

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

march 1999

Therefore go
and make disciples
of all nations,
baptising them in the
name of the Father and
of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit, and
teaching them to
obey everything
I have commanded you.



Church Planting

Soundbite sermons • In the presence of God • Church Directory

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Tending God's garden

Iplanted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor 3:6,7). This is only one of many references on the theme of planting and growth. Jesus often used the picture too. "A farmer went out to sow his seed", "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed". Then he goes on to talk about the problem of weeds and good wheat growing together.

This issue of *AP* focuses on church planting. Writers are tackling the subject from different angles: Sunday corporate worship as a venue for planting and watering as God makes things grow; jealousy for God's name as motivation for planting churches; struggling with all the practical issues of planting a new church; and factors that have destroyed zeal for evangelism and church planting.

I'm sure readers will respond in many different ways to the contents of this *AP*, including:

- A sense of failure because despite efforts to promote growth, there has only been shrinkage.
- Delight, because more concern is being shown in our denomination for the great commission of Jesus to make disciples.



Robert Benn

- Frustration as a result of previous attempts to mobilise the congregation in evangelism, with only the faithful few responding.

- Niggling questions as to why God has allowed phenomenal growth in other parts of the world but not here.

I clearly remember the struggle of missionaries in Thailand during the '70s. They had laboured faithfully for so many years. How many Christian converts? Fifteen. We were in Indonesia. God had worked through his quickening Spirit so that the planters and waterers saw 10 million turn to Christ from animism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in just one decade. It was much harder to be a missionary in Thailand. We all love to see growth.

Was the missionary team in Thailand any less faithful than the missionary team in Indonesia? I think not.

Was Paul any more faithful at Ephesus where there was considerable growth which followed the planting and watering, than he was at Athens which was something of a failure if viewed from the point of view of numerical growth? Was our risen Lord any less pleased with him after Athens? I don't think so.

So what is the key issue?

At Ephesus he "argued persuasively about the kingdom of God . . . and in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power".

At Athens he "preached the good news about Jesus and the resurrection".

At Corinth he resolved to know nothing while he was with them "except Jesus Christ and him crucified".

The gospel of our Lord Jesus and its urgent communication was always right at the heart and soul of Paul. That was far more important than a good success story. Even Jesus didn't always have good responses to his ministry. But he did model faithfulness perfectly.

That faithfulness will be seen in us when we align ourselves with the call of Jesus "to go into the world and make disciples". Are we prepared to face the fact that if we are not doing that, then we are being unfaithful? There are so many seemingly good things that can draw us away from that commitment. We must resist the temptation to get our priorities all askew!

On returning from a study tour to Asia recently, one on which I was study leader, a student said, "When I was in Asia I found it so easy to talk about my faith in the Lord Jesus. Now I'm back here, I find it so hard. That's the very reason I'm staying here!" That's the spirit, isn't it? That's the kind of zeal for truth's communication that we want. That's the way our Aussie friends will be saved. Planting, watering and prayerfully depending on God to "make it grow".

We hope you find this issue stimulating, and that it will lead to more loving obedience to our Saviour who said, "On this rock I will build my church."

*Robert Benn,
Convener, National Journal Committee.*



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Jealous for God

Paul in Athens provides a model for modern evangelism.



Anyone who has ever travelled to Athens will never forget his first impressions. The senses are heightened by the exotic smells, the incomprehensible language, the apparent lack of road rules and the antiquity of the city. Although the Apostle Paul lived in a different time, I'm sure that when he arrived in Athens on his second missionary tour he could not help but notice the city.

For centuries Athens had been the proud home of philosophy, literature, architecture and art. Many tourists flocked to this famous city. But when Paul arrived in Athens, he did not see the city through the eyes of a tourist, but from God's perspective. Luke records for us in Acts 17:16 that when Paul came to Athens he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

How do we see our city? Some curse the city as a place of smog, overcrowding, traffic jams and impersonal relationships. Others thrive on coffee shops and the bustle of the CBD. But have you ever seen the city through God's eyes, as a home of idolatry?



Ian Smith

I live in Sydney, 10 minutes drive from Mt Olympus where the gods of the Sydney Olympic Games organising committee prepare to meet, 15 minutes drive from Australia's oldest university where modern and ancient philosophies are discussed, 20 minutes drive from where international visitors come to the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 15 minutes from the world's most beautiful harbour where people live for the simple pleasures of swimming, sailing and sunbaking. Yet I rarely notice the idolatry of where I live. If I did, I would be far more motivated for evangelism and church planting. If I saw the city through God's eyes, I would not ask the question, "Why do we need to plant churches?" Instead, I would

ask, "How can we be more effective in evangelism and church planting?"

Our motivation for evangelism and church planting will affect how we engage in these activities. By and large, Christians are motivated to share the Gospel by one or more of the following reasons.

The first stimulus for evangelism is that we need to be obedient to the Great Commission. Jesus has commanded us "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Motivated by obedience, we will plant churches. This is good and proper, but it may result in the Christian fulfilling the Great Commission merely out of a sense of duty. It may not stir one's inner passion for church planting as it should.

Others will therefore talk about a love for the lost. On the judgment day all people – our neighbours, family and friends – will stand before the judgment seat. Out of love for these people, we need to share the gospel that they might escape God's coming wrath. Such motivation for evangelism is concerned with compassion rather than obedience. Some may even say that compassion is a higher motivation than legalis-



tic obedience. Both these motivations are good, and I don't want to belittle either. But there is another motivation for church planting that should be overarching, the one that motivated Paul when he came to Athens and saw the idolatry of that city. This motivation is that we are jealous for the name of God in the midst of idolatry. God and God alone is to be worshipped.

God is jealous for His own name's sake, and we, His children, should be jealous for that Name. This is what Jesus meant when he prayed "hallowed be Your name". Look around at your local community, whether it be urban or rural, and try to see things from God's perspective.

This jealousy for the name of God will lead to all sorts of missionary endeavours. In 1848, John Geddie, a missionary from the Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia, became the first missionary to settle in the islands of Vanuatu. He landed on the island of Aneityum, and when he was confronted by the idolatry of the local people, as expressed in cannibalism, in the custom of widows being strangled and buried at their husband's funeral, in fear and superstition, he was deeply disturbed. He wrote in his diary the words from Ezekiel 37:3: "Can these dry bones live?"

But Geddie did not give in, because he was jealous that God alone should be worshipped. He preached the Gospel on the island of Aneityum for 24 years. By the time he retired from this ministry, every person on that island, as far as the human eye can see, had turned from idolatry to worshipping the living God.

If you visit that island today, you will see behind the pulpit of the main church the famous words of the church historian Robert Steel, who, speaking of Geddie's ministry, said *when he landed in 1848 there were no Christians here; when he left in 1872 there were no heathens*. Such a ministry of church planting is motivated by jealousy for the name of God.

