

U S T L I N

Presbyterian

THE M A G Z I N E O F THE E S T A B L I S H E D C H U R C H O F U S T L I N

february 1999

Christian
Education?

Crisis in the
Classroom...



The beauty in grief • Long-distance Dads • The scandal of Timor

prayer

FEBRUARY 1999

- 21 Veteran WEC missionaries Stewart & Marie Dinnen, Tasmania, with wide responsibilities.
- 22 Presbytery of Gippsland, Vic: 5 parishes, totaling 7 congregations with 500 communicants, 155 adherents, 130 children and youth, 50 elders. Peter Swinn clerk.
- 23 Mordialloc parish, Melbourne; about 95 communicants, about 25 children and youth, 12 elders; Gary & Margaret Ware.
- 24 Burwood parish, Sydney; about 60 communicants, about 20 children and youth, 5 elders; Jim and Bev Elliott.
- 25 All members of Federal and State Parliaments, and the integrity, wisdom and witness of those who are Christians.
- 26 Barbara Brown, Melbourne, working with Navigators among enquiring adults.
- 27 Morwell parish, Vic, including Hazelwood North; about 150 communicants, about 30 children and youth, 18 elders; Peter and Patricia Swinn.
- 28 Effective impact of Australian Presbyterian on the thought and lives of readers, and the work of manager Walter Bruining, Kilsyth, Vic, to develop circulation and revenue.

MARCH

- 1 New revival among the 3 million people of Wales, and wisdom in the political devolution process.
- 2 Bowenfels parish near Lithgow, NSW; including 5 congregations; about 85

communicants, about 40 children and youth, 7 elders; John and Leanne Neasey.

- 3 Presbytery of New England, NSW: 5 parishes, 1 home mission station; totaling 20 congregations with 665 communicants, 280 adherents, 360 children and youth, 70 elders; 1 retired minister. Murray Fraser clerk.
- 4 The raising up of more candidates for Christian ministries in this country and throughout the world.
- 5 "Hap and Glad" (Harold and Gladys) Skinner, long engaged in a varied auxiliary work with Wycliffe Bible Translators in PNG and Australia.
- 6 Cowra parish, western NSW; including 3 congregations, about 160 communicants, about 40 children and youth, 156 elders; John and Elizabeth McClean.
- 7 Bible Society work in Bangladesh (135 million people, 37 languages) amid great poverty and opposition.
- 8 St. Marys parish, western Sydney, NSW; about 70 communicants, about 30 children and youth, 7 elders; Paul & Margo Nellies.
- 9 Samoan parish, Fawkner, Melbourne, including Pascoe Vale; about 60 communicants, about 60 children and youth, 11 elders; Simalu & Urima Cowley.
- 10 The violent South American nation of Colombia (35 million people — 93% RC, 4% Protestant), and the progress of the Gospel there.
- 11 The Northern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia ("Free Church") with parishes in Brisbane, Maclean,

Grafton, Lismore, Armidale and the Hastings.

- 12 Samoan parish, Five Dock, NSW; about 40 communicants, about 60 children and youth, 9 elders; Colin Alston interim moderator.
- 13 Presbytery of Melbourne West; 7 parishes, 2 home mission stations, totaling 11 congregations with 690 communicants, 105 adherents, 125 children and youth, 72 elders, 2 chaplains, 1 missionary. Peter Phillips clerk.
- 14 Walcha parish, northern NSW; including 5 congregations, about 65 communicants, about 30 children and youth, 8 elders; Murray & Lyn Fraser.
- 15 John Calvin Church, Thuringowa, Townsville, Qld; about 80 communicants, about 70 children and youth, 6 elders; Bill & Jenni Lutton.
- 16 Bruce & Lorraine Meller from Hurstville as he takes over as superintendent of the NSW Ministry & Mission Department.
- 17 Progress in peace in Ireland and spiritual impact of the churches both in the Republic (3.9 million) and Ulster (1.6 million).
- 18 Tallangatta home mission station, Vic; including 3 congregations, about 30 communicants, about 10 children and youth, 4 elders; Barrie Baker interim moderator.
- 19 Fresh life in your parish and neighbouring ones this year through groups for fellowship, mutual concern, Bible study and prayer.
- 20 Parramatta City parish, Sydney; about 70 communicants, about 55 children and youth, 4 elders; Warren Hicks interim moderator.

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A U S T R A L I A N
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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The education debate

Education is often in the news. It was recently. David Marr, the Sydney journalist, lifted the lid in early December on a simmering controversy in the Anglican Church, which has the potential of boiling over into the wider church. The issues at the heart of the debate in the Sydney Diocese relate to the appointment of school principals, the qualifications of school council members, whether teachers need to be involved in a church and the perspective from which individual subjects should be taught.

Yet behind all these points of contention in the Synod is an even more basic issue: what is a Christian education? There are several approaches to this question, but the minimalist view is the one that dominates the Anglican church schools at the moment. The minimalist view involves a commitment to a number of core values:

1. The need for independence from the state.
2. The teaching of scripture/religious studies.
3. The need for staff to be committed to a Christian ethos (which does not imply a personal faith commitment), and



Robert Benn

4. Striving for excellence in every field of educational endeavour.

There may be others, but these are the ones most frequently mentioned.

Interestingly, some Anglicans are critical of these aims in education. They say they don't go nearly far enough. Philip Jensen, the rector of St. Matthias and the chaplain at the UNSW, is dissatisfied with the status quo. He wants to push through some far-reaching changes, which he thinks will lead to a more Christian approach to education. And, of course, this is what all the fuss is about.

We may ask, how does a skirmish in the Sydney Anglican Diocese affect other independent schools, notably those in the

Presbyterian Church or in the Christian school movement? It affects us in this way: it confronts us again with the issue, "What is a truly Christian education?"

We can begin by asking a basic question: Is Jesus Christ Lord of all? If He is, then there is no part of life that can escape His control. If Christ has the final word on how we bring up and prepare our children for life, then clearly His views need to prevail on a subject about which God has a lot to say. This means that teaching Christianly is not an optional sort of thing; we are obligated to educate our children in Christ's way. Not to do so, by following secular methods, is to be unfaithful. Therefore, we must consistently teach in a distinctive Christian way.

How we do this is the subject of our February issue. We recognise that the issues that our contributors raise are intensely controversial. Whether teachers in Christian/Church schools should have a faith commitment to Christ will be hotly debated. Other issues such as whether Christian teachers should be involved in state schools, the governance of Church schools, and the aims of education will all spark lively discussion.

The one thing that we must do as we reflect on these matters is to think Christianly. Unfortunately, Christians today have succumbed too readily to the secular drift of thinking about education. We need to heed the warning of Harry Blamires, the British educator: "There is no longer a Christian mind. As a thinking being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularisation. He accepts religion — its morality, its worship, its spiritual culture; but he rejects the religious view of life, the view which sets all earthly issues within the context of the eternal, and relates all human problems to the doctrinal foundations of the Christian faith."

Blamires is right. We must start thinking about education as though Christ is Lord of all — and that includes our educational goals, our admission standards, our teaching practices and our forms of governance. Let the debate begin.

Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee 

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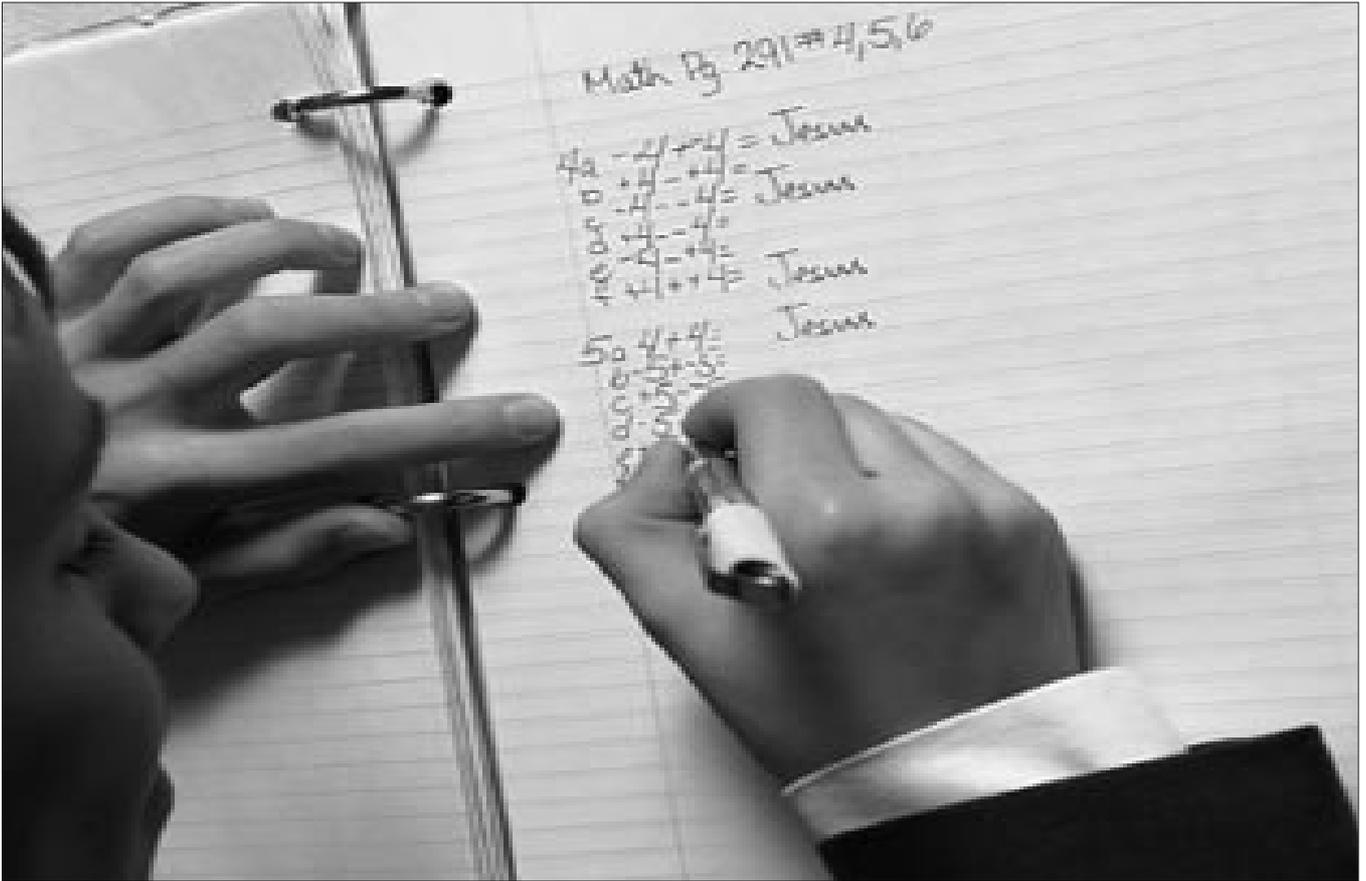
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Distinctively Christ's

The church must not give its name to an inferior secular product that claims to be Christian.



Do you think it strange that a Christian school should be — well — Christian? Many find this proposition strange, including Sydney journalist and critic David Marr. “A few last skirmishes of the Reformation are being fought out in this relaxed and sensual town,” he jibed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* recently, as he attacked Anglican moves to strengthen the Christian approach of its Church schools.

The Rev Phillip Jensen, the rector of St Matthias and chaplain of the University of NSW, is relaxed about Marr’s attack, and unrepentant. “The materialist philosophy of life is governing the school curriculum,” he says. “Our society is besotted with the idea of getting a TER of 99 to get into university. Christians have other values. If we have a Christian system, it should be Christian.”

The same debate is being heard among Presbyterians too. What do we require of schools that bear the Presbyterian name and are associated with the Church?

The Anglican debate focuses on principals, teachers, council members and cur-



Neil Benfell

riculum. How distinctively Christian should these be? The Sydney Anglican move is plain enough. The upgraded standards will mean that principals will have to make Christian confession and show doctrinal allegiance to Church standards, and councillors will need to make an informed confession of biblical Christianity — “preferably of the Evangelical variety”.

Principals may be asked to report annually on the church involvement of members of staff. For Phillip Jensen, the schools have to be Christianised “from top to bottom”. What is surprising is that this standpoint is challenged, not only by unsympathetic secular critics such as David Marr,

but often by those in the churches and their schools as well.

It is a sad indicator of our spiritual state after 150 years of Christian decline and rampant secularism that we still have to persuade Christians that there is a distinctive Christian form of education! What would King David of Israel have said to his servants if they couldn’t tell the difference between the schools in Israel, and those more culturally sophisticated schools of the Philistines across the border?

The issues for us are precisely the same — what are we preparing our children for? To get into the best university courses so they can earn high incomes, or to develop Christian minds so they are better equipped to serve the Lord in their vocations, families and the wider community?

