presbyterian Church on the far north coast of NSW, built at a cost of £120, was opened free of debt on 26 January 1898. A larger church was opened in 1958, also serving Anglican and Methodists. The centenary of the original building was celebrated at a special service on Sunday 1 February, conducted by **Dr Peter Lush**, resident supply, and **Rev Je-Kon Oh**.

With Christ

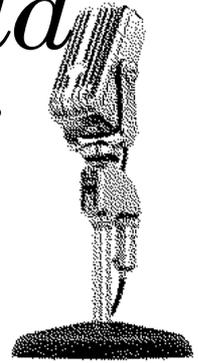
Rev Harold Gilbert Durbin was called home on 22 December 1997 at an advanced age. He was one of the most senior ministers of the NSW church, widely known and respected for his gentleness and wisdom. He was ordained and inducted to the Parish of Canowindra (NSW) in 1948 and later served ministries in Leeton-Yanco, Beecroft, St Andrew's Newcastle and North Sydney, from which he retired in 1986. Harold's first wife, **Mary**, died in 1953. He is survived by his second wife, **Daphne**, who is a resident of Pitt Wood Nursing Home in Sydney. His ministry extended far beyond the parish. He served with distinction as a chaplain in the defence forces and as business convener of the NSW General Assembly and the GAA.

His "finest hour" came just before church union in 1977 when he was elected moderator of the NSW General Assembly. A staunch continuing Presbyterian, he was asked by the assembly to travel widely to give a ministry of encouragement to the whole church in NSW at that traumatic time. Harold and Daphne fulfilled this task with great zeal. Daphne was an office-bearer in the PWA for many years, giving strong leadership, especially to small and struggling branches. "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord."

Mrs Johanna Haxton passed away on 29 January in Maitland (NSW), where she and her late husband, **Rev Charles Haxton**, had ministered for many years. Both were very well known throughout the Hunter region, Mrs Haxton having worked tirelessly for the cause of the PWA throughout the presbytery.

Fiona Faye Cooper, daughter of **Rev Kevin** and **Mrs Jenny Cooper**, died at the Manse in Dungog (NSW) on 6 December, aged 27. Fiona was diagnosed with cancer soon after the Coopers arrived in Dungog from South Australia just over a year ago. Clergy from all the local churches took part in her funeral.

world
news



Church of Scotland evangelicals aging

Rev James Philip retired from his 40-year ministry in Holyrood Abbey Church, Edinburgh, on 26 October 1997, and **Rev Eric Alexander** retired from his 20-year pastorate in St George's Tron Church, Glasgow, about the same time. As evangelical preachers, both men have given gracious leadership through faithful, expository biblical preaching which has encouraged many to hold fast to the old truths during years of theological declension in the Church of Scotland. One who inspired these men and many others was **William Still**, minister of Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, who was called Home to Glory late last year. *Banner of Truth* magazine reports that The William Still Trust has been set up with a view to "advancing expository ministry in Scotland". The proceeds of the trust will, through various means, further Mr Still's great aim of "building the real church in Scotland". Enquiries or donations may be addressed to the secretary, **Dr William Philip**, 12 Burnett Place, Aberdeen AB24 4QD, Britain.

Korean Churches growing in Canada

Just as Korean Presbyterian congregations have sprung up in Australia during recent years, there are now 22 Korean congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The moderator of that church, **John Congram**, writing in *The Presbyterian Record*, tells of his association with a Korean-speaking congregation in Toronto for almost a decade. The earliest Korean congregations in Canada are now

celebrating their 30th anniversaries. They have experienced some difficulties settling in to Canadian church life and as a result the PCC has established two Korean-speaking presbyteries – one in the east and one in the west of the country.

Computers speed up Bible translation

The Bible is becoming available in 50 more languages every year, thanks to the increased productivity made possible by computers. The **United Bible Society** reports that in 1993 the number of languages with at least a portion (one book or more) of the Bible had reached 2000. By the end of 1997 that number had climbed to 2197. Computers allow manuscripts to be altered quickly, multiple changes to be made at the touch of a key, and programs to be written which facilitate the translation of related languages. Eight new Bibles, 31 new New Testaments and 41 portions were recorded in 1997 alone. UBS is currently involved in 681 translation projects.

World Mission proceeding well

It's not gloom and doom all around the world for the cause of Christ. **Matt Welde**, a Presbyterian minister who has been seconded to the US Centre for World Mission in Pasadena, reports that Christianity is growing at the rate of 90,000 new believers a day worldwide, with 3000 new churches opening around the world every week. The church in Africa is growing by 20,000 people a day. The African continent in 1900 was 3 per cent Christian; today it is 60 per cent Christian. In 1900, Korea had no Protestant Church, but today it is 35 per cent Christian, with 7000 churches in Seoul alone. In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, the number of Christians may be as high as 15 per cent of the population. There are about 85 million professing Christians in Russia (56 per cent of the population) after nearly a century of communist oppression.

The US Centre for World Mission, founded by the dynamic missiologist **Ralph Winter**, is a community of people and agencies collaborating to finish the task of world evangelisation. Its strategy is to explore unreached peoples – finding out where they live, why they haven't been reached and how they can be reached with

the Gospel. It offers training courses and services to equip and mobilise Christians in mission, and publishes *The Global Prayer Digest* to enable committed Christians to share in informed prayer for world-wide mission.

Presbyterian Church growing in Uganda

New Horizons magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America, reports strong growth in the Presbyterian Church of Uganda. OPC missionaries **John** and **Marita McGowan** say that a second presbytery has been formed in the Mbale area. The other is in the Kampala area. Seven churches have recently been planted in the new presbytery, the pastors all attending Westminster Theological College, where John McGowan teaches. "The denomination and presbyteries are young and inexperienced," Mr McGowan says, "but they are moving steadily in the direction of becoming consciously Reformed and Presbyterian."

Saudi believers hold on

The Middle-East Reformed Fellowship reports that although there is not one single church building in Saudi Arabia, expa-

triate Christian workers are unofficially allowed to worship within diplomatic mission compounds.

Even under such constraint, however, the Gospel is having an impact on many Saudi lives. A leading Muslim cleric recently wrote a newspaper article expressing concern over the impact radio broadcasting and Christian literature are having on young people. MERF says that his fears are well-founded, as one young Saudi believer has recently written saying: "Brothers, I hereby declare that I have embraced the Christian religion ... the only Christian I have met is from Sudan. He is considered by all here an unclean person. This is how they all view Christians. Now I am one like you; I believe that Christ is the Son of the Living God."

Noted scholar dies

Harold Lindsell, former editor of *Christianity Today*, author of *The Battle for the Bible* and co-founder of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, died on 15 January, aged 84. A firm believer in biblical inerrancy, he always believed that the truth and authority of Scripture were central to the church's witness, and was prepared to do battle even with other evangelicals at the first sign of wavering. During a visit to Australia in 1985 he gave an interview to APL and expressed gratitude to God for the way in which He was calling the PCA back to the Bible.

ap

teachers

Maths/Science, PD/H/PE, Infants Primary



Applications are invited from committed Christian teachers of reformed persuasion, for three maternity leave replacement blocks in the above areas commencing from the start of third term 1998. Permanent positions may be available at the end of the blocks. The Maths/Science position is part time. The PD/H/PE appointment will involve teaching PE across the whole school age range. Potential PD/H/PE subject coordinators should also apply.

Sutherland Shire Christian School is a Parent Controlled, Kindergarten to HSC, Protestant co-educational school with enrolment in 1997 of over 750 students and a staff of over 70. The school is located in 3 hectares (nine acres) in Barden Ridge (a suburb approximately 25 kilometres south of Sydney).

