

A U S T R A L I A N

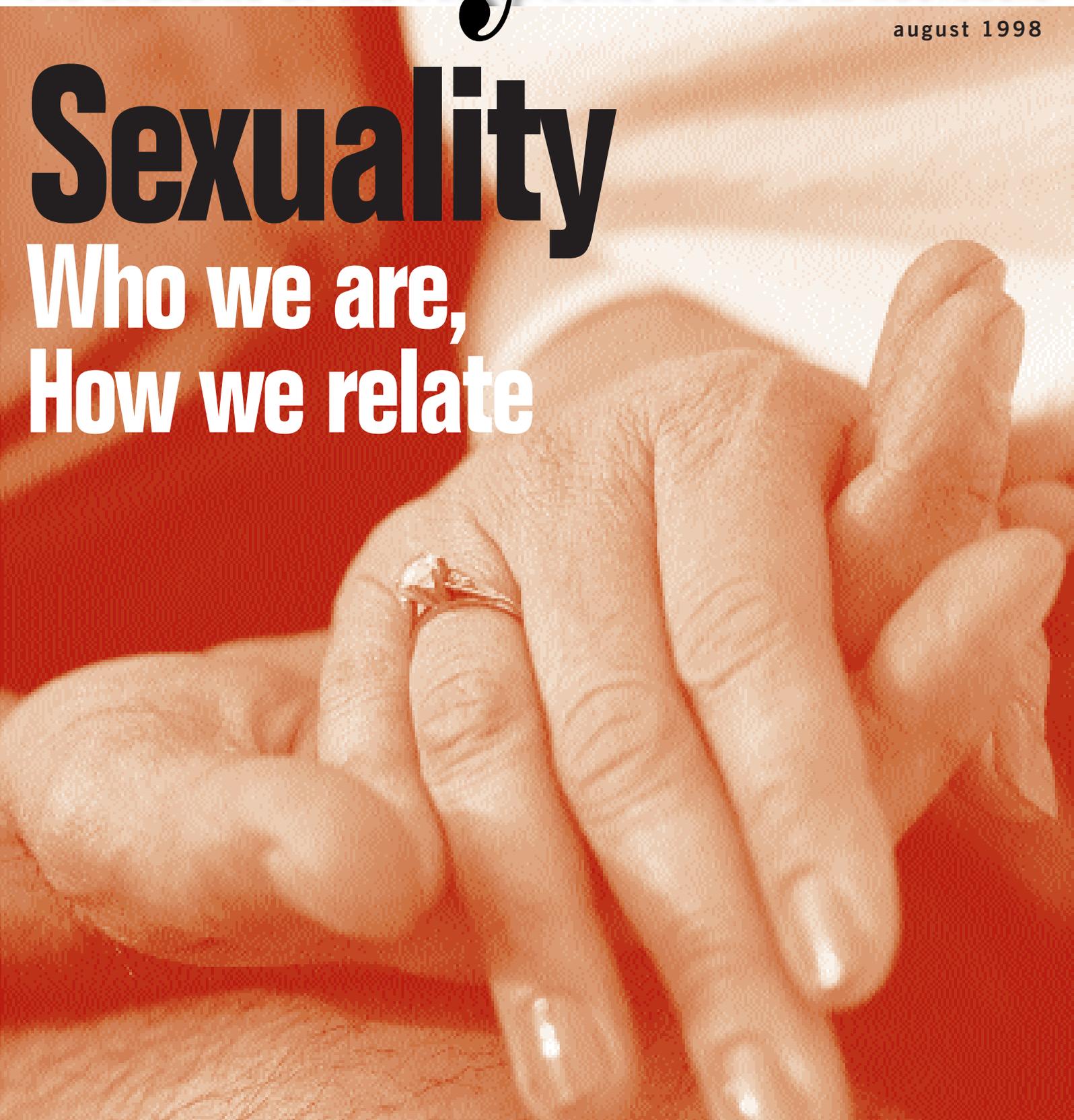
Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

august 1998

Sexuality

Who we are,
How we relate



Pure sex • Affair-proof your marriage • The religious supermarket

prayer

AUGUST

- 21 Stanley-Rocky Cape special (home mission) parish, north-west Tasmania; 20 communicants, 15 children and youth, 3 elders.
- 22 Christian work, peace and justice in desperately poor Mozambique, East Africa, 18 million, 40% African traditional religions, 13% Muslim, 23% Roman Catholic, 14% Protestant.
- 23 Rhondda Price from Castlemaine, Vic., working with Action Partners at the Sudan Literature Centre, Nairobi, Kenya.
- 24 Presbytery of Tasmania: 7 parishes, 5 special parishes, totalling 21 congregations with attendance of 1240, 3 retired ministers, 1 missionary; David Turner clerk.
- 25 Warwick-Southern Downs parish, Qld; 5 congregations, 14 communicants, 70 children and youth, 12 elders.
- 26 Politicians of all parties, and the voting public — that justice and compassion may not be overshadowed by materialistic greed.
- 27 Mavis Price from Victoria, involved in literacy work with WBT in Papua New Guinea.
- 28 Racial harmony in our country with justice to the original inhabitants, descendants of older settlers and newcomers from Asia.

- 29 Nicaragua, Central America — 5 million people in a deeply divided nation; 79% RC, 17% Protestant (growing strongly but needing unity and leadership).
- 30 Cranbourne parish, Vic; 5 congregations, 90 communicants, 30 children and youth, 6 elders; Ken & Gillian Martin.
- 31 The work of TEAR Australia in channelling relief and development aid to the poorest two thirds of the world, and promoting the Jubilee 2000 petition to lift the crushing debt on such countries.

SEPTEMBER

- 1 North Adelaide parish, SA., including Largs North; 70 communicants, 18 children and youth, 7 elders; John Watson and other supply preachers; Robert & Lilian Burns.
- 2 Presbytery of the Hunter, NSW (Newcastle area); 13 parishes, 2 home mission stations, totalling 34 congregations with attendance of 1000, 5 retired ministers, 1 missionary; Donald Smith clerk.
- 3 Marnoo home mission station, Vic.; 30 communicants, 20 children and youth, 4 elders; John Gething.
- 4 The Bible League Outreach at the Royal Adelaide Show, mainly involv-

- ing Lutherans, Reformed Churches and Presbyterians.
- 5 Caloundra parish on Qld Sunshine Coast; 55 communicants, 10 children and youth, 6 elders; Noel & Elizavetta Thomason.
- 6 Bible Society work in Peru (25 million people, 91 languages) including families donating Bibles to other families and selections for youth.
- 7 Shepparton-Stanhope-Kyabram parish, northern Vic; 115 communicants, 10 children and youth, 9 elders; John & Muriel Sutherland.
- 8 Honesty and spiritual insight in the print media — newspapers, magazines and books.
- 9 Stephen Agnew from Hawthorn, Vic, working in Ethiopia with SIM.
- 10 Parkes-Forbes-Peak Hill parish, western NSW; 3 congregations, 105 communicants, 10 elders; Max Hayward.
- 11 Rod & Margaret Malin working with Missionary Aviation Fellowship in PNG.
- 12 Presbytery of Melbourne East; 15 parishes, 2 home mission stations, totalling 19 congregations with attendance of 1100, 3 retired ministers, 1 school chaplain; Paul Swinn clerk.
- 13 Balaclava parish, Vic; 40 communicants, 10 children and youth, 6 elders; Mike & Sue Wharton.
- 14 Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, Sydney: staff — John Davies, Paul Cooper, Chris Balzer, Peter Barnes, Greg Perry and others — and all students.
- 15 Barbara Sayers from Gosford, NSW, member of WBT since 1961, translation consultant.
- 16 Wisdom for Christian parents teaching and modelling godly attitudes and behaviour in an unbelieving society.
- 17 Stephen Lilley from Hurstville, NSW, working in South Asia with WBT.
- 18 Wauchope home mission station, NSW north coast; 3 congregations, 50 communicants, 50 children and youth, 5 elders; Wayne & Barbara Weatherstone.
- 19 Work of the Bible League in encouraging Scripture study and reading in the home, and producing Scriptures in new translations by WBT.
- 20 Progress of the Gospel among the 40 million people of Poland (94% RC, 2% Orthodox, 0.5% Protestant), including the work of Oasis in the Roman Catholic church.

Presbyterian Theological College Open Night

**Friday 11th September
6.30pm to 9.00pm**

- **Guest Speaker: Dr David Searle
Rutherford House, Edinburgh**
- **Information about courses for 1999**
- **Meet staff and students**
- **Enjoy soup and sandwiches**
- **Parking in grounds**

**684 Elgar Road, Box
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August 1998
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AUSTRALIAN
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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Sexuality without shame

For many years, the Culture Watch section of this magazine has been a “hot potato” for the National Journal Editor. Inevitably, the section deals with issues that many Christians would prefer to avoid. They believe that some subjects are unsuitable for discussion in a public forum, and that believers should have nothing to do with them.

We are sensitive to this point of view. Indeed we recently decided as a matter of editorial policy that the following principle should steer all analyses within the Culture, Video and Film Watch section: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things” (Phil 4:8).

Yet this month we have chosen “Sexuality: Who We Are, How We Relate” as the title for this issue of *Australian Presbyterian*. Some readers may well think that this is opening a floodgate that runs counter to our above-mentioned editorial policy.

It is certainly true that so much of what we see, read and hear about in this “liberated” society flies in the face of what our Lord has taught about the expression of our sexuality.



Robert Benn

On reflection, it seems to me that we have two clear guidelines that should direct us as we approach this subject.

First: “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure” (Heb. 13:4).

Second: “It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (Eph. 5:12).

Is it possible to talk about sexuality in the '90s without overstepping the mark in regard to the second principle? Shouldn't we be saddened that sexuality is often dealt with in an exploitive and degrading manner when books and magazines feature what “the disobedient do in secret”? It certainly worries me. And I continue to be concerned that so many Christians have become blasé about what they tolerate. The “whatever is true, noble, right, pure,

lovely...” often seems to be eclipsed by whatever is untrue, dishonourable, impure and corrupt! I cannot but believe that this falls into the category of that which “grieves the Spirit”.

However, sexuality was created by God. Everything that He created was good. God specially purposed that male and female would be “one” in marriage. And through the Song of Songs and many other passages in Scripture we are told that marriage and love-making are honourable.

Therefore sexuality is a subject that we can tackle with confidence. Our aim is not to accentuate abnormality, but to highlight that which is holy and good in God's sight. Good models and teaching will give the young person something to work towards. But here's the problem. How many young people in our society have good models for marriages that are “strong and happy”? So many come from single-parent families, or very dysfunctional homes.

And teaching? Despite the fact that the Government has spent more money on sex education in the past two decades than in any previous period, promiscuous behaviour is at an all-time high and the young are as confused as ever about the key to a happy sexual relationship within marriage.

In this issue of *AP* we want to help our young people conduct themselves in such a way that later on they will not be ashamed to introduce a previous girl/boyfriend to their marriage partner.

Our aim is to portray relationships and marriage in God's way. If we sensitively touch upon some delicate subjects, it is not to ape *Playboy* or *Cosmopolitan*. Rather, our purpose is to draw our readers' attention to God's wonderful creation of male and female sexuality, and the design God had in mind for it. Moreover, we want to promote marriage and family as two of the greatest gifts God has bestowed upon us. For it remains true that human society can only be strong and happy where the marriage bond is held in honour.

Read on.

Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee *AP*

A future edition of *AP* will examine issues of Christian singleness.

Maintaining the Reformed Faith Today

— B I B L E C O N F E R E N C E —

Oct 2nd to Oct 5th 1998

Bible Presbyterian Church, 496 Magill Road, Magill, Adelaide, SA
Speaker: Rev Malcolm Watts of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury, England

Friday Oct 2nd	7.30pm	Maintaining the Reformed Faith Today
Saturday Oct 3rd	11.00am	The Nature of the Reformed Church
	4.00pm	Reformed Doctrine
	7.30pm	Reformed Government
Sunday Oct 4th	11.00am	Reformed Worship
	2.00pm	Reformed Evangelism
	7.00pm	Devotion and Reformed Practice
	11.00am	Discipline in the Reformed Church
Monday Oct 5th	11.00am	The Glory of the Church
	2.00pm	

Further details, and requests for accommodation write:

PO Box 316 Magill, SA 5072

Pure sex

The biblical perspective is neither prudish nor prurient.



It would be difficult to conceive — if that is the right word — of a culture which is more sex-obsessed but less sexually satisfied than our own.

The media are especially fond of extolling the joys of sex, and they find a ready, willing and gullible public. One of the gurus of this whole approach was the novelist D.H. Lawrence, a man plagued by impotence. Lawrence wrote of sex in mystical terms: “And God the Father, the Inscrutable, the Unknowable, we know in the Flesh, in Woman. She is the door for our in-going and our out-going — in her we go back to the Father: But like the witnesses of the Transfiguration, blind and unconscious.” Sex, apparently, has become a means of grace — indeed the mediator between God and man.

Alas, if we make a god of sex, it has a way of turning out to be a devil. The world has become schizophrenic. It lauds sexual freedom, then expresses mock horror when a civil or ecclesiastical dignitary actually acts on that philosophy. It told us there were no rules, then passes a whole host of lawyer-enriching laws against sexual harassment.



Peter Barnes

Where do we go for a touch of sanity?

It comes as a bit of a surprise to many people that it was not Channel 10’s *Sex/Life* or Alex Comfort who invented sex, but God Himself. There it is on the first page of the Bible: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them and God said to them “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth” (Gen. 1:27-28a).