It is even more discouraging to have to sell the notion of a Christian education to church leaders responsible for Church schools. Allegiance to Christ has become overlaid by other priorities such as “reputation”, “excellence”, and “professional independence”. Debates on the issues are marked by special pleading. Sadly we are

wavering between two opinions! The church must say: "If God be God, then follow him in our schools" (I Kings 18:21).

Issues are often intertwined, preventing clear Christian thinking. There are matters of control and church rights, differing expectations of what Christian education should be, and there are curriculum issues too.

First, consider the most basic issue of what Christian education really is. Are our schools a passport to success to indulge a few who can afford expensive fees, or are they meant to be a front line preparation ground for training Christian minds, shaping Christian character, and discovering each child's gifts to be used in the service of Christ?

The task of a Christian school is to present a Christian view of life and the world to its students. The content and substance of the Christian world and life view can't be taken for granted — at least not any more!

Anything less than a fully developed biblical view of knowledge, which sees the whole of the universe and everything that happens in it as under the sovereign ruling hand of God, is untrue, and will produce sub-Christian education. Any view of life which does not help students see that although they live in a world that is ruined by sin, it has been redeemed by Christ and is destined for glory, is sub-Christian education. It will not impact on the world for the Kingdom of God. What business has the Church to give its name to an inferior secular product that claims to be Christian?

Where educators are fully committed to the Bible as God's Word, they will present their knowledge of life and the world to students in the most winsome and effective way. The extent of a Christian view of life will know no limits, going way beyond the Bible study periods into literature, history, art, music, science, and into everything that touches the life of the school. There is a Christian way to think about these things. It will show up in the novels read and the way they are approached. Look to the visual arts program and the school music and dramatic productions, the way the P.E. teacher cultivates attitudes to the body, the

discussion of ultimate questions in the physics lab. These are indicators of Christian depth or otherwise.

From the basis of absolute truth revealed in Scripture, we seek to build a world-view that allows students the power and freedom to carry Christian thinking with them into life. The school has to teach consistently with the Church — Christ reigns.

For instance, students in one Australian Christian school are being taught to formulate a biblical appreciation of 'the State' — a kind of Christian Civics curriculum. Year 8 students meet a patriarchal society by studying Abraham as an example in Genesis. They move on to the medieval states with feudalism, and the church-state



conflict. They meet controversy between emperors, kings and popes about authority and its sources. Guided by Scripture, students seek out biblical norms for social organisation. In later years this program examines 20th century states, and democracy in general, in the light of biblical norms.

During the process, students have been trained in critical thinking, not by standards of humanistic thought or political science, but by God's Word. Above all they have been through a powerful exercise in learning how to think Christianly about life in the real world. They see how to draw on the vast resources of the Scriptures and the Christian heritage. In this area of life, they will never be adrift in their minds, at the mercy of changing whims of political fashion. This is Christian education.

There's an urgent need to train our children in this kind of thinking in all the arts and sciences, starting in kinder and continuing into Christian graduate schools. With an education like that we'll have some hope

of impacting the secular mind of coming generations.

A Christian world-view is grounded in Scripture, but is mediated to students through an assenting Christian mind. The teacher's own understanding and experience of the faith are of critical importance. If the Word of God is to take life and shape the mind of the student, it must first live in the mind and heart of the teacher.

Robin Williams in the film *Dead Poets' Society* showed how a secular humanist teacher can set poetry alight for students, because he first experienced the power of the poetry within himself. Can less be accepted in the service of Jesus, that teachers teach about Christ's world in the power of Christ's Spirit?

Those who oppose thoroughly reforming our schools often ask Christian educators a question designed to throw them off balance: shall we employ poor-quality teachers just so we can have Christians? Yet it is illegitimate to put this question unless we have first adopted the principle of real Christian education.

Of course there are poor teachers in most schools! This is no argument to employ non-Christian staff, but rather to provide for better solutions. We dare not judge a great issue on the basis of a few bad experiences. In fact the question itself is badly put, because it poses excellence and Christian faith as opposites. A whole range of other issues lie behind this question, and I'll raise some of them here.

The question is often asked out of misunderstanding, or lack of confidence. Perhaps the questioner is unaware of the vast contribution of Christian scholarship through the years, and today. He may not perceive that excellence flows from dedication, calling, and truth. Or perhaps the questioner is afraid that Christians are simply not up to the academic challenges of contemporary life, and lacks confidence that they can rise to the task. Worse still, he may not think Christianity itself has answers to the challenge of the modern world. He feels safer when faith is confined to the world of religious language and worship. He doubts whether the Christian faith can confront the world at all sorts of intellectual levels.

At worst, the question may point to a deep-seated weakness in apologetics and epistemology. The questioner may not understand that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ Jesus". He simply may not see that all knowledge is related to his faith in Christ. Whatever it is that paralyses advance in Christian professional education, the underlying attitude in the church often is, "if we leave things as they are we won't

Trinity
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al College

rock the boat! At least some Christianity may rub off on a few passing students, and some might get saved in the lunchtime evangelism program.”

There are several ways to face the issue of building a Christian teaching staff for our schools. Most are long-term solutions. Growing to maturity in the institutional world of schools requires gestation time. Yet we should first insist on the principle, and then take action to make it work.

One step is to encourage our most promising Christian students into teaching as a high calling under God, worthy of a life of commitment and discipleship. It is a challenge to serve Christ in his Kingdom in education.

We need to encourage older people as well, who have a proven track record of Christian life and career. We should invite them to consider a career change: “come and teach in a Christian school. Bring your wide experience of life into a mature-age career change, and enrich the school with the professional insights you bring from another area”.

This applies particularly to professionals who have served the Lord faithfully in his church, and who have successfully raised families for Christ. Taking this rather radical step will confront the secular obsession of many Christian families who steer their children into more lucrative careers. Teaching is viewed by many educators and parents alike as a second-rate career for the also-rans.

On the sidelines of this question, hangs another. Teaching the young once rated highly in the church, and teachers were often trained in theology — if nothing else! Let us elevate the calling and ministry of Christian teaching of the young. Let us place school teaching alongside missionary service and pastoral ministry as high callings in the service of the Lord.

It is also important that training opportunities be opened up for those wanting to serve in Christian schools. Many teachers would benefit hugely from a graduate year, or some part-time courses, attached to one of our theological colleges. Courses in Bible, theology, apologetics, Westminster Confession, Christian education, church history, ethics, evangelism, would all enrich our teachers and schools.

Why not a Presbyterian Diploma in Christian Education? This would soon become a highly sought-after qualification. It would provide some theological depth which the schools desperately need if they are to develop and mature their curricula, and would serve the interest of the church and her ministry. The stronger and clearer our Christian schools, the better our hope for solid congregations in days ahead. The richer the Christian schooling of our prospective Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and ministry candidates, the more blessing we may expect in the pews. Our Presbyterian forebears sponsored and established schools. The schools were charged to provide an education consistent with the teachings of Christianity, including religious instruction and education in the Bible.

The first responsibility of school governors to the church and to their trust is to ensure this is actually how schools educate. When governors are selected, a clear ability to carry out the responsibility for ensuring real Christian education must take precedence over considerations of a candidate's community standing, clout, or legal, accounting or other expertise. If the Church appoints candidates for governorship who lack the qualifications of clear Christian thinking and living, it places a responsibility on that person in God's Kingdom which they are unable to fulfil. Both the church and the individual are in breach of trust to God and man.

“But what right has the church got to be interfering in schools?” some may ask. Simply this. A Christian school is an official imparter of the faith to the young. The church has a responsibility to ensure a Christian education is provided in a way the church can confidently support. In a Presbyterian model, as the church appoints elders to manage the church, and committees to run retirement villages, so it appoints councils to manage its schools.

There can be problems with the way school councils conceive their role. It's a common view that the council should appoint the principal, manage the school as a business, and leave it at that, unless there's a crisis of some kind. The principal is the chief executive officer, the school is a business, and the board are honorary directors. If the church wants its appointees to have a say in policy, curriculum or staffing, this may be seen as meddling where it has few rights and little expertise. In this case, the school is an end in itself.

When this school-as-a-business paradigm dominates the field, the council asks: “What does the market expect? How can we keep the roll full, attract endowment, maintain top staff, and assure the future?” When this becomes the driving force, everything else will be subservient. The Gospel may be stated in the rhetoric, but the heart beat and agenda of the school will lie elsewhere. The tail is wagging the dog.

Presbyterian schools were begun to help Christian families bring up their children in the faith. Because of dedication, sacrifices for the Lord and answered prayer, the schools succeeded.

We are on a treadmill, and escape is difficult. But it is time for thinking Christianly about our schools from top to bottom. Many Sydney Anglicans want off the treadmill. David Marr asked Phillip Jensen if the time has come to put a bomb under the schools for Christ? Jensen is clear about his intentions. “He rolls this question around in his mind for half a second, spreads his arms wide and with a great smile says: ‘Yes’.”

The next six months will show whether the rest of Sydney diocese supports Jensen's moves to make its schools Christian both in name and fact.

Neil Benfell is principal of Kings College, Warnambool, Victoria which he helped to establish in the mid-'80s. He is a graduate of the PTC Melbourne and a Presbyterian minister.

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It was the night before Christmas. I was chatting with my six-year-old daughter, Tiffany, before she went to bed. "Dad," she said. "If a poor person can only give a glass of water to his child for Christmas, does God mind?"

I told her the story of the widow who gave all she had in a single coin. Tiffany asked some questions about what makes people poor, then about how God views people. What's His attitude towards the rich? What does He think of those who are poor?

Just then Susan, my wife, walked into the room. Tiffany repeated the story to her, telling her what she thought was important. At that moment Tiffany was forming a little bit of her self. She was "becoming someone", she was "learning".

Now that moment was only one of many that will become Tiffany's "learning history". All of her life will be a rebellion against or an acceptance of the places she lives: her home, her school, her society and beyond. She will value some things and disregard others.

As her father I want her to treasure those things that God values. At the same time I want her to have the freedom to ask challenging questions about the way that I and other adults see the world.

Indeed, wherever I have a "classroom" — whether in my home, at school or at church I want it to be the most brain-reviving, world-considering, language-exploding place it can be. Gerard Manley Hopkins said: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. Let it be so in my room."

This raises the question, what are the optimal learning conditions for teaching in such environments? It is clear that there is no one set which applies in all situations. How people learn is married to their culture. I offer a few ideas which are the prod-



Paul Burgis

uct of my own experience and reading as a teacher and father.

The back-stage work.

Learning takes place best when our physical needs have been met. Maslow was right. Tiffany and I met in her bedroom well-fed and comfortable with one another. I wasn't rushing anywhere; she wasn't scalywagging about.

This is not to say that learning can't take place under uncomfortable or even painful conditions. Members of concentration camps tell us that they learned a lot about themselves in their sufferings.

In general, though, the first task of the teacher is to create an environment where basic physical and emotional needs are being met: where the food is good, where the children feel safe and important, where there is time to play and time to work by yourself, where the walls speak with colour and ideas, where there is enough light to read by and where the chairs keep your back straight and your bottom comfortable. In the home, where only a few children are the focus, the settings are more informal. A lounge is a great place to read a book. However, whether at the kitchen table, or in their own rooms, children need to be free from distraction. At school, where teachers need to consider the needs of many children, the settings are more formal.

Wherever we are, we need to feel safe and emotionally secure. By giving clear instructions the teacher or parent can help to make learners feel that they are not going to make a fool of themselves. By following simple rules like Locke's "private rebuke, public praise" the teacher can protect the image of the child with their friends. To add to Locke, private praise can also help the child to know that his or her work is noticed.

"Fear," Don Asquith said, "closes the door to learning."

Creating the script: the importance of making the child do the thinking.

The class is settled. They are in year 10. You enter. You are their teacher. It is the first real lesson you have together. What do you do?

In making it all work you have many tasks — you can inject some humour to let them know that you are a human being; you could drop in a personal anecdote or two to let them know that you have a life outside the classroom; you could give them a term outline to let them know that you know the big picture.

As soon as they are emotionally safe, I think that one of the teacher's main tasks is make students feel that the classroom is the place for adventurous thinking. Even from a Christian perspective there are still many unresolved questions. God is all-powerful and rules the universe — but He gives us freedom. Again, God is one, but He is three persons. God is love but there is pain in the world. And then there are complexities in human behaviour which are hard to explain: good people can be proud; people who love others can also try to control them.

If we as Christians are dealing with the big questions, then our students need to know that we will take each of their questions seriously. In the high school years I want them to know that life is for talking about and that I am not shocked by different views.

This is where it's so important to be open about the mistakes of our past. In church history, for example, it's as important to cover the witch trials in Europe and America which saw many senile old women burned at the stake as it is to cover the leading role the church had in the 1800s in ending slavery.