Interested teachers should write (with full details of teacher training, teaching experience, Christian experience and church affiliation), to:

The Business Manager,

Sutherland Shire Christian School, P.O. Box 390, Sutherland, N.S.W., 2232.
Telephone enquiries welcome on (02) 9543 2133.

We see ourselves as an extension of the home, so that Christian teaching given in the home is reinforced by the school in a non-elitist caring environment.

Home-made service

Sue Reynolds finds fulfilling missionary work without leaving town.

A little over twelve months ago my official position on overseas missions was as follows:

No, I *don't* want to live overseas. However, I'm *convinced* that overseas missions are vital, and yes, I would love to be more involved in supporting missionaries.

At my home church, Parramatta City Presbyterian Church, it's important to have an "official position" on overseas missions because someone is always on about missions. This narked me a little at first. There were sermons on missions, prayers about missions, interviews with potential missionaries. We even spent a whole weekend in the Blue Mountains talking about missions. This would have been fine, only I had no appetite for the overseas mission field, and my circumstances deemed it, well, impolitic. So what was a girl to do, surrounded as I was by this mission-madness?

Enter Ian Smith, lecturer and registrar at the Presbyterian Theological College, font of wisdom concerning missionary life and speaker at the aforementioned Blue Mountains weekend convention. I believe it was during his second talk of the weekend that I was roused from mission-induced oblivion to hear him speaking in practical terms about how folk at home can effectively support their missionaries.

What an insight he gave – I was so riveted that I forgot to take notes! The details are less important than the fact that he had my attention. In subsequent discussions over the weekend, a concept began to emerge of a more defined level of support for our three up-and-coming missionaries. The notion of a "support coordinator" for each missionary was introduced, and at this, my nose began to twitch. I could smell an opportunity.

As it happened, my very dear friend and prayer group partner Joanne Cutler was in the early stages of preparing to go to Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu as a missionary. After some prayer, I approached Joey and offered to be her support coordinator, recommending that she pray about it.

Some five months later, under the impression that she was still praying about it, I was accosted at a church function by none other than Robert Benn, world mis-



Sue Reynolds, left, with Joanne Cutler

sion national director for the Presbyterian Church of Australia. It was October '97.

His words to me, and I paraphrase, were "Your mission, Sue, should you choose to accept it, is to support Joey in raising, by January, \$26,000 a year for her two years at Talua. We need 100 per cent, and we don't have much time."

After being assisted to a chair – no, just kidding – I composed myself and accepted the mission.

Buoyed by the sage advice and support of such gems as Ewen Brown (NSW APWM convener), Fiona McWilliam (mission support coordinator at Parramatta City Presbyterian Church), Alison Schofield (secretary at NSW APWM offices), and of course Robert, we began our journey. The support coordinator's position invented itself over the course of the next two or so months, and involved:

- Writing to churches within the Hawkesbury Presbytery, introducing Joey and inviting them to join P.C.P.C. in sending Joey to Vanuatu.
- Liaising with the ministers of each church, arranging dates for deputation, planning the interview/presentation, sending relevant information.
- Accompanying Joey on deputation visits and speaking to each congregation about how they might support Joey prayerfully and financially. Building relationships and speaking with church folk at morning tea after church.

- Making Joey's brochures available at every opportunity!
- Keeping Joey's home congregation informed about her preparations and prayer and financial needs.
- Being general advocate and promoter – while it can be hard for a missionary to be direct about their financial needs, and to "blow their own trumpet" so to speak, I could do so for Joey with great pleasure and gusto!

While it was a tense time, with deadlines and support targets looming, it was truly a joy to mingle with the Presbytery, tripping around each Sunday to meet with God's family from Camden to Campbelltown, Blacktown to Blaxland. If the position had any perks, this was it.

Thanks to the incredible faithfulness of our Heavenly Father, and the loving response of Joey's supporters, we were able to raise almost full financial support, and a fantastic network of prayer supporters.

Joey has made it to Talua and is settling in well. Here at home, the support co-ordinator's role is continuing to define itself, as I speak almost daily with her supporters, post Joey's regular prayer letters, liaise with APWM offices and endeavour to fulfil my twofold commitment to Joey – ensuring that Joey continues to feel a part of her church family and wider family of supporters, and that they feel a part of what she is doing at Talua.

It's been a great learning curve, from my mission-phobic past to my present involvement. Perhaps there's a missionary you know who could do with some help.

Wouldn't it be great to see all our field missionaries with their own support coordinators, freeing them up to get on with the task of taking the love of Jesus across geographic, cultural and language barriers!

My official position on overseas missions has changed just a little;

No, I still *don't* want to live overseas. However, I'm still *convinced* that overseas missions are vital and I love being more involved in supporting missionaries.

Sue Reynolds is a member of Parramatta City Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

What happens when I die?

Ian Smith considers what it means to be with the Lord

What do you say to the widow of a Christian man when she asks: "Please, tell me what's happened to my husband. Is he fully conscious with the Lord, or is his soul asleep as he waits for the resurrection?" How would you answer that question?

It all depends on what you believe about the afterlife. Within the church today, there is enormous confusion over what happens to the believer when he dies.

Do we receive our resurrection bodies at the point of death? Or do we enter a state of unconsciousness which will only end when Christ returns? Do we travel to a different dimension that is not measured by what we know as "time"?

Paul answers these questions in his second letter to the Corinthians (5:1-8). In short, he tells us that Christians who have died are now in heaven, fully conscious and enjoying the company of Jesus. However, they are not yet complete. They will only get their resurrection bodies when Christ returns.

As Paul deals with the issue of the afterlife, he uses three different images to help us understand existence beyond the grave.

The first image is of a house. In verse one he says: "If the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven..." Here Paul refers to death as the dismantling of the believer's earthly tent. This word "tent" would have reminded Jewish readers of the desert wanderings of the Israelites after the Exodus before the building of a permanent temple.

The meaning is quite clear. For Paul, our physical bodies are like small tents that are dismantled when we die. Once we leave our earthly tents behind, we enter a permanent building. Paul is obviously referring here to our permanent bodies – that is, our glorified resurrection bodies that he mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:44. This is the body we receive at the point of the Second Coming.

In verse one Paul is comparing two houses. The first house stands for our physical body which will be destroyed in death; the second house is the eternal resurrection body that we receive at the Second Coming. So what happens to us if we die before Jesus returns?

The answer is simple. We enter into a bodiless state. And this is exactly the situation Paul addresses in verses two to four with the clothing image. There he tells us: "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because



when we are clothed, we will not be found naked."

This clothing image introduces us to the heart of Paul's thinking on this matter. In one sense, he is eager to leave this life. In another sense, he is afraid. He tells us why in verse four, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling."

Paul tells us that he's very keen to put on his heavenly dwelling over his earthly tent, as though he was putting an overcoat on top of his other clothes to keep himself warm. If this happens, his mortal body will "be swallowed up by life" (v4). That's what would take place if Paul was still alive at the moment Jesus returned.

However, he also tells us that there is a sense in which he is anxious about death. If he dies before the Second Coming, he will be forced to put off his earthly body before he can put on his heavenly one. This will leave him without any clothes at all; he'll be naked (v3). In other words, Paul will be in some form of bodiless existence.

Therefore, he groans at the painful prospect of putting off his current clothes (his earthly body). He would much prefer to put on the overcoat of his resurrected body without having to strip off his earthly body first.

These two images, the first of the house and the second of the clothes, show a tension in Paul's thinking. He looks forward to being at home with the Lord, yet he shrinks from the thought of being somehow naked in a disembodied state. It's not that he's afraid of death; it's just that he'd prefer Jesus to return while he was still alive

so that he didn't have to experience losing his earthly body. The way Paul gets over this tension comes out in his third image – that of the homeland.