Although we are encouraged by such stories from far-away shores, and we continue to send missionaries to countries that are still steeped in idolatry, we fail to see the idolatry all around us.

How does Paul preach the Gospel in Athens?

It would have been easiest, perhaps, for Paul to reject the city with its idolatry by preaching against the evils of the city;

to be like many modern preachers with a totally negative message. Instead, in the most amazing way, Paul embraces the city. He goes to the seat of learning, the Areopagus, and quotes the philosophies of the day. He understands the worldview of the Greeks and even cites their poetry. For Paul does not want to reject the city, but to redeem it. After all, one of the images the New Testament gives us of Heaven is that of a city, the New Jerusalem.

And so, in a pluralistic society, Paul builds a Christian worldview. He begins by explaining that, in the light of the fact that God has created the world, idolatry is nonsense. We have not made God, as if He were some idol that we could domesticate and feed, rather He has made us. This fact, that God has made us all, means that we must all worship Him. Our God is not a tribal God for Jews only. He is the God over all.

One of the central tenets of today's political correctness is that it is always wrong to dismiss someone else's views. That does not leave much room for evangelism! We are to respect other people's tribal gods, in whatever form, and our tribal god will be respected by them. But that is not the message of the New Testament. Our God is not only the creator of all, He is the judge of all. And therefore all need to hear the gospel, no matter how offensive it may sound to their ears.

Thus Christians must necessarily give offence. The question is, to whom? Do you want to offend your neighbours by implying that their worldview is wrong, or do you want to offend God by tolerating idolatry? Are we more jealous for our neighbours than we are for the name of God?

The final objective in our work of evangelism will be that Christians are gathered together in worshipping communities where they are jealous for the name of God. Churches, whether they be new or old, are to be earthly reflections of the Heavenly reality.

Why should we plant churches? That question can be answered by another question, How do you see your local community? If you see it through God's eyes, you will be jealous for His name, that He alone will be worshipped.

Therefore we engage in church planting that we might be stimulated to evangelism. We engage in evangelism that we might plant churches. And all of this is done because we are jealous for His name.

Ian Smith lectures in New Testament at Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney 

I guess I have always been aware of the power of the church's public worship, but something happened in 1984 which helped me to see the mysterious attraction of congregational praise. It occurred one day after a morning service. While introducing herself, a lady told me that she had travelled a hundred kilometres to our church. I was dumbfounded. Why had she come?

"If you really want to know," she said, "I am looking for a worship service where I sense the presence of God's Spirit." It was a lesson that I will never forget. It reminded me of a comment that Mahatma Gandhi once made to some missionaries in India: "Just remember that the rose never invites anyone to smell it. If it is fragrant, people will walk across the garden and endure the thorns to savour it." There's a moral here that we shouldn't miss: the Sunday worship of a church can be a lighthouse whose flashing beams beckon weary travellers.

I know it was in my case. Whereas I'd made a conscious decision to follow Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade, it was simply the climax of 12 months' attendance at weekly Gospel services. In other words, this regular experience of corporate worship was a special evangelistic force in my life. The crusade was merely the trigger for my conversion. All the preparation had been done in church.

The idea that congregational worship can have an evangelistic role in the church's life is one of the forgotten truths of the last few decades. While nearly every major denomination has been preoccupied with reaching the masses, the emphasis in the past 50 years has been on mass crusade evangelism, personal contact in one-on-one witnessing, and more recently the development of so-called "seeker services", where unbelievers no longer share in the elements of normal worship services, but instead are treated to a meeting which is consciously shorn of vital aspects such as confession and prayer. Sadly, many seem unaware of the evangelistic power of Spirit-filled corporate worship. Instead, worship and evangelism are seen as different as cheese and chalk.

However, it was not so in the ancient church. Moses did not subscribe to the theory that "seekers can't relate to worship". In several places in the Torah, Moses gives clear directions about the worship of the assembly. And in the midst of these instructions, he makes it clear that he expects unbelievers to be present and to participate. "For the generations to come, whether an alien or anyone else living among you presents an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the Lord, he must do exactly as you do" (Num. 15: 14). He gives a similar instruction in

The power of praise

History everywhere proves the evangelistic power of congregational worship.



Peter Hastie

Deuteronomy 26: 10, 11: “And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you.”

The same was true for David. He believed that God would draw unbelievers to Himself when they became involved with Israel’s worship: “I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations,” he said (Ps. 57: 9) “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord” (Ps. 40: 3).

Similarly, in the first-century church it was not uncommon for unbelievers to be present when the church met together for corporate worship. Indeed, Paul was concerned that everything that was said was intelligible to the outsider so that nothing would stand in the way of an unbeliever’s conversion. Worship had an evangelistic side. “But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you!” (1 Cor. 14: 24, 25). Once again we see how the power of corporate worship can become part of the process of evangelism.

I can’t think of a better illustration of this principle than in the church at Antioch where the worship of the gathered congregation was part of a dynamic process that led to many conversions and new initiatives in mission (Acts 11:23-26; 13:1-3).

Luke tells us some interesting things about the worship in Antioch. First, it was structured. The word that he uses for ‘worship’ is leitourgein, from which we get the word “liturgy” (Acts 13:2). There was obvi-

ously some pattern and order in what they did when they gathered to meet with God.

Second, their worship was centred on God. They “worshipped the Lord”. Their minds and hearts were directed by the liturgy to God’s revelation of Himself in Christ. Indeed, they were so gripped by what God had done for them in Christ that they didn’t have time for food (Acts 13:2). Their worship was serious business.

Finally, they were expectant. They believed that the living God would speak to them and guide them into His will. And God did. Not only did many of those attending church in Antioch become believers (Acts 11:23-24), but some also heard God’s call to preach to the nations as they were worshipping the Lord (Acts 13:2). Is it any wonder that the weekly assemblies of the early Christian church drew increasing numbers, and that many seekers came to faith in Christ?

This pattern continued throughout the first centuries with seekers taking part in the public worship of the church. Indeed, Justin Martyr and Hippolytus tell us that

from the second century down to the close of the fifth, the church service was divided into the worship of catechumens (seekers), and the worship of the faithful. The former consisted of scripture-reading, preaching, confession, prayer and song. It was open to people who were unbaptized. The latter involved the Lord’s supper. Only believers could attend it. It was during this early period (AD 150-450) that large numbers were evangelised and became members of the church. And it happened in the context of Sunday worship.

Is there a lesson here for the modern church? I think there is. Since the evangelistic power of Sunday worship can be great, we ought to be creating as many worship centres as is practicable throughout the nation. Each centre then has the potential to become a lighthouse to attract seekers. The planting of congregations where the focus is on the worship of God will release a new burst of evangelistic energy.