We cannot obey God’s command here without engaging in sexual relations. God did not create a unisex culture. He made men and women different for good and necessary reasons. Sex for procreation: While there will be some people who

remain single (Matt. 19:11-12), most people will marry. If so, they engage in lawful sexual relations — relations upon which God has set his seal of approval. Children do not make a marriage (1 Sam. 1:8), but they are a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). In fact, “happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psalm 127:5). While today’s received wisdom is that children are a burden to be complained of as often as possible and disposed of as soon as possible, the Bible delights in the arrival of new-born life.

Hence the Psalmist rejoiced in God: “He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children” (Psalm 113:9). On the other hand, Rachel almost wished for death when she was unable to bear children (Gen. 30:1).

Relational aspects of sex: Yet the Bible has another purpose for sexual relations within marriage — a relationship purpose. In all their pre-Fall innocence, Adam and Eve were to become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). In the next verse it is said that “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they felt no shame”. There is no false prudery

here, as in the old limerick:

*There was an old lady of Harrow
Whose views were decidedly narrow.
At the end of her paths
She installed two bird baths —
One for each sex of sparrow!*

The Bible is both pure and earthy in its treatment of sexual relations. Fornication, adultery, homosexuality, incest, paedophilia, pornography and all other sexual perversions are always wrong. Even lust in the heart is worthy of everlasting damnation (Matt. 5:27-30). Masturbation too would seem to be an assault on the Bible's teaching that sex is not a solitary exercise but to take place with one's married partner of the opposite sex (1 Cor. 7:9).

Both the Old and New Testament speak of sexual relations in a very positive way. One of the 66 books which make up the inerrant Word of God is the Song of Solomon, which is a love song. The language is obviously sexual without being frank in the modern sense (Song of Solomon 7:1-3). Proverbs 5 speaks the same language. It contains a warning against sexual immorality, then goes on to speak of the relational aspects of married love: "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love" (Prov. 5:15-19).

Male and female are not identical in their functions, but there is a mutuality in married sexual life. "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and

likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:2b-5).

Sex is not only for producing offspring but is also to express the lifelong commitment of a man and woman to each other. To state the obvious, it is meant to be enjoyed.

Sexual relations are not to be casual; they are not to be invested with a kind of pseudo-spirituality that we find in D.H. Lawrence; they are not to be splashed across our movie screens in the name of honesty and frankness. It has been long noted by the best social commentators that cultural advance and sexual morality go together.

As sex is treated in a more exotic and uninhibited way, so it has created an insatiable desire for more of the same. Paradoxically, in all this intoxication there is more than a touch of boredom, of a sense that sex without a Christian framework is promising more than it can deliver. Sex is on the brain — which is a bad place to have it.

Not so with God's view. Sexual relations within marriage provide the God-given way for children to be brought into the world in as happy, stable and secure an environment as possible. And they provide the way for a husband and wife to express in a physical and joyous way their commitment to each other. As always, Christians ought to practise what they preach!

Peter Barnes is the minister of Nambucca River Presbyterian Church (NSW). 

Over the past 10 years, churches worldwide have begun to accept and approve homosexuality. This move from the traditional Christian stance on the issue has been highly controversial. Here in Australia, the Uniting Church has been shaken by an increasingly bitter dispute about whether homosexuality is a valid form of sexual expression.

While this debate has been gathering pace, the Metropolitan Community Church, an openly "gay" denomination, has established congregations in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. Homosexuals increasingly demand that churches accept their lifestyle and sexual practices completely. Many Christians are now confused concerning homosexuality and homosexuals. There are two questions that need biblical answers if Christians are to escape this confusion. The first question concerns the moral nature of homosexual behaviour. Is such behaviour right or wrong? Does Scripture see homosexuality as simply another form of human sexuality that is a valid alternative to heterosexuality? Sex is God's good gift to humanity. He is the one who created the human body. He is the one who made that body capable of giving and receiving sexual pleasure. As the giver of the gift, God is entitled to stipulate how it should be used. And He does precisely that in Scripture.

Through His holy Word, God declares that there are right and wrong ways to enjoy sex (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:6-8). The Christian sexual ethic can be summed up in two words: heterosexual (involving the opposite sex) and monogamous (involving a single partner).

According to Scripture, sex is morally good when (and only when) it is practised between one man and one woman in a loving marriage relationship. Negatively, this means that sexual activity is morally bad outside marriage. Indeed, God's Word condemns all extra-marital sexual activity as sin. This condemnation plainly includes homosexual activity.

Sexual intimacy between members of the same sex is expressly outlawed by God in Leviticus: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (18:22). Again, "if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (20:13).

Four truths about homosexual behaviour are evident from these two passages. First, it is forbidden: it must not be practised ("you shall not"). Second, it is offensive: it disgusts God ("it is an abomination"). Third, it is serious: it demands judgment ("they shall be put to death"). Fourth, it is wilful: it arises from choices for which the chooser is accountable ("their blood is upon them").

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul condemns same-gender sex in his letter to the Romans. Speaking of people who had perverted the truth and dishonoured the Creator, he



Gay? No way

*The Bible is clear: homosexuality is sinful and wilful,
argues Andrew Lansdown.*

states: "Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons, the due penalty for their error" (1:26-27).

This passage reveals a further four truths about homosexual activity. First, it is universal: it can be practised by women as well as men ("women...and the men likewise"). Second, it is unnatural: it goes against the created order ("women exchanged natural relations for unnatural"). Third, it is lustful: it arises from perverted and unrestrained desire ("consumed with passion for one another"). Fourth, it is harmful: it embodies its own punishment ("receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error").

Paul also writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals...will inherit the kingdom of God." No person who practises homosexual sex will enter God's presence in eternity. This is the teaching of Scripture. And this is the teaching of compassion: for those who heed it will turn back from destruction. Repentance is the door to God's kingdom. This is the homosexual's hope. For what God condemns He also forgives, provided the offender turns by faith from sin to the Saviour.

Having warned that (like sinners) no homosexual will inherit the kingdom of God, Paul goes on to say, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." Some of the people to whom Paul writes once were homosexuals, but no longer. Having repented, having turned from their sins, they had been cleansed by the blood of Jesus and claimed by the Spirit of God.

The second question that we must answer from Scripture concerns the origin of homosexual behaviour. Is homosexuality a compulsion that people are born with or is it really a matter of choice? Many people today

believe that homosexual behaviour originates from a homosexual orientation over which an "affected" person has no control. Is this a sound belief?

The biblical prohibition on homosexual behaviour is instructive. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman" (Leviticus 18:22a). This command is based upon the supposition that the forbidden behaviour is also a chosen behaviour; otherwise it would not make sense to forbid it.

The biblical condemnation on homosexual behaviour — "it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22b) — is likewise instructive, for Scripture does not classify as evil behaviours that are outside a man's control, nor does it condemn a man for behaving in ways that he cannot help. By defining homosexual behaviour as sinful, Scripture also defines it as wilful.

According to Scripture, homosexuality activity originates in the mind and will of man. It is a chosen behaviour. What, then, are we to make of the claims that some people are born with (or somehow inadvertently acquire) homosexual "orientation"? Such claims need to be considered with caution.

Scripture makes no mention of a homosexual orientation (and medical science offers no evidence for it). The Bible speaks only of homosexual acts, which it condemns, and of homosexual persons, whom it likewise condemns. Also, we must recognise that homosexuals (that is, people who engage in homosexual sex) often have a vested interest in fostering the view that they are affected by a sexual orientation over which they have no control. Encouraging this view is a way of gaining sympathy, of avoiding responsibility, and of escaping condemnation.

The duplicity of homosexuals concerning the cause of their behaviour is evident to those who have followed the developments of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s and the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. During the 1970s, homosexual activists ridiculed the notion that they couldn't help themselves, and worked tirelessly to destroy the arguments that their sexual behaviour arose from some form of medical or emotional disorder.

These activists insisted that "being gay is a choice".

However, with the advent of AIDS in the 1980s, many homosexuals began to downplay or deny the role of choice with regard to their sexual activities. Why? Because they were and are trying to escape the blame for the consequences of their behaviour — namely the spread of AIDS.

In this fallen world, it is possible that a small percentage of people are affected by unsought and (originally, at least) unwanted desires of a homosexual nature. But even if this is true, it does not alter the reality or the validity of the Scriptural condemnation of homosexual behaviour as sinful and therefore wilful. A person with homosexual inclinations is both able and required to resist putting those inclinations into practice. He can and must abstain from sexual activity in exactly the same way as a man with heterosexual desires can and must abstain from adultery.

But the matter needs to be kept in perspective. It would be a mistake to assume that all or even most homosexuals are afflicted with a homosexual orientation.

Some people — and this is especially true of women — choose to experiment in homosexual sex for ideological reasons. Some women writers have stated that they changed their sexual behaviour from heterosexual to homosexual (lesbian) because of the influence of feminism. It is a contradiction, they claimed, for a woman to relate primarily to other women and yet stop short of sexual contact. In short, choice of ideology can affect choice of sexual behaviour.

Interestingly enough, Paul describes homosexual behaviour as "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10). It arises from wrong thinking. (What a warning this is for those who think that doctrine is impractical and unimportant!) In Romans 1:25, Paul again traces homosexual practice to false belief: "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie". And that lie has to do with lust (24a) and idolatry (25b). Before people do wrong things they usually believe wrong things. And wrong beliefs about sex are particularly attractive because they promise and (in the short term at least) deliver powerful physical gratification.

What is the cause of homosexual behaviour? Like every other sin, it originates from wrong thoughts and desires. It is — at least until deliberate practice results in habituation — a behaviour well within a person's control. People engage in it by choice. It is in fact as wilful as it is sinful.

Andrew Lansdown is the author of 12 books. His poetry, stories and essays have been published in more than 70 magazines and newspapers. A Baptist pastor, Andrew has also written widely on moral and ethical issues.

When the thrill has gone

A maintenance programme for marriage

Meet Karen and Peter. The alarm went and Karen dragged herself from bed. "Is it time to get up already? How can I sleep a whole night and still feel so tired?"

She looked across the bed to Peter. He still snored soundly. As he lay there exposed, she felt nothing. After 16 years of marriage, how things had changed! The years had been less kind to him, with an increasing waistline and receding hairline. Karen felt unaroused but, more disturbingly, she felt a distance. Somehow their lives seemed to be going different directions despite them sharing the same family, life and bed. How did it happen?

The children were all now at school but the busyness of life continued to escalate. Each day seemed like a list of responsibilities and chores that had to be accomplished and at night in the bedroom there was one more chore. It wasn't that she didn't enjoy making love, but the spontaneity, the passion, the fun, had gone. This, together with the competing demands on her, made her feel resentful.

Peter too, felt the change in their relationship. He loved her just as much as when they were first married, but life was so much more complicated now. Karen was always tired, but he didn't understand why. The children weren't babies anymore and Karen was rarely up during the night, yet the children had changed things. He loved them dearly but they distracted Karen's attention from him.

Admittedly, he had responsibilities that kept him up late or caused him to fall asleep in the chair, but only occasionally. Now, even to suggest making love made him feel guilty and her increasingly negative response made him frustrated. Sex was beginning to cause tension between them.

The Post-Baby Blues: Does Karen and Peter's situation seem all too familiar? For many couples, the stage after babies can pose new problems in the bedroom. Usually the sleepless nights, hormones and physical discomfort have passed but greater career, family and often church responsibilities make finding time for each other a constant battle.

So is this a problem, or just a part of life that Karen and Peter, and you for that matter, may have to endure? The answer to this



Kathy Thurston

question will depend on how important you think sex is to a healthy marriage.

Mike Mason in his book *The Mystery of Marriage* says: "Sex is a powerful outward symbol of the inner temper of a marital relationship. It is an arresting and self-evident truth that the quality of a marriage in all of its facets depends upon a wholesome and mutually satisfying sex life. And the corollary is also true, that the partners' feelings about the marriage as a whole will almost always be reflected in the quality of their sexual relations."

You may find this hard to swallow and may wish to protest that there is much more to a good marriage than good sex. This is true, but a good marriage usually involves good sex because the intimacy a husband and wife share in sex unites and heals them like no other form of communication.

The act of making love between a man and woman committed to one another in marriage as God intended it to be, is the deepest, most powerful experience between two people. It is not just a physical union but the emotional and spiritual act of becoming "one flesh".

Breaking through the barriers: If this is the case, then we need to work hard at breaking through the boredom and barriers stopping our sexual relations and, thereby, the intimacy in our marriage deepening. Here are three suggestions:

- Maintain your relationship. Sex in a Christian marriage is not an end in itself. It is an expression of the love a couple already feel toward each other. Nor does it take place in a vacuum. The relationship and the sex should encourage each other.

When we feel loved and happy we want to give ourselves passionately to one another and when we give ourselves passionately

to one another, we catch a glimpse of how the rest of our relationship could be. As we recall the qualities that initially attracted us to each other, share together the experiences we both enjoy, laugh together and work hard at communicating beyond the superficial, we will want to go to bed earlier and vice versa.

- Maintain the romance. Sex blossoms where it is nurtured with romance. We need to communicate our love through word and action. Even when someone knows you love them, it's nice to be reminded. Even when you don't have time for sex, it's nice to have a cuddle with no strings attached. And when you feel tired and frumpy, it's nice to hear that someone finds you attractive.

- Maintain time together. Scheduling time for sex doesn't make it second rate. At this stage in our busy lives, we need to plan time alone so we can ensure privacy and undivided attention. It may mean abandoning spontaneity for a time, but not necessarily abandoning enthusiasm. It may mean balancing each other's needs and responsibilities and making a time that suits both of you. It will definitely require communication and desire.

Scheduling extended time together without children can be harder but nothing enriches a marriage more than uninterrupted conversation, relaxed enjoyment of one another and time to rediscover the joy of sex. Once a year even, arrange for the children to have a weekend at grandparents or organise a swap with friends so you can enjoy your home alone or some other secluded spot. Take my word for it, it's well worth the effort.