In verses six and eight Paul tells us that "as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord", but "we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord".

Earlier, in verse three, Paul has said that while he does not look forward to losing his earthly body in death, nevertheless his relationship with Jesus is always more important than whether or not he has a body.

While we are in our present physical body, we are "away from the Lord" (v8). This does not mean that we don't have a relationship with Jesus in our current bodies. However, when we go to Heaven, at the point of death, our relationship with Jesus will no longer be spoiled by sin. We will therefore be "at home with the Lord".

Some people say that Paul contradicts himself here. In verse three, he has said he doesn't want to be naked. But now in verse eight, he says it's OK because he's "at home with the Lord". Isn't he being inconsistent? Not really. Just because Paul has two perspectives on dying doesn't mean that he's changed his mind. While being without a body is physically unattractive to him, nevertheless being with Christ is relationally attractive. The two ideas can fit together quite happily.

So let's get back to the widow's question: "What has happened to my Christian husband? Where is he, and what state is he in?"

Paul's answer is quite simple: at the point of death her husband passed immediately into the presence of Christ. When he departed this life, he "went home". It is futile to speculate about what his bodiless state is like. She should be comforted by knowing that since he died in Christ, he is now with Christ.

Both he, as well as all of us who are still alive, should be looking forward to the day of Christ's return. On that great day, we will all receive our new resurrection bodies. But in the meantime, those who have died in Christ are away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Ian Smith is lecturer in New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, NSW. He obtained his Master's Degree in Theology on the subject of the afterlife in the light of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

For thirty pieces of silver

Russell Lander ponders a corrosive substance.

In the movie *Wall Street*, one of the major characters, Gordon Gekko – played by Michael Douglas – is obsessed with making money. Lots of it. In one scene he speaks to a meeting of spell-bound shareholders who are worried that they're not making as much money as they could. He says: "Ladies and gentlemen, greed – for lack of a better word – is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all its forms – greed for life, for money – has marked the upward surge of mankind."

Is he right? From where I sit in the stockbroking industry, I think that Gordon has given a bad call. While it's true that money wisely spent is a very positive thing for society, it's also true that it has qualities that can expose the worst aspects of human nature.

I've been around long enough now in financial circles to see how money breeds bribery and corruption, the sale of illegal drugs and other forms of crime, the licensing of casinos by governments oblivious to the consequences for the very community which elected them, and so on.

Money is highly addictive – the more one has, the more one wants. And always with a passion. This was not lost on the writer of Ecclesiastes who notes "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase" (Eccles. 5:10).

Many people I know are prepared to work long hours, seeing little of their families, probably sleeping poorly, worrying incessantly about their business, and risking their health to gain the marginal dollar. While devotion to hard work may be necessary and even laudable in a young person becoming established, it tends not to stop there but to become entrenched as a way of life.

The phenomenon of overworking reflects the widely held view today that money is the only true measure of success. I have never met a person whose character has been enhanced by gaining great wealth!

As an investment analyst, I have met some very wealthy people who have told me



that they strive for more wealth not because they will ever need it, but because making money has now become a game which they do not want to lose! Proverbs 23:4 addresses this issue by bluntly warning us "do not overwork to become rich", while noting sagely that "riches can make themselves wings and fly away like an eagle toward heaven". Ask anyone with a portfolio of Asian shares! Solomon goes further in noting the futility of building wealth for another person, whether wise or a fool, so that he can spend that for which he has not laboured. (Eccles. 2:18,19)

The desire for money can blind us. I think of how Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver or how the rich young ruler refused to become a follower of Jesus. And don't forget the prodigal son's callous demand for his entitlement to his father's assets. In each case the sway of money brought grief – Judas repented, albeit too late, and killed himself. The rich young ruler went away very sorrowful, and the prodigal son was confronted with starvation and utter disgrace.

Another deceptive aspect of money is its relative value. There are clearly different types of money. For example money which is saved assiduously week by week has a different value to the owner than winnings from gambling. Money set aside for the church offering often bears no resemblance to the donor's capacity to give. This can better be gauged by looking at the total of

the week's entertainment and restaurant costs. Many give in church as though the inflation of the 1970s and 1980s never occurred!

Another curious thing one notices in church giving is that it often ceases when members are on holidays, unlike mortgage repayments! Even stranger is the fact that very few Christians remember the church in their will, preferring to leave it all to their families with never a thought for the Christian outreach which could result from a major bequest.

Jesus focused on money's relative value when he drew His disciples' attention to the magnificent sacrifice represented by the widow's mite. In God's economy the quantity of money is not important, what is significant is what is going on in our hearts. This is illustrated in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11, where they both lied about their gift which they had laid at the apostles' feet. Here the gift was not important, but the manner of giving was.

Money will not buy happiness or love. Paradoxically, however, donating money generously to a needy cause or person brings immense joy to the giver. Paul touches on this when commending the Philippian church for their financial support and writes: "I am not trying to get something from you, but want you to receive the blessings that come from giving." (Phil. 4:17, NT in Contemporary English)

In conclusion let us hear from the lips of the Master Himself as to how we attain lasting wealth: "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (NKJ, Matt 6:30-33)

Russell Lander is an investment analyst with Dicksons, a Sydney stockbroker, and is a regular contributor to the Bulletin magazine. He worships in Wabroonga, Sydney



A world of opportunity

Phil Campbell, editor of Culture Watch, introduces a new column, which ponders how to be in the world but not of it.

My friend Jason is unemployed, and lives at the local caravan park. It's tough – especially because Jason's unemployed van-park mates are always asking him around for a drink. It's almost impossible, says Jason, to say no. In his words, it's a constant struggle to be “in the world, but not of it”. But some of us face an even more difficult dilemma. We're very much “of the world” in our petty rivalries, our jealousies, and our secret sins – but we're not “in the world” in any real sense at all.

When it comes to facing up to pagan culture, the apostle Paul's example in Acts 17 is a helpful model. Surrounded by idols in Athens, Paul is greatly distressed (Acts 17:16). But his distress doesn't stop him from looking closely – “As I walked around,” says Paul, “I observed closely your objects of worship” (Acts 17:23). And it was that close observation that provided him with a bridge to the minds and hearts of his hearers.

How closely do you observe our culture? How hard are you working at building those same bridges to your unbelieving friends? Did you chuckle when the British Lord Chancellor announced the Queen's latest peer as “Sir John Elton” rather than “Sir Elton John”? Or did you take a perverse sort of pride – as some Christians do – in the fact that you didn't know the name of the world's top-selling recording artist either?

As Christians, we have every reason to work at knowing our culture – because we've got a message worth sharing. If we're going to interface with our world in any meaningful way, we need to know about it. We need to be more and more “in it”, and less and less “of it”. We need to make the effort to know who's singing what, who's saying what, what's happening at the movies ... and even what's hot on the World Wide Web.

That is, of course, a big ask. Editing

Jim Carrey wrestles with the truth in *Liar Liar*

Culture Watch in *Australian Presbyterian* is pretty much like receiving what footy followers call a “hospital pass” – as soon as the ball is in your hands, you're crash-tackled by a heavy bunch of front-row forwards.

Risks aside, this is a page that's going to try to keep tabs on our culture. Most of it isn't pretty – but we'll look at it anyway. And instead of simply saying “this movie has a swearword, so don't go and see it,” we're going to try to analyse things a little more thoughtfully.