In doing so we show that we are all people who need grace and that we are not afraid of our history. We want our children to know that it's OK to question and even condemn what has been done in the past. We must also question the present, and even ourselves.

Further, it puts the religious questions back in the centre of the frame — where

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they should be. Ponder with your students the implications of the world being a chance occurrence and of my thoughts now, or yours as you read this, being no more than chemical reactions. Does anyone live as if the evils of the holocaust were a chemical mistake?

As students ask questions about the ethics of the church they can be led to see that God is the reason why anyone ever says that something is “good” and something else is “bad”. We may argue about what it means to be good but we can’t rid the universe of the idea.

Once the classroom is a place for adventurous thinking, we can use many means to explore questions: reading, writing, drawing, debating, computer programs, speaking. Students can then use the Bible to critique the world. They can look at social issues such as poverty and the environment, sex and marriage, body image and popular culture, war and refugees and believe that the classroom is a good place to imagine how the world could be different.

It is important, even with younger learners, that the teacher helps them to understand how they arrived at their answers. Learners find out information, they discover how to look for it, they even learn how to reuse it. The big step is helping them to think about their own thinking.

If the teacher reflects on how he came to think the way he does the students will see this modelled. The child can learn the same habit if the teacher asks the right type of questions.

“What makes you think that (e.g. the world is an accident)?”

“Can you explain why (e.g. the Bible is God’s word)?”

Such thinking is adventurous because the questions expose our emotional commitments and hidden assumptions.

By tackling the hard questions at home or school kids may come to believe that the family/classroom is a good place to work things out. At the same time as we are doing this we have another task: to model what we believe.

Acting the play — providing life models.

In the story which began this article, Tiffany repeated the tale of the widow’s coin to her mum. By choosing to retell it as an important story on giving she was making the story part of herself. Her sister Chelsea has taken the next step by joining with her Sunday School class to finance the digging of a well in Bangladesh. In doing this, she has modelled herself on her teacher who believes that we should share what we have to make the world a fairer place.

Chelsea’s teacher is here taking her classroom to the world — she is modelling a response to it which goes far beyond observation and awareness. She’s engaging it.

Alongside any debate about what’s true we need to provide opportunities for students to live as Christians in the world. Students who reject the Christian faith need to see the faith in action. Learning is not just thinking. It is acting and being. Consider two examples: one a special event, one a lifestyle.

Example one. The special event. Recently at Scots each student contributed about five dollars to a fund. With a little extra fund-raising we were able to pay for a Christian married couple, Noah and Letwin Zhou, to come from a poorer section of Harare, Zimbabwe, to tell us about life in their country. They lived with us in the school for two weeks — visiting classes like artists-in-residence.

Over the fortnight almost every student met them and had lessons on poverty, injustice and the future of Africa. They were popular in the playground. Students knew that they were taking part in helping that family to buy a cow and to put their son into a tertiary trade course. It is my hope that, for many boys, poverty now has a name and a voice and a face. I will let you imagine the next step we could take.

Example two. A lifestyle choice. Here I have decided to pray with the boys in my year 6 class to help them see that God listens to their needs and concerns. Those who don’t wish to pray are asked to sit quietly. This year we’ve found it tough — praying with class mates who’ve lost family members — but we also say thanks for every inch of life. Students come to respect that we all have needs which are beyond our own ability to fulfil. They come to see that we all have important stories to tell.

The truth is that every word we say is a model for those in our care. Eyes watch us. Ears hear. Every time we label someone, developing minds wonder if the label is deserved.

Like our students we are learners too. We learn from them. As we watch our children making choices we are reminded of the choices which we have made. We are not too different from one another. In the intimacy of a home, and to a lesser extent a school, we will live what we believe.

Paul Burgis teaches at the Scots College Preparatory School. He has an M.Ed. and is completing a Ph.D. at the UNSW. He is also a graduate of Sydney Missionary & Bible College. He has taught in Zimbabwe and has been the deputy principal of Hillcrest Christian College.



Training them up

How is it that some children delight in obedience?

At the park one day, I watched a young mother call her children from their play as she walked back to her car. The two scampered after her like puppies, both coming at her call, the boy pausing to examine a stick, but still coming. I watched another mother call her child, offering him a chocolate bar if he would come. He swore at her and then dug his heels in. She had to drag him kicking and screaming to the car. Why such a contrast? How did one mother get it so easy, and the other so hard? Is it possible to have children who enjoy obeying you?

There is no doubt that some children are much harder to raise than others. Yet individual differences among children do not stop us observing that some families as a whole are dysfunctional whilst others have an almost complacent atmosphere of control and contentment. In the early years, the parent as trainer or coach determines this. It is possible to develop skills that produce the sort of family life that others admire.

Mrs Aeneas Gunn, who wrote *We of the Never Never*, tells the story of a quiet stockman which is an unforgettable picture of confident strength in a battle of mind over mind, not mind over matter. The story is of course about the gentling of a magnificent colt, straight from the wild. It saddens me that so many of our parenting practices



Marion Andrews

harden children in their wildness, and never bring them to a point where they gladly obey their parents, and ultimately their God. The quiet stockman worked always for intelligent obedience, not cowed stupidity. He undertook a long course of careful training and schooling in which nothing was broken, but all bent to the control of the master.

If such skill and patience is expended on a horse, how much more should we strive to school those magnificent little creations God puts in our care. Some of them are like prancing, untamed brumbies, others are patient and gentle by nature, but all need obedience training.

But there are questions: "Who are parents? How much control should they have over a child? Should we see parenting in terms of a battle of mind over mind?"

Christians agree that God is their creator, and we owe Him obedience. In procreation, parents bring their child into being. They are sub-creators of that child's being. In the early years, parents are "as God" to their child. The child knows who God is only through his parents. This is where it is imperative that a child not only sees obedience to God modelled in his parents, but that he is taught to practice obedience to his parents so that he will more readily obey God in maturity. "I delight to do your will, O my God," is a great theme for life.

The good parent doesn't want his child to be a robot. Preferably, obedience comes through love, though sometimes by fear or respect. Like the brown colt, the skilled trainer leaves his will free, but brings him to a point where he delights to obey. Some parents strive to control their children, and to make them as fully subordinate to the will of their procreator as the characters of a novelist are to their creator. This is the opposite error to total lack of control.

Perhaps the analogy of a band may be helpful here. To have a band, you must have musicians. Your particular family band may have three members or nine: it doesn't matter. A good bandmaster selects the music to be played and inspires obedience to his direction by each musician. Within this structure, he must allow for individual talent and interpretation. This is not going soft on bad playing, but eagerly welcoming imaginative performance that enhances the production. The master, and in fact the whole band finds their satisfaction increased immensely. The performers become more willing than ever to do the will of the master.

In the family, we have a great advantage over the hard-pressed bandmaster, struggling to keep his group together. We start off with strong ties of love holding us together, as well as complete interdependence for a number of years. God has written the score, and given it to the parents to teach, direct and inspire. This is a divine trust, and should be held in high honour.

There is usually one child who thinks he should hold the baton. The occasional experience of being in charge may cure him. When my husband was about 10, he was left in charge of his two younger brothers one evening. The climax of his frustration was when one brother took a piece of his mother's treasured Royal Doulton and threatened to smash it! This left him with a lasting impression of the awesome task of child care. It also convinced him that no child should be regularly in charge of younger siblings.

I return to the example of the quiet stockman, but not to put children on a par with horses. At the end of the initial training, Mrs Gunn recounts, "he turned towards us with soft, shining eyes. 'There's not many like him,' he said, pulling at one of the flexible ears. 'You could teach him anything'."

This reflects something of the purpose of Christian discipline. Teach your children the fundamentals of loving obedience, and you open up for them life to the full. God gives us the privilege of that initial gentling of their spirit, first to our will, and then to His. When they leave us and we hand them over to God, He will be able to teach them anything!

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For the public good

Why a Christian works in the secular school system

Occasionally I meet people who believe I'm working for the wrong organisation. Their views are usually expressed in the form of a question: "Helen, why do you work for the Education Department when Christian schools are crying out for people with proven leadership skills?"

It's a hard question that every Christian teacher has to face. My justification in working for the state is that the Lord needs his witnesses everywhere.

Jesus said: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). This tells me that I am called to witness for the Lord in a world lost in sin and darkness. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded His disciples, "you are the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13) and "you are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). Jesus goes on to say: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

It has been my experience that there is no more rewarding area of service for a Christian teacher than the public school system. Each school community is a mission field as close as the next suburb or town.

Consider the number of people who make up a school community. First, there are the students, their parents and relatives. Second, the school staff, both teachers and the ancillary. Third, there is the wider community which includes visiting Scripture teachers, police, Department of Community Services and the many people who support the work of schools. For me, this is an exciting opportunity. What a challenging mission field at my own doorstep!

One of the reasons I went into teaching was that it is a noble and responsible vocation. If I want to be an excellent teacher I need to have a commitment to a calling. This commitment is to the worth of the student and the conviction that all children can learn. Christian teachers value human life, knowing that God created everyone in His own image. As life-long learners, Christian teachers are committed to improving their knowledge base and expertise as classroom practitioners.

Parents send their children to school to learn and expect that this will happen. The teacher, as a professional, is meant to be



Helen Calquhoun

fully competent so that children reach their full potential. Christian teachers have a specific calling as teachers of excellence at the school to which they have been appointed.

My own personal experience is that good Christian teachers can have a marked impact on their own school community by being professional in their job and interacting with people in a godly way.

People are quick to detect frauds i.e. those who claim to be "Christian" but where no evidence can be found to support their claim.

For me to teach "Christianly" involves:

- Modelling Christ to a regular audience.
- Displaying a godly attitude to others. This includes respecting the education system and government, and maintaining a high standard of speech, dress and general

manner. It also means being loyal to staff and having the ability to keep confidences.

- Having a strong work ethic, commitment to the job and the people and a willingness to go the extra mile. This includes punctuality, good attendance and a true spirit of cooperation.

- Believing that all children can learn, and teaching to achieve the highest possible academic standards. The Christian theory of knowledge is a tremendous incentive to teachers to help students master everything there can be known about the world God made.

- Credibility in staff relationships by taking a stand against gossip and "put-downs" which are often a part of staffroom interaction.

- Taking on leadership opportunities, and demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment to the task. Leadership provides opportunities to develop excellent skills in interpersonal relationships.

How is this possible? I certainly don't pretend that I can do it in my own strength. As a Christian teacher I underpin my life with prayer and Bible study. I am often surprised at the many answers that I receive to prayer for the school and the classroom. What a privilege to pray for others in a practical way!



Long-distance Dads

Paul Lewis suggests how to be a better father even if you're away from the kids.

One responsibility that weighs heavily on me is my need to pray often for the children under my care. Christian teachers may be the only ones praying for class members, so this is an important ministry. I often find that I can use the Bible when teaching lesson content, in particular when I am dealing with history and moral issues.

Often I am asked, why teach in the public school system? The reason is simple. Teaching provides an opportunity for close contact and significant influence on students' lives. The 25 to 30 hours a primary teacher may spend with students each week is significant and can be used to build trust and open communication. What better environment to demonstrate God's love?

One practice that I encourage in my school is a regular meeting with other believing staff. Christian teachers often meet as a group during the school week to share fellowship and to pray. The staff respects this network, particularly when they run a Scripture Union group for students. In secondary schools the ISCF group may operate, and Scripture Union Primary Activities are available for years 5 and 6 in primary schools. Teachers prepared to give extra time for a student group is respected by all.

I have been a teacher in the NSW public school system for more than 25 years. This has included classroom teaching, being an executive staff member and, now, a school principal. At each of the eight different schools I have had many opportunities to witness for Christ. I have taught English as a second language to parents, and ministered to specific emotional needs, counselled teachers and distressed parents and shared the love of God to many children through Bible stories and in everyday situations.

Of course there are tough students and tough situations, but God has proved faithful to His word. As He calls he also equips. As Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength (Phil. 4:13) and "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love of self discipline". (2 Tim. 1:7).

Helen Colquhoun is a member of the Ashfield Presbyterian Church and is principal of Chester Hill North public school in a south-western Sydney suburb. AP

Because Spencer Wright is on the road three weeks a month, he must father from afar. As a high-profile trainer to several large companies, Spencer's job keeps him away from the family for long stretches. Occasionally, Joan and the kids accompany him on summertime trips, but that doesn't erase the pain of his steady absences.

"I make it a point to call home every day," says Spencer. "There are times when I learn one of the kids was injured, or they did well in school, and I'm not home to help or to celebrate. That's the most helpless feeling. But I've learned to relax and let the kids ramble during cross-country phone calls. It sometimes takes a while for them to reveal their most important thoughts, but big phone bills are easier to resolve than big problems."