But there is a cost. Church leaders must make Sunday services their top priority. We can’t skimp on preparation. The day must be covered in prayer, newcomers must experience a genuine welcome, and imagination must be given to the prayers, preaching and music. God must be the focus. We must give our utmost for His highest. If all these things are happening, evangelism is as sure to take place as night follows day. And if it can happen in increasing numbers of centres across the country, then we can expect many seekers to find Christ.

Peter Hastie is the issues editor of AP and minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, NSW.



Beating urban blight

David Thurston talks to Robert Benn about planting a church in central Sydney.

Robert Benn: David, in your first sermon you said emphatically, “I want to see success by God’s standards.” What do you mean by that?

David Thurston: Success by God’s standards is primarily faithfulness. It is faithfulness to the message about what God’s done through Jesus. And second, it’s faithfulness in terms of the method, that is to keep on working hard at understanding the Gospel, engaging the world, and risking everything to tell people about Jesus. And third, faithfulness in building a community that in a broken world shows that we can live God’s way.

RB: You’ve been in one church plant before at Parramatta. Why are you involved in this one at central Sydney?

DT: One answer could be that I am just dumb! But really there is nothing more exciting than starting up something absolutely brand new. It gives you the opportunity to shape things in a different way. It gives you the possibility of seeing new Christians growing, and having that sort of excitement spread through the

all the time. You have to think about why you are doing what you’re doing, and whether you are doing it well. Being right at the cutting edge of the gospel is a very exciting place to be!



David and Susie Thomas

We want to see a vibrant church with people who are interested in spreading the message, and showing the people in the community and within the church a different life, a different way of existing that’s not the worldly existence.

church planter faces?

DT: Two things: the first one is a matter of the whole idea of success. Whether you are being successful or not, and what you are going to measure that by. It can be a very up and down sort of existence, where you don’t get a lot of people one week and you feel incredibly down. It’s then that you begin to think, what will I do? What fancy new thing will I do? The challenge is to resist that temptation. It’s working at being faithful to the gospel because the gospel alone is going to produce gospel growth and God-honouring growth.

RB: Is there much blood, sweat and tears?

DT: There’s a lot. Last night I didn’t go to sleep until 2.30am! There’s a lot of concern. There’s always the question, am I doing it in God’s strength or my strength? That’s always a question that has to be asked. There’s always the expense personally, for my family and everybody who is working with us. But there is also tremendous blessing. The fact that Kathy and I, and my kids, will have been involved in two church plants, I consider a great privilege.



David Thurston leads a service



Paul and Melinda Spackman (assisting David and Kathy)

We share David’s vision of seeing people changed by the gospel in this area of great need. This is a very needy area of rich people and poor people. It’s really an area of contrasts. There are people leading normal lives; people very much confused about their sexuality and relationships. People come and go. They may be single, they get married, have kids and then they move out. They need the gospel.

RB: Do you ever get scared?

DT: I get scared a lot. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking, are we going to make budget? I get scared thinking about, do I believe my own hype? I get scared just thinking, if it doesn't work out what are other people going to think about me? But at the end of it all it's bigger than me, and it's bigger than us all together. It's all about God's kingdom. That fact takes a lot of the fear out of it!

RB: What Scripture truths and promises help you to persevere?

DT: I really think the thing that keeps me going is that God's the ruler of this world. He's the one who is in control even though the world might look out of control. He has given us His gospel. He's told us that that's the way He is going to change us. And to be part of the process of changing the world through God's Word is a great privilege and a great responsibility. That's what keeps me going.

RB: How is the church plant financed?

DT: A number of ways. It is really a partnership. Wee Waa Presbyterian Church has backed us over three years. They are very generous. The Presbyterian Church in Atlanta are backing us. Ministry and Mission has given us some money as well. All those three sources of finance are on a decreasing yearly amount. But that's a good thing. It means that we have to grow up, grow quickly, and stand on our own two feet.

RB: Who do you have helping?

DT: First and foremost I've got Paul and

Melinda Spackman. They are incredibly generous. They are prepared to work full time for only a little money, and as we grow they will be paid as full timers. They're working full time anyway! Paul has just been great. Melinda is terrific as well. Then we've got David and Caron Balzer from the PTC. We have people from SMBC and Moore College who want to be trained. And we've got a whole lot of very enthusiastic Christians.

RB: David, what is this place in which we have met today?

DT: It is a public school. Right in the middle of Redfern and Newtown. It's an excellent place. It straddles the yuppie end and



Leigh and Elisa Trevaskis

We thought we needed to find a church where we could get good experience in ministry and also be in a church where they had good biblical preaching. We are presently considering whether to go as missionaries overseas or work full time in a church in Australia.

the less salubrious end of town. I think we want to be a bridge in one sense between people. This place just seems to me to fit the bill.

RB: How are you going to go about gathering a new congregation? What is your strategy?

DT: There are two things, two parts to the process. The first one is to get people who are moving into the area who are already Christians. We want to do church really well and attract them. But if that's all we do then all we've done is moved people around. We want to train them so that they will actually want to be talking to and making friends with people in this area to bring them to the Lord. It's fine to grow from a bit of transfer growth, from people moving into the area. But if that's where we stay it's just not good enough. We've got to do evangelism, and do it very creatively, continually learning new things.



Tim and Jenny Weber

We are looking for preaching that explains the Bible clearly and applies it as well. This stretches our minds to think how we need to change and how we can reach others for the Saviour. Also, a church service that is friendly and welcoming, with songs that are relevant to the Bible and what's been happening in the church service. We want a church that we can invite non-Christians to.



Warren and Andrea Ling

We have come to join this church because we can see a new exciting opportunity to bring the gospel to a part of Sydney that is desperately in need of the life-changing words of Christ.

RB: What would you like to achieve in the first year?

DT: I'd like to have a group of people who are working hard at living out the gospel in their lives. People who are prepared to be trained in doing new things, who are building relationships and learning to bring other people to the Lord. In other words, I want a group of people who are thoroughly evangelistic! ap

VISITING PERTH?

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Every Sunday at 9 am & 7 pm

Minister Rev S Bonnington
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Rescue shops

Presbyterians should be working 'within a yard of hell'.

Why should the Presbyterian Church establish congregations? Is it simply a survival mechanism to preserve our denominational strength? Is church-planting an exercise in self-preservation and growth? No! Planting churches for self-interested reasons will lead to disappointment.

It's a bit like happiness. Happiness is elusive. If you aim for it you will miss. It comes as a by-product of something else. We Christians would say "if you want to be happy aim to be holy". Similarly, if you want to be Presbyterian aim to be gospel-minded.

At the time of church union in 1977 the Presbyterian cause was virtually wiped out in southern Tasmania. All that remained was St John's in the centre of Hobart. Since then two other congregations have been started. Rokeby, across the Derwent, began with a large Sunday school work in a community hall. Montrose, in the northern suburbs, started with the coming together of the remnant of a Brethren assembly and a core group from St John's. Both groups have their own buildings, neither has a full-time minister.