So where does that leave Karen and Peter? Is there hope for them that things can be different? Yes. Peter is not satisfied with a second-rate marriage and is determined to keep pushing their relationship to be the best it can be. This rekindles in Karen a desire for Peter that she thought was lost. Both Karen and Peter commit themselves to making sex a priority in their marriage. For there, as they lie naked beside each other, acceptance is found, tensions are healed and intimacy is renewed.

Kathy Thurston is married to David Thurston, director of evangelism for the Presbyterian Church in NSW.

An affair-proof marriage

Stuart and Pauline Coulton offer a survival guide.

Peter and Gillian were a young Christian couple. They had served overseas on the mission field and upon returning to Australia they settled into their local church. Peter worked part-time for the church and Gillian began work in an office. Her boss asked Gillian to travel to Brisbane with him on a business trip ... they dined together, spent time talking and one thing led to another.

When she got home Gillian began to tell Peter that she no longer loved him. Eventually she admitted that she was having an affair with her boss. Gillian and Peter are no longer married. The workplace can be treacherous ground for marriages — even Christian marriages are at risk!

A Christian friend of ours was told by a recently converted woman, that he was the only man she knew who was not having an affair! He and his wife were stunned. However a 1994 study in the USA found



Stuart & Pauline Coulton

that 30 per cent of people surveyed who identified themselves as conservative Protestants had had more than one sexual partner in the previous 12 months, and 14 per cent had two to four partners in that time. Most people accept that the pressure upon marriages in the '90s is enormous — so what are you doing to affair-proof your marriage?

One of the worst things we could do is assume that it will never happen to us. The fact we are Christians doesn't make us

immune to the pressures. As Paul warned the Corinthian church: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Here are some ideas about affair-proofing our marriages.

First, look out for your spiritual health. Or, as Stephen Covey puts it, sharpen your own saw. Sexual temptation is like any other temptation — it hits hardest when we are weakest. When we are overworked and our decision-making is clouded; when we feel that life has let us down; when we are hurting inside and feel that no one understands us — then we are vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

We can seek for comfort and security in a relationship outside our marriage. However the place to start in any marriage is with Jesus. Our deepest needs are only met in Him. We need to give ourselves permission for what a friend calls 'wasting time' with God. Spending time at leisure



Bislama Bible

Epping Presbyterian Church invites you to join us to celebrate the dedications of the **Bislama Bible** in Santo and Vila, Vanuatu.

Bill and Sue Camden first went to Vanuatu in 1957. They saw the need for a translation of the scriptures into the common language, Bislama, and Bill worked on and coordinated this translation until his death in 1994.

Sue Camden and some 30 relatives and friends attended the Dedications and Sue will tell us of their trip and the excitement of the people of Vanuatu as they received the Bible in their National Language

**Sunday 30th August
at 10am**

There will be a bring and share lunch in the Church Hall afterwards for everyone

with Him, in prayer and bible meditation and fellowship with His people.

Strong Christian marriages are built upon each partner's strong walk with Jesus.

Don't nourish temptation. The first step in temptation is to allow the thought that an affair with someone else is possible. It isn't! So don't imagine that it is. When we allow ourselves to daydream about romantic dinners or sexual encounters with someone else — we are already losing the battle.

We also need to be careful about our friendships. When we begin to get excited at the thought of meeting someone else or start making unflattering comparisons with our partner, then it's time to take a deep breath and a big step back. Dwight Hervey Small says: "An intimate friendship seems innocent alongside a sexual affair, but a purely emotional attachment can do more to threaten marriage than falling into sexual sin. In a friendship one does more than lend his body to passing pleasure; one gives his heart away." Friendships outside of marriage are precious. But they cannot be immune from scrutiny.

Identify temptation. Since the serpent first presented sin as a chance to be like God, Satan has been dressing up marital unfaithfulness to appear romantic, fulfilling and exciting. It isn't. Like all of Satan's temptations, an affair promises so much and delivers so little. It's a hollow promise. The offspring of an affair are guilt, deceit and pain. So identify the temptation for what it is, not for what Satan would fool us into believing. Let's call an affair what it really is — adultery. Steve Farrer says: "In the war on the family, adultery is treason."

Resist temptation. Why should we say 'No' to an affair? Bill Hybels suggests that

we will say 'No' firstly because we love Jesus, secondly because we love our partner and thirdly because we fear God's judgment. Three pretty good reasons!

Second, work hard at communication. Everyone we speak to tells us that communication is essential to affair-proof our marriages. So how come it's so hard to do?

Well, life is hectic and we struggle to make the time. Young children rob us of sleep. Talking to our older children can become an easy substitute for talking with our partner. We can grow complacent and imagine our marriage doesn't need the levels of communication we once had. When we do communicate, it can often degenerate into expressions of pent-up frustrations that tear each other down. We can spoil our communication if we use it to maintain the tally of wrongs done.

However, just because it's hard, doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. Good communication is essential to keeping our marriage relationship strong. We need to take time to affirm our partner. The psychologist William James said that possibly the deepest need we have is the need to feel appreciated. Are you telling your partner how much you appreciate him/her? Holding hands, spontaneous hugs or a smile across the room all tell your partner that they are someone special.

We need also to take time to talk about more than who needs the car tomorrow and whether the chops are tough tonight. Conversation that stimulates and refreshes will draw us closer together, help us understand one another better and deepen our appreciation of our partner.

None of this happens without planning

and effort. We need to set aside time to talk, and lots of it! Especially when children arrive, we can make excuses not to find time to talk at leisure.....we're too tired, life's too rushed, it costs too much.

What works for us are regular visits to the coffee shops which give us a terrific place to settle down to talk. We go away at least once a year (a wedding anniversary does as an excuse) for a special time away. The children are left in the care of their Aunt, the pets are put out to board and we spend 24 hours simply enjoying one another's company.

Third, practice love. God has shown love to us. We should show love to one another. One of the best decisions we ever made in our marriage was to assume the best in whatever our partner said or did. It's so easy to assume that they meant to hurt us or that they deliberately ignored our wishes. We must give one another the benefit of the doubt. Assume that when our partner made that promise to love us — they actually meant it!

Fourth, accountability. Is there someone you have agreed to tell, if you sense yourself sliding into an unhealthy relationship? Someone to whom you hold yourself accountable? One couple covenanted at the beginning of their marriage that if ever they felt attraction to someone else, they would immediately tell their partner. After 10 years they still keep that covenant.

Fifth, romancing the home. Paul Newman once explained the success of his marriage by asking why would he go out for MacDonalds when he had filet mignon at home? We can help our marriage to be affair-proof by making ourselves so attractive our partner would be a fool to look anywhere else!

So let's foster the romance in our homes. Be outward looking to what pleases your partner. Not many blokes are moved by a bunch of flowers, but most women are! Find out what really matters to your partner and seek to satisfy them.

Special meals together after the children are asleep, times of physical and emotional intimacy, walks in the park and lots of surprises! Romance helps us feel special, cared for and loved. Don't let the children take the place of your partner as the chief focus of your time and affection.

Our marriages are a precious investment. The care and effort we invest in them will repay us many times over and bring glory to God. To lose our marriage will cost us dearly; to keep it will bring an eternal reward.

Stuart Coulton is minister of the Blacktown East Presbyterian Church and Pauline is a social worker in Sydney's western suburbs. 

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Family planning

Greg Fraser considers whether contraception is Christian.

"Whenever I hear people discussing birth control, I always remember that I was the fifth." (Clarence Darrow).

The place to begin when thinking about family planning and contraception is that marriage is for mutual friendship and for bringing children into the world. There are some special situations where the latter is not possible, but the normal way of married life is for mutual companionship and children.

The mutual companionship of marriage includes sharing each other's bodies. Sexual union celebrates the union of husband and wife. The bonding which sexual union reinforces need not be with the primary goal of conception. In the Bible, for example, Song of Solomon and 1 Corinthians 7, sexual union is greeted as an expression of mutual joy and satisfaction of our natural sex drive — aside from any idea of conception.

The fun of sexual union is an end in itself — otherwise the Bible would have directed us to only have intercourse at a woman's fertile time. Sexual union is much more than "mating". In this context, morally justifiable contraceptives have their place.

Another end or purpose for marriage is to have children. The children of Christian parents, by and large, become part of the Church of the next generation. It is a denial of God's purpose for marriage for a couple who have the ability to have children to decide not to.

Selfishness is at the heart of this decision. There are always exceptions such as genetic disorders, but the couple who can reproduce, but won't, need to consider again the purpose of marriage for the Christian: to honour God, by mutual loving service which extends to having children.

For a young couple beginning their married life, it may be wise to allow for a time of adjustment and stabilisation without the added complications and demands of a baby. Getting married is a very stressful time — a new address, a new mortgage, a focus on establishing a life together, a turmoil of personal adjustment and getting to know the other person for the first time. The couple may still be finishing study or trying to establish a home without the



Greg Fraser

burden of debt. There may be personal health reasons for which a delay in child bearing would be right. To add a new baby could be unwise for the couple and the child.

In this case contraception (for a limited time) may help to build a stronger marriage. The couple are not denying the children aspect of marriage, but rather are taking deliberate responsibility, and planning when is the best time to extend one's servant role to children. If, however, the use of contraception was for selfish reasons, then it would be an abuse of God's purposes.

Always bear in mind that there are a number of medical reasons why some couples cannot have children. These people should never be confused with those who abuse contraception.

Amorally responsible doctor may recommend a family-planning program something like the following — yet even this, as we will see, needs to be handled with caution. A newly-wed couple who need to finish education, overcome some economic hardship and establish career paths will need an effective method of birth control, for example, the pill. When they begin to have their children, they may want to space the babies with such methods as the rhythm method, condoms, spermicides. When child bearing is completed the contraception options are limited. Long-term use of the pill may not be safe, and the rhythm method may be a strain and unreliable over many years. So if the couple are SURE that they have finished having children, then sterilisation may be appropriate.

This may sound fine but there are several dangers. If either of the "newly-weds" families have any history of reduced fertility then to delay having children would be unwise. Couples need also to be aware that the biological clock is ticking away and that

their optimum time for bearing children is when they are younger, not older. The energy which children require favours young parents, not old. And not many people want to be rearing teenagers in their late 50s and early 60s.

Couples need to consider carefully the method of contraception they will use. The Bible recognises human life from the moment of conception. So a fertilised egg has a sacred, God-given value. Some contraceptives are morally wrong. The Intra Uterine Device is not acceptable as it prevents a fertilised egg from implanting. Likewise any contraception which allows conception to take place is not acceptable. So preventing the union of sperm and egg is the correct method.

The pill is nearly always effective, yet very occasionally conception may occur. Some of these come to term but others spontaneously abort due to the chemical effects of the pill. Couples need also to consider with such contraceptives as the pill that a significant chemical alteration is being made which will have varying side-effects, both short term and possibly long term. Couples must ask their doctor to explain how each contraceptive works before considering them.

Very often contraception is left to the wife to organise and implement. This is wrong. The husband should accept responsibility as well in this important matter. It is not good enough for a husband to act selfishly and put the onus on his wife to organise family planning. He and his wife need to make decisions with the welfare of the whole family, present and future, in mind.

My final caution to couples considering contraception is to keep their focus on God's plan for marriage. Children are a God-ordained part of marriage. If humanly possible, children should be an assumed goal. Don't let the world's wrong and selfish values encroach on this blessing of service. Money and career are nowhere near as important as children and family life.

Greg Fraser is the minister of the Ararat Presbyterian Church in Victoria. He serves as the convener of the Church and Nation Committee. The committee has published booklets on such topics as gambling, homosexuality, euthanasia, democracy and most recently freemasonry.

All in the mind

When sexual problems aren't the real problem.

We all expect to be able to enjoy a good physical relationship in marriage most of the time. Continuing difficulties with sex are frustrating and upsetting. However, many couples think they have a sexual problem when the real issue is something else. It's easy to assume there's a biological or technique problem, particularly when magazines such as *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* regularly tell us that technique fixes everything, and ignore psychological and relationship issues that are the real problem.

Some medical conditions can result in difficulties with intercourse. A few examples are: infections of the vagina or urethra, diabetes, thyroid or pituitary dysfunctions, multiple sclerosis and vascular disease. Technique issues can include inadequate time and preparation for arousal, inadequate stimulation, and situational factors such as lack of privacy.

We want the "quick fix" and so are susceptible to the lure of the latest sex drug. Hence the popularity of such drugs as Viagra that can be disappointing and even dangerous in their effects. Of course, medical screening



Maureen Miner

is important to rule out medical conditions and it's good to refer to books or experts to help with sexual techniques, but when these don't work it's time to ask why.

Why are sexual problems more than just physical or technical issues? It's because people are more than physical systems. Psychological, social and spiritual systems interrelate with the physical. Thus psychological, spiritual and relational problems can cause sexual difficulties.

Psychological problems causing sexual difficulties: Sometimes one partner in the marriage becomes frustrated when the other is consistently reluctant to have sex. Perhaps both are distressed by the lack of sex. Lack of desire is one of the most common complaints of married couples, according to Masters and Johnson, well-known sex therapists.

Stress at work or in our busy lifestyle is a major cause. Working hard to keep our jobs, too little sleep, pressures to do more and more for our children, voluntary work and church meetings all add to the stress load. But do we really need to work so hard or keep up with everybody's expectations? To deal with stress-induced low desire we must carefully prioritise and make time to nurture the marriage so frequency of sex is acceptable to both partners.

Depression is a major psychological problem for Australian adults, affecting about 20 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men at some point in their lives. It frequently results in loss of interest in sex. As depression lifts with good treatment, so interest and pleasure in sex increases.

Past sexual abuse can cause intense fear of sex. This can result in lowered desire, difficulties completing intercourse and loss of pleasure. People with sexual fears can be helped by counselling for the past abuse and their current sexual problems.