"When my wife walked out on me, I literally hated her," admits Phil Ralston, a social service worker. "She took Jason, my one-year-old son, and I was livid.

"Although I had been a Christian for several years, I didn't turn to God for solace. Instead, I was filled with anger at this unfairness. I nursed the hurts for nearly a year . . . even pondering abducting Jason and going abroad. The thought of Jason growing up without knowing his daddy, nor me him, was devastating."

Ralph Streader drives a big semi-trailer coast-to-coast. Those long, straight stretches on interstates offer lots of time to think — and to worry about how the kids are doing. Often, Ralph wonders how his wife is coping with two teenagers when he is not there to back her up. "It all seems okay right now," says Ralph. "But will it stay that way? I've learned enough about parenting to know that there are no ironclad guarantees. You just have to stay on top of it ... and that's tough when you're on the road."

Michael Paraz experienced deep doubts about his ability to be a good father after he and his wife divorced. During the court proceedings nine years ago, she was awarded custody of Jim, then two. Afterwards,



Michael kept trying to maintain a relationship with his son. At times, Jim seemed indifferent to Michael's efforts, but last week Jim phoned his dad "just to talk" — the first time he called without prompting from anyone.

"It was glorious, and it felt so good to see him take the initiative. I guess there is nothing more satisfying to a dad than watching your son mature, especially when it means a stronger relationship with him. I just couldn't believe a 'pay-off' on all my efforts was actually happening. It was great!"

God's role for the father as head of the home should be the norm for families. Yet in millions of households, Dad won't be home tonight.

Long-distance fathering is a growing phenomenon. Not long ago, fathers worked on the family farm or commuted 15 minutes to work. Today's business travel, however, sends fathers skittering across time zones.

That's why staying in touch with the kids — physically, emotionally and spiritually — is probably the most difficult assignment a father can face. The pressure to be a good dad often results in guilt, bitterness, anger, denial and passion.

Sometimes, dads act irrationally — even to the point of kidnapping their own children. But many fathers rise to the occasion, and use their bottled-up feelings to fuel heroic expressions of grace and love. Long-distance dads can bridge the geographical boundaries and provide much of the love and support their children need.

In the first few years following his divorce, George Randall was a short-distance dad — he lived in the same town as his son, Peter. Even though Peter's mum sought to restrict their contact, George consistently found enjoyable times with his son.

Then, when Pete was in primary school, George's company reassigned him across the country. Adjustments were required in both households. "One of the smartest decisions I made," George recalls, "was to take Peter along in the moving truck. It helped him get a sense of where I was actually going, and those last-minute pick-ups to catch a game at the park were no longer going to be possible. Several days on the road did wonders for Pete's understanding."

George had serious doubts how his relationship with Peter would fare over the long haul, but he would not let go or give up. No matter what the financial cost, George was determined to sustain contact.

At the outset, George telephoned weekly, even if he didn't feel like it. "Some calls were disasters," said George. "Those were the days when Pete was far more interested in TV than in talking to his dad. But I hung in there."

Recently, George remarried. Pete's new step-mum has added to the bonding process by writing and sending special packages. Their emotional support has been vital because George's ex-wife just remarried for the second time. Remaining an active dad to Pete has provided an important measure of stability in the young boy's life. Pete's summer holidays with Dad have increased gradually over the years; they're up to five weeks now. While more challenges lie ahead, George no longer worries whether he will be a permanent; and influential part of his son's life.

From the experience of these dads and the advice of professionals come several helpful pointers:

- Strive for consistency. Regular, small moments express love far better than infrequent "Disneyland" extravaganzas.

- Make and sustain contact with your child's schoolteachers. Knowing how they're doing in school will help you better support and encourage them.

- Direct contact with the school will also reveal any discipline problems and help you learn about academic achievements. This will keep father-son or father-daughter long-distance interactions far more enjoyable and insightful.

- Similarly, an occasional telephone call to their sports coaches, music instructors and Sunday school teachers will display your appreciation for their love and attention to your child.

- Keep your children in touch with relatives and friends on your side of the family as much as possible.

- Guard against letting those hours you used to spend with your children each week become absorbed by other activities. Noting your child's special days or events on a calendar will help you keep in touch. Ask their school to put you on the parent's mailing list.

- Keep a camera handy and regularly enclose snapshots of yourself at home or at work.

- If you're not intuitively creative about how to make notes, cards, letters and phone calls fun and meaningful, seek out published resources and tips from other dads in similar situations. One good resource is The Write Connection, a well-conceived binder full of fun stationery, cards, envelopes, long-distance craft projects, stickers and communication logs. It's aimed at children from four to 12, and can keep you communicating for six months until your own ideas take shape. Another tool is the Dads Only newsletter. While written to custodial dads, these newsletters and "Dad Talk" cassette tapes contain many adaptable tips and ideas to keep you sharp, both at a distance and when your child is with you.

- Let the separation motivate you to pray for your child in more specific ways. Read up on the stages of development your child is passing through. Your fervent prayers can help protect him or her against the lure of life's many seductions.

If your child's mother remarries, a stepfather enters the picture. He may or may not do a wonderful job of guiding your children. Whatever the case, you will need to act wisely. Your sensitive involvement remains important.

Everyone knows, however, that quality time does not fully compensate for the loss of quantity time. A dedicated, patient long-distance dad can be enormously effective in his child's life. Being a long-distance dad is never a lost cause. It's worth every ounce of the energy, expense and effort a dad can invest.

Your child has only one natural father. In this broken world, our Heavenly Father takes great delight in meeting giant needs with our loaves and-fishes efforts!

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Hezekiah's gift

Margaret Wood recounts a memorable stroll through Jerusalem

Instant panic gripped me as I lowered myself into the dark, murky waters of Hezekiah's tunnel in Jerusalem. As an acute sufferer of claustrophobia, what had possessed me to join this scary adventure? The officials told me that the water never rose above the knees. "Never, ever", they assured me. Also, though I admitted this only to myself, I knew I couldn't bear to be left out of any reminiscing on the venture.

The tunnel was discovered in 1880 when a schoolboy, playing near the old city of Jerusalem, wandered into it. He slipped into a pool, and while groping his way out, noticed inscriptions on the wall which told how King Hezekiah, King of Judah, cut out a tunnel to ensure a water supply from the Spring of Gihon in the event of an Assyrian attack. The events are described in 2 Chronicles 12:4, 30; and 2 Kings 20:20.

Armed with candles and matches and clad in swimsuits and sandals, 15 of us noisily entered the 1760-foot long tunnel at the point where Solomon was anointed to be king. The pool of Siloam is at the other end. The floor of the tunnel is of uneven earth. The passage is wide enough to allow only for single file. Once you are in the tunnel, you can only move forward by digging your elbows into the wall. My head touched the roof when I stood on tiptoe, all 5'3" of me! I took a few tentative steps, then announced in a loud, unfamiliar voice through chattering teeth that I was turning back. There was no way that I was going one step further.

My friends immediately reminded me that the coach, which had dropped us off, was now speeding to the exit to collect us. "And," they added, "you are scarcely dressed for street-wear in your swimming



An engraving of the pool of Siloam, with the tunnel entrance above.

costume." I had no choice. It was pitch dark and freezing cold, with "things" floating past and around throughout the entire journey — "things" too small for rats, but creepy and busily alive nevertheless. "Please God," I prayed, "don't let them be leeches."

Our bravado and hilarity dwindled to an uneasy silence as one by one our candles blew out and our shaking hands made it impossible to re-light them. Most of us had dropped our matches anyway.

Even now I can imagine the terror which would have overwhelmed us if the man at the rear of our detached group of five had not had the foresight to bring a torch. We were moving at a snail pace. That gave me time to make a mental calculation of how

many steps there were in 1760 feet.

Was I imagining it or was the floor sloping and the water rising? Suddenly it reached my shoulders, then my chin, while I desperately tried to increase my height. I prayed like never before or since. Panic almost suffocated me when the lady in front of me realised that she was stepping into uncertain depths. She held herself upright only by digging her elbows into the wall. Judging by the laughter away in the distance, the others in our party had scampered through quickly.

"I'm going to faint", she whispered. "Faint? Good grief. You can't faint. There's no room to faint", I told her in a shouting whisper. Her fear was contagious, but we tried very hard to be brave by singing *Amazing Grace*.

When she again threatened to faint, we flattened ourselves against the wall and allowed the man with the torch to become the leader. She clung to him and I supported her under her arms. Everyone was now silent and terrified.

It was a long tortuous pilgrimage. Fortunately, there were no detours to confuse us. At long, LONG last we saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Never was daylight more welcome. The lady in front of me managed to delay her faint until she collapsed into the arms of our tour leader, just in time to prevent her from falling into the pool of Siloam (John 9:7). For all of us, our experience will forever be a conversation piece, but even more so for the lady in distress as it happened to be her birthday, a yearly reminder, courtesy of King Hezekiah.

Later, while browsing through a guidebook, I read: "If attempting to travel through Hezekiah's Tunnel, it is advisable to wear hip boots." Hip boots!

Shortly after our ordeal, the tunnel made world headlines. A party of 100 American students was trapped. Only the prompt action of the fire brigade in siphoning out the water saved their lives. All were shocked and many were injured.

As for my claustrophobia — am I cured? No way! If anything, I am 10 times worse, thanks to good King Hezekiah.

Margaret Wood worships at Port Macquarie Presbyterian Church, NSW.

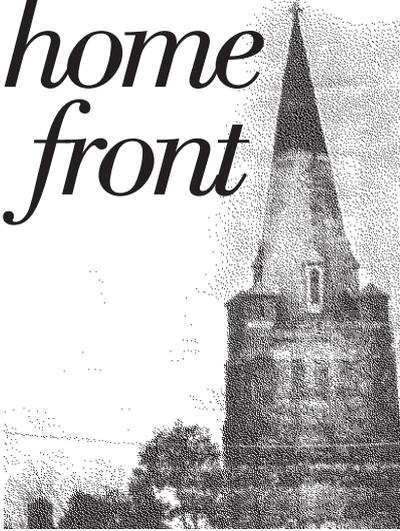
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Never tolerate injustice

Members of the Hamilton, NSW, parish, made a thought-provoking trip to the Sydney Jewish Museum, where they were challenged by aspects of Jewish culture in Australia, and watched the film, *Evil will triumph when the good remain silent*. The visit challenged the group's perceptions of morality, democracy, and human dignity. The lesson is, never tolerate injustice.

Celebrations

The St Andrews church in Chatswood, NSW, held an inspiring commissioning service for **Shari Collison** at the end of November. Shari is working with SIM in the Niger Republic.

At **Coorparoo** in Brisbane, **Rev George Lievano** led as the congregation dedicated a seat in memory of **Mrs Yvonne Fetherston**, marking many years' service to the Guild and the congregation.

The **Mudgeeraba Presbyterian Church**, which was started in early 1997 under the Queensland Assembly's Vision 5 program (the planting of five new charges in 10 years), in November opened extensions to its building. The church, between Nerang and Coolangatta on the Gold Coast, began with 24 people in the local school, then bought a 15-year-old three-bedroom home. Within three months, attendance reached 70, and 135 attended the thanksgiving service for the extensions on 11 October. Queensland's moderator, **Rt Rev David Secomb**, opened the extensions on 7 November. The minister, **Rev Glenn Samuel**, asks that the wider Church continue to pray for the outreach work of the congregation, and that the Lord's people will be encouraged as they see His hand at work among them.

Readers, thank you for your support in sending news from your church and district. Please send items to:

Neil Benfell, P.O.Box 681 Warrnambool, 3280; Fax 03 5562 9718;

Email kingcoll@standard.net.au

Please don't send us your church newsletter or bulletin for we can't read these to select news. Rather send a particular news item for events in your congregation or presbytery that will interest people around Australia.

The congregation at **Bald Hills** celebrated the opening of a new complex on 25 October. Bald Hills is an older established congregation, but in recent years the population has boomed, and the old building, seating 100, proved inadequate. The new complex consists of a worship centre seating 200, large activities hall, kitchen, disabled facilities, office and meeting room.

Appointments

Kempsey charge in the Hastings Presbytery has a new session clerk, with the appointment of **Mr Bruce Wilson**.

The **Rokeby special charge**, Tasmania, has ordained two new elders, **Mr Tim van Engen**, and **Mr Geoff Peatling**.

At **St Andrew's** in **Launceston**, **Mr Norman Holder** has been appointed session clerk, succeeding **Mr Paul Vogelpoel** who held office for a short time following the resignation of **Dr Trevor Clezy**, who held the office for 15 years.

At **St Andrews**, **Ulverstone**, **Mrs Enid Hays** retired from the session recently after 30 years service, and is now Elder Emeritus.