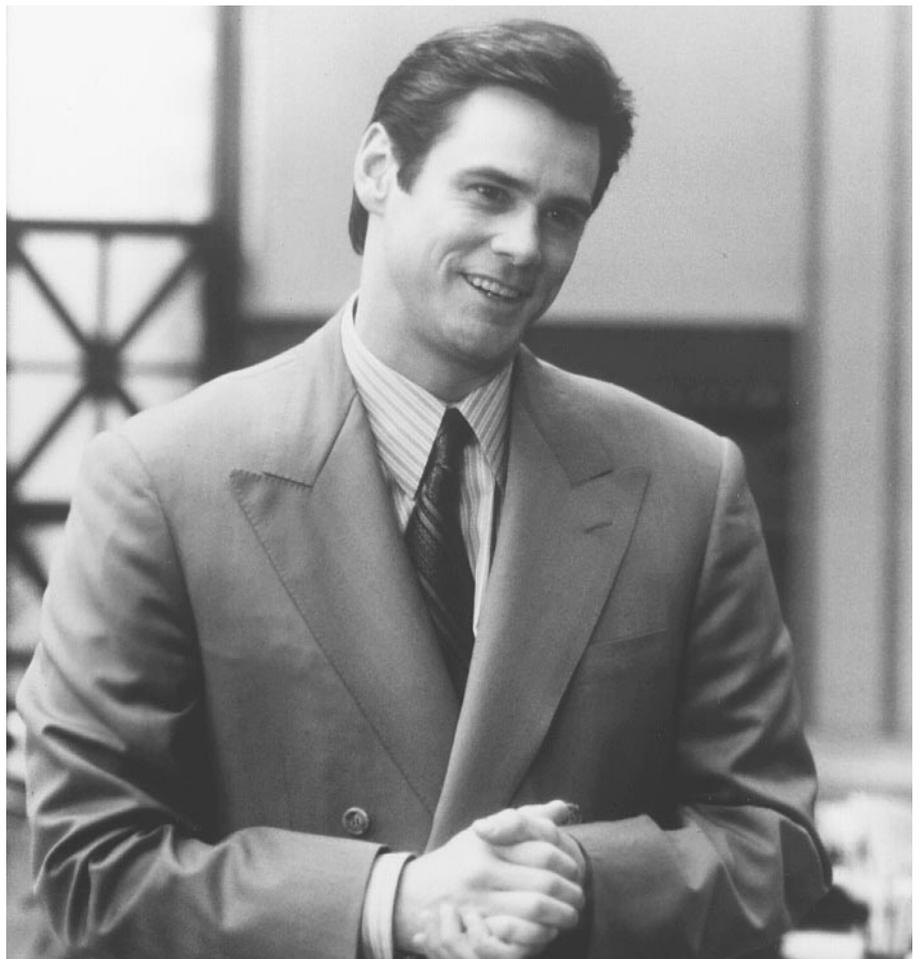
As usual, some readers aren't going to like it. But it's important that as we seek to reach the world with the gospel that we also seek to know the world we're part of. In it as deeply as we can... of it, as little as possible.

Videowatch

Liar Liar

Elastic-featured Jim Carrey brings us face to face with the realities of human nature in the recently released video *Liar Liar*. Sadly, what should have been a good family flick with a message has been pushed into an M rating through the inclusion of unnecessarily strong language, and a torrid (though always fully clothed) office romance.

Carrey's six-year-old son is tired of the fact that his lawyer dad never keeps his promises. In spite of his best intentions, Carrey always tells people what they want



Coping with an age-old problem

Jesus provides our example even in the care of aged parents, writes Marion Andrews

to hear – especially when he's dealing with his estranged wife and son. He promises to play ball, but works late instead; he promises to be at the birthday party, but winds up defending an unexpected case in court. And the fact is, as a high-powered lawyer, that's just the start.

Carrey lies to everyone, without a moment's thought. Until, that is, his small son's birthday wish is magically granted... "I wish my dad couldn't lie for a whole day." And so it is that Carrey is forced to face a life of honesty, which in the space of 24 short hours almost ruins his meteoric career. It's a simple morality tale, with some hilarious moments, and a happy ending that actually promotes both honesty, and family values – in short, a movie I wish I'd been able to watch with the kids.

Phil Campbell

On TV

All Saints

Seven/Prime

After a strong opening week in the ratings, new hospital-based tele-drama *All Saints* dropped from an initial top-10 spot in the viewer-favourites listing to settle somewhere in the mid-40s. That's still a strong-enough position to ensure a healthy run, and with Australia's sweetheart, Georgie Parker, leading a strong cast, it will be no surprise to see the show growing into a long-term Aussie favourite.

Production values are strong, with adrenaline-rush opening credits that are every bit as slick as popular American programs like *ER* and *Chicago Hope*. What isn't so slick, though, is the heavy-handed way in which the first two episodes lay on the moral dilemmas. Should terminal cancer patients have the right to die? Should a doctor fight to prolong the life of an unwilling patient simply to maintain his good record? Do nurses always know better than the arrogant doctors they work with? Stay tuned.

Trouble is, building up the ethical tensions that drive a quality medical drama like *Chicago Hope* takes a little more subtlety than *All Saints* can muster – so far, at least.

More significantly, as head of nursing at All Saints Hospital, Georgie Parker is a Nun. Social researcher Hugh McKay is right when he points out that – in the Christian arena at least – Roman Catholicism is becoming Australia's "default spirituality". Keep watching as fans are fed a regular dose of crucifix-stroking piety in appealing Georgie Parker packaging ... to most Aussie viewers, that's a Christian.

Phil Campbell

ap

Say good-bye to Grandma! She may not be here next time you come." Year after year went by, and the same instruction was given to the assorted children. I came to notice a twinkle in Grandma's eye. This became a bond between us. We sensed a certain humour in that well-worn statement, especially as she lived for 26 years beyond the allotted span of 70.

Old age is a time of uncertainty, even for someone as secure as my grandmother. People wonder: How long will I live? What measure of health and strength will be granted me? How will my children treat me?

Jesus is our best example of consideration for an aging parent. He, as the eldest son had the responsibility of caring for his mother. He did not forget this, even in the pain and sorrow of His crucifixion. From the cross, Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son", and to the beloved disciple, John, "Here is your mother". From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:26,27).

Christ teaches us here to provide for our parents to the fullest extent in our power. This will vary over time and situation. For some, it may mean a regular letter, phone call or visit. For others, it may involve a lot more commitment or expense. Aged parents are honoured by children who take generous regard for their needs.

Jesus, on the cross, was no longer able to care for His mother. He appoints John as His substitute. There may be situations in our lives when obedience to God demands that we hand this filial duty over to another disciple. Putting this honour on John was testimony to his reliability and loyalty.

The story hints that John had his own settled establishment, and had the sort of family dynamics, prosperity and relationship with Mary to make this possible. In finding substitute care, we should seek to make as wise and discerning a choice as Jesus did.

Many elderly people prefer to stay in their family home. While a person is able, mentally and physically, this should not



be a problem. Do a little dust and cobwebs really matter so much?

However, for many elderly people, the time comes when hard decisions have to be made about their future. It is especially important for children to heed parents who are still capable of making their own decisions (Ephesians 6:2).

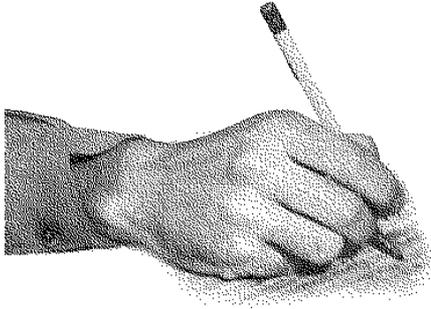
For adult children to accept responsibility, as Jesus did, for the well-being of parents, there must be godly relationships within the family. Good relationships start with a genuine concern for the other person. We are all urged to consider each other better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), and nowhere is this harder than in the family. The apostle Peter has a special word for men to be considerate of their womenfolk (1Peter 3:7).