Spiritual problems causing sexual difficulties:

A big trap for marriages is when we expect our partner to fulfil needs that only God can fulfil. Yet our partner cannot always be loving, accepting and the meaning-centre for our lives. Dissatisfaction with our partner feeds into dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship when the real cause is spiritual – our relationship with God.

Lack of forgiveness for major and minor issues is another spiritual problem for marriages. We hang on to grievances rather than giving up on revenge. Meanwhile, we are holding aloof from our partner, so how can we fully enjoy sexual intimacy?

Anger is another spiritual issue that can destroy intimacy. Disagreements will occur between any couple but these must be dealt with immediately so they don't escalate into violent words or deeds. Ephesians 4:26 urges, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" for delaying reconciliation gives an opening for sin. Prolonged hostility or violence shatters trust that is the basis for real sexual expression in the marriage.

It's important to diagnose spiritual problems so that spiritual remedies such as confession and prayer can be used. Relationship problems cause sexual difficulties: if marriage partners are free of major psychological and spiritual problems, they can still have sexual problems because of poor communication. It's often the small things we say or don't say in our relationships that make all the difference to sexual intimacy.

Marriage manuals give many different types of communication problems: I'll focus on four that I think are most relevant to sexual problems.

First, avoiding the issue. We bring expectations about our relationship, including our sexual relationship, into the marriage from our homes, churches, friends and the media. Generally, men prefer physical release whereas women have a stronger longing for affection. When we don't clarify our expectations and desires we set the scene for disappointed

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and disappointing lovers. Throughout the changing stages of our marriage we should be considering what we would like to give and receive sexually and make opportunities to talk through the “when, what and how” issues.

Second, dishonesty. This can be dishonesty about our desires and needs, or dishonesty about an attraction for another. Dishonesty breaks trust that is needed for a healthy sex life. Prevention is the best remedy here: being open about desires and previous attractions before the marriage and dealing with attractions to others before they threaten the marriage. Then we must make the effort to maintain honest communication.

Third, disrespect. We are disrespectful when we say and do things that treat the other person as an object for our own selfish desires. For example, referring to our partner as “the husband” or “the wife”, failing to say thank you, or even demanding services. These may be unthinking bad habits but

some people with low self-esteem believe they don't deserve good things and have to demand them. Of course, the reality is we are all valuable to God. Our partners are worthy of consideration and, in God's plan for marriage, their delight in sex will increase ours.

If disrespect spoils our sex life we need to let God show us how valuable we are to Him. We must see our partners as people God is blessing directly and through us. Finally, we must act on God's principle of sacrificial love, not selfish taking.

Fourth, negativity. This includes annoying actions and criticisms that can smother love or make it harder to enjoy sex. For example, once the romance diminishes from the honeymoon we become aware of all the little things that can be a turn-off, such as smelly feet. We are being negative when we refuse to make the effort to change the serious turn-offs.

As well, rudeness and criticisms make it hard for us to feel safe when we are expressing ourselves sexually or want to talk about

our sexual needs. Dealing with negativity involves telling our partner when their comments hurt and perhaps developing gentle signals as a reminder to them to desist. We can take time out in heated exchanges to lower the heat. Finally, we must build positive comments into the relationship: express loving thoughts and plan compliments or encouragers daily.

Although some sexual problems have a biological cause, most result from psychological or spiritual problems in one of the marriage partners or, most commonly, a relationship issue. The cure is not a “quick fix” drug or studying sex manuals to revitalise our sex life but dealing with the underlying issue. This takes time and commitment but is well worthwhile for a good sex life and a satisfying relationship.

Maureen Miner lectures in psychology at the University of Western Sydney and in pastoral theology at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood. ap

Breaking the silence

Presbyterians are learning to deal with sexual abuse in their midst.

Do you think that sexual abuse could never touch your congregation? Take a moment and consider these two true cases. P.B. was a devoted church worker and youth leader in two NSW independent congregations. Parents trusted him with their most treasured possessions – their children.

For years it seemed he had a wonderful ministry teaching children about the love of God, but there was another, darker side to P.B. He later admitted in court that he had repeatedly sexually abused a ten-year-old girl and a nine-year-old boy. The abuse had taken place in the children's homes and at Christian camps. It was only when the girl finally told her mother that the physical abuse stopped. It was another two years before she conquered her feelings of shame and told the police.

R.L. became an elder and Sunday school teacher in a newly-planted Presbyterian church. He was a good preacher and was committed to pastoral visitation. He seemed to be a normal husband, family man and Christian. However R.L. had a long history of sexual and other offences. A skilful liar and cunning predator, he was eventually convicted of the sickening sex murder of a

six-year-old girl. On the morning he committed this terrible deed, he attended the church prayer meeting.

These tragic events indicate the need for protection from sexual harassment and abuse of those under our care. This especially applies to the children in our Sunday schools and our youth fellowships. We need to acknowledge that sexual abuse is not simply confined to denominations where the clergy are celibate.

If we fail to recognise these things, we may inadvertently attract people who have a sexual interest in children. Our congregations need to be places where positive Christian values and a strong commitment to the safety and well-being of parishioners are evident. This should arise from their understanding that all people, being made in God's image, are entitled to a fundamental respect for their person.

Jesus' teachings about children are sobering: “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone tied around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). These words reflect a recognition of a child's particular vulnerability to harm and a particular obligation of

God's people to be mindful of their interests and most certainly to protect them from harm.

Sadly, churches are not always what they should be. Some Christians give in to the temptation to sexually violate or offend others. In other cases, people outside the church may seek association with church ministries to gain access to children and other vulnerable people. While hoping that such people will be open to the gospel dynamic of repentance, confession, forgiveness and personal renewal, the church must be realistic about what can and does happen.

All Presbyterian churches need to have in place specific child protection policies. For any such policy to be effective there must be an awareness that sexual abuse is a compulsive behaviour. Abusers will not be stopped by “a slap on the wrist” or a mild rebuke.

Members of congregations should be aware of the content of policies and all church workers must agree to abide by them. Where churches have protection policies in place, those who wish to abuse children will be warned off. It is a clear responsibility of Sessions to see that this is done.

To help churches develop child protection policies, the General Assembly of the PCNSW has issued the report *Breaking the Silence*, which contains detailed procedures for protecting against and addressing sexual abuse within the Presbyterian Church.

Paul Beringer is the Superintendent of Ministry and Mission for the Presbyterian Church in NSW. He is also the convener of the Committee on Sexual Abuse. Breaking the Silence is available for \$5 from the Ministry and Mission Department, PCNSW, Box 100 GPO Sydney 2001. ap

Mental fidelity

Christians face a challenge in a mentally impure age.

It was a bright, sunny day in Galilee. Jesus was surrounded by many disciples who were intently listening to one of His engaging sermons. As the crowd grew with the arrival of new inquirers, a few men turned their heads to note an attractive woman who took her place on the grass.

Some of them allowed their gaze to linger and their minds to wander – until they heard Jesus say “...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart...” (Mt. 5:28).

Mental purity is as essential to Christian faith and character as any external behaviour. In fact Christian holiness begins at this most fundamental level. A person may pass through life outwardly on the way of righteousness while his mind may be wallowing in the gutter of ungodly desires.

Jesus teaches that His people need to be “pure in heart” (Mt. 5:8), while Paul says that a person is truly transformed with the “renewing” of the “mind” (Rom. 12:2). These are standards every believer must face if we claim to love and follow Christ.

Over the centuries countless thousands of people have retreated into one form or other of monasticism in their effort to subdue their desires. It is liberating to discover that the Bible doesn’t ask us to eliminate our desires, but only to redirect them to God-given ends.

God has given us various desires to be



Andrew Clarke

used for His glory and our enjoyment. The Bible does not teach that strong, passionate desires are necessarily inconsistent with God’s purposes for our lives. Our problem lies in the fact that “the world, the flesh and the devil” pervert our desires so that they often become immoral and destructive.

This is especially true in our minds, and we find ourselves trapped in mental impurity. In a culture that is saturated with images and attitudes of sexual immorality, the Christian faces a serious challenge when seeking to be pure not only in body but in mind.

Advertising has linked sex with just about everything in our society. Whether the product has to do with people, clothes, food or cars a sexual angle is persistently introduced. No one can pretend to live a godly life without attempting to come to terms with this subtle yet all-pervasive pressure to mental impurity.

There are two faulty strategies that we must avoid in dealing with this problem. Sometimes people try to make guilt a stronger motivation to do right than a recognition of wrong desires. They immerse themselves in self-hatred, shame, and contempt – only to find that the problem resurfaces stronger than before.

The other faulty approach is through self-analysis and introspection. This method attempts to locate the problem in past experiences or present circumstances and results in self-absorption rather than a face-to-face encounter with the real problem of sin. So what steps do we need to take to deal with the problem of mental impurity?

The first step in the Bible’s solution to this dilemma is to face the problem directly. John tells us to “confess our sins” (1 John 1:9). It is not self-abuse through guilt tripping or self-absorption through endless analysis that will bring forgiveness, but

honest and genuine confession of our rebellion against God. The second step is to entrust ourselves to the faithfulness of God. Only in His strength can we obey Him and follow “the way of escape” from temptation which He has promised to provide (1 Cor. 10:13). We must believe that in every situation there is both the spiritual strength and the practical opportunity available to us to overcome mental impurity.

The third step is to make a personal resolution to adopt an attitude of right-thinking. Peter says to “arm yourselves also with the same mind” as Christ, that we should not live “for the lust of men, but for the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:1-2). This means that we must consciously order our living and our thinking so that we actively ward off and avoid temptation.

The fourth step involves the cultivation of right desires. Paul tells us to find “whatever is true ... noble ... pure ... lovely ... admirable ... excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things” (Phil. 4:8). We need a radical change of interest and appetite. We need to understand that the problem of mental purity is not merely an individual one. It is an issue that the Christian community needs to address together. Why? Because there are practical steps that can be taken collectively to reduce the opportunity for temptation. Paul tells us “not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13).

We need to help one another identify what the obstacles to holiness are. Those who are younger in faith may need the wisdom and experience of those who are older in the Christian life at this point. A wide range of questions could be discussed such as: How conscious should a Christian be not only of fashion but also of modesty in the matter of clothes? At what point does popular music become inappropriate? How should a Christian relate to the Australian pub and beach culture? What is the difference between being friendly and being forward? We need to develop an environment where we “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Andrew Clarke is minister of Bendigo Presbyterian Church and serves on the Victorian Church and Nation Committee. 

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Don't just do it

Sex is about commitment, suggests Murray Norman.

Just do it. If it feels good, go right ahead. This is what the world feeds us. I remember when I told some of my friends at work that I was getting married. They couldn't believe it. Their reaction was "too young, too much commitment, too much hassle. Why not try before you buy? Sleep together, see if you're compatible? If it works then get more serious, try living together. But, don't rush marriage because it's a big commitment. If the going gets tough or you get a better offer, walk away, try someone else."

Is this what we should be aiming for in our relationships? Or has God something better in mind? The Bible is clear: God does have a greater view of sex and our relationships. As a young married guy I can tell you that God's way is not only better than the imitation of love that the world is trying to sell you, but it is the only way to find true love which lasts for a lifetime.

Love is more about serving the other person than it is about sex. Don't get me wrong: God intended sexual relations between a husband and wife to be a source of pleasure and delight. The best sex is experienced within the bounds of a lifelong committed relationship and that means marriage.

Why is it so important to have a sexual relationship only within marriage? Because the sexual act binds you emotionally and spiritually to your partner. By having sex you are exposing yourself to another person, at the deepest level and in the most intimate way. It is a very vulnerable time where both individuals are sharing all they have with the other – their emotions, their hopes, their dreams, their whole self.

Young people often think that adults are just trying to stop them having fun when they warn them about pre-marital sex. Remember that Jesus said "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away" (Mt 5:28). Jesus is serious about sex before marriage.

According to Jesus, the real problem is lust. If you "just do it", or put yourself in a situation where you are causing yourself and the other person to get more and more physically aroused, you are being driven by lust.

The real problem with lust and getting



Murray Norman

too physical is that it is hard to stop once you start. That is, once you become sexually stimulated, it's very hard to put the brakes on. This is the reason why your youth group leaders, minister or parents say "Don't go into the same room alone with the lights off, don't arouse each other, don't park your car in secluded places." They know that lust is very hard to stop.

All these rules are to keep you from getting into a situation where you may lose control. You may say, "I'm stronger than that," but I can tell you now that nearly all people who have had sex – married or not – have started out with kissing and lying down together, and gone on from there.

The problem with lust is that it uses the other person to make you feel good. Real love sacrifices all that you have, even your life, for the other person. This is the type of love that Christ showed for you and me when he left heaven to come to earth and died in our place. He was nailed to a cross for a crime he didn't commit, left by all his friends, so that you and I might be saved from eternal pain and suffering in hell. This is real love: caring more about the other person than you do about your own needs.

"I love my boy / girlfriend and we want to get married, why can't we just kiss, and not go any further?" The Bible doesn't tell young couples not to kiss, but it does say don't be lustful. Jesus is not mucking about – if you're not married, don't put yourself in a situation where you're compromising your love for the other person. A good rule of thumb is if you wouldn't be happy for Jesus to walk in on you while you are kissing / hugging, don't do it. God has set boundaries and if you have crossed the line and acted lustfully towards your girlfriend / boyfriend, then you must stop.

If you have fallen into a pattern where you and your partner are flirting with lust,

there are a few simple steps to follow:

- Repent and start to live as Christ would have you live.
- Pray that God will keep you faithful.
- Talk to your girlfriend / boyfriend about setting some boundaries.
- Avoid situations where you are more vulnerable, such as sitting alone in a car in a secluded spot. Go with a group.
- The most important thing is to pray about it, even better, pray with another Christian whom you trust and who will keep you accountable.