At **Camp Hill** in Queensland, the Presbytery of Mowbray inducted **Rev**

David McDougall into a collegiate pastoral charge.

Rev Bruce Harrison has accepted a call to Central Queensland.

Burnett ordination

South Burnett, Queensland, is rejoicing in its first ordination since Church Union, when only a couple of small congregations were left. The charge, centred on Kingaroy, became a Home Missions charge in the late 1970s. The Presbyterian Church was left with no property in Kingaroy, but was able to buy the former Kingaroy Presbyterian Church and hall back from the Uniting Church. The congregation also bought a manse. Over the years, several home missionaries have served the charge, which includes congregations at Wondai and Goomeri. After an exit-student, **Mr Wallace Brown**, was appointed in January 1998 the Lord began to add people to the church. Five new elders have been ordained, and at a special service on 3 December, the **Presbytery of Darling Downs** ordained Mr Brown the first minister to be appointed to the charge since Union.

A prized teacher

Ms Di Wilson, a teacher at **Presbyterian Ladies College**, Melbourne, has received the inaugural 1998 Optus teacher of the year award. Ms Wilson, the deputy head of library, won an educational trip to London for the award, which recognises outstanding contributions to education using leading technology. Ms Wilson's work related to efficient and effective use of the internet, guided by sound learning principles.

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Award for hospital

St Andrews War Memorial Hospital, a joint Uniting and Presbyterian acute private hospital in Brisbane, has won an Australian Quality Council award for progress towards business excellence. The hospital has also been recognised with awards for waste management, human resources management, and excellence in networking.

Meanwhile, the Queensland State Assembly has agreed to a proposal from the Uniting Church, to buy out the Presbyterian right to appoint board members to the hospital. The hospital faced an uncertain future since vast changes were made in the whole area of funding by governments and private health organisations. St Andrews will now become part of the Queensland Uniting Church's chain of hospitals, thereby benefiting financially from the resultant cost savings and greater negotiating power.

The Queensland Presbyterian Church is now taking the opportunity to streamline and improve its own ministry among the elderly, and will also investigate involvement in other ministries of care and compassion. To this end the department of social missions is being restructured under the guidance of an interim management

team of Mr Ron Pilkington, Pastor Des Gallagher and Rev Guido Kettmiss. A health-care consultant has been engaged, and it is planned to spend more than \$1 million in upgrading aged people's complexes.

Whitney wing opens

The \$3 million Whitney Wing of the Hopetoun Aged Persons Complex was officially opened and dedicated on 5 December before a large number of friends and supporters. The Hopetoun complex is the largest of six managed by the department of social missions of the Queensland Presbyterian Church. The Whitney Wing, named after Dr and Mrs Harold Whitney, provides accommodation for low-care and high-care residents, and includes a secure special care unit for dementia residents. Dr Whitney was the state evangelist for many years and the first principal of the Queensland Theological Hall after Church Union. Mrs Whitney had her own ministry of encouraging students and their wives and working among the women of the state through the PWMU. Both lived in Hopetoun for some 15 years, and for most of that time were actively involved in the Hopetoun community.

The state moderator, the Rt Rev David Secomb, gave the address and led in the

prayer of Dedication, and Rev Margaret Mills, a daughter of Dr and Mrs Whitney, officially opened the wing.

Songs of Praise

Mackay's carols evening has become an interdenominational success story, with more than 1200 people enjoying the service in December. For several years the Mackay Presbyterian Church, Qld, held the event in the front yard of the church, then in 1992 it was moved to the park. Local firms provided the scaffolding and canvas needed for a covered stage and to put up lighting and sound equipment, which was done with the help of people from various denominations. Now, under the oversight of Rev J. Brown and his musically talented wife Judith, musicians, choirs and singers are chosen from the local churches, ensuring a top-quality program. Regional newspapers and radio stations advertise the evening free. The Gospel is clearly and unashamedly proclaimed. Other denominations have closed their evening service to encourage people to attend, enabling Christians to invite friends and family members who would not normally go to church.

Presbyterian identity

A conference on the historical roots of Presbyterian identity is being held at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Burwood, Sydney, on Saturday 20 March. The speakers are Dr Mark Hutchinson, Rev David Burke, and Dr Helen Clements. For more information, contact Rev Paul Cooper at the college.

Scotch

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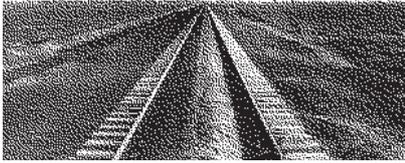
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across australia



A courageous testimony

The *Celebrate Messiah Newsletter* reports that Rabbi Harold Vallins of Bet Hatikvah Synagogue in Melbourne was asked to leave his congregation because he publicly declared that Jesus was his Messiah. Rabbi Vallins has suffered personal tragedy since that time last year, but declared, "It is extremely painful and I have prayed long and hard for the Lord to change this situation. However, my life is forever bound up with Jesus and I would not want it any other way."

Olympic quest

The Quest Australia outreach for the Olympics, is seeking Christian performers in the creative arts to perform at venues throughout the Olympic, carnivals and Paralympic Games in 2000. To help identify performers, Quest is running a 1999 Gospel Eisteddfod competition in every state, seeking top performers in solo, band, dance, street theatre, drama, and ethnic performance. The eventual aim is to supply 2000 venues during the Games with 25,000 performers from Australia and around the world, to present the Gospel through creative arts.

Top viewing

The *Jesus* film has been seen by 1.7 billion people around the world, according to *Jesus — Gift to the Nation*. The film screened recently in the Hoyts Lawson Cinemas in Penrith, NSW. Churches and Christians are invited to help promote the film, and to use it. For more information, contact Young Goh, *Jesus — Gift to the Nation*, 9 Exeter Rd, Homebush, NSW 2140; phone 02 9746 1099.

Pornography anger

The new pornography classification announced by the Attorney General, Mr Daryl Williams, has angered Senator

Brian Harradine. The senator, a long time critic of censorship laws, and a supporter of conservative Christian values, wrote in *The Australian* in November that the new classification was recommended to the government by the former deputy chief censor, and now adviser to the pornography industry, David Haines. Removing the classification X and replacing it with another just serves to make pornography more respectable, says the senator. "It really boils down to what priority is given to the porn merchants' claimed right of freedom of expression as against the responsibility of governments to uphold the essential common good of a free, equal and life-affirming society. If you want people to accept bad for good, you must first change the language."

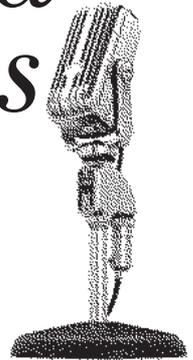
Call for cloning ban

The NSW Council of Churches has called on the federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Wooldridge, to support an immediate moratorium on all experimentation into human cloning in Australia, and to encourage the states that still have no preventative legislation in place to act quickly in the matter. The council's president, Rev John Edmondstone, said: "It is outrageous to think that a few prominent Australian medical scientists and ethicists are considering farming cloned human embryos for medical spare parts ... We have come to the time where some no longer are content in just considering themselves a god but now, in a frenzied race to be first, want to prove to the world that they can equal the God of creation in the human reproduction stakes."

Evangelical defined

The Gospel defines what makes an "evangelical" Christian, according to noted Australian theologian Dr Leon Morris in the magazine of the *Evangelical Alliance*. "An evangelical is a Gospel man, a Gospel woman. 'Evangelical' derives from 'evangel', 'gospel'. By definition an evangelical is someone concerned for the Gospel. This means more than that he preaches the Gospel now and then. It means that for him ... the Gospel is at the centre of his thinking and living ... The whole system of the evangelical is the outworking of the Gospel. With whatever blunderings and mistakes, the evangelical tries to unfold the implications of salvation through the cross and to live by them. The evangelical man or woman is, above all else, a product, and a bearer of, the Gospel." For the full text of Dr Morris' article, contact the alliance, PO Box 175, Box Hill, 3128.

world news



Our world news section concentrates on information you won't read in the secular press, and aims to provide a broad sweep of movements and events affecting God's people worldwide. This month some of it makes painful reading. But the church of Jesus lives in the real world, which "lies in the hands of the wicked one". We have to pray much for our brethren throughout the world.

Riots in Indonesia

Indonesia continues in a volatile state, and this is affecting Christians. "Christian" mobs have retaliated to Muslim riots in burning and looting. In the midst of these political/religious feuds, the real believers suffer as they try to continue their testimony for Jesus and be a force for peace. The mob does not distinguish between "Christian" and "non-Muslim", which is what the term Christian most often means in Indonesia. The **National Prayer Network** called on Christians to devote a whole month to prayer and fasting "for the restoration of security and peace by God to overcome the mindless violence".

Saudis weed out Christians

The *Voice of the Martyrs* reports that 25 Christians were deported from Saudi Arabia recently. Another five Christian women from the Philippines were expelled in December for their Christian activities. Some had served in Saudi Arabia for 20 years, received no severance pay, and were even denied a luggage allowance for their flight out. Some of the women had held Christian meetings in their living quarters. **Pastor Wally Magdangal**, a former prisoner for Christ in Saudi Arabia says the effort is aimed at weeding out everybody who is a Christian. Christians are urged to send a

protest to the Saudi embassy over the continuing mistreatment of Christian nationals.

Iraqis fear worse

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Cyprus) reports that Christians in Iraq, including Reformed Christians, have voiced fears about apparent Western plans to topple the Iraqi government. Public discussion of these plans has raised the concern of minorities who fear the loss of the measure of protection and support, as well as religious freedom, provided to them by the secular government of President Saddam Hussein. "Please remember to pray that the new fears and tensions will not lead to a new wave of immigration from among the churches in Iraq." In the past three years, these churches have lost several key spiritual leaders to immigration. MERF is involved in helping Iraqi churches train elders, youth leaders and Sunday School teachers.

Peaceful settlement

Christian churches from many countries are "adopting" Jewish settlements in Israel. The Foundation for Israel, based in Colorado Springs, USA, promotes "Adopt-a-Settlement", enabling churches to link with towns in Gaza, Samaria and Judah.

IT'S N W 1

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The program was conceived as a way for churches to reach out in love to villages now situated in the areas of the Palestinian Authority. Founder Ted Beckett says; "Churches or individuals can bless and do good works for their Jewish friends who have at times been hurt by Christians and are now forgotten by the rest of the world. The members of the adopting church are able to visit their settlement and develop relationships with those living there, as well as having meaningful pen pal relationships between Christians and Jews." For more information, contact the Foundation For Israel, PO Box 16050 Colorado Springs, CO 80935, USA, or tedbecket@aol.com.

Hindus attack Christians

Hindu militants in India – reinforced by the doctrine of Hindutva which teaches they have the right to coerce all non-Hindus out of India – have turned their attention to Christians. Most of the '90s have been occupied with attacks on Muslims, but in 1998 the focus turned to Christians. This attitude has strengthened since March when the militants' favoured party, the BJP, gained power. Violence against Christians has soared. Evangelists have been beaten in many states. Hundreds of churches have been destroyed, and four nuns were gang raped in Madhya Pradesh last September. Horrified Christians, who barely form 3 per cent of the population have protested in vain to the Government. A nationwide day of protest by Christians In December has begun to attract the attention of the outside world.

Islamic campaign

In the Sudan, the National Islamic Front continues its forced Islamisation campaign against black African Christians in the country's south. There are documented accounts of Christians being sold into slavery, families torn apart, churches destroyed, and reports of Christians being tied to crosses and beaten. Starvation is used as a weapon of war, with widespread suffering and death. In London, **Baroness Cox**, president of **Christian Solidarity Worldwide**, highlighted these abuses in a speech in the House of Lords. She accused the international community of naivety in allowing atrocities to continue. The Baroness called the British Government to strong action and intervention, on the grounds that the Khartoum regime is mistreating its people as badly as Baghdad has the Kurds. Christian Solidarity Worldwide can be contacted at PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3YF, UK.

Copts under pressure

In **Sohag** in Egypt at least 1000 people have been arrested by local police and subjected to harsh interrogation and torture during an investigation of murder. The villagers are known as **Copts** — the largest Christian presence in the Arab world. **Lord Alton** of Liverpool, a British MP, said: "It is absolutely shameful that Egypt's Government should put so much energy into trying to cover up the truth rather than punishing the officers who abused more than 1000 Christians." The Government acted swiftly against those who tried to expose the injustices. **Bishop Wissa** and two other clergymen have been charged with "damaging national unity".

Newt nominated

The United States Religious Freedom Panel is taking shape, with outgoing House Speaker **Newt Gingrich** among the nominees. In October, Congress adopted the International Religious Freedom Act, intended to alleviate the persecution of religious adherents in foreign countries. The panel will report annually to Congress, and the President has powers ranging from protest to economic sanctions in dealing with offending governments.