This is something that needs to be practised from youth, when habits of upsetting a sister, or taking a mother for granted begin. Consistent work in this area of life will pay dividends in each generation. The way a young man treats his mother and sister is the way he is likely to treat his wife. The way I behave towards my parent today could well be the way my child treats me when I am old.

On Mount Sinai, God told His people to "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you"; our first duty to others, and the first commandment with a promise. The dying Saviour put aside His own agony to consider the comfort of His mother. Whether the time we care for our parents is short or long, secure or uncertain, let us make Him our example as we celebrate His death and resurrection.

ap

letters



Just one version

I am writing in response to the article printed in the February issue of *Australian Presbyterian* titled "Ten Commandments for Parents".

Call me naive, but I thought God gave us Ten Commandments. If we are to take the Bible as the word of God and abide by 2 Tim 3:16 ("All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness") then why do we need to make another Ten Commandments? Obviously I have been doing the wrong thing for my teaching career, I have been teaching, rebuking, correcting and training, instead I should have been following the wisdom of men!

Paul Vales
Head of Languages
St Peters Lutheran College, Qld

Editor's reply: The 10 Commandments headline was added during production as a summary, and was not written by the author, Graeme Watson.

A boon for parents

I was particularly impressed with the article by Graeme Watson of Scots College Prep School in Sydney entitled "Ten Commandments for Parents".

This was a thoroughly thoughtful, well-written article with wide appeal and practical advice for the Christian parent and the Christian child as well. In a modern world dominated by the negative headlines about our youth – suicide, drugs, low self esteem, a feeling of not being loved – Graham's thoughts are a great tonic. They provide an opportunity for all parents, grandparents, church members and leaders and anyone who has an influence on a young life to practise the preventative medicine contained in the article, rather than resort to some type of 'bandaid solution' when it is too late.

His thoughts on parents needing to take an interest in their child's activities and to reinforce in the child a sense of discipline and self organisation were particularly pertinent points.

In a Christian sense, Graham's 10th point is vital – recognising that God has made each child unique, lovingly created with special gifts and character; each entrusted to us as his or her parents.

This is the heart of the matter which Graham has left, sensibly as the conclusion to his article. If we parents can recognise this one aspect, we have the basis for a meaningful relationship with our children which, with God's help, will enable the child to prosper, blossom and become someone significant in this imperfect world.

Geoff Cowles,
Mitchelton Presbyterian Church,
Brisbane, Qld

Growth and the Gospel

I read the letter of Douglas Milne (A.P. Feb.) with some dismay. Surely he has misunderstood the thrust of Peter Corney's important articles. Surely to imply that he is guilty of "pragmatic responses" and minimalist theology" is an entirely unfair conclusion.

Writers such as David Elby and Bill Hull very rightly point to dangers and errors in the church growth movement. But to suggest therefore that anyone who has espoused church growth principles is culpable of its worst errors is an unwarranted conclusion. There are many things we can learn from the movement without the slightest compromise on strong biblical teaching and Gospel, or neglect of the personal growth of members, or commitment to prayer. I know Peter Corney, have been a participant in the Institute for Contemporary Christian Leadership course (I would recommend it to all Presbyterian ministers and leaders) which he conducts, and have attended each of the regular Sunday services in his Church. It is a vibrant, booming church, but not one in which there was any hint of the failings which Douglas Milne intimates.

Of course the New Testament churches and apostles worked within a sociological and cultural context. Paul's principle "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel..." is pertinent here. Pragmatic in the approach, immovable in the message – that is the key.

Either consciously or unconsciously, every activity, every time we conduct worship, we have made a sociological and cultural assumption about our target group. Sadly, much of what happens in Presbyterian churches is targeted at a small and diminishing sub-culture. What is the use of the best sermon in the world if there are few to hear it, and those few are already convinced anyway?

The strength of the Presbyterian Church is in its good foundation of theology, and its good teaching. But unless we learn how to reach with that towards the vast majority of Australians, and make the adjustments in non-essentials to make it possible, we are doomed to being a dying, irrelevant anachronism.

Rev. John Langbridge
Ipswich, Qld.

Worship: heart and head

I am concerned that in Stuart Bonnington's lead article of the March AP, 'objective worship' is his consuming passion, without reference to how it touches us in interpersonal relationships within the church.

While I believe firmly in the importance of correct doctrine and the faithful teaching of God's Word, I am weary of eloquence and theological exposition which more often provide food for the mind than deep conviction of the heart. There is a certain safety both in teaching and receiving Scripture at an intellectual level, that doesn't require getting involved in the messy work of relationships. We can only worship God out of the level of authenticity with which we live. The way we relate to men will be the way we relate to God.

I long to belong to a community of believers committed to the sort of vulnerability required to grow into a deeper relationship with God and each other, willing to share themselves in the hard work of building authentic relationships. I want to come to grips with the Scriptures, not just at an intellectual level, but in a working out of these truths in the context of the church community. So often it seems that churches are more concerned with the structure and content of worship services, building programmes, even outreach opportunities than loving one another well.

God created us relational, in his image, for relationship with him and with each other. In the final analysis he is far less concerned with our breadth of doctrine, our involvement in church activities or our attendance at public worship, than the daily choices we make in our relationship with him and with each other. 'No matter what I say, what I believe and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love' (1 Corinthians 13).

Glenyss Barnham,
St Giles Presbyterian Church,
Hurstville, Sydney

Dramatic disagreement

Dear Sir, How far do we go before we abandon the regulative principle of worship enunciated in Chapter 21 of our Confession of Faith, and subscribed to by

all ministers and elders in the Formula?

Scott Kroeger in 'Enhancing Worship' (multi-media column, *AP* February) writes about the use of the overhead projector, visual and auditory media, and a band for accompaniment of singing.

One can perhaps see these things belonging under the category of "some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (Chapter 1, section 6 of the Confession).

These circumstances would have to concern things that would enable a congregation to use the means "prescribed in Holy Scripture" as detailed in Chapter 21, namely prayer, reading of the Scriptures, preaching of the Word, singing, and the sacraments. They would have to be used with care so that they do not become ends in themselves and do not detract from the simplicity of worship in our reformed tradition centred on the preaching of the Word.

But where is drama prescribed in Holy Scripture as a means by which a congregation may worship God? The reformers and puritans rightly eliminated this along with other non-prescribed additions used by the Church of Rome and others.

*Rev. David Secomb,
South Toowoomba, Qld.*

Sorrow at Mardi Gras

I am writing this letter in regard to the decline and slide of our cultural and moral values. As an Aboriginal elder, I know that we had a good culture, with high standards and ethical values.

Unfortunately, we have allowed ourselves and our children to be influenced by the negative side of the culture we live in, and have come to accept the worst of it as being normal – such as the abuse of alcohol, misuse of drugs, etc. – which leads to domestic violence and family breakdown. We have been seduced by the profits that can be made (such as from sale of marijuana), not seeing the scars it produces. This is to the destruction rather than the advance of our culture.

A worrying example of this is the involvement of our people in the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras, and accepting it as being normal. From our cultural history this kind of behaviour was never accepted, and was considered unnatural, and against our best interests.

A sad observation is the number of naive Aboriginal and Islander parents innocently taking their families to witness this event as

though it is part of our culture. However, this would contribute to more family breakdowns and further unhappiness, as it sends the wrong message to our children.

I am troubled that our people, especially the Aboriginal and Islander men have not been outspoken about the cultural wickedness.