Remember: sex is truly fulfilling only inside marriage. If marriage is not an option for the time being, then don't put yourself or your girl/ boyfriend in a compromising situation. Just remember, God will not allow Satan to tempt you past what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Email me at pyprojm@ozemail.com.au or write to me at:

3/50 Noble St ALLAWAH NSW 2218, if you would like:

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- To ask any question related to these issues.
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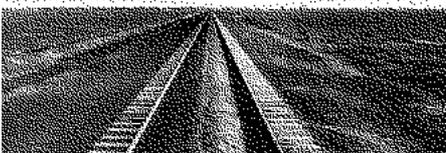
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Praise Corroboree

Aboriginal Christian leaders are planning a "Praise Corroboree" to be held in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra, from 1 to 8 November 1998. Prayer rallies are planned for 7pm for the last four days, and there will be bush tucker barbecues at 5pm every night except the National Day of Prayer and Fasting on Friday 6 November. Other events include conferences for indigenous women and an indigenous ministries leadership summit on 3,4 November, a victory praise march at Parliament House on Saturday 7 November at noon, and final celebrations in local Canberra churches on Sunday 8 November. For more details contact Praise Corroboree, PO Box 5209, Wollongong 2500, phone (02) 4226 4066. Website: www.praisecor.dynamite.com.au.

Young people invited to Reachout

The annual Reachout Convention will be held at the Katoomba Christian Convention Grounds on the weekend of 21-23 August. Reachout is a cooperative effort of 60 mission agencies and bible colleges throughout NSW. It aims to bring the needs of the mission field both in Australia and overseas to the hearts and minds of young people in NSW. Speakers this year



Students of Tahlee's inaugural TESOL course

are Michael Frost of Morling College and David Cummings of Wycliffe Bible Translators. More information and application forms can be obtained from Nick Green on (02) 9484 3825.

Tongues at Tahlee

Tahlee Bible College, north of Newcastle, NSW, has a vision to equip Christians for service and evangelism. As part of that vision, the college this year offered a five-week live-in short course in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The course was written by Robyn Stewart, wife of Rev Ian Stewart, both staff members of Tahlee and missionaries under APWM. Being accredited, it is an official qualification which will open doors into countries looking for qualified teachers of English.

Two of the six students in the inaugural course were Presbyterian missionaries: Sue Letcher and Dr Jacqui McLeod. Sue Letcher comments: "This course is a wonderful tool for evangelism in communities in Australia where there are people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Churches can set up small language classes or individuals can take students into their own homes. These people are highly motivated to learn English. They are often lonely and isolated, and very willing to form friendships with their teachers, providing

opportunities for sharing the Gospel."

The course is expected to run again next year, and more information can be obtained from Tahlee Bible College, Karuah NSW 2324. The college is holding its annual Open Day on Saturday 8 August, and all are welcome. Phone (02) 4997 3003 for further details.

Watching and praying

Several years ago, various Christians throughout Australia who had a recreational or scientific interest in the study and observation of birds decided to form a society. The basis of the Christian Bird Observers' Society is an evangelical view of the Bible, God, salvation in Christ Jesus, and of creation. The society exists to bring together professing Christians who share an interest in ornithology, and to promote the recreational and scientific study of birds. It seeks to do these things so that people may find recreation, enjoyment and knowledge in the wonder of God's creation and of birds in particular. A contact list is issued from time to time of members throughout Australia. Two issues of a magazine are published each year. The cost of subscription is \$7. For more information, contact:

The secretary CBOS, RSD 348, Cobuna, Vic. 3568, (phone 03 5456770).



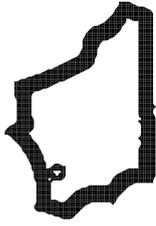
Submissions Welcome!

What's Happening in Your Church? Please share your news with our Australia-Wide audience. Send your Parish Paper, your news stories and pictures to:

The Rev Bob Thomas,
AP News Editor,
PO Box 6456
St Kilda Rd Central 3004

Phone: 0411 084 970
Email: onespres@ozemail.com.au

*Pictures will be returned if requested.
A stamped self-addressed envelope would help us*



News from WA

Blest in the West

Stuart Bonnington reports that Western Australian congregations are greatly encouraged by events in “the State of Excitement”. The Presbyterian Church in Western Australia has enjoyed another year of steady growth. In the older established congregations with their own buildings, in the non-English speaking congregations as well as in the church-planting congregations, the number of communicants and adherents has risen. Information from the 12 PCWA congregations published in the 1998 Presbyterian Church Year Book shows that the total number of communicants is up 14 per cent (589 to 671), the number of adherents is up 10 per cent (259 to 285), and the attendance figures rose a healthy 11 per cent (695 to 769).

Country ministry

For the first time since the foundation of the Presbyterian Country Ministries some years ago, it was possible in June to respond to a number of invitations to organise a ministry trip to the south-west of WA. Bible studies and worship services were held in Augusta, Albany and Jerramungup. The PCM wants to encourage and have contact with existing independent Christian groups as well as new people, and build on the pioneering work done in some of these regions by **Rev Rob Duncanson**.

New faces at Guildford

Steve and Jill McAlpine report that they have enjoyed their time at Guildford this year. “We have really witnessed God’s graciousness to us as a couple, and to the congregation in general,” reports Steve. “Coming as I did straight from my full-time studies at Trinity Theological College, I was somewhat daunted by the responsibility with which I was entrusted, especially the important task of preaching the Word on a regular basis. However, God has certainly sustained us, and we have received strong support from the elders and the congregation. “It has been great getting to know the Guildford people and sharing

their lives. A ministry of the Word and of prayer is often regarded as outmoded on the verge of the 21st century, but nothing could be further from the truth. This year both Jill and I are going through a steep learning curve. It’s fun, but it’s demanding. Jill works as an educational psychologist and is also studying for her Masters in clinical psychology. Since my position is half-time I also work as a freelance writer. Please pray that in the busyness and changes of life, our priority would be to know God better and live lives worthy of His calling.”



Friends for Life

“They were a breath of fresh air!” This was the reaction of many who took part in the various activities associated with the visit in January and February to the PCWA of **Rev David Thurston** and **Steve Marquet** from the PCNSW. Those who attended the various meetings were challenged and stimulated in the task of evangelism. The pair left a number of copies of David’s book *Making Friends for Life*, a workbook about evangelism designed for use in small groups. In it, David takes a study group step by step through planning and running an evangelistic event. It is a hands-on resource that will help the small groups in any congregation realise that effective evangelism is within the reach of everyone. For a copy, contact David Thurston on (02) 9636 1987.

David Shearer PIM Patrol

Ray Rutland reports from the Presbyterian Inland Mission’s David Shearer Patrol: “Following some deputation work, we had Easter at home, then packed the LandCruiser for our Midlands Wheatbelt Patrol (Bonnie Rock, Beacon, Bencubbin). Most calls this time were second visits, and many people remembered us. Responses were mainly positive, with only a couple of visits that were not as well received as the first. Perhaps they did not want to encourage us too much, as we really did intend to come back again and again. “Trudy and I had been invited to stay on a farm, and did so for a couple of nights. As arranged, I preached at their church. We

were very encouraged by the people’s interest in the work of the PIM. We later drove 100 kilometres north, to the point where farm country meets station country, and we visited the three stations in this area. Videos and books were lent to two families.

“We were openly told by a few people that they were encouraged by our visiting them, and we feel this will give us great opportunities to get back and build on the friendships that are being forged.”

Advance, struggle and growth

Rev Bruce Fraser is working among the people of Joondalup. Prayer is asked for this group of younger people and Bruce Fraser’s health.

Rev John Myles resigned from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia at the February meeting of the Presbytery of WA.

The **Leederville** congregation elected a five-member Board of Property and Finance in April. The congregation continues to develop, with a growth group, a ladies group and Sunday school now operating. **Ross Fraser** is leading the work as well as studying at the Bible college.

Peppermint Grove Church is involved with the Westminster Presbyterian Church in COCOS (Christians On Campus On Sunday), ministering to a student congregation at the University of WA.

Scots Church, Fremantle, was packed to the door on Easter Sunday as the Presbytery of WA inducted **Rev Dr Samuel Huang** into the Chinese Presbyterian Church.

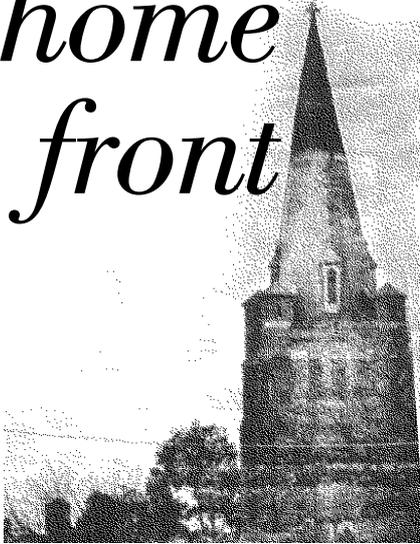
The **Balga** Detached Youth Work opened a new office at the rear of the Mirrabooka Shopping Centre on Sunday 22 March.

We rejoice with the **Santos** family at the birth on 17 April of a baby daughter, Keziah Adassa Abreu dos Santos! Keziah is absolutely beautiful! Julio Santos is the home missionary working with the Portuguese congregation in Perth.

Stuart, Sharon and Rebecca Bonnington were on long service leave during March, April and May. Among other things, Stuart was able to complete his MTH in Presbyterian history, *Like a Mustard Seed: A History of the PCWA from 1829-1901*. He hopes it will be submitted soon to the examiners.

The Presbytery of WA commissioned **Rev Soon Yong Park** into the work of the Korean congregation on 8 February, then on 27 Feb the presbytery commissioned **Ray Rutland** into the work of the Presbyterian Inland Mission David Shearer Patrol.

home front



Baptism of fire for NSW moderator



The NSW General Assembly, held from 6 to 10 July at PLC Croydon, was a memorable gathering despite the fact that it was one of the coldest July weeks in Sydney on record. Held in the cavernous Thompson Hall – PLC's gymnasium and indoor sports centre – the assembly was marked by a spirit of warmth and friendliness that was largely due to the example of the moderator, **Rev David Tsai**.

The assembly began on a high note on the Monday night with a powerful address from the moderator calling on believers to fear God and to live for His glory. "This is the eternal gospel," Mr. Tsai said, "to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people."

In recent years, the NSW assembly has reflected the cultural and racial diversity that is now typical of the wider community. Indeed, the Presbyterian Church has been a trend-setter in rising above the parochialism and prejudice that characterised Australian society under the White Australia Policy in the 1950s and '60s. Mr Tsai is the second Chinese moderator of the NSW assembly in the past five years, which is simply a reflection of the ethnic diversity and tolerance of the Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps this is why the *Sydney Morning*

Herald was so intrigued with Mr Tsai's election as moderator, and why it ran a controversial story on him on the second day of the assembly. Mr Tsai, a Hong Kong-born Chinese, created a storm in the press by taking a reasonably tolerant approach to **Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party**.

"I can understand what Pauline Hanson is saying," said Mr Tsai, who speaks English as his native language. "A large number of Asian people who come here today are not able to command the English language to express their feelings, and that inevitably causes a distinct sense of 'them' and 'us'."

But he doesn't think Pauline Hanson or the One Nation Party have the answers.

"To say people should have English when they come here is misguided. It's the desire to learn English that's important." Not everyone agreed, and there were howls of protest in the letters column that a Presbyterian leader had not taken a more forthright stand against the One Nation platform.

Sadly, many of the correspondents were not present at the assembly to see how Mr Tsai, through his public prayers and unflinching courtesy, was able to moderate controversial issues to a peaceful and harmonious conclusion. The lasting impression of all the commissioners to the NSW Assembly was that Mr Tsai's focus on prayer, as well as his firm but gentle chairmanship, made the assembly a genuinely friendly place to be.

Fighting fire with fire

The Queensland Christian Education Department will hold its third "schoolies week" camp this year in the last week of November. The camp is designed as an alternative to the infamous "schoolies week" on the Gold Coast, where year 12 students congregate to celebrate the end of their secondary education. The camp will consist of relevant Bible studies and plenty of time for campers to relax and enjoy themselves. There will be opportunities to discuss important issues, make friends, and get to hear and see what Christianity is really all about. The camp leader will be **Rev David McDougall**, collegiate minister at Camp Hill, Brisbane.

Jewish witness in Sydney

Rev John and Katie Graham, ministering at Bondi Presbyterian Church, are active in sharing their faith under the auspices of Christian Witness to Israel in this largely Jewish area of Sydney. They tell of meeting a young American boy who had been exposed to Gospel teaching before,

and who they trust will be witnessed to in future. During his brief stay in Sydney he was open and receptive to their witness. Two other young men visiting from overseas proved to be Jews in name but not in faith, one of them expressing the view that all religions (including Judaism) are wrong, that we are here by chance and after death there is nothing. Nevertheless they accepted some good literature and expressed a desire to come to the church at Bondi. "It is our prayer that as these young men travel around and finally return to their respective homes in Israel and England, they may reflect on what they heard that day," writes **John Graham**. "May the Spirit of God enlighten them."

Better health in Queensland

The Queensland Committee for Building a Healthy Church has been collecting and analysing figures from all the congregations around the state for many years. Their statistics show that, while the state population has grown by 30 per cent, the number of people attending church services across the state has remained static. So to help congregations "be healthy", the committee has brought together a team of people who will be willing to sit down with congregations, sessions and presbyteries and share the knowledge and skills they have. The convener, Dalby minister **John Morrow**, said the team would be able to help congregations understand the findings of the National Church Life Survey; suggest ways of making congregations more effective in building up the church and reaching out; and provide a forum for those who have new ideas and fresh ways of reaching Australians with the Gospel.