Churches ignore MPs

The Evangelical Alliance in Britain found in a survey that fewer than 10 per cent of churches pray regularly for MPs, and less than 5 per cent for their local councillors. Some MPs complain that even their own congregations refuse to pray for them because they don't want to appear to be supporting one party! The alliance says no one needs prayer more than our politicians, not just because of power but because of the corrupting demands, and the complexities of the issues they deal with. The Scriptures command prayer for MPs: "*I urge then ... that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all holiness and godliness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour*". 1 Timothy 2:1-3.

Holy racquet

Tennis star **Michael Chang** continues to give his Christian testimony around the world. You can catch up with Michael's activities and find his testimony on the net at www.mchang.com

Beauty in grief

Paul Swinn rejoices through the death of his infant son

Dear friends,

For a long time I have been intending to write to you, to thank you for your kind thoughts and words after Joshua's death. Yesterday was exactly 18 months since his birth. Please accept this letter, although obviously circular, as a heart-felt expression of gratitude for your remembered kindness.

Joshua remains as much part of our family today as ever he was during his brief lifetime. Every day he is in some way in our thoughts. Our memories are precious to us. I hope that you will allow me to share a few memories with you. For me it is a privilege thus to be able to pay tribute to my son.

I well remember his birth. On Friday 29 July 1988, at 10.40am, Joshua David Swinn came into this world, a beautiful 6 lb 2 oz baby. Not just "a baby"; no! What words can capture the flood of memories as I recall with what deep gratitude to God I welcomed our darling second son as he lay crying his birthcry in Linda's arms! People talk about "maternal instincts"; but I can assure you (if you were not already convinced of it anyway) that there are paternal instincts, too! With what bonds of tenderness did I nestle him against me and soothe his shock on entering the world, while Linda lay back exhausted, eyes closed, after a morning's hard work.

Joshua David. It had taken us a long time to choose his names. In fact, they had only been settled the previous day. How glad we are that we had names ready! How glad we are for every memory of our Joshua!

We were quite unaware at his birth that anything was wrong with him. The first 24 hours passed, for me, in the usual flurry of activity after a baby is born — telephoning a list of near relatives, taking Michael (then almost two years old) twice to see his new baby brother, and trying to catch some rest after the exhaustion of the previous few days. Linda and Joshua, meanwhile, rested in the lovely maternity unit at Windsor Hospital, NSW.

On the Saturday evening, I received a phone call from Linda. The staff were worried about Joshua. He had been very sleepy and hardly feeding at all, and he was getting very cold. The doctor was examining him;

Paul and Linda Swinn were married in January 1985.

In September 1986, Michael was born. Then Joshua was born in July 1988.

It had been a normal pregnancy with Joshua. A couple of weeks before his due date, the doctor was concerned about possible placental insufficiency and arranged an induction. However, Linda went into natural labour, and Joshua was born on the morning of Friday 29 July.

The Swinns have never forgotten what happened in the next three days. On 30 January 1990, Paul wrote a letter to friends in which he describes Joshua's life and death.



they were thinking of transferring him to Nepean Hospital for a more detailed examination by one of the paediatricians there. I hurried over to Windsor. By the time I arrived, the ambulance was waiting.

What was wrong with Joshua — if anything — we still did not know. We certainly had no expectation that he was dying.

The news was broken to us very graciously. One of the sisters in Nepean's special care nursery came in with the paediatrician and asked us whether we had had Joshua baptised. Suddenly we apprehended the seriousness of the situation. The paediatrician gave us his provisional diagnosis and answered our questions. From the physical symptoms and from carefully listening to Joshua's heartbeat, it appeared that he had a condition called hypoplastic left heart. He would have to be taken to Camperdown

Children's Hospital for confirmation of the diagnosis, but we were advised to expect the worst.

Hypoplastic left heart means that the side of the heart which pumps oxygenated blood out into the body had not developed properly during pregnancy (no cause of the syndrome has yet been identified); consequently, a baby suffering from it almost inevitably dies, usually within the first week after birth.

A very long night followed while we waited for a further specialist and an ambulance to arrive. Joshua liked to have us with him. He was lying on a special bed with a heater directly overhead; he gripped our index finger tightly with his one free hand but started violently if we tried to let go. Sometimes, though, we would have to go and lie down because we were so very tired.

About that time, I received a great deal of comfort from words of the 22nd Psalm which, interestingly, had wrought powerfully in my mind during the early stages of labour some 40 hours before: "*But thou art He that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*" (Psalm 22:9-11) That beautiful passage came again and again to my mind in the hours which followed. Speaking of the Saviour, and highlighting God's covenant promise to be our God and our children's God, we knew that we could trust Joshua to His care. If you ever visit Joshua's grave, you will see that we have inscribed Psalm 22:10 on his gravestone: "*From my mother's womb You have been my God.*"

At the Children's Hospital, the diagnosis of Joshua's condition was confirmed, and we knew that he had only a few hours or days to live. In the event, he lived for 13 hours after he was taken off the mechanical support device. We were given the use of the parents' room at the hospital where we sat with him until, in the late afternoon, we were allowed to return to Windsor.

It was a peculiar and deeply moving experience to be attempting to prepare our own child for death. Oh, I wished I could have held his hand as he passed through its waters! but he must go alone, leaving Linda and me to observe from the nearer shore. I



knew, though, that there was a stronger Hand than mine that was sustaining him.

How many things I wished I could have had time to tell Joshua about this wonderful world in which God had placed us — about the waves and the wind, the fields and sunshine, flying kites, the principles of geometry. But he was going to a brighter, better land, a land which I could but dimly describe to him, one he would soon behold with unveiled eye. Who knows, perhaps Joshua now knows all about the waves, wind, sunshine, golden harvest, and geometry!

We read many precious Bible passages with him and sang many of the psalms we love so well. Just last night, in the course of our daily family Bible readings, we again read John's Gospel chapter 14, whose opening verses have been permanently gilt for me since we read them with Joshua: *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whithersoever I go ye know, and the way ye know."*

From that afternoon and evening we also have a lovely set of photographs of Joshua which we delight to peruse; and also ink prints of his hand and foot which a nurse at Camperdown so thoughtfully made for us. To have tangible memorials of our baby is precious beyond words.

There are many more memories which I must pass over, but they will live forever in my mind. Joshua died at about 12.25am on Monday 1 August 1988, shortly after my parents (who had travelled up from Victoria) had seen him. Linda's parents had seen him a couple of times in the previous two days.

His death was very peaceful. We had

prayed that it would be so. Without a sound or perceptible movement, he lay snuggled in my arms breathing gently; shortly after, he had stopped breathing. It was amazing to be present. I learnt something of the spirituality of the soul which I had never fully appreciated before.

The pathway of grief is a long process. It touches Christians just as much as non-Christians. We cannot deny that we often wish Joshua were here with us still. Undoubtedly, though, he would not wish to be back!

Why do children die? I cannot say. But I have no doubt that God took Joshua to be with Him because He loved him. Joshua did not go to heaven because he was sinless; he went because his sins had been washed away by the blood of his Saviour Jesus Christ. Those truths mean a tremendous amount to me. I can appreciate them in a deeper sense than before because of Joshua. How Linda, Michael and I look forward to meeting Joshua in heaven! and to meeting his and our Lord!

We are expecting another baby very soon. It will be lovely to have a baby in the house again! But our memories of Joshua will live for ever. Thank you once again for your love. May God watch over you and your loved ones during the year ahead.

*With love from us all,
Paul*

Postscript

Paul writes (January 1999):

Linda and I have had four more children since I wrote my letter — Eliza (February '90), Rebecca (November '91), Caleb (August '93) and Lydia (June '95). Yet Joshua retains a very special place in our hearts and home. There has hardly been a single day in the past 10 years that he has not been in our thoughts in one way or another. And there is nothing morbid about that.

The past 10 years have had their ups and downs. There are probably few experiences in life that rival the death of a child; though every type of grief is unique, and you can't really compare them.

We have felt great pain on the human level. Physical separation — hearts torn apart. Social isolation from people who were too embarrassed to talk to us about our grief.

Spiritually, we have never doubted God's presence and control, even though His fatherly hand has at times rested heavily upon us. We have also been tested — in our marriage, in our parenting role, and in our patience with others.

Heaven has become a more concrete place because of Joshua; but so too has earth, for we have an acute sense of its "groaning" (Rom. 8:22).

The people who have been most help to us have not been those who could quote the Bible — for we knew the same passages just as well as they did and never doubted them (e.g., Job 1:21) — but those who were not afraid to be human, to sit with us and listen to us. Salvation is not super-spiritual inoculation against pain but the creation of a real, flesh-and-blood, restored humanity in Christ. Because of what we have been through ourselves, we have also learned how to relate to others in their bereavement (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-5).

Our children all talk about Joshua without the slightest inhibition. The younger ones sometimes even cry for the brother they have never met. There is a gap in our home. There always will be till we are in heaven. But it is also a busy, happy home.

How many children do we have? Six. Five on earth, and one in heaven. I can't find words to express how enormously proud I am to be the father of my six children and the husband of my wife.

For Linda and me, grief has a name and a face — a beautiful name and a beautiful face. It has tiny hands and feet, and a voice that cried, and eyes that gazed in the semi-darkness of a hospital room. It has gentle breath, breath that came quietly to a stop. And it has left us 10 years of memories and a small brass plaque in a cemetery in Sydney.

But grief itself has an end. Death will be swallowed up in victory.

Paul Swinn is minister of Chalmers Presbyterian Church, Auburn, Victoria. This article is an amended version of one that appeared in APL Today in March 1992

Strong partners

This ministry plants a new church every 15 hours.

His name is Nanok. He is a Bangladeshi convert with a burden to reach his own people with the Gospel. He is in Australia seeking support to realise that dream. He approached Robert Benn, whose mind turned to CNEC/Partners International as a possible means of developing a base to proclaim the good news of Christ.

Robert initiated a meeting with Nanok and me to explore the way forward. CNEC/PI's mission statement is: "Linking supporters with effective grassroots Christian ministries worldwide."

We are in partnership with some 72 ministries in more than 50 countries, many in the "10/40 window" across Asia and the Middle East, including 95 per cent of the least evangelised peoples of the world. We are training national leaders for many thousands of underground churches in difficult-to-reach countries including China, Vietnam and the Arab world. Nearly 3300 frontline evangelists and Christian workers are involved with more than 115 different unreached people groups, culturally distinct groups of people who do not have a viable indigenous church.

Through these ministries, more than 62,000 people have been converted in the past year, according to reports. Some 600 new churches are started through these ministries each year, or a new church every 15 hours.

Twenty or more national missionaries like Nanok are supported for the typical cost of one Western missionary family. It



David Cohen

seemed a classic opportunity to move forward. However, after prayerful consideration it was decided not to do so at this point. Nanok was disappointed. His sponsor-mentor was equally so.

CNEC/PI, in the 55 years since it began with its focus on China, has learned a number of lessons the hard way. It has developed a number of criteria to prevent problems recurring to the detriment of the ministries.

For example, support will never be given to a one-man ministry. There needs to be a board to whom the leader or worker is accountable. The work needs to have a proven track record, affirmed by the wider evangelical constituency of the area where the ministry is being carried out. There need to be measurable goals, and financial accountability.

In Nanok's case, most of these criteria were not met. The problem was not that the vision was not of the Lord, or that his own commitment to that vision was not deep.

With a certain sadness of heart, Nanok was encouraged to return to his beloved

country, to establish his ministry, perhaps within an already-existing network reflecting his own vision. In time, a partnership may well develop.

Just a couple of days after the meeting I set off on an 18-day journey to Kenya, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the UK and the USA. What an incredible privilege to be able to visit partner projects already supported, and to evaluate possible new ones.

In Kenya, I was able to visit the Kawangware project in the Nairobi slums. In two years, a church of 400 adults and 400 children has grown from nothing. A primary school, a children's feeding program, a carpentry training workshop and a women's sewing workshop have all been established, in what was one of the most violent areas in the country.

Visiting another project, I was impressed to see first hand the impact that four committed and trained Maasai evangelists have had, and the respect they are given. Plans to provide desperately needed dams are being evaluated. It is a classic case of how nationals can be so effective in the work of the Gospel, but need resources.

In Rwanda there were four prospective new partner ministries to evaluate. You will remember Rwanda's horrific genocide in the mid-'90s when one million refugees fled out of the country to border camps. The Barakabaho Foundation, begun during the troubles, is caring for widows and orphans.

It is highly regarded by the Rwandan Government as a national, grassroots organisation, with deep Christian commitment motivating desperately needed material care. Carefully planned leadership training programs will prepare tomorrow's leaders to replace a whole generation of leaders murdered during the genocide.

It's crucial work. So multi-faceted. It cries out for strong partnership in the gospel. Together we can continue "to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour".