What lessons have we learned?

While committees can help initiate new ventures, it is churches that plant churches! A growing church should seek ways of planting new churches so that new areas can be evangelised. A church-planting



David Jones

vision is one way of preventing a growing church from becoming flabby and overloaded numerically.

There can be a weakness in large numbers as there is a weakness in small. A large church can easily become complacent and often has a higher proportion of "passengers" than a relatively small church. Small, however, does not necessarily mean beautiful, for a small church can be as dead as a large church, and it certainly looks more pathetic. Yet small companies can have some advantages where there is genuine spiritual life, namely a greater sense of fellowship where every member knows and is known. Pastoral work can then become a reality.

Becoming involved in a new church carries a cost. It means leaving a familiar circle of friends in the home church and moving to a small group where at first you may know few people. Often the singing isn't inspiring, the facilities are rented and everybody has a job to do. There is no room for

pew warmers or passengers.

There is no one way to plant a church. Each church plant must take on a life of its own and not be a clone of the mother church. As someone has said, "When God sends a snowstorm every snowflake is unique. Human beings make ice cubes!" Variety is the mark of God's Spirit at work, not sameness. (1 Cor 12:4-6) We need to be much more flexible in our church structures and patterns of ministry to allow for this. The most famous and prolific church planter of all time was a tentmaker who refused even the "minimum stipend" (1 Cor. 9).

We should always give priority to people over property. The money should go into workers rather than church buildings. We should be prepared even to sell buildings in order to invest in new works.

God, of course, is the ultimate church planter, and the kind of church that He sends down from heaven to earth is one that welcomes all comers and is open in every direction, to the four points of the compass (Rev. 21: 9-14). It is not a denominational club. To try to start a church by targeting nominal Presbyterians would be a mistake. We must throw the doors open in every direction.

Our motivation should not be merely to wave the Presbyterian flag, but to reach the lost and so glorify God. For this reason it is imperative that our churches catch a church-planting vision and get a church planting mentality and adopt church planting as a deliberate policy.

The great tragedy of the Titanic was that there were never enough lifeboats for the people needing to be saved. If every church in town preached the Gospel and every building was filled to capacity, the vast majority would still be unchurched. Not only do we need to better man and equip the lifeboats we have, we need more lifeboats.

These well known lines of C. T. Studd may not win a poetry competition but they are a timely reminder to us of what we are about.

"Some people wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

David Jones is the minister of St. John's Presbyterian Church in Hobart. 



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Working together

A new group in NSW is a catalyst for growth, reports Kevin Murray.

One evening in late 1997 a promising event occurred in the life of the Presbyterian Church in NSW. No fewer than three Assembly committees met together to hear about a common vision for church planting.

The evening was run by a new group known as the Joint Task Force for Church Planting, a cooperative venture between the three committees – evangelism, ministry and mission and theological education. Church planting is not easy, so it was considered vital that the committees work together so that each could bring its knowledge and networking resources to bear on the projects under consideration.

The meeting was designed to bring together as many members of the executives of the three committees as possible. During this evening the Joint Task Force began to outline its vision for spreading the gospel throughout NSW by planting new congregations.

As part of its vision, the Joint Task Force decided to look beyond our shores to consider relevant church-planting work. In February last year a research team of four members – Ian Smith, C.S. Tang, Craig Tucker and myself – visited the following places:

- Capetown, to examine the work being done under the leadership of Bishop Frank Retief. His congregation has planted some 20 churches in 20 years.

- New York, to examine the ministry of the Redeemer Presbyterian church under the leadership of Rev. Tim Keller. This church was planted in Manhattan in 1989 with 13 people and today has more than 3000 members. It has already planted other churches. What is remarkable is that instead of remaining as a large and growing church it has elected to split into a series of smaller churches to better reach people in their local neighbourhoods. This is not just another growing church but a church that has spawned a movement of church-planting churches.

- Atlanta (Ministry Assessment Centre), to observe and receive training in the process by which the Presbyterian Church of America selects its church planting couples. Their selection method has reduced the number of 'failed' church plants by 30 per cent.



Kevin Murray

- Atlanta, to observe the Perimeter group of Presbyterian churches. The Perimeter church is a "movement church" in that it has planted a large number of churches that are now planting other churches. As part of this study we spent time with the folk from Intown Presbyterian Church. This congregation is generously providing part of the funding for our newest church plant, Central Sydney, under the leadership of

Rev. David Thurston.

The Joint Task Force sees itself as a catalyst. It tries to bring together presbyteries that are interested in church planting and potential church planters. We have plenty of people who are suitable and experienced but someone needs to get alongside them and challenge them to consider the possibility of being involved in a church-planting ministry. We want to cast the vision widely.

But we do not see ourselves as having a monopoly on church planting. If a presbytery or congregation wants to plant a church without us, that's fine. Church planting needs to be done as a joint task with the glory going to God!

Kevin Murray is chairman of the NSW Joint Task Force for Church Planting. 

To the Assembly, Presbytery or Session Clerk,

Would you please take a moment **NOW** and write, fax or e-mail (see below) us with the following information relative to your office;

- **Any alterations to Presbytery details:**
- **Any alterations to Church Directories**
- **Any alterations to the Directory of Ministers**
- **Associates & Assistants**
- **Appointed Ministers & Supply Ministers**
- **Colleague Ministers**
- **Candidates for the Ministry**
- **Deaconesses**
- **Home Missionaries; Licentiate and Youth Pastors**
- **P C A - Chaplains**

Please write, fax or e-mail us **TODAY**, your cooperation is appreciated, deadline is

Monday, March 22, 1999

YEARBOOK 1999
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Help, I'm still a baby!

Grow up, advises Guido Kettmiss

*in the
presence
of
God*



Can you imagine someone in his 30s still in nappies? Or being spoon-fed? And yet there are many Christians who never seem to grow. They continue on in their Christian infancy, showing no maturity, and marking time in their commitment to Christ and involvement in the life of the Church.

This of course is no new problem. Paul faced the same situation in his day: "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able..." (1 Cor. 3:2). There seems to be here a note of utter despair. In the previous chapter, Paul had stressed that Christians were no longer bound by the foolish wisdom of the world, but that through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit they had in fact "the mind of Christ".

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Now what does this mean? The use of the word 'mind' denotes understanding. We see this clearly illustrated in the Emmaus Road encounter where the Lord "opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). In Romans 12:2, Paul writes: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is..."

Through the power of the Holy Spirit Christians are to grow in their understanding of God's Word – in the ways of Christ – so that in all things they will have a Biblical approach to life. To have the mind of Christ is to have an increasing understanding of the Word of God, so that the Lord's people will be able to give "an account for the hope that is in them..." (1 Pet. 3:15).