A joyful noise

When elder **Dr Owen Ingles** was inducted as moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania on 12 May, his grandson **Antony Pederson** piped him into the Auld Kirk, Sidmouth (West Tamar Parish, north of Launceston) to the tunes of *O for a closer walk with God* and *Amazing Grace*. The induction was attended by some 110 people. The moderator hopes to visit all Tasmanian parishes in the next year.

Victorian moderator-designate

Rev John Woodward, BTh, FCA, minister of Malvern in Melbourne's inner eastern suburbs, has been elected moderator-designate of the 1998 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. Mr Woodward ministered in the NSW charges

of Hawkesbury District and Young before moving to Malvern in 1990. As convener of the Community Chaplaincy Committee of the PCV Mr Woodward has greatly expanded the Presbyterian Church's involvement in ministry to hospitals and other community services. His wife, Lyn, works closely with him in both the work of the parish and chaplaincy. Mr Woodward's theme as Moderator will be "the Lordship and Deity of Jesus Christ". He proposes to advance this theme throughout his year as moderator, seeking to proclaim the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of a pluralistic society.

People in the news

The session at **Surrey Hills** (Vic) has recorded its deep appreciation to elder **Ted Miles**, who has served since 1983 and before that in Oakleigh, but whose advancing years and uncertain health have brought about his retirement.

Rev Barry Porter was ordained to the ministry and appointed to Wyndham (Werribee, south-west of Melbourne) Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Melbourne West on Sunday 5 July.

The new president of the Queensland PWA is **Mrs Jean Perry**. Jean has been associated with the Presbyterian Church and the PWA in both Queensland and New South Wales. Together with her husband Niell, they were full-time missionaries with Christian Literature Crusade for a number of years, spending two years with the mission in New Zealand. Since returning to Australia, Jean has again been active in the PWA at local and state levels, having served as state treasurer before being elected president. Jean and Niell are members of the Bald Hills Congregation, Brisbane.

Rev Charles Abel has retired from the ministry after serving in the Church of Scotland and the PCA since 1962. Charles and Mary are living in retirement in Dorrigo (NSW), not too far from Armidale, where they have ministered since 1982. A man of perceptive wit and strong faith, his delightful Scottish brogue brought light and life to many a dull moment in committee meetings. His year of service as moderator of the NSW General Assembly brought much healing to the NSW church.

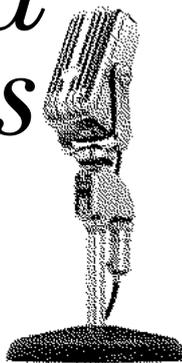
On Sunday 31 May, members of **Beacon Hill Presbyterian Church**, in the Northern Beaches/Plateau area of Sydney, celebrated the 45th anniversary of the founding of their congregation. Much catching up was done at lunch after the service with former members who returned for the day.

With Christ

Mildred Douglas, a much-loved member of Gosford (NSW) congregation, was called Home suddenly on 6 May, just after finishing teaching a Scripture lesson at Niagara Park Public School. She had been awarded the Department of Education's Jones Medal in 1940 for the most distinguished student teacher. She taught in many schools throughout NSW and in 1949 for one year at Church Street School in London. In 1966 she spent time in Nigeria and was instrumental in training infants teachers.

Armidale College of Advanced Education has inaugurated an annual event, 'the Mildred Douglas Presentation in Aboriginal Studies', because of her work done in Armidale on multicultural studies, specialising in aboriginal education. **Rod Mallinson**, her minister, comments: "Mildred loved her Lord and she loved teaching little ones about Him. She had been coordinating Scripture teaching in the primary schools in Gosford for many years, and even to the end she was teaching 14 lessons a fortnight."

world news



Stanford Reid biography planned

The biography of the late **Rev Professor W. Stanford Reid** is being written by his close friend and colleague, **Rev Dr Donald MacLeod**. Readers of *AP* may remember that Dr Reid taught at the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne in 1982, 1983 and 1984. A minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, he is best known as Professor of History at the University of Guelph (1965-79) and as a prolific writer, especially of the biography of John Knox, *Trumpeter of God*. Professor Reid wished to do all he could to ensure that the Presbyterian Church of Australia maintained its historic evangelical and reformed basis after 1977. Dr MacLeod would welcome correspondence or personal reminiscences anyone in Australia might

have; also copies of any letters written by Dr Reid. Dr MacLeod's address is: Box 1124, Trenton, ON, Canada K8V 5R9. His email address is: amacleod@msn.com.

A new generation

In Scotland the Lord has raised up a younger generation of evangelical ministers in the place of those who have recently retired from key Church of Scotland pulpits. The congregation of **Holyrood Abbey** in Edinburgh, where **Rev James Philip** had such a significant influence, have called **Rev Philip Hare** from Ullapool. The Tron Kirk in central Glasgow, from which **Rev Eric Alexander** retired recently, have called **Rev Sinclair Ferguson**, of Westminster Theological Seminary. Gilcomston South in Aberdeen, from which **Rev William Still** led the evangelical movement for more than 40 years, have called **Rev Dominic Smart** from Dundee, while **Rev Peter MacDonald** from Kirkcaldy has been inducted to St George's West in Edinburgh. Prayer is asked for these and other evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland, including: **Rev Peter Neilson**, associate minister at St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh; **Rev Colin Sinclair**, formerly of Scripture Union and now minister of Palmerston Place, Edinburgh; **Rev Willie Black** who has recently gone to Stornoway; and **Rev Graham Houston**, soon to become general secretary of the National Bible Society.

MERF helping Sudan

Middle East Reformed Fellowship reports that the situation among more than 35,000 families in Sudan within the community of Reformed churches is extremely serious. These people are facing starvation and life-threatening diseases, with infants and young children most at risk as the death rate continues to climb. MERF is appealing for at least \$US300,000 to provide direct funding for the relief of at least some of these families. All enquiries regarding MERF and the Sudan Appeal may be made to the Australian director, **Rev Les Percy**, PO Box 64, Zillmere 4034, phone (07) 3862 8606, email merf-aus@ucaqld.com.au.

New book by Pratt

Dr Richard Pratt of Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida, who will soon be making another visit to Australia for lectures in Sydney and Melbourne, has written a commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles which is about to be published by Christian Focus Publications. ^{AP}

Ministering to ministers

Stuart Bonnington talks to David Searle

David, you are Warden of Rutherford House in Edinburgh. What is Rutherford House?

Rutherford House was established in 1983 by the Scottish Evangelical Research Trust. The trust is made up of a number of senior ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland – such as the late Rev William Still of Aberdeen, Rev Eric Alexander of Glasgow, Rev Professor Sinclair Ferguson of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and Professor Frank Lyall of the University of Aberdeen – who wanted to fight liberal theology by promoting sound conservative, evangelical reformed theology.

The aim of Rutherford House is to encourage and revive evangelical ministries throughout Scotland, Northern Ireland and the world. This has to be done through encouraging scholarship, by publishing and by training through conferences. Rutherford House is a charity and is supported entirely by the gifts of God's people. It crosses the denomination barriers, and though its doctrinal position is reformed and its subordinate standard of faith is the Westminster Confession, we do not exclude from our ministry those who may not dot the 'i's' or cross the 't's' with us.

How did you become warden?

While I was minister of a Presbyterian Church of Ireland congregation and after having served for 20 years as a Church of Scotland minister, I was approached by William Still, the Chairman of the Trustees of Rutherford House and asked to become Warden. I took up my appointment in June 1993. The trustees were looking for someone with wide experience of pastoral work and preaching and also someone who had "turned round" liberal churches to become

evangelical. I suppose I fitted that job description. They also wanted someone who would be reasonably at home with academics.

What is your vision for Rutherford House?

My vision for Rutherford House is to enable younger ministers to minister effectively. That involves me in training in three main areas: expository preaching; various aspects of pastoral work – time management, stress management, team building, leadership; and training elders to work effectively with the minister. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is a congregation. It's hard, therefore, for me to assess my work as what I do will only become apparent in its effectiveness or otherwise after many years.

Some of us in Australia know of the Rutherford Journal of Church and Ministry. Could you tell AP about it?

I established the RJCM as a mouthpiece for Rutherford House. It is aimed not only at reformed evangelical ministers, but also at those who are not sure of their theological position. It aims to bring in the waverers and to enable them to see their ministries more clearly and so to begin to take a stand. I try to include in each issue one article on some issue for pastors, an interview with someone of interest in the Scottish or Irish scene, often also a sermon by one of the reformers, and something that will be of interest and value to elders.

I've come across a number of books published by Rutherford House. What are you trying to achieve with your publishing program?

Our publications are on four levels. First, we publish doctoral theses which we judge will make a significant contribution to reformed scholarship. Second, we publish aids for pastors and elders, eg, an Elders Training Manual, and *Work of the Pastor* (by William Still), and *Coming Alive* (a reformed alternative to 'Alpha' course). Third, we publish books dealing with controversial issues such as pluralism, the Toronto blessing, homosexuality, unemployment etc. Fourth, we have published several books to encourage the teaching of the Christian faith in Scottish schools. With the rapid growth of pluralism in

Western Europe, the teaching of the Christian faith is being neglected while Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism receive a high profile. To try to encourage teachers to give school children some instruction in Christianity, we have published several books for primary schools.

You are involved in organising the Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference. What is that all about?

Every second year, we organise a Dogmatics Conference, the papers of which are invariably published. The aim of the 'Dogs' Conference is to make a contribution to theological thinking in Scotland. For that reason, we involve a fairly wide spectrum of theological opinion (keeping broadly within the ranks of orthodoxy). One conference was on 'Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell', and the book necessarily included contrary views, being a symposium on the subject. But it was a serious theological work with major chapters by men such as Paul Helm and Henri Blocher. The last 'Dogs' Conference was in 1997 and was entitled 'Westminster: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow?'

David, why are you coming to Australia?

A number of people have noted that the work I am doing among ministers and elders is filling a gap very often lacking. For that reason, I have ministered in Brazil and India as well as the four countries of the UK. The work of encouraging and training elders seems to be appreciated the world over, as is the work of helping ministers with expository preaching and pastoral issues. During my 33 years in the pastoral ministry, I made many mistakes and, I trust, through them learned valuable lessons. Also, I had several assistant ministers working with me over a 17-year period and in seeking to help them learn ministry skills, I learned a little more myself. So I am really drawing on past experience and using it to help others. My travels around the UK and to other countries are also major learning experiences. I am able to take back to Scotland vital lessons learned from others. So in coming to Australia I am also keen to be taught in order to share with others back home some of the good things you are doing.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Bicton Presbyterian Church, WA.

David Searle's Australian itinerary:

Perth: 22 to 30 August Details:

Contact Rev Keith Morris, (08) 9384 9186

Brisbane: 31 August to 6 September Details:

Contact Rev Ian McIvor, (07) 3871 9347

Melbourne: 7 to 13 September Details:

Contact Rev John Wilson, (03) 9898 9384.

The religious supermarket

Women are more open than ever – but to what?

“You’re right,” remarked the woman behind the counter in the Insurance Office. “I do love dolphins. I’ve got them all over the house. They give me peace.”

“That’s very interesting,” I replied. “I go to the maker of the dolphins to get my peace.”

“Do you? What do you mean?”

“I go to Jesus. He gives me peace in this life and after my life here is finished.”

The conversation ended here as the next customer came up behind me. A short encounter, hardly a Pauline preaching opportunity; but a seed was sown. I returned later to give her a New Testament, and I continue to pray for her.

Have you noticed that women are very ready to talk about spiritual matters these days? About 30 years ago, when training for the various Crusades, I found it was nearly impossible to get people to talk about spiritual matters. You did not dare talk to the average Mrs Australia about Jesus – she was not only uninterested, but decidedly wary of your message and suspicious of your motives.

Today, women are aware of their spiritual identities, that they are spiritual beings. Money and material possessions do not satisfy; relationships and families are under strain; and their own awareness of the global needs of the earth and the people upon it drives them to look for spiritual answers.

It might be noted that they are looking for these answers in all sorts of places: astrology, psychics, magic, witchcraft, numerology, Tarot cards, mysticism and Eastern Religions. In addition, we have the various religions brought to Australia with our new multicultural immigrants. It is indeed a religious supermarket out there – Jesus has become just one of the gurus and Christianity has to take its chances with the rest.

Christianity may be only one of the many religions on the supermarket shelves; but we must be there and actively promoting the claims of the God of the Bible in ways intelligible to the spiritual shoppers.

There are wonderful opportunities to speak about Jesus to women who are hungry for spiritual input into their lives. Here



Leah Balzer

are some ideas about how we can cooperate with God in this ministry.

Celebrate the similar: The Christian world view is very different from that of those around us and we tend to focus on the differences which separate, rather than the common humanity which unites. There is a commonality of experience and often of desires which unite most women – we want the best for our children, we want peace and happiness, we have a longing for God – even if we don’t know it, we want to be accepted and to make a difference, we have a passion for justice and a longing for kindness; we have pain, disease, birth and death to cope with, a longing after something better and a guilt which wears us down.

Does all this sound familiar? These are all areas we can use to speak of the love of the Father and the experience of his forgiveness in Jesus. But we must be gentle, sensitive and honest. Sometimes we only need to sow a seed; we can leave the Spirit of God to make it grow.

Expand your mind: It is at this point we start to make ourselves vulnerable as we begin to look at life through someone else’s spectacles. We need to do some reading and ask some leading questions and even more importantly really listen to the answers. If we are serious about really communicating with women today, we need to master something about New Age beliefs and the basics of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

Have you read *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield? It’s the most popular book in Australia and has topped the charts for months. It is advertised as ‘the book which captures the spiritual moment’ and is an exposition of the main thrusts of New Age beliefs, the reading of which should open your eyes to what many women today believe. You can use what

you read as jumping points to talk about Jesus. Other books which deal with ways to chat about Jesus are Alister McGrath’s *Building Bridges* and Michael Green and McGrath’s *Springboard for Faith*. These will open your minds to other points of view and give you confidence.