David Cohen is the National Director in Australia of CNEC/Partners International.



David Cohen with Maasai evangelists in Kenya.

Seeking refuge

Can Christians ignore genocide in our back yard?

Australia's conscience is on the line. The 1700 or so East Timorese seeking asylum in Australia have been in the news a fair bit lately. Articles have pointed out the complex political and legal issues facing these people.

Most of them arrived here after the Dili massacre, making use of a temporary loophole to gain visitors' visas from Bali. A small number are boat people. Most came here in fear for their safety back home. Many have been tortured by the Indonesian military or have seen family members killed.

Meanwhile, the Australian Government does not want to offend Indonesia by granting them refugee status and thereby conceding that human rights abuses are happening in East Timor. It continues to sidestep the issue, arguing they are Portuguese citizens because Portugal was the former colonial power, and that they should seek asylum there.

Ironically, while in Opposition in 1995, the current Foreign Minister, Mr Alexander Downer, claimed that "Australia has never considered the people of East Timor as anything but Indonesian since 1979". Now the Government wants to send the asylum-seekers to Portugal. And so they form a largely traumatised, anxiety-ridden group, living here under the threat of deportation.

But what is our responsibility as Christians to these people, mostly Catholics, who continue to live in uncertainty? Their indeterminate status limits their access to welfare services and jobs. Legal aid is no longer available to help them put their cases before the Refugee Review Tribunal. Any legal representation is carried out by professionals who are willing to donate their services.

And what about our response to the human rights abuses which continue to be inflicted on Christians in East Timor, our near-neighbours — only 450 kilometres from Darwin? Especially when the East Timorese people hid Australian soldiers from the Japanese during World War 2 and tens of thousands were killed for aiding our troops. Understandably, the Timorese expected Australia to honour its war-time debt by supporting an independent East Timor.



Dee Gronlund

Religious persecution of Catholics in East Timor is part of this whole political conflict — Indonesia's sovereignty over and against the people's right to independence. Carolyn Graydon, a Melbourne solicitor representing 650 Timorese seeking asylum, explains: "The Catholic Church is the only independent power in East Timor. Indonesia views the Church as being involved in the East Timorese resistance, Fretilin. So, if someone is involved with the Church they are automatically associated with Fretilin."

Carolyn has heard many first-hand accounts and witnessed statutory declarations. "Intimidation of people is common," she says, "The Indonesian military have waited outside churches, hurling insults at East Timorese worshippers. On occasion they have entered churches and killed people

seeking protection there."

This was the case which led to the Dili massacre in 1991. Sebastian Gomez, a resistance member, was killed in a church while hiding from the military. The army later attacked and killed mourners at his funeral at the Santa Cruz cemetery. In recent months the media has revealed that further killings also took place away from the cemetery.

Indonesian forces put pressure on Catholics in other ways. Carolyn adds, "Women are abducted and assaulted on the way to church. Catholics are offered money, or are threatened outright to get them to convert to Islam." And yet the opposite has happened over the past 16 years, since Bishop Carlos Belo was installed as leader of the Catholic Church in East Timor.

Admiring Belo's boldness in speaking out against the Indonesian regime and exposing its atrocities, the East Timorese have turned to the Church in large numbers. Initially 30 per cent of the population was Catholic; now the proportion is reportedly about 90 per cent.

Apart from outright religious persecution, there are other forms of abuse which impinge on religious freedom. Maria Brett, from the East Timor Human Rights Centre, claims: "There is evidence of the forced ster-



Protesters in Dili moments before the 1991 massacre.

ilisation of women as part of official family planning programs — or they are coerced to take part in such programs...against their Catholic beliefs.”

Jose, an East Timorese asylum seeker living in Melbourne, says it appears that Indonesians have actually destroyed churches. He has come across broken statues and the ruins of buildings. But Jose’s fears extend to other infringements of personal freedom and intimidation.

“It is not safe there at all”, he states, “There is a red card on the doors of East Timorese houses. On it there is the name of the household head and a list of family members. If Indonesian soldiers knock on your door you have to let them in to inspect your house and see who is there. You can’t go for a walk at night...”

Apart from the threat of violence, Jose also faced debilitating economic restrictions in East Timor. He had a job in photocopying services. But, because he was not a Muslim, he had trouble travelling through different areas to carry out his work. “Everyone has an ID card with his personal details on it. It is like a ‘human licence’. Muslims (Indonesians) can easily travel between regions — but it is hard for a non-Muslim.”

According to Jose the social effects of Indonesian domination are profound. “We couldn’t get jobs because the Indonesian Government relocated its people from its other 26 provinces to East Timor — and they took our jobs and land. We can’t do anything! We don’t have enough food, or money to buy land. We had to sell to survive.”

In contrast to his people’s forced sell-offs, Jose claims that the Indonesian government gave many hectares of land to Indonesian settlers, enabling them to plant

vegetables and rice so they could get established. But the East Timorese are not given any help. So the process of cultural erosion continues. And past and present Australian governments, not wanting to pass up their share of oil and gas resources in the Timor Gap, have been passive accomplices.

The East Timorese seeking refuge in our country continue to wait. It seems that the Australian Government is stalling the process. Some Australians, however, are taking action to help our struggling neighbours. Urban Neighbourhoods of Hope, a group set up by the Churches of Christ to work with poor communities, actively supports the asylum seekers.

Ashley Barker, one of the coordinators, says: “We asked them what their concerns were. Out of that we set up a job club, started English classes, indoor soccer, and monthly outings for them... We also organised a protest at Queenscliff, where the Government has been training Indonesian soldiers.” (Some East Timorese have described being tortured by members of the Indonesian military that were trained in Australia as part of the government’s military cooperation.)

More controversial in its approach is Sanctuary Network, a scheme established to offer asylum seekers refuge in people’s homes if the Government decides to deport them. Sheltering deportees is illegal and can incur a jail sentence under the Immigration Act. Yet the list of people and organisations willing to take this risk exceeds 12,000 names. It includes church groups. For some Australians it is one way they can take definite action to show their opposition to Australia’s policy on East Timor.

While many may not agree with protest through civil disobedience, perhaps more Christians should give voice to their conscience about human rights abuses in our own region. About 200,000 East Timorese have died as a result of Indonesian occupation — nearly one third of the population. It amounts to genocide in our backyard.

Dee Gronlund is a part-time writer who works at Ringwood, Vic.

ap

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Hard-hitting

Phil Campbell

The new kids movie *Babe 2* is facing allegations of undue violence and nastiness. There's a dog chase scene that US critics claim is potentially disturbing for tots. Most tots disagree. And as Australian critic Rob Lowing points out, it seems fickle that the same American industry that spawned the brick-in-the-face fun of a movie like *Home Alone* suddenly has problems with a talking pig in a dog chase. Violence on film is a complex issue. Without it — or at least, without some “threat” — drama simply ceases to be drama. Adrenaline flows in response to danger, and danger is the essence of drama and plot. But how much to show? What's appropriate? What's not? Those are tough questions, and they require some thought.

Here's a starting point. Violence that's simply “eye-candy” can desensitise the soul — violence that makes people seem expendable,

that makes death seem trivial, takes us down an ugly path indeed. And often, in “fun” movies like the *Die Hard* series, that's the violence being dished up.

Ironically, video violence that makes us feel bad is probably much better for us. *NYPD Blue*, for example, is an American TV series with real heart — and some scenes of graphic violence. By the end of an episode, you'll be feeling drained, because you've come face to face with man's inhumanity to man. Case-hardened cops Andy Sipowicz and Bobby Simone are often reduced to tears — and you might be too. It's not a light evening of entertainment, but it shows vividly the consequence of living in a world beset by sin in a way that a glib shoot-em-up never does. In the following review, Katrina Ramsay takes a look at *Saving Private Ryan* — a violent movie, that if you're tough enough, may actually be worth watching.

Film Watch

Saving Private Ryan

Katrina Ramsay

Let's not beat around the bush here. *Saving Private Ryan* is incredibly violent. Limbs are blown off, blood flows unchecked, and one soldier clutches vainly at his intestines as they spill out of his gaping stomach. The MA rating is a fair one. If gore disturbs you, ignore the presence of family-values heavyweights like Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks and steer clear of this film. The good-hearted sentimentality of sending eight men to search out the one remaining brother of three others who have died in the war, to comfort his mother in her grief, will not redeem this film for you.

Having said that, here are some reasons to see the film anyway. First, *Saving Private Ryan's* treatment of the violence is not frivolous. In a marked contrast to most Hollywood action films, the combat is not represented for our enjoyment, as in a Jackie Chan film. It's shocking, not spectacular. The fighting is not accompanied by a swelling orchestra, so we don't ride the emotional tide of the athletic heroics of the characters. There is no gratuitous slow motion, no blood and bodies arcing through the air, as in a John Woo film (*Broken Arrow*, *Face/Off*). *Saving Private Ryan* doesn't even depict the iconic, ironic violence of *Reservoir Dogs* or *The Usual Suspects*. Instead, the horrific fighting of World War II is presented simply, baldly and, most importantly, realis-

tically. Spielberg has worked hard to recreate a convincing sense of actually being there. One way he does this is through the camera movements. The camera is not static, but it moves through the combat, simulating a soldier's-eye view. It continually surprises us with the suddenness of death and suffering in the frenetic battles of war, and we are reminded of the terrifying powerlessness of the individual soldier.

The extent to which the violence of *Saving Private Ryan* is different to most other cinematic violence can be seen in the audience's reaction. During the screening I attended, only once or twice did the audi-

ence emit the adrenaline-charged, almost involuntary cheers that usually accompany the cartoon violence of an Arnie Schwarzenegger flick. In contrast, the horrors of *Saving Private Ryan* prompted stunned silence, or, at the most, small gasps of despair. The bare reality constructed by Spielberg is far more effective than a highly stylised alternative. The question that remains, therefore, what end does it achieve? Is there a reason behind such epic film-making, or is Spielberg, the master director, being merely self-indulgent? We can marvel at the skill involved in staging 25 minutes of stunningly realistic battles, but we need some kind of motivation to sit through such



a barrage. It is at this point that Spielberg's use of flashback sets the whole thing in context. (Unfortunately, I can't argue this point to completion without giving away the ending, so if you want to see the film unspoiled, stop reading now!)

The entire story of the film is portrayed as being part of the recollections of an aged war veteran who is visiting the masses of white crosses that represent fallen soldiers. His faltering step contrasts sharply with the lithe healthiness of his grandchildren — he is obviously disturbed by the experience.

One critic attributed this device to Spielberg's inability to letting a story stand on its own merit, because he thinks that we need the direct connection to our own lives in order to glean anything from the film. More than this rather superficial sense of identification, the presence of the war veteran heightens our entire experience of the film. We learn, at the end of the film, that the

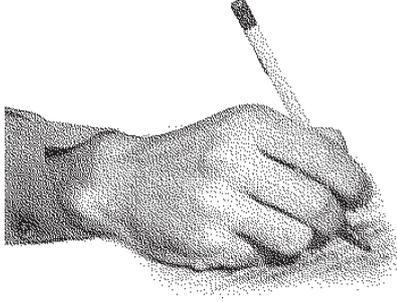
old man is actually the Private Ryan of the film's title. He is the man for whom at least six others have died. We see the other characters agonise over the ethics of sacrificing the sons of other mothers for this one man. The noble Captain Miller (Tom Hanks), dying on the bridge that his men have saved, grabs Ryan's collar, and in a whisper, urges him to "earn it" — to earn what he already has: his life.

With that scene still resonant in our minds, the film cuts to Ryan as an old man, crouching beside Miller's cross, tears in his eyes. He turns to his wife and pleads with a desperation that is almost panic: "Tell me I've lived a good life. Tell me I'm a good man." The fear that his life has not been worthy of the sacrifice that was made for him grips him with an urgency that is almost tangible.

I found myself wondering if war veterans struggle everyday with question of whether their lives are worth the deaths of others.

They are only alive because someone else has died instead of them. And then I thought that our own situation as Christians is not that different. We have life only because Christ's death provides it. And do we live every day in the light of the knowledge of that sacrifice, striving to live our redeemed lives in a manner worthy of the calling we have received? Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:15 that because Christ "died for all ... those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them". As shocking as *Saving Private Ryan* is, the horror of God dying in our place, "the offence of the cross" (Gal 5:11) is more shocking still. And the concern that Ryan has over the value of his life is therefore a goal that should consume us all the more. At every point, our lives should reflect the gracious sacrifice made for us. 

letters



Church sales

I refer to two letters in the December issue which complain about the New South Wales Trustees selling the property of the former Chester Hill Presbyterian Church at Sefton to a Muslim community.