When we look at the Church at Corinth, we see the result of these "spiritual babes". The people resisted the truth, lacked love for one another, did not use their spiritual gifts in serving the Lord, got involved in incidentals instead of the fundamentals, were led astray by false teachers, were poor stewards of all that God had entrusted to them and frequently disobeyed God's Word.

Is it important for Christians to "grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)? Why not just coast along, be happy and not get too involved in the demands of knowing the Lord better and being committed in our service to Him?

First, to grow shows that we are genuinely converted. Growing is part of life. We grow in knowledge, in maturity, in experience and we grow physically, mentally and socially. When we look at the life of Christ, we also read that besides all of these, He "kept increasing in wisdom and in favour with God" (Luke 2:52). Christians, like their Saviour, will also grow spiritually – it is part of the dynamic of the Christian life. And so in response to the love, mercy, grace and righteousness shown by Christ in dying for them on the cross, surely the Lord's people will desire to know their Father better, love Christ more, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, be conformed more and more to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Second, it is only through growth that the Triune God is glorified. Could you imagine an orchard full of trees or vines that are stunted in growth? Such an orchard would bring disrepute upon the farmer. As A.W. Pink wrote, "it brings no glory to God that His children should be dwarfs." Sadly, the Church today displays evidence that the Lord's people are not growing in grace and knowledge. The Church has lost its cutting edge for reaching into society.

May the desire of the Lord's people be once again to bring honour and glory to Christ in how they live, in what they say and in bringing a mature biblical approach to the chaotic and rebellious nature of our world. Just as God gives sunshine, rain and nutrients for plants and trees to grow and to bear fruit, so He has given the means of grace for Christians to grow: "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect of salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). Growing Christians bring glory to God.

Third, growing brings peace and assurance to the believer. When there is no growth, there will not be a desire on the part of the Christian to first seek the kingdom of God, but a greater conformity to the ways of the world. If the Lord's people do not grow up into Christ "in all things" (Eph. 4:16), and do not "give all diligence to add to their faith" (2 Pet. 1:5), then fears and doubts will enter their hearts. Then they will lack the peace of Christ and the assurance of their salvation.

But the more we give evidence in our lives that we belong to Christ, the more we will honour Him who has set His love upon us.

Guido Kettmiss is minister of Gateway Presbyterian Church, Brisbane, and a member of AP's editorial committee.

**Trinity
Theologic
al College**

Neville Bonner: Senator, Christian

Compared to those who have spoken this afternoon, my association with Neville Bonner is very minor. I knew him briefly some 35 years ago, followed his career and life with great interest and was very happy to renew the acquaintance when I came to Ipswich.

Some this afternoon have given anecdotes of Mr Bonner's life, and even if we stayed here all afternoon, people could probably recount even more such stories with humour, affection, or great seriousness. I want to speak of another issue – the relationship of Neville Bonner to his God.

In the reading from Psalm 103, the writer in a poetic form spoke of a God fully aware of our frailties. The Psalmist spoke of our bodily frailty. After all, we only live a comparatively short space of time, then we die, and our bodies return to the earth. And then the Psalmist referred to our spiritual frailty – a reminder that we fail so easily by doing wrong through our actions, our thoughts and in what we say.

But God, knowing these frailties, and motivated by a wonderful but undeserved love, provides to all who will respond two things – forgiveness and being accounted as righteous. Through these acts of God, we are restored to relationship with Him, and are assured of life beyond this awful experience of death, to live eternally in that relationship with Him.

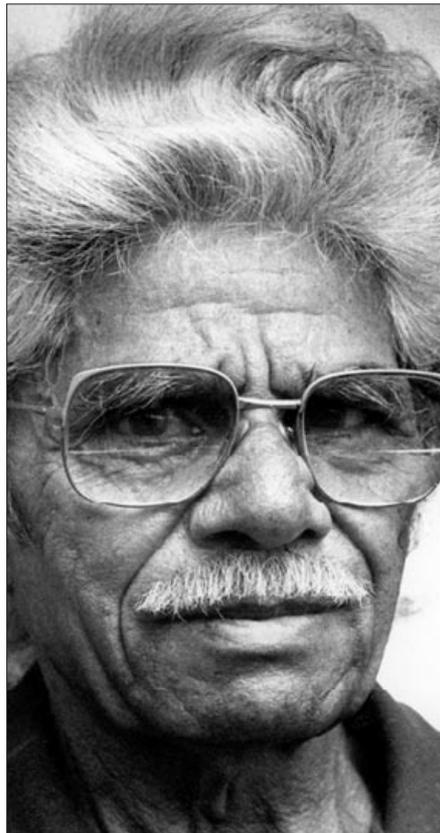
These things, Neville Bonner had come to believe.

We now turn to the reading from Revelation 7 – a picture of heaven. It records a vision that the Apostle John received, a glimpse of a multitude of people, more than it was possible to count, gathered in great rejoicing and praise of God and of Jesus Christ.

But who were these people, and what were they doing there? These were people who could celebrate their part in God's eternal kingdom, not because they had deserved it – the exact opposite in fact. They had been cleansed from sin (that is, forgiven), and they wore robes perfectly clean (they were accounted as righteous). So they could rejoice that God and the Lamb Jesus Christ had done this for them – even though they were undeserving. They had not arrived in heaven on their merits, but by the gracious love of God, and Jesus Christ.

The fascinating part of this is that this multitude of people came from every nation, tribe, people and language of earth – no discrimination, colour bar, prejudice, division or any such thing. Forgiveness,

On Friday 12 February, Australia farewelled to Neville Bonner, the nation's first Aboriginal Member of Parliament. At his funeral service in St Stephens Presbyterian Church in Ipswich, Queensland, many dignitaries paid tribute to the way Senator Bonner left his mark on our nation. Leading politicians were present. An Aboriginal pastor, Pastor Ben Bird, the Premier of Queensland, Mr Peter Beattie, and the Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, read the Scriptures. This is an edited version of the sermon delivered by Rev. John Langbridge, minister of St Stephens.



righteousness and eternal life are not given exclusively to any one people group. The love of God and the work of Jesus Christ are entirely non-discriminatory. In heaven there is a 'togetherness' of the races that Neville Bonner will particularly appreciate.

So we have seen the promises of God for all who are to be brought into an eternal relationship with Him. Secondly, we have just had a glimpse of that eternal kingdom of Heaven. But what about in between? Here let me relate my favourite story about Neville Bonner.

For the 1983 Senate election, Senator Bonner refused to make the calls and visits to lobby people for their vote concerning his endorsement. He said that he did not want to owe anything to anyone, because sooner or later there would be obligations on him to return the favour and perhaps vote in ways he did not agree with. This is

no political statement – opinions may differ as to whether it was a matter of great integrity, or naivety. The point that I am making is that when questioned about these things, he said these now famous words: "I will stand on my record." There was a delightful cartoon drawn by Will Mitchell, showing him standing on top of a 12-inch LP.