It is time our men took the senior role of setting the example of a strong family life in line with our traditional cultural beliefs.

Have we forgotten the results in other cultures of the misuse of their sexuality? Empires have been destroyed, nations dispersed and long family lines ended. There are no exceptions.

Not only does homosexuality violate natural law, but it is also against God's law. When both have been violated, we can expect not to survive more than a generation or two.

It is time for the men of Australia to rise up and take the lead in these matters, and declare we do have a higher goal and a better culture, and we will declare our rights for a better way of life.

*Pastor Peter Walker,
Mt. Druitt, NSW.*

Is one voice a muzzle?

I welcome Paul Cooper's "The separation of Church and Media" (Feb. 98). We certainly need to be a little more "savvy" in our relations with all forms of the mass media.

It needs to be observed that mass media these days include some unusual forms of advertising, as well as the Internet. The "knowledgeable person", proposed by Paul Cooper to be the authorised mouthpiece of the church, would have little credible influence over these areas.

If this is a proposal to create a "propaganda department", would this not put our Church in the same league as Josef Goebbels, the Inquisition and the Church of Scientology? Shouldn't we rather be honouring the obligation of our fellow Christians to speak as the Holy Spirit may lead them?

And is Paul suggesting repression? If so, this is the hall-mark of people who have something to hide. We have something to proclaim. We would do better to transparently acknowledge ourselves sinners before the world than present ourselves as gilded plaster angels. Otherwise how can we expect those who "hear" us to be moved to genuine repentance and faith in Christ. The Roman Church has had to learn this bitter lesson in recent times.

We Presbyterians hitherto have always revelled in open debate over applying the truth of the Bible. I wonder if, "down the

track" from Paul's thought-provoking letter is a troubled, muzzled church. I don't think any of us would be happy with a denomination preoccupied with repressing dissent on Internet news-groups, for instance.

*Ivan Ransom
Balmain, NSW.*

Meet the media half-way

The article by Paul Cooper (February 1998) titled 'The separation of Church and Media' is timely, informative and challenging. It is easy to condemn the 'media', but we each have a responsibility towards the media with our attitude, tolerance, or understanding.

Paul correctly summarises our churches' responsibility towards the media by suggesting "each state assembly appoint a knowledgeable person, with excellent communication skills, who could be the contact person for media". Rather than fostering an intolerant attitude we would be better to initiate a spirit of co-operation and unity, one that builds bridges instead of barriers.

Well done Paul & AP.

*Scott Webster
Springwood, NSW*

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.

AP

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

secondary teachers

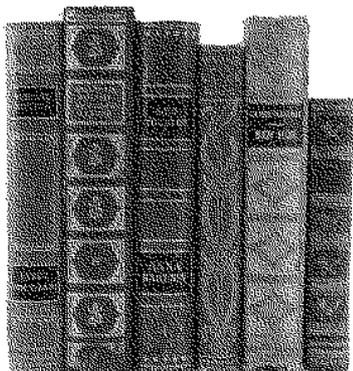
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The Principal: Mr Mark Hodges
Cooloola Christian college
1 College Road
Southside, Gympie QLD 4570
Ph: (54) 821 222
Fax: (54) 836 299

books



Just a Talker: Sayings of John (‘Rabbi’) Duncan

By John M. Brentnall (ed),
Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1997

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

‘Rabbi’ Duncan (1796-1870) – so named because of his love for the Jews and the fact that he finished his life as Professor of Hebrew at New College, Edinburgh – was renowned for his Calvinistic piety, his struggles with his own assurance of salvation, and his somewhat eccentric nature. He wrote no substantial work, and once said that he was “just a talker”.

John Brentnall has collected many of these sayings together, and the result is a lively and stimulating work of considerable spiritual power.

Perhaps the best way to review this work is simply to cite some of Rabbi Duncan’s sayings, and trust that the reader’s appetite is whetted: “The Lord is especially near to his people in affliction.” “There is nothing but Christ between us and hell, and, thanks be to God, we need nothing else. I cannot love a man and love his sin.” “Man is of noble descent, though he has become of ignoble character. If man examines why he disobeys, he will find universally that it is from a notion that he will promote his happiness better by disobedience than by obedience. “Nothing is more pernicious than light definitions of repentance.” “Unalloyed pleasure is to be found only where there is perfect holiness. If you are without love, then the church bell is as good a Christian as you.

There are many more – most of them

thought-provoking in a spiritual way (a few seem a little trite).

In Duncan there is something of the depth of the philosopher and the simplicity of the child. It is thus not altogether surprising to read that when the learned professor went to bed he would say the child’s hymn: “This night when I lie down to sleep, I give my soul to Christ to keep, If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Christians today would find their souls enriched by reading the ‘Rabbi’.

The Confusing world of Benny Hinn

By G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman et al, Personal Freedom Outreach Publication, Missouri, 1996.

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

In view of the enormous popularity of the healing evangelist Benny Hinn, this is a most important book. Most of the major issues that have surrounded Hinn’s ministry are dealt with here. It makes for unpleasant but necessary reading.

Perhaps the most serious charge brought against Hinn is that of deception. Hinn has maintained that his father was the Mayor of Jaffa in Israel in the 1950s, but this has been found to be untrue. Hinn also claims that for the first 21 years of his life, he stuttered so badly that he avoided getting into conversations. This was supposedly cured miraculously, but, strangely enough, none of Hinn’s youthful colleagues could remember such a speech disability. Nor could the Catholic chaplain and staff recall anything to support Hinn’s claim that in 1976 at a Catholic school in Jerusalem all 200 to 300 schoolgirls, together with the teaching nuns, “got saved” when Hinn preached to them.

Hinn tells of little male angels who appear in his bedroom at night, to stand and look at him. He also once saw a devil in his bedroom, and the Lord identified this one as the demon of poverty. He rebuked the demon with Scripture, and, says Hinn, “from that day till now, there’s been blessings on my life”.

Hinn treats hallucinations as reality. One can only wonder about his view of spiritual power; it has little to do with the fruit of the Spirit. Hinn asserts that his whole body goes numb, then adds that “it’s as though I get plugged into an electric plug or something”.

Despite the routine claim that about 1000 people are miraculously healed at each crusade, Hinn’s organisation has been slow to come up with verifiable cases. After surviving a plane crash with five others in 1983, Hinn led people to believe that he had healed the eye of one of the passengers – it was supposed to be hanging out of its socket. Despite his contention that he did not have a scratch, Hinn spent two days in hospital. The passenger with the crushed eye had his sight restored not by Hinn but by a number of operations.

In December 1992 a woman named Ernestine Rodriguez, suffering from brain cancer, was repeatedly “slain in the spirit” at Hinn’s crusade in Houston. Hinn was jubilant: “Satan, you’ve lost this one and you’ll never get her back!” Three weeks later, tests showed that Rodriguez still had the cancer. Hinn tried to explain his way out of this one by asserting that “healing is received by and must be kept by faith. There’s been the cases where they’ve lost their healings”. This is yet another case where the fraudulent performer blames the victim.

Hinn regards the words “if it be thy will” as “faith-destroying words”. Those who utter them are apparently doomed to be dragged down in despair. Hinn seems to be blissfully unaware that Christ Himself uttered these words in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:39).

Many more examples could be given. The movie star Ben Vereen was advertised in 1994 as going to be healed from serious injuries and ailments from which he suffered as a result of two traffic accidents. Alas, Ben Vereen could not turn up for his miraculous healing as he caught a little cold! The Sault Ste. Marie General Hospital was once forced to issue a statement denying what it called the “outlandish and unwarranted” claims that Hinn had performed miracles there in 1976.