It needs to be understood that the identity of purchasers of Church properties is often not known. This is partly because the property might be offered for sale by auction in which case the highest bidder is successful. As Trustees with common law duties to secure the best price for a property sale by auction is a generally preferred method. In the case of Sefton the property was submitted for sale by public auction but was passed in. Subsequently a private sale was negotiated with the Lutheran Church and contracts were issued but ultimately that Church did not proceed. The selling agents then negotiated a sale to a purchaser which was a corporation with the name "House of Peace Pty Limited", which sale was duly completed.

*Simon Fraser
Law Agent,*

Presbyterian Church of Australia, Sydney

Searching for signs

Thanks for the excellent articles by Mike Wilson on cross-cultural ministries. Over the years I have been involved with Korean, Chinese and Portuguese Presbyterian churches, and can see therefore that Mike speaks many words of wisdom! Perhaps I could add a footnote. We've found that with the benefit of hindsight much angst and misunderstanding could have been avoided in our "sleepy" suburban church context if we had remembered to list the times of our "ethnic" congregation meetings/services on our church notice board. This turned out to be especially important when new neighbours purchased houses next to our church without knowing that from 6am Sunday (and other mornings, or in some cases overnight!) our building was

being used. They had only visited during the week and during the day time. And surprise, surprise the real estate agents "forgot" to mention it.

*Rev Stuart Bonnington
Bicton Presbyterian Church, WA*

White to harvest

A mission field – but not on your doorstep. This mission field is 2,500,000 square kilometres of beautiful country which has very few churches. That is an area more than 11 times the size of Victoria – big enough to be one of the 10 largest countries in the world.

The Presbyterian Church is growing in this mission field. Membership and attendance were up 14 per cent and 11 per cent respectively in 1997-98. The workers are keen, committed and few.

This is not a mission on your doorstep, but it is within your home! This is the third of your country which is Western Australia.

I wonder how many *AP* readers have considered how it would be, to have such huge opportunities for ministry, but so few personnel resources.

I encourage you to add the Presbyterian Church of WA to your regular prayers.

*Rev Rob Duncanson
Rochester Presbyterian Church, Vic*

Free speech

Victorian readers of *AP* may be interested to know that during February, Laurie Peake and his wife Gwen will be undertaking a month of deputation for P.I.M. throughout the state.

From 11 to 18 February they will be in Melbourne speaking at various churches, but there are a number of days where no arrangements have been made. Laurie wants to make maximum use of the time that he is in Victoria and to speak to as many groups as he can. If any churches or groups would like to hear about the work of P.I.M. could they contact me a.s.a.p. on (03) 5032 9074 and I will try to arrange it.

Laurie has more than 10 years of experience as a patrol padre. He is currently working full time in the Flynn Patrol which covers the area from Morgan on the Murray river to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and from Innamincka on the Queensland border to the Gawler ranges in the South West of South Australia. There are certainly some great stories to be told from this gospel pioneering work that our church is involved in, and much to encourage us spiritually.

While I have the opportunity, could I encourage all readers of *AP* to continue to pray for the work of P.I.M. Please pray specifically for the padres, who spend many hours on the road travelling between isolated properties, that they may be able to develop relationships that will lead to gospel and ministry opportunities.

*Rev Martin de Pyle
Swan Hill Presbyterian Church, Vic.*

A friend indeed

Working in a high profile Christian overseas aid organisation, where issues involving poverty, pain and perversion are dealt with on a daily basis, is a confronting experience. I count it a special privilege to contribute to a work of love in the Name of Christ, but am concerned that too few Christian communities in wealthy countries such as our own, are sensitive to the needs of the vast majority of the world's population. By and large we live as if there were no tomorrow.

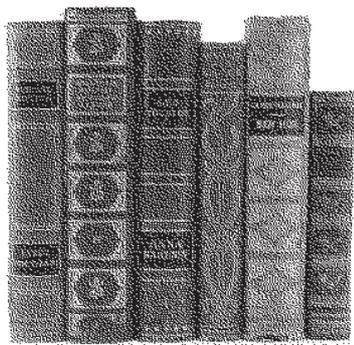
The Scriptures are clear that "having" carries with it certain responsibility towards the "have nots". It is true to say, however, that the inclination to respond to this injunction is somewhat dimmed by lack of exposure to the facts. Out of sight, out of mind. Allow me to share a few details on two issues, which affect the lives of countless people in numerous financially and spiritually impoverished nations.

The International Labour Organisation estimates there to be some 250 million child labourers around the world, 100 million of whom are thought to be bonded labourers (ie working to pay off a debt incurred by others). Children work as miners, street sellers, soldiers, prostitutes, waiters, agricultural labourers, and in factories, under conditions harmful to their health and development. In the process they are deprived of childhood, dignity, education and life skills.

In Afghanistan, since the Taliban (Muslim extremists) came to power in 1996, women have suffered severe oppression. Prior to this relative freedoms were enjoyed, but the rapidity of the transition to today's restrictive lifestyle has resulted in acute depression and, in many cases, suicide. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love. The challenge we as individual Christians face in interacting with life, is firstly coming to terms with what love means, and secondly, translating that understanding into action. One thing we can be sure about is that love acts in positive ways.

*Bronwyn Lee
Wantirna, Vic *

books



Calvin and the Calvinists

Paul Helm
Edinburgh: Banner or Truth, 1998.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

In 1981 R.T. Kendall published his *Calvin and the English Calvinism to 1649*, which claimed that classic Westminster theology goes back to Calvin's successor, Beza, not Calvin himself.

In Kendall's view, Calvin taught that Christ died for all mankind (not only for the elect); assurance is a necessary part of faith; and the gospel is to be preached before the law.

The Puritans, on the other hand, believed that Christ died for the elect, that assurance is not a necessary part to faith, and that the law needs to be preached to prepare the ground for the gospel. Calvinists apparently do not owe as much to Calvin as they thought.

Paul Helm replies vigorously and convincingly to this view. To cite Calvin on John 6:37, "Here we have three things, briefly indeed, but most perspicuously expressed. First, that all who come unto Christ were before given unto Him by the Father; secondly, that those who were thus given unto Him were delivered, as it were, from the hand of the Father into the hand of the Son, that they may be truly His; thirdly that Christ is the sure keeper of all

those whom the Father delivered over to His faithful custody and care, for the very end that He might not suffer one of them to perish."

Helm shows that there is a deep continuity between Calvin and the Westminster Confession, and that Calvin was, after all, a Calvinist.

The Prophecy of Isaiah

J. Alec Motyer
Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993.
Reviewed by Jeremy Middleton

Although Alec Motyer himself acknowledges the IVP has spent more than 30 years anticipating his commentary on Isaiah, the publishers cannot but feel, along with the Christian public at large, that it has been well worth the wait. This new publication will surely become a standard work on the shelves not only of conservative scholars and preachers, but of every serious theologian and student of the Old Testament.

This book is the fruit of a lifetime's labour. Here is a man who, through diligent and reverent study, has faithfully and painstakingly trampled the grapes of the Isaianic vine; and the long years of growing familiarity with, and reflection on, this literature have given to the wine of this commentary a richness and maturity which is always thoroughly satisfying and at times well-nigh intoxicating!

Motyer's commentary is, first and foremost, a manifestly scholarly work. He himself identifies "three main thrusts in commenting: explanation (what the text means), encyclopaedia (the course of specialist debate), and exposition (the continuing reality of the text as God's word today)". Of these, he decided "to major on the first while by no means forgetting the last", but, there is no doubt that, at least in the sense in which he means it, his work has an encyclopaedic thrust as well.

His references to the course of specialist debate are largely confined to the concise — but not cursory — 22 page introduction and the detailed footnotes, intruding into the main body of the commentary only as

they have a bearing on the meaning of the text.

On the crucial issue of authorship, Motyer argues the case for the unity of the text fully, cogently, and quite unashamedly. He speaks of, and illustrates, "a literature bursting with internal evidence of its unity". Combining linguistic, manuscript, theological, historical, and logical arguments, he demonstrates why the whole literature can and should be attributed to the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem. His argument makes compelling reading, especially for those who might otherwise be awed by the apparent complexity of the ongoing debate.

A second notable feature of this commentary is, as one has come to expect from this author, its marvellous lucidity. A full and helpful table of contents outlines the basic structure of the whole book of Isaiah, as Motyer sees it, a structure "built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1-37), the Servant (chapters 38-55), and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56-66)". The introduction then fleshes out the skeleton, while throughout the commentary each new section is prefaced by further introductory comments, in such a way that the reader is well prepared for the detailed exposition, and well rewarded by the discipline of study.

For the academic purist, it is perhaps regrettable that there is no index, and that the select bibliography is so selective that it excludes, for instance, O.T. Allis. But these flaws are ultimately insignificant and (presumably) easily remedied.

No review of this new commentary, however, would be complete without brief mention of a third feature characterising the book: it is always and evidently a deeply reverent work from the pen of one who clearly strives to combine the pursuit of academic excellence with the spirit of ardent worship. As a result, the serious student of Scripture will find this a book that both engages the mind and inspires the heart, giving depth and substance to his praise, point and passion to his mission: a book to be read and used with the same patience and eagerness that the publishers themselves have shown in awaiting its completion!

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Awake and rise!

Encouraging words from Psalm 44

New Year is a suitable time to look back in time, to consider the present and to ponder the future. That is precisely what the psalmist does in Psalm 44. The psalmist thought that Israel's present decrepitude was not really her fault (verses 17 to 22). This not true today because the present condition of Christendom is largely her own fault; but some basic principles are raised in this Psalm which may help us.

First, look at the present condition of God's people. Verses 9 to 16 tell of shame, defeat, disarray, slavery, scorn and derision. As the psalmist sees it: "You make us a byword among the nation, a shaking of the head among the peoples" (v14). Israel was weak and lacked respect, rather like the Church in the West today.

On 21 January 1866, responding to drought, floods and economic depression, the NSW government closed all government offices, and called a day of public humiliation. It would not happen today; it would not even be considered. The churches have obviously lost influence in the world.

Is the problem out there, in the world, due to sociological changes? Or is it in the Church herself? One Presbyterian minister has recently written: "It is not the brand of theology which has depleted our established congregations but wider sociological change." Is that so? This is a crucial question. If the problem is out there in the world, all we can do is wring our hands in anguish. But surely our clerical friend has got it wrong.

For well over 100 years we have lived with biblical criticism within the Church, all sorts of compromises with evolution, and bishops and pastors who do not believe in the virgin birth or the resurrection. The last Lambeth Conference even debated the



Peter Barnes

ordination of homosexuals and the admissibility of same sex marriages. It's strikingly similar to the 18th century when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu commented that "to be styled a rake is now as genteel in a woman as in a man". She joked that Parliament was "preparing a bill to have "not" taken out of the Commandments and inserted in the Creed".

But the problem was as much in the Church as in the world — indeed, there seemed hardly any difference. The great lawyer Edward Blackstone once heard the best-known preachers of London, and claimed that he gleaned no more Christianity from their sermons than he read in the writings of Cicero. Neither Church nor world knew the Gospel. It is the same today. Whatever the world has done, the Church has surely grieved the Spirit.

Second, look at past blessings, which Israel has enjoyed. The psalmist recognised that in the past God had greatly blessed His people (verses 1 to 3). In the exodus and the conquest of Canaan, Moses and Joshua performed remarkable deeds, but it was God who was behind those wondrous events. We too have seen better days. Churches have not always been debating the ordination of women, joining in inter-faith services, and going nowhere in particu-

We need to know our past. The study of history has recently fallen on hard times. In the 1960s some two-thirds of NSW final-year students studied history; by 1998 this had fallen to less than a fifth. We need to know about Wesley and Whitfield, and the transformation that the evangelical revival of the 18th century brought to English and American societies. The deist Benjamin Franklin was startled: "It seemed as if all the world were growing religious."

For that matter, we also need to know what happens to societies, which follow the line of apostasy, as set out in Romans 1. Fourteen of the first 15 Roman emperors were bisexuals. They were not gifted, arty men; they were depraved megalomaniacs.

If you know about John Bunyan, Barbara Thiering is likely to be less appealing; if you read J.C. Ryle, Bishop Spong will seem like the dinosaur; and if you know what happened in the 18th century, you are not so likely to panic when the media in the present age make fun of Christianity.

Third, let us plead for the future. The psalmist pleaded that God would awake and arise, and so help and redeem His discouraged people (vv.23-26). What God has done in the past, He is able to do in the future. The study of history is to be an exercise in neither nostalgia nor triumphalism. History is not the story of, to cite Chesterton, "how we became the marvelous mugs that we are". Nostalgia leads to lamentation, and triumphalism to pride — two deadly temptations. We need to be realistic about the present, knowledgeable about the past, and trusting in and prayerful to a sovereign God about the future. O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come (Isaac Watts). That is the great lesson — faith and prayer.

Peter Barnes is minister of Nambucca River Presbyterian Church, NSW.

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