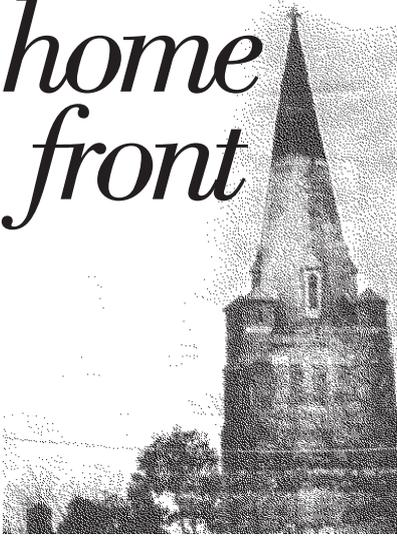
In Philippians 3, Paul speaks about his so-called righteousness. In the eyes of a lot of people, Paul had it all. He would have been regarded as a great one, and admired accordingly in his society. But when he discovered the truth of Jesus Christ, he recognised that however great his accomplishments, however exemplary his life, these things counted for nothing. He said that they were loss – "I consider them rubbish." Before the throne of God, his life and accomplishments would not be his entry ticket, but the life, accomplishments and death of Jesus Christ.

There is a parallel here with Neville Bonner. This was a man of great and admirable accomplishments. The picture is imprinted on my mind of him sitting in his chair in the corner of his lounge room. It seemed so natural to sit on the floor at his feet. Others I have spoken to have done the same thing. There you could hear his wisdom, the fruits of his life and experience – and marvel. This man, to stand on his record, had an impressive record indeed. But he knew and believed that there was one place where he would not and could not stand on his record – that was before God. He would attain a place in heaven not by his record, but by his faith in Jesus Christ.

I have spoken to you this afternoon about one feature of Neville Bonner that has not been canvassed – his Christian faith. When it is all boiled down, it is probably the most important of all. His accomplishments here in this world will be recorded in books of history. In time they will be read and studied by people for whom it is all very remote and academic, not by those who knew and loved him. History is a record of events that are past and done. The man is gone and his deeds here are finished. But it will be his faith that will last forever.

What do you want to have gained by your part in this service here this afternoon? To have done honour to this wonderful man? To remember his life and record? Perhaps to thank God for giving him to us? The greatest heritage he may actually leave us is the challenge for each and every one to discover, as he had, that acceptance with God is not something we earn or deserve, but something that God has provided freely to all who would believe.

home front



Presbyterian honoured

The Australia Day honours list 1999 included the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division, for Mrs June May Angus of Penshurst, NSW. The citation was for service to the community through the NSW Branch of the PWA.

PLC centre opens

PLC Melbourne has opened a \$2 million language centre and the Doris Daniel Theatre. The federal Treasurer, Mr Peter Costello, opened the complex, and the dedication was carried out by the Victorian moderator, Rt Rev. John Woodward.

Professor to lead tour

Friends of the Ferguson Library are taking a bus tour to Bowenfels in the Hartley District, to visit sites of interest to Presbyterians. The associate professor of history at Sydney University, Dr Ian Jack, and Rev. Stuart Clements, will lead the tour. The party will visit sites of 160 years of Presbyterian activity in the area, and learn about the pioneering ministries. The tour is on Saturday 13 March. For further information, contact Marie Jux on 02 9635 0842, or June Angus on 02 9570 1611.

Women's ministry

The 1997 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia established a committee to explore opportunities for a positive approach to the ministry of women in the church. The committee is working towards a report for the 2001 assembly, within the context of existing decisions on the role of women in the

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.

Presbyterian Church. Submissions are invited from interested persons and groups as to how Christian women can be encouraged, helped and used in various forms of ministry. Submissions should be lodged by 20 May 1999 with the Committee Secretary, Rev. David Burke, at GPO Box 100 Sydney 2001; fax 02 9310 2148; email dburke@hinet.net.au.

Appointments

At St John's Hobart, the Presbytery of Tasmania on 2 February inducted Rev. Robert White previously of Essendon in Victoria, as associate minister of the charge.

Keith Robert Harris has been licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Mowbray, at St Stephen's, Ipswich. The moderator, Rev. K. Ridley led the service, and Rev. G. Eastwell preached.

Reservoir, Victoria, has a new minister. Rev. Chris Siriweera was inducted in December in a church packed with congregation, the Siriweera family from Sri Lanka, and members of Mr Siriweera's past congregation at Noorat in Western Victoria. The moderator of the Presbytery of Melbourne North, Rev. Theo Fishwick presided, and Rev. Paul Ridgewell of Terang preached.



Rev. Chris Siriweera after his induction at Reservoir

Resourceful

The NSW Christian Education Committee of the PWA, has produced the 1999 edition of their Resources catalogue. The booklet lists stocks of devotional

materials, camp studies, Easter and Christmas resources, Bible Studies, spiritual renewal day studies, and a lot more. You can obtain this useful listing from the committee at GPO Box 100, Sydney. NSW 2001.

Celebration

St James Church, Ryde, had a happy and encouraging service in December, with new members joining the church. Rebecca and Ken Finis, Nicole Bell and Laura Prendergas were received into communicant membership, then joined the congregation in the communion service. Interim moderator Rev. Dennis Garland of Eastwood conducted the service. Session clerk Ken Shephard presented Bibles to the new members.

across australia



Big vision

World Vision will benefit from the work of Christian landscape photographer Ken Duncan. He has unveiled the world's largest photograph, measuring 30 x 1.3 metres, and requiring 7.2 GB of computer memory to reproduce. The spectacular print combines scenes of central Australia with portraits of indigenous people, photographed on a visit to World Vision's preventative health care program at Papunya, NT, near the McDonnell ranges. The donated print cost \$30,000, and is located at World Vision national office, 1 Vision Drive, Burwood East, Vic.

Missionary history

We Wish We'd Done More, John Harris' book on Church Missionary Society involvement with Aboriginal communities in north Australia over 90 years, was launched at the CMS summer school in Katoomba in January. Dr Harris' parents were CMS missionaries, and he grew up in

Aboriginal communities. The book centres on the work of more than 530 missionaries, and argues that CMS work always focused on preaching the gospel. The book discusses compassionate and medical work, language work, and issues such as land rights and the stolen generation in the mission context. It is published by Open Book.

Show and tell

A Children's Ministry Expo will focus attention on materials for teaching and evangelising children. To be held at Bankstown, Sydney, in October, the expo has exhibitors from all states and overseas. A wide range of materials and issues will be highlighted, including skill sessions for parents and workers, materials, and staff training. The expo is organised by **Life Ministries** and **Campus Crusades**.