Creating opportunities: We need to create occasions for togetherness. Take every opportunity to celebrate – Christmas is a good start. Have the neighbours in, organise a street party, get to know those you live among. During an afternoon tea at our house for the women of the street to welcome a newcomer and to celebrate a Very Important Birthday (not her 21st) of another neighbour, we learnt that one woman has lung cancer and the one-year-old daughter of our other neighbour had her kidneys damaged by a virus and was facing dialysis and a transplant. Both of these opportunities for valuable friendship came out of an ordinary social afternoon. (The woman has gone into remission and the child improved the day after we prayed for her and is now clear.) It’s my experience that people will always come to your house for food. This could be followed by a speaker (make sure you tell them if you’ve organised this), a video, or just talking together.

How busy are you? For this you need time. If your life is programmed up to the last minute and you are always rushing off to another appointment, you don’t have time to be available, nor do you have a spare moment to stay still and listen.

Be encouraged. Michael Green says: “It is a fascinating time to be alive. The dogmas of the Enlightenment, which have dominated Western thought for two centuries, are in full retreat. The barrenness of materialism is evident. The hunger for spirituality is very clear. Even if people have yet to discover fully the spirituality of historic Christianity, they are aware that there is a spiritual dimension to life which is not being satisfied. We are standing at one of the turning points of human thought.”

Leah Balzer is an ESL teacher to adults; at present, she is completing a Diploma of Bible and Ministry. She is a KYB Leader and an Outreach speaker.

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Minding the language

Victorian moderator Keith Bell returns from India with a challenge.



I was thrilled to be invited to India “to visit Presbyterian missionaries” so I could understand from experience where they are working and what they are doing on our behalf. With the blessing of APWM and with the permission, encouragement and funding of my congregation, I was able to be in India for almost four weeks in February and March.

Nothing you read or hear about India can prepare you for the reality of what you experience. India is a magnificent country populated by majestic peoples. There are more than 1600 different Indian language groups in the land and they all have their own culture. More than 300 of these languages have no portion of the Scriptures written down. Very few have the full Bible. What a challenge this is to the Church – to get God’s Word into the heart languages of the people.

In Guwahati, I had my eyes opened to the wonderful world of Bible translation by attending a Bible translation workshop. This was a cooperative venture between Scripture Gift Mission (SGM), the Bible Society of India and Wycliffe Bible Translators. Its purpose was to bring together a team of translators and language consultants to tackle the task of translating the booklet *Jesus Christ Has Power to Save Us* (excerpts from the gospel of Mark) into several languages simultaneously.

I had a vague idea of how Bible translation was accomplished. First there is a rough draft and a back translation into English. Then a bit of a polish and off to the publisher. That’s not quite the way it works, there is a lot more to it than that. I had not considered that people might not want to use the same script we use. Nor had I contemplated the difficulties of translating abstract ideas.

I was to learn many things in the art and

science of Bible translation – including that it is just plain hard work. Just typing the manuscripts (I did two of them) is exacting and trying.

In only seven days, a team of more than 20 translators and eight language consultants (two were Australian Presbyterians) accomplished the goal of translating the booklet into 11 micro (less than 1,000,000 speakers) languages. The key criteria in selecting a language for this workshop were that the language had none of the Scripture in writing and that at least two translators from the language group attend the workshop.

The number of language groups who wanted to take part was overwhelming. Many were denied access because they could not send a second participant.

At the end of the workshop, the booklet in 11 new languages, but this did not complete the task. They still must be printed and distributed (free of charge) to the people who need them. SGM will be covering the costs. I asked the director if he had the funds. He said: “No.”

That started me thinking. “All this hard work will accomplish nothing without funding. Two Australian Presbyterians were language consultants. Why should their work be wasted? Wouldn’t it be great if Australian Presbyterians would cover the cost of printing?” So I decided to launch an appeal to raise the money. I set a target of \$10,000 which I am assured would be close to the amount required. Thus far just over \$1,000 has been received.

I encourage you to prayerfully consider supporting this project. Please send your donation to me at 21 McIntyre Street, Hamilton, Vic., 3000. Cheques should be made payable to Hamilton Presbyterian Church.

India is a fascinating place and I have been privileged to go there. God is doing great things in that land but a great deal more needs to be done. Many opportunities for evangelism exist and we would do well to become more involved with the churches and mission organisations who are working there.

Please keep India and our folk there in your prayers.

Keith Bell, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, is minister of the Hamilton Presbyterian Church. 

The Council of Christian Education in Schools (CCES), an ecumenical body responsible for religious education and chaplaincy in Victorian Schools, invites inquiries from persons interested in serving as

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Romantic relationships

Surprisingly positive

Here's a neat idea. Next time you're looking for a way to share your faith, why not start by saying something surprisingly positive?

Here's an example. When your non-Christian friends are chatting about their latest video rentals, they're probably expecting you to chime in with comments on the bits that offended your Christian values. Why not do the opposite, and actually affirm something?

The trouble is, being negative is such a hard habit to break. We're so used to tak-

ing offence, to taking the moral high ground, that it probably doesn't even occur to us that movies can say anything worthwhile at all. Many don't.

But as Katrina Ramsay demonstrates in her review of *My Best Friend's Wedding*, while it's easy to make glib criticisms of the movie, it may be more profitable to think a little harder, and say something positive. Who knows? It may lead to a great opportunity to talk about the gospel.

Phil Campbell

ly experienced woman. However she is also portrayed in a blonde, cheery, little-girl kind of a way, and looks insubstantial next to the strong, funny and intelligent Julianne. This identification with Julianne, despite her obvious faults, shows us how easily we are seduced by our desire for a romantic relationship, and how easily we confuse feelings of love with selfish desires.

My Best Friend's Wedding is one of the few Hollywood romances that don't end happily. Julianne has to come to terms with the fact that even though it is absolutely inconceivable to her, the guy who has been "the man in her life" for nine years genuinely loves another. He will not leave Kimmy.

Despite all the cinematic signals given to us that show that Michael and Julianne are "perfect for each other", Michael refuses to conform to romantic convention and does not fall in love with Julia Roberts. Merely casting Julia Roberts as the lead in a romantic comedy sets up a whole range of expectations for the audience that the film toys with. I found it an arresting experience to see an almost black comedy that refuses to appease our desire for easy alliances and automatic relational harmony. Julianne is forced to reassess her own scheming motives, and decide that a true love is self-sacrificial, not conniving. If she truly loves Michael, she will not lie to him, or manipulate his family, or force her editor to pose as her fictional fiancé to make him jealous. Instead, she will back off, and submit her own desire to the happiness of others. She comes to the conclusion that "the world is as it should be, because my best friend has married the best woman".

However because the film endears Julianne to us, in spite of her obvious faults, it shows us the dangerous ground we tread when we're involved in romantic relationships. The strength of our desires can make any one of us behave in ways that are cruel and selfish.

Ultimately, *My Best Friend's Wedding* shows us that without the transforming work of God's Spirit in our lives, the tendency for our self-centredness to override our concern for others is strong.

Katrina Ramsay is a final year Arts student who majors in film studies. 

Video Watch

My Best Friend's Wedding

Katrina Ramsay

Recently released on video, *My Best Friend's Wedding* is a romantic comedy starring the beautiful Julia Roberts. The film sounds innocuous enough with a relatively innocent title like *My Best Friend's Wedding*. Nevertheless it is a film which has a heavy dose of human vices and yet, in an unexpected way for Hollywood, affirms the importance of faithfulness to your promises. This may seem incongruous, and even highly unlikely, but Australian director P J Hogan achieves it through clever character construction and subversion of genre.

Hogan has already shown his insight into weddings and family relationships in *Muriel's Wedding*, a film that explores similar longings and machinations. In *My Best Friend's Wedding*, Hogan develops as his main character Julianne Potter, a selfish, conniving woman who manipulates everyone around her to break up the wedding of her best friend Michael and his new fiancée, Kimmy. Her motive?

After nine years as "just friends", she's finally decided she is in love with him herself. Ultimately, though, she fails, and

Michael marries Kimmy. This unexpected undermining of the conventions of romantic comedy (that the main guy gets with the main girl) is a major reason for the film's impact.

My Best Friend's Wedding employs many of the antics and good-natured schemings of the classic screwball comedies of the '40s and '50s — elements that are kept alive today in popular films like *While You Were Sleeping*. However, where the deception of Sandra Bullock's character in *While You Were Sleeping* endears her to the whole cast, and ultimately means she gets her man, Julianne's plotting is cruel and nasty.

More than once, Hogan allows her meddling to develop beyond our expectations, alienating her from the audience — so much so that many friends of mine came down wholeheartedly on the side of Kimmy, rejecting the traditionally strong narrative appeal of the main character. They saw Julianne as purely vindictive — an unusual quality in any character played by Julia Roberts.

What makes *My Best Friend's Wedding* an intriguing film is that an equally common audience response is one of empathy towards Julianne. It is not hard to believe that she genuinely cares for Michael, or that they are well-suited for each other.

Kimmy is a character who sends mixed messages. On the one hand she is a sexual-

letters



Defending a tradition

I was saddened to read Ian Smith's remarks about the Presbyterian Church before 1977 in his article 'Why plant churches?' (*AP*, June). As one trained before 1977, I feel deeply hurt at the rude and insensitive nature of his comments, not to mention their inaccuracy. I am angry that he has dismissed so scathingly the work of generations of faithful church leaders – ministers and elders, theological teachers – whom God used to build a denomination which was vital and progressive, in which theological inquiry was not stifled or ministers intimidated into silence and which was noted for its scholarship and its influence in the corridors of power of this nation. When one attended the Assembly in those days one felt in touch with many generations of mainstream Christian witness and part of a strong and vigorous Christian tradition which was making a significant contribution to the nation. Today there seems little left of that tradition, which is a pity. Mr Smith should recognise that our post-institutional, post-membership society has created a very difficult environment for the church. It is not the brand of theology which has depleted our established congregations but wider sociological change. There is an urgent need now for all of us to look at building up established congregations as well as planting new ones. As for 'termite-eaten rafters', really! Calling one another names is not very helpful.

*Rev Malcolm Cram
Gladesville, Qld*

A kneedy church

Congratulations to the Editorial Committee for the fine job being done with *AP*. Last issue's articles on Revival were excellent, especially those by David Jones and Douglas Milne. The quote in the article by Douglas taken from *The Presbyterian* of 1872 was particularly apt. We can use all the measures under the sun

to grow our churches but the heart of the matter is that without the Divine Presence, and the resultant conversion of souls and nourishment of the faithful, all our efforts are in vain. Surely the most fundamental need we have in the church at the moment is for more searching prayer that we may be blessed with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. However, it is not enough to be aware of this fact. We have actually to put it into practice and that seems to be where we all fall short. Thanks for the timely reminder which I hope drives us all to our knees. Yours in Him

*Rev David Niven
The Gap, Qld*

Contemporary disaster

I read the letter of John Langbridge (*AP*, April) with much dismay. It confirmed my belief that in these days, or any other, contemporary is not a good adjective when combined with church.

The church at its foundation was anything but contemporary, its teachings were totally opposed to the contemporary views of God, religion and conduct. It almost lost its soul when it became contemporary during the reign of the Emperor Constantine.

I doubt if the church in all its history has ever been more contemporary than it is now in Australia. Never has it been seen to be more of a dying, irrelevant anachronism than now.

John Langbridge's choice of adjectives is illuminating: contemporary, vibrant, booming. I think of the contemporary society in NSW and notice the club movement is vibrant and booming. From what I hear and read it appears the gambling industry in Victoria is vibrant and booming.

Enough said.

*John Dempsey,
Doonside, NSW*

Uplifted

The session of St Andrews, Newcastle, congratulates *AP*'s editorial staff for the marked improvement of the magazine. While we purchase copies for distribution at the church for those who are not regular subscribers, we have noticed recently that all copies are taken on the first Sunday they are put out. The session asked that I request the committee of management to purchase additional copies, as the magazine now appears to be attracting attention by its cover and recent good articles.

*D.W. Taylor, Session Clerk
St Andrews, Newcastle, NSW*

Brutal, then and now

The essay 'The Corporate Cannibals' by Barney Zwartz (*AP*, June) was thought-provoking. My information is that the main claim to fame of Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was being instrumental in influencing the abrogation of the Royal Patent by which an Englishman was permitted to coin Irish currency. There seems to be a parallel with Australia today in that the bulk of our currency (credit) has been globalised. I am convinced economic rationalism is a distorted out-growth of St Paul's assertion, "if a man will not work he should not eat", and the Protestant work ethic. Events in Ireland in Swift's day were largely a conflict between the economic philosophy of Irish Catholicism and Anglo Protestantism. The English treated the Irish with disdain, considering them lazy and indolent and their tendency to emphasise the social rather than the economic side of life the reason for their poverty. The crude brutality used to exploit the Irish and Ireland's resources certainly has a parallel with modern economic rationalism. There is always a need for economic initiative, but when economics overrule social values, society can come too close to the depraved reasoning portrayed in Jonathan Swift's satirical essay 'A Modest Proposal'.

*Robert Bell
Horsham, Vic*

Benign cannibals

Regarding Barney Zwartz's article 'The Corporate Cannibals' (*AP*, June), although it is true that people who engage in business must make a profit to survive, I doubt if financial motive is their sole incentive. There are many who are greedy and ruthless like the robber in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but I have the impression that traders today are very conscious of their reputation. They strive to present an image which will not offend customers or clients and thereby damage their business. Major companies have a high standard of ethics and realise that if that standard is not retained they will suffer in the long run. Recently the chairman of Shell Transport and Trading Company made these interesting statements: "Financial gain alone does not explain the commitment, the effort and the belief so many Shell people pour into their work. Although economic considerations are given priority, other considerations are not swept aside." I understand a very senior executive of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia made a not dissimilar remark to senior state management recently. The Shell chairman made this

additional comment: "I am an oil man, a geologist, father, sailor, Briton, Christian. I always felt when I got out of bed in the morning that I was making a real contribution to my company, to the development of the country in which I was working and to overall economic progress." So Mr Zwartz, there are people in industry who see people and community as important, as well as maximising profits.