Sometimes people suffer harm rather than as healing at his services. In 1986 in Oklahoma an 85-year-old woman died after someone who had been “slain in the spirit” by Hinn fell on her and fractured her hip. For 20 minutes the ushers refused to call an ambulance because an ambulance would not look good at a miracle service. A lawsuit was settled out of court.

Hinn’s attempts at prophecy are no more reassuring. In Basel in Switzerland he prophesied over a man with cancer and declared that he had yet many years to live. Two days later the man was dead. Hinn also prophesied that two “giants” of the Christian world would die in the mid-1990s. One of these giants was later identified as Lester Sumrall who, aged 83, died of meningitis in 1996. However, Sumrall was hardly a giant, being little known outside Pentecostal circles.

In other prophecies Hinn suggested there would be resurrections from the dead, the homosexual community in America would be destroyed by no later than 1995, revival would come in the early 1990s, a woman president would serve in the White House, and a short man would become world dictator. Hinn confronts his critics with "never mock the anointing", but it is not immediately obvious that Hinn's anointing is from God.

Doctrinally, Hinn has been guilty of some erratic efforts. He once asserted that each person in the Godhead has His own personal spirit, soul and body, so that the Trinity really consists of nine parts. Before he uttered this nonsense, he told his congregation: "I feel revelation knowledge already coming on me." He also holds to the literal and physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, which is presumably why all who eat and drink are meant to be healed. Furthermore, says Hinn, Adam could fly and was capable of interplanetary travel.

A number of Hinn's explanations of Scripture are ludicrous. In explaining John 14:6, Hinn claimed that the tabernacle of Moses had three entrances, called the way, the truth and the life. Hinn invented this piece of information, as he did his claim that the man born blind in John 9 actually had no eyes. In the crossing of the Red Sea, the Egyptians were apparently not drowned but crushed by ice! Hinn even issued the challenge: "You Hebrew scholars look me up, you'll find I'm right." Not so, even the first-year student of Hebrew finds Hinn wrong again.

We are called upon to test the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:l). Hinn's ministry is yet another illustration of why the apostle John had to issue such a warning.

The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons

Thomas F. Torrance T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996

Reviewed by Gerald Bray

Professor Torrance has written a great deal in recent years about the Trinity, but his most recent book breaks new ground in

a number of important respects.

First of all, it is more comprehensive and systematic than most of what he has written before, and thus the reader can follow the fullness of his thought more easily. His predilections for Athanasius and Karl Barth are in evidence, as one would expect, but they are not in isolation from the broad sweep of Christian history. Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianzus and Calvin, to name but three, also figure prominently and Professor Torrance is keen to demonstrate how they too, fit into the broader picture which he recreates for us on these pages.

The author's basic argument is that the homoousion ('consubstantial') of the so-called Nicene Creed (in actual fact the creed of Constantinople in 381) signals a revolution in Christian thought. He recognises that it may not be the last word on the subject, but insists that, as with any discovery of that nature, it cannot any longer be ignored. If we move on from it at some future stage it will be because we have absorbed its truth and gone farther, not because we have abandoned it. God can only be known by self-revelation, and this occurs fully and finally in Christ. In Jesus, the Christian meets God, and it is this apparently simple affirmation of faith which leads us to confess the homoousion.

Once we understand that, it changes our entire perception of God. For a start, we can no longer be simple "theists", positing the existence of a supreme being and evaluating the rest of the universe accordingly. For whatever truth there may be in theism, it is wholly inadequate to do justice to the mystery of a direct, personal encounter with the Living God, The Bible is not a philosophical treatise about ultimate reality, but the story of a self-revealing God who wants us to know him in a personal way. The ancient world had no categories in which to express this, which is why the early Church had to battle to establish a theological vocabulary which would give adequate expression to its faith. Athanasius played a key role in this, as did Gregory of Nazianzus. It was the latter, for example, who first applied the homoousion unambiguously to the Holy Spirit as well as to the Son, thereby rounding out the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Professor Torrance shows us, by his study of the Bible above all, that the Church Fathers were compelled to make this confession by the evidence of Scripture and by the nature of their own encounter with Christ. In the process, they transformed the Greek understanding of reality, and made it something infinitely more subtle and more powerful.

He also tackles such difficult issues as divine impassibility, pointing out that in Christ it was God who suffered and died on the cross, though it still remains true that God cannot suffer and die in himself. Ultimately God is greater than our categories, and it is only by knowing him personally that we can resolve these paradoxes in our minds.

There is no sense pretending that this book is an easy read — Professor Torrance tells us himself in the preface that it is heavy going. But it is always worthwhile trying to get to grips with great minds, and in this book we have a veritable feast of them.

If one may be permitted to express a regret, it is that Augustine and the rich medieval tradition which followed him does not get the attention which it deserves. This is a pity, but it should not stop us from appreciating the great Greek Fathers, who for many of us have stood in Augustine's shadow far too long. Professor Torrance is to be congratulated for bringing them back to light for us, and his book will hopefully make a significant contribution to our wider understanding of this fundamental Christian truth.

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Is your church guilty of theft

Scott Kroeger

I recently visited a church where the music team was using an overhead projector to put words to a song up on a screen. They had been hastily hand printed on and I noticed that there was no reference to the author or publisher, which was interesting since I knew the song to be a recent composition.

This is a common problem in Christian churches today. With church budgets next to nil, and a demand from other sections of the church to come up with fresh and exciting worship contributions, the easy answer is to avoid the outright expense of buying enough copies of music, books or other worship aids, by making copies of them.

The intent behind this is often justified with comments like, "It's only temporary, we'll do it just this time and then destroy the copies" or "It's for Christian worship, I'm sure the authors won't mind" or "There is nothing new under the sun...it all belongs to God anyway".

Such comments and attitudes show a lack of appreciation for the gifts and skills of other members of the body of Christ.

Original ideas are hard to come by these days, and patent offices have committees who spend months determining whether or not something deserves to be set apart and protected. Examining the question of copyright and ownership is full of problems, and even some red herrings. Just what is copyright all about?

In layman's terms, it is the protection of your creative output against the misuse of or profiteering of that output by someone other than yourself. Every school and university has a policy on copyright and rules against plagiarism.

Using material that is not your own in a report or paper and failing to give proper credit is subject to harsh discipline. Copying materials to avoid additional costs can procure equal chastisements. Copyright ownership can be bought and sold and many companies have developed policies regarding the intellectual property rights of its employees. The issue is who owns an idea, a thought, a process or procedure?

The issue is not always black and white. Any pastor who has preached over a number of years will at some point use an illustration he has picked up from somewhere

else. Or he will use an outline hastily written down when he visited a church last holidays.

Giving credit where credit is due should always be our goal. But sometimes you can't remember who to give it to. Should a good illustration go to waste simply because you can't remember who said it?

For myself, if someone thought one of my illustrations good enough to use in a sermon, I would be pleased. In this area I think the copyright issue is less of a concern ... unless the pastor is copying whole sermons off the Internet and repeating them as if they were his own.

Of more concern is the arena of Christian service where certain people use their God-given gifts to serve the body of Christ, Christian artists, musicians and authors particularly. These are people who make their living producing works of creativity. They write songs and books and produce art to feed their children and pay the bills.

Yes, this work is for Jesus, and yes, the church is the benefactor and yes it is all for the glory of God. But to take advantage of the situation and not pay for those extra copies simply because you are on a tight budget is nothing more than stealing from the mouths of their children.

I have known musicians who have been in financial strife because people (often their friends) have copied their original

work on to cassettes, or photocopied music and printed material. And often it is done without the intent to hurt these people. We sometimes gloss over the consequences of our actions.