St James turns 175

Sydney's oldest church, **St James** in King Street, celebrated its 175th anniversary in February. Guests at the services included **Rev. Samuel Marsden**, a direct descendant of his better-known ancestor of the same name, who was chaplain to the colony at Sydney Cove. St James' Church was built on the direction of Governor Macquarie, and designed by the gifted architect and convict, Francis Greenway.

Evangelically united

Evangelicals within the **Uniting Church**, are moving to form an **Association of Evangelical Congregations**, to allow like-minded Uniting congregations to support one another. The new grouping is an extension of the organisation Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church. A spokesman for the EMU, **Rev. Ian Weeks**, said the association is not a move toward organised separation from the Uniting Church, but a network, "whereby congregations within the Uniting Church can publicly affirm the basic truths of the evangelical faith, which is the heritage of the Uniting Church".

Mardi Gras opposed

Uniting Church ministers who take part in the **Sydney Mardi Gras** have been labelled a disgrace to their calling. **Rev. John McKay**, chairman of the EMU in Queensland, called on the president of the Uniting Church, **Rev. John Mavor**, to request Uniting Church people to have no part in the Mardi Gras. Mr Mavor was quoted in the *Herald-Sun*, Melbourne, in

February as saying: "We are sure that a lot of people in the church would be concerned but believe that the church could cope because it is so diverse."

Nile's long run

Rev. Fred Nile has announced he will stand for re-election as a representative of the Christian Democratic Party. He has been a member of the NSW Legislative Council for 18 years, and his wife Elaine has been for 10 years.

Staines trauma

An Australian teacher at **Hebron Christian School** in south India found himself dealing with many distressed and troubled students. The children of **Mr Graham Staines**, burned to death with his two sons at Manoharpur village in January, were students at the school. Teacher **Mark Ronalds**, previously of Presbyterian school King's College in Warrnambool, knew the boys well, especially **Timothy**, 7, who had been in his class. The tragedy has provoked widespread reaction throughout India.

In Opportunity's way

Opportunity International in Australia, held an information day at Terrigal, for Christians concerned to help the poor of the world transform their lives and nations. Opportunity believes that God has provided enough resources in the world, and seeks to harness the potential and expertise of the poor in 28 countries, to help them find a way out of poverty. "A way out not a hand out" is Opportunity's theme. Through small loans and advice to poor entrepreneurs, many people are able to get the start they need. In 1997, \$A37 million was lent, and the repayment rate was 94 per cent. For more information, phone 9233 7133.

Because He first loved us

Christian Children's Fund is the second largest child sponsorship agency in Australia, and 30 per cent of its donors are not in the work force. More than half the sponsors give because they believe it is God's will to do so. Nearly 18 per cent of sponsors have family incomes under \$20,000, and 69 per cent have children themselves. CCF has been in operation for 60 years, and is dedicated to overcoming effects of poverty in developing countries. This is done for children irrespective of their religion, nationality or gender.

Venerable visitor

The old lady **Doulos**, the oldest passenger carrying ship afloat, returns to Sydney in July 1999. The ship is home to 300 Christian volunteers from 35 countries. Crew members are unpaid, and are sponsored by their home churches. The ship will offer tours, a book fair, free training programmes for Christians, teams to share in churches, and special events.

Change by stealth

Rev. Fred Nile has attacked the tactics of the NSW Government in dealing with changes to the definition of de facto relationships. He called on the Attorney General, Mr Jeff Shaw, to apologise to Parliament for deceitful tactics, in burying the changes inside a bill to benefit persons suffering the long-term effects of disease. The Fred Nile group supported the bill on compassionate grounds, for victims of asbestosis, mesothelioma, and silicosis. They found later that it gave recognition to same-sex couples for the purposes of worker's compensation. "It is reprehensible that the Attorney General chose to deceive the Parliament and not be honest about his intentions," Mr Nile said.

An Australian identity

Some Australian Lutherans are casting about for a more Australian model for the church. **Good Shepherd Para Vista** in Adelaide's northern suburbs is leading a two-day conference this month on *Building a 21st Century Church for All Generations*. The president of the Lutheran Church in Australia, **Dr Lance Steicke**, says, "too often we rely on American models for building a church".

Blind director recovering

The Australian deputy director of **Blind Mission International** is recovering from a near fatal accident last October. **Mr Jim Stallard** became paraplegic as a result, and now a period of difficult rehabilitation lies ahead. But Jim's family and the mission are giving great praise for his preservation. In **Sierra Leone**, where the mission has four eye hospitals and many workers, fierce tribal fighting has ravaged many areas. Mission workers are ministering to many people with eye injuries as a result of the troubles.

world news



Indian minister resigns

A senior minister of India's ruling coalition government, led by the right-wing Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party, has resigned in protest over recent attacks on the Christian community. The Parliamentary Affairs and Tourism Minister, **Mr Madan Lal Khurana**, resigned at the end of January, saying he was ashamed of being part of an administration that could not protect the lives of minorities in India. Hindus accuse Christians missionaries of converting Hindus by luring them with money and jobs. Christian leaders admit conversions but deny offering inducements.

Indonesian upheavals

Christians on the island of Ambon have suffered heavily in January and February, and many have been killed. There are Reformed congregations on this once-peaceful island, which is more like a war zone now, with more than 5000 soldiers and police deployed to restore order. Reports suggest that animosity to immigrants from other islands is a major cause of the violence, but some church leaders say people have been forced to take sides, by the clashes in other areas of Indonesia.



A car is torched in Jakarta

Gospel reaches Kwaio

The **Kwaio** people of the East Solomon Islands at last have the gospel in their own language. **Language Recordings International** have produced the audio-

taped gospels, based on the work of Australian missionaries and recordists. Pastors reported deep interest among the Kwaio people, with the tapes being played long into the night.

Cullman dies at 96

Theologian **Oscar Cullmann** has died, aged 96. His work was wide-ranging across both theological and New Testament fields, and church history was also an interest. Cullmann, a Lutheran, was an important ecumenical figure in Europe, teaching many years at the Reformed Faculty in Basle, and later spending time at the Waldensian Faculty in Rome. He was received by three Popes, **Pius XII**, **John XXIII**, and **Paul VI**. **Karl Barth** teased him, "Oscar, on your gravestone it will say 'Here lies the adviser to three Popes'". He was invited as an observer at the Vatican II Council.

Cuba burns bibles

Thousands of bibles were burnt in Cuba early in February, with authorities arguing they were "subversive books" from the USA. While Cuba watchers have reported increased openness, especially for Catholic churches following the Pope's visit, the burnings indicate no official change has taken place towards biblical Christianity.

Presidential flaws

Best-selling author **John Maxwell** says the greatest sin of impeached American **President Bill Clinton** had to do with leadership, not with sex. Maxwell says he violated three leadership laws. First, the law of the inner circle: When Mr Clinton allowed his cabinet to defend him publicly when he knew he had lied, he betrayed their confidence and destroyed his credibility. Second, the law of solid ground: When Mr Clinton misled the American people, he violated their trust. Third, the law of sacrifice: At any time when a leader's personal problems become his people's focus, "the organisation's priorities get out of whack", Mr Maxwell says.

Uzbekistan ban

A wave of protests in Uzbekistan greeted the government's ban on unregistered religious activities. **President Islam Karimov** has intervened with a decree to allow for "exceptions" in the demand for small religious communities to gain official registration. However, local authorities are continuing to begin legal proceedings against

Christians for violating the new law's narrow provisions. Successors of the former KGB have continued to intimidate Christians suspected of outreach, especially among traditional Muslims.

Revolutionary Messiah?

A poster published in Britain in January shows Jesus looking like the Latin American revolutionary, **Che Guevara**. The poster looks much like the famous Guevara poster that went around the world in the 1960s and '70s, except that Guevara's beret is replaced by a crown of thorns. It is aimed at the Easter season. The caption reads, "Meek, mild. As if. Discover the real Jesus. Church April 4." Reaction to the poster is varied. The Churches Advertising Network said, "We wanted to get across the idea that Jesus Christ was the greatest revolutionary who ever lived." The **Bishop of Wakefield** said the poster was well-intentioned, but "biblically ill-founded".

Persecution mounts in Vietnam

Open Doors (associated with **Brother Andrew**), reports pressure on Vietnamese Christians. Pastors report the Communist Party as urging their officials to "promote patriotism", and "fight the activities of hostile forces". Vietnamese Christian leaders tell of assaults on youths, and pressure on church organisations. Children in tribal areas endure rough tactics from police. One boy was nearly drowned when his head was shoved down a toilet. He said, "The police officer tried to force me to stop talking to my classmates about Jesus. I refused." In Ho Chi Minh City, a church leader spoke of his two-day detention by police. **Brother Nien**, whose church numbers 9000 members, was questioned about the structure and leadership of his church. But one pastor summed up the attitude of the believers as "More persecution, more blessing; more problems, more power!".

Hodde's own goal

The **Evangelical Alliance** in Britain has responded to media reports that sacked national soccer coach **Glenn Hoddle** is an evangelical, born-again Christian. "Reincarnation is not a Christian belief," the alliance wrote. "A person dies once and is accountable to God depending on their faith in Jesus Christ. Glenn Hoddle's statement is indicative of the pick-and-mix attitude to religion and deep search for spirituality so prevalent in our society. His reported beliefs are more akin with eastern religions."

Video Watch

Deep Impact

Reviewed by Mark Powell



It's easy to be cynical about Hollywood – bigger budgets and more amazing special effects all add up to more money at the box office, end of story. But *Deep Impact* is a movie which – while it follows the familiar “block-buster” formula – leaves a much more lasting impression (if you'll pardon the pun.)

Sure, the special effects are great – and in this regard, *Deep Impact* is every bit as good as other special effects films like *Twister* and *Independence Day*. But the fascinating thing about this movie is the strangely “biblical” plot it follows, which keeps it from being quite as superficial and mindless as some other movies of the same style.

Here's the situation. Planet Earth is about to be destroyed by a huge meteor, 10 kilometres in diameter. The nations of the world form an elite crew for a last ditch space shuttle mission dubbed the Messiah – their task is to destroy the meteor, and save the world from total annihilation.

Meanwhile, back on earth, the American Government builds a massive underground bunker – curiously named the Ark – where one million people and every sort of animal (naturally, two of each) will be housed while the planet recovers from the after-effects of the comet. No one over 50 is allowed in the Ark, and the million people who do inhabit it are “elected” at random by computer.

Thus, a major dramatic device in the story is the tension between those who have been selected to be saved, and those who will be left behind to face almost certain destruction.

The real strength of the movie lies in its characterisation. You can't help becoming attached to each of the key players, and it's not long before you find yourself identifying with what they're going through. So much so, that I couldn't help but shed a tear when things eventually did happen.

Watching *Deep Impact*, you really do get a sense of what it would be like if you knew

the world was going to end on a certain day and date. In this regard, the panic and mass hysteria of knowing there is absolutely no escape is captured – I think – superbly.

However, apart from the gospel allusions – there's got to be at least one good sermon illustration in there! – *Deep Impact* raised a number of other interesting points to ponder. For example, when the President of the United States – played by Morgan Freeman – breaks the news to the nation that they're all going to die, he calls on them to pray, then pronounces the Aaronic blessing found in the book of Numbers. My question is, in what sense does America see itself – corporately speaking – as “the people of God”? It was once remarked that the pilgrims went to America because of their convictions, while our forefathers came to Australia because we were convicted! It's sobering that we quickly denounce any attempt of Hollywood to

employ biblical themes and imagery – mostly because it's done so poorly – but how often does an Australian movie even raise the subject, except to criticise?

Maybe there's an explanation here for why American evangelicalism features pre-millennial eschatology so prominently? (Or, in English, why they're so fixated with the end times.) Is it because the US sees itself as a kind of “national Israel” that Old Testament prophecies are not viewed as being fulfilled in the cross, but as having yet to be realised with the restoration of Israel and a 1000-year reign of Jesus?

Ironically, without giving too much away, *Deep Impact* does picture quite accurately how the true Messiah does save us ... and for that alone, it's well worth seeing.

Mark Powell is a final year student at Sydney's Presbyterian Theological College.

ap

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On this rock

Music is a great way to spread the gospel, a new band has found.

What does it mean to serve God with all your heart, mind and soul? What if you and a bunch of mates had a dream to use the abilities that God has given you to play music to tell other people of God's love for them in Jesus Christ?

That is what a group of five young guys from Port Macquarie, NSW, have done, forming the band Across the Way. The band is lead singer Paul Hodge, drummer, trumpeter and keyboardist Ben Sampson, bass guitarist Rob Nichols, rhythm guitarist Simon Gilmour and lead guitarist-drummer Nick Weatherstone.

The band first got together for the secular Port Macquarie Battle of the Bands in June. Originally they intended to play only in that contest, but God obviously had other ideas. The band came second of 17 bands, giving them an opportunity to witness to the 3000 people there. At this stage they had only been a band for four weeks.

Nick Weatherstone says: "We are convinced that it was our Lord God playing through us that night."

After their success, Across the Way were invited to play at many other events. These included inter-school socials, TAFE nights, Christmas Carols and Reclaim 98 (reclaiming Christmas for Christ concert in Port Macquarie). They also supported Brisbane



Murray Norman

bands Beanbag and Battered Fish in a concert at Port Macquarie. They love taking part in church services, sharing their faith and worshipping the Creator with others.

Nick tries to sum up what being in Across the Way means to the band: "We can't thank Jesus enough for what he has done for us, firstly giving his life to take our sins away, then for giving us great gifts of music and the opportunity to use them. We are so honoured and awestruck, that He should