*R.W. Pilkington
Elder, Ann Street Presbyterian Church
Brisbane*

Pill no answer

Comments made by Danielle Mazza, medical director of Family Planning Victoria (Melbourne *Herald Sun* 15 June and *Age* 16 June) that the over-the-counter provision of the morning-after pill would reduce teen pregnancy and its associated trauma is, I believe, an over-simplification of a very complex issue. In fact, it could spell disaster for our young people. Unmonitored provision of this pill could expose teenage girls to a whole range of unforeseen health risks. It loads the system with concentrated bursts of high doses of the contraceptive pill, now administered only under strict medical supervision. My concern is that unsupervised access could encourage indiscriminate and repeated use of these hormones. This also places enormous responsibility on not only the pharmaceutical companies, but the pharmacists involved in dispensing the drugs. It is not only the health risks that are of concern, but also the emotional factors. Teenagers in crisis need more than an over-the-counter solution to their problems. Counselling and support would be bypassed and the unsafe behaviour that leads to the possibility of a teenage pregnancy remains unaddressed, locking the teenager further into an at-risk lifestyle. Over-the-counter access to the morning-after pill may seem a very attractive option but, with young people's health so much at stake, professionals need to avoid the temptation of a quick fix solution and take a more responsible approach.

*Anne Neville, Director of Counselling
Open Doors Counselling Services,
Melbourne*

Unbreakable code

What does it mean to be a reformed church? Which document has higher authority, the Bible or the Code? We often use such expressions as fellowship, unity, one body, the Presbyterian family. What do they all mean? Does our church today suf-

fer from the problem of "Jews and Gentiles" in a new way? The above questions and others went through my mind after the Presbytery of Sydney meeting of 2 June 1998. In that meeting, the Presbytery endorsed the decision of the North Strathfield congregation to discontinue the use of their premises by the Strathfield Arabic congregation. Our congregation has existed for 12 years. We joined the PCA in March 1997. We are proud of that. The Lord blessed us as a local church. We increased numerically and spiritually. Most of the time we worshipped at the North Strathfield premises. We sincerely thank the North Strathfield congregation for opening their doors to us during that period. But they recently decided to put us out. Where to? No one knows! We looked and still look to the Lord for a solution to this great problem and we trust the Lord will find a speedy solution for us. We appreciate the sincere desire of the Presbytery to help us. But every possible solution to our dilemma was found to conflict with the existing Presbyterian Code. The code provides the absolute right to the local congregation to

unilaterally decide its own affairs regarding the use of its property. And, as Presbyterians, we should respect and comply with the code. However, when one literally applies the code in this issue, this may hurt a poor church and provide an element of doubt regarding living as the "one body". Many ministers understood our need to continue our ministry from the North Strathfield base. But we all could do nothing to resolve this dilemma because of the restrictions of the code. We respect the code and the decision of the Presbytery. However, this really is an issue that needs to be addressed for the general spiritual well-being of our church. I urge presbyteries and assemblies to carefully study the kind of problem that we have encountered for the sake of the future of congregations that own no property, for the good of our PCA and the glory of God. Remember, the Word of God is unchangeable, but codes may be changed – to help and organise, not to hinder.

*Rev Hamdy Awad
Strathfield Arabic Presbyterian Church,
Sydney ap*



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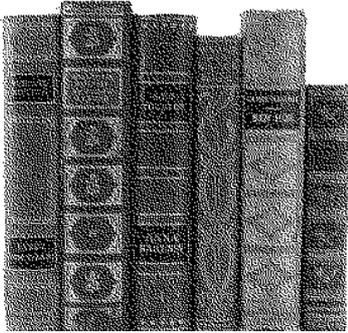
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books



Why Shouldn't We?

By Brian Edwards, Bromley:
Day One Publications, 1993
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

This booklet is from the well-known series, Prepared to Answer, by Brian Edwards of Hook Evangelical Church in England. These booklets deal with contemporary issues among Christians and take the form of conversations between Edwards and young Christians.

This particular booklet involves a discussion between a newly engaged couple who discuss "the growing pressure in society which encourages young people to have a sexual relationship together before marriage..." with Edwards and his wife

Christine.

The discussion ranges over the importance of an engagement, the pressures to have sex before marriage and how to come to terms with falling for sexual temptation. There is a lot of practical, pastoral and biblical wisdom packed into its 16 pages. It would be very suitable for youth study groups. One comes away from reading it reminded of the vast gulf between biblical sexual morality and popular Australian culture.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Bicton Presbyterian Church, WA.

God, Sex and Marriage

By John Richardson
Baulkham Hills: MPA Books, 1995
Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington.

God, Sex and Marriage carries the subtitle "Guidance from 1 Corinthians 7". The book is basically a concise commentary on a chapter of the Bible that contains a great deal of teaching on how Christians should conduct themselves "whether single, courting, engaged, married, separated, divorced or even bereaved". It is a good book, but at points, for this reader at least, it got a bit difficult to see what was "the big idea". Nevertheless God, Sex and Marriage has much practical Christian wisdom. Richardson (who studied at Moore College) helps us see how Paul

- Dismisses a negative view of sex;

- Encourages the married to have a full sex life;
- Addresses widowers and widows;
- Speaks clearly about divorce and separation;
- Advises those married to non-Christians;
- Directs us to avoid asex before marriage;
- Helps us recognise whom, and when, to marry.

God, Sex and Marriage has lots of "seed thoughts" for sermons and some great cartoons. Richardson begins with interesting comments about "sexist" language in the Bible (p.8). He handles the whole question of sex and spirituality very well (p.18-23) and discusses the relation of Wisdom literature to marriage in a fresh way (p.59-62). He ends with an apt word: "Ultimately we must seek holiness rather than fulfilment, and the Kingdom of God rather than singleness or marriage." ap

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Is life meaningless?

There is more to life than killing time until time kills us, suggests Martin Duffield.

Ralph Barton, a wealthy American cartoonist once wrote: "I've had few difficulties, many friends and great successes; I've gone from wife to wife and house to house ... and I'm sick and tired of trying to invent devices to fill the 24 hours of the day." It was his suicide note.

His deadly personal emptiness highlights a problem which leads many to contemplate suicide or at least "dropping out" of society. Suddenly they cannot see any ultimate purpose for their lives. For them life becomes meaningless. But why is this so?

The answer lies in the very nature of human beings and the chief purpose for which we were created. Scattered throughout the Bible, from its earliest book to the last, we find that purpose in this statement: "and they shall be My people and I shall be their God" (Lev 26:12; Rev 21:3).

Made in God's image, we were created by Him for a relationship with Him. Without that relationship we are not fulfilling our true purpose. We may do many of the things we were designed and created to do, even brilliantly and heroically; but until we know, love and fellowship with God, we remain unfulfilled in them. Augustine of Hippo's famous prayer sums this up: "O Lord, You have made us for Yourself; and our hearts are restless until we find our rest in You."

Here then is why a man like Ralph Barton can die so bitterly "fed up with inventing devices to fill the 24 hours of the

day". Here is why the brilliant King Solomon could examine all these same "devices" in his own time and say they are "all vanity and a chasing after the wind". His titanic struggle to find the meaning of life in created things alone (what he called everything under the sun), repeatedly ended in emotional shipwreck and despair.

In Ecclesiastes he struggled with the cycles of human existence. He discovered a changeless change that swallowed us all into history without leaving a trace (1:11). He tried to find purpose in work (4:8) and human achievement (2:18-26), but they too left him frustrated. He sought it in the pursuit of knowledge, yet the more he learned the more it distressed and exhausted him (1:8; 12:12; 1:17,18).

But of all the things that rendered human activity meaningless, death was the most effective. "Like birds trapped in a snare" (9:12), he said, we may be struck down by it at any moment. In the end he saw that "the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same..." (3:19). Such is life on its own, or "under the sun".

However, scattered through even the most despairing pages of this book are regular reminders that there is more to life than what we see "under the sun". Above the sun is heaven and the invisible Creator Himself. We see that it is God Who is the Giver of all good things, such as work and its rewards (5:18-20), food and its delights (3:13). It is God Who has set every human event appropriately in its time (3:1-8). We are not uselessly labouring, acquiring, eat-

ing or enjoying. We are not pointlessly killing time till time kills us.

We are making part of His story – history; a history that God planned for us before time began (Ephesians 2:10); and we are doing it with Him and under Him (2 Corinthians 6:1; Psalm 8:3-8).

The presence of Jesus Christ in the world makes all this possible for us. Through His cross and its power to remove the barrier of sin between us and a holy Creator, we can receive life and life in abundance (John 10:10). "And this is life" said God the Son to God, "that they may know You, the One True God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent (1 John 17:3)." Because of the cross, intimate fellowship is restored between creature and Creator; the wills of God and man are in harmony. Because of the cross, the Spirit of God is given to empower us to do what we were destined to do. We become what we were made to be. We take our true place in the world – right here, right now and forever.

Once we belong to God's people and "own" Him as our God, we know Him truly through Jesus Christ, and we know ourselves truly also. It is the end of meaninglessness and empty "devices...to fill the 24 hours of the day". It is the beginning of a life which will "glorify God and enjoy Him forever".

Martin Duffield is the minister of Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church (Qld). He is a regular contributor to the Walk With The Lord (Onesimus Press) daily Bible reading notes.

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Singing sex's praises

John Davies reflects on the hottest book in the Bible.

Some years ago Julie and I chose to celebrate our wedding anniversary at home with our children, rather than at a restaurant. I've long since forgotten what was on the menu that evening, but I will never forget what happened during the candlelit dinner. Our six-year-old, sensing that the occasion called for something appropriate, reached for the Bible and read what he described as his favourite passage.

My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me." (Song of Solomon 2:10-13)

I have no idea how much of this he understood, but it was a case of "out of the mouths of babes ..." Many Christians have never discovered the charm of this Supreme Song (to give it its Hebrew title). After all, it is tucked away in that part of the Bible which some treat as sub-Christian and as superseded by the New Testament.

And of those who do stumble across the Song, many are puzzled, perhaps even scandalised by its contents. For the Song is not a historical account of God's dramatic interventions in the affairs of this world, nor his dealings with his wayward people. In fact, it's doubtful whether the name of God occurs at all. Nor do we find such "theological" issues as righteousness or faith, and we scan it in vain for instruction on matters of living wisely in God's world.

What the Song appears to be is a cycle of erotic poems depicting the delights of human sexuality. Surely that can't be its real meaning! Well, many Christians from at least as early as the third century have thought so. Such a glorying in things of the "flesh" would be an embarrassment in the canon of Scripture. Many Christians, adapting a framework laid down by earlier Jewish commentators, have understood the Song as an allegorical work, where spiritual realities are described in physical terms.



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Because it is in the Bible, they feel, it can't be read on the surface, but must have something to do with the mystical union between Christ and the Church.

Such hesitancy, however, at seeing the beauty of breasts or thighs and the exhilaration of sexual contact between a man and a woman depicted in the Bible owes nothing to genuine Christian piety. It is closer to pagan Greek notions of the inherent unworthiness of the body and all things physical.

The Bible begins by portraying a physical world which God made and declared good. The only thing which was not good was the fact that man was without a sexual partner until God provided one exactly corresponding to him.

The Song gives us richly sensual images of the mutual appreciation and enjoyment of a bride and groom in one another's physical charms. For a description of a stunningly beautiful woman we could not go past 4:1-15, while the dashing figure of 5:10-16 must be every woman's dream. The intense desire for and pleasure in the consummation of the relationship is tenderly expressed at a number of points, such as 7:8-13.

Some readers see in the Song a lovers' triangle of a king, a Shulammitte girl and her shepherd lover. It is by no means clear, however, that such a dramatic reading can be sustained. I prefer to see the Song as a series of impressionistic cameos, not as an unfolding drama.

The Song abounds in rich imagery drawn from rural and garden settings reminding us of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2). Here all of our senses are

engaged at once. The most delightful fruits are there for the picking. The fragrances of every variety of aromatic plant imaginable greet our noses. There is music in the air. In this idyllic world, man and woman feel no shame as they lie together among the henna bushes. There is also a lavish use of the royal imagery of palaces, crowns and royal chariots; of gold, lapis lazuli and ivory; for in this setting of luxury we see man and woman with the royal dignity God designed us to enjoy.

Sex is a good gift. Like everything else in God's world it has been corrupted now by our rebellion and the consequent skewing of the whole created order. We need to recapture something of God's good design in married love. The Song affirms that despite the Fall (Genesis 3), God's wonderful purpose in marriage is not lost. Through the Song, we catch a glimpse of the "redemption of sexuality" just as other parts of Scripture point us to the redemption of other aspects of our lives.

The Song is not an allegory. However, in portraying the tender lovemaking of husband and wife in the context of the canon of Scripture, it may help us to grasp something of the intimacy of the marriage imagery used elsewhere in the Bible. God in Christ relates to us as a groom does to his bride. This marriage metaphor is begun in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1; Ezekiel 16, 23, Hosea) and developed in the New (Ephesians 5:22-23; Revelation 19:7; 21:2,9; 22:17).

Today our culture surrounds us with tired images of perverted sexuality and the supposed pleasures of someone else's garden. The Song, in contrast, is an exuberant celebration of the delights God intends us to enjoy in our own garden. It may also then serve as a pointer to the love and joy to be found in the relationship which transcends all others, a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This Supreme Song is surely the hottest book in the Bible!

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