Check whether your church has:

- Produced an overhead or photocopied a piece of music that was copyrighted, without the authority to do so.
- Produced an overhead or photocopied a piece of music without noting the author and the publisher.
- Used Christian clip-art for church bulletins and newsletters that was not bought but just passed on and on and on.
- Copied more music sheets for the choir because God sent you another tenor.
- Printed in the church newsletter a little gem you gleaned from an overseas magazine (figuring no one reads that stuff from over there anyway).
- Recorded public worship services where copyrighted music was performed.

If your church has done any of the above, chances are you have broken copyright laws. In the next column, I'll share what you can do about it.

Scott Kroeger is a chaplain at the Royal Institute of Technology in Melbourne.
Email: skroeger@aardvark.apana.org.au

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SUPERINTENDENT OF MINISTRY AND MISSION COMMITTEE OF THE NSW GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Expressions of interest for the position of Superintendent are being sought.

The present Superintendent will complete his 5 year term in August and will be seeking to return to parish ministry.

The Superintendent shall be a minister appointed by the General Assembly who shall Superintend the work of the ministry and mission committee and act under its direction.

Please address expressions of interest to:

The Convenor: Rev Ernie Noble, 3 Cheryl Ave. Terrigal NSW 2260
by 30th April 1998

Are the Resurrection accounts contradictory?

Chris Balzer

Consider how three members of a Christian family may report on a morning church service to Mum who was absent through sickness.

Dad: "Darling, the parking lot was full and I had to park 400 metres down the road. Then I found myself on the door handing out hymn books because the person who was rostered never arrived. I wish some people would get their act together! The minister preached on the parable of the Prodigal Son. He really taught me something about how loving our heavenly Father is."

Bob (16): "Dad was cranky by the time we got to church. Then I noticed that Tom, my best friend, wasn't there. So I had to sit with the family – what a drag! The sermon was OK today. The minister told us that one of the main things in the parable of the Prodigal Son is that rebellion against God is not necessarily the end of the line."

Mary (13): "The church was full and we just managed to get a seat. We sang that beaut new song from *Ring of Praise*, and the sermon was about pigs. I'd hate to work on a farm."

Is it fair to say that these reports of morning church are inconsistent?

No. Remember we are dealing with three descriptions of an event, and not with three witnesses under cross-examination in a court of law.

Our four Gospels are a bit like that family's reporting of the morning at church. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each use different sources of information for what they write, and each one wishes to emphasise something slightly different from the others. I suggest that if we could get our four Gospel writers in the same room at the same time and ask them specific questions about where each account seems to differ from the others, we would then discover that our chronological problems disappear.

Each writer condenses his account of the events and includes particular incidents because he has a particular angle he wants to emphasise. The fact that each Gospel writer tells the resurrection story in a slightly different way, even down to mentioning some witnesses whom the others



do not mention, is actually solid evidence for the reliability of the records.

What I mean is this: if Dad, Bob and Mary each told identical stories to Mum, she would immediately get suspicious and say "You've all been somewhere other than church. You obviously have got together and agreed on a story to tell me so I don't know where you've been."

Our Gospel writers are not attempting a leisurely account of the whole history of Jesus' life, ministry and teaching. Mark's Gospel is not like Professor Manning Clark's six-volume *History of Australia*. The Gospel writers are more like barristers in a court of law, with limited space and time, trying to summon the most telling evidence for the point of view which they wish to emphasise.

Matthew seems to be telling the resurrection story from the point of view of Mary Magdalene, the other Mary and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Mark's purpose seems to be to give a very dramatic account of the resurrection. Luke's aim is to present the historical facts and thus to emphasise the physical nature of the resurrection, while John probably draws on his own memory of the events, thus providing a basis for the life-giving faith which comes through believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

Remember, each of the four Gospel writers was selective in what incidents he

included in his Gospel. None of them attempts to tell the whole story. All of them would echo John's words in 20:30 that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." Each of the four Gospel writers carefully selects the details to include which will serve his purpose in writing, and God superintends and approves of this selection.

Tip: each Easter, read only one Gospel account; absorb what God the Holy Spirit through that human author wishes you to receive. Next Easter, read another Gospel account, and so on for four years. In other words, each Gospel was intended by the human author and the Holy Spirit to be read on its own terms. Praise God for giving us four different but complementary accounts of these wonderful events.

(For further reading, see John Wenham, *Easter Enigma*, Paternoster Press. \$4.95)

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AP

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The Slow Fires of Misery

John Piper shows why we should endure the pain of a flawed marriage.

Abraham Lincoln's marriage was a mess, and accepting the pain brought deep strength in the long run.

I write this not because it is wrong to seek refuge from physical abuse, but because, short of that, millions of marriages end over the agony of heartbreaking disappointments and frustrations. They do not need to. There is much to gain in embracing the pain for Christ and his kingdom.

Our culture has made divorce acceptable and therefore easier to justify on the basis of emotional pain. Historically, the misery of painful emotions was not a sanction for divorce in most cultures. Marriage durability – with or without emotional pain – was valued above emotional tranquillity for the sake of the children, the stability of society, and in the case of Christians, for the glory of Christ.

In Christianity such rugged, enduring marriages, through pain and heartache, are rooted in the marriage of God to his rebellious people whom he has never finally cast off.

“Your husband is your Maker for the Lord has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you” (Isaiah 54:5-7).

Abraham Lincoln brought debilities to his marriage with Mary Todd. He was emotionally withdrawn and prized reason over passion. She said that he “was not a demonstrative man ... When he felt most deeply, he expressed the least”.

He was absent, emotionally or physically most of the time. For years before his presidency he spent four months each year away from home on the judicial circuit. He was indulgent with the children and left their management almost entirely to his wife.

Mary often flew into rages. She pushed Lincoln relentlessly to seek high public office; she complained endlessly about poverty; she overran her budget shamelessly both in Springfield and in the White House, she abused servants as if they were slaves (and raged at Lincoln when he tried



Abraham Lincoln's marriage was filled with pain, but the United States benefited from the presidency of a man who learned to embrace pain.

to pay them extra on the side); she assaulted him on more than one occasion (with firewood, with potatoes); she probably once chased him with a knife through their backyard in Springfield; and she treated his casual contacts with attractive females as a direct threat, while herself flirting constantly and dressing to kill.

A regular visitor to the White House wrote of Mrs Lincoln that “she was vain, passionately fond of dress and wore her dresses shorter at the top and longer at the

train than even fashions demanded. She had great pride in her elegant neck and bust, and grieved the president greatly by her constant display of her person and her fine clothes”.

It was a pain-filled marriage. The familiar lines in his face and the sombre countenance reveal more than the stress of civil war. But the two stayed married. They kept at least that part of their vows. They embraced the pain, even if they could not (or would not) remove it.

What was the gain? God will give the final answer, but here are two historical assessments. First, how was it that Lincoln, when president, could work so effectively with the rampant egos who filled his administration? “The long years of dealing with his tempestuous wife helped prepare Lincoln for handling the difficult people he encountered as president.” In other words, a whole nation benefited from his embracing the pain.

Second, “over the slow fires of misery that he learned to keep banked and under heavy pressure deep within him, his innate qualities of patience, tolerance, forbearance, and forgiveness were tempered and refined”. America can be glad that Lincoln did not run from the fires of misery in his marriage. There were resources for healing he did not know, and short of healing, embracing the fire is better than escape.

Increasingly, contemporary culture assumes the opposite. Pain-free relationships are assumed as a right. But God promises his people something better. “Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, RSV).

John Piper is senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This article is reprinted from A Godward Life: 120 Daily Readings (Multnomah Publishers, Oregon; 1997). Used with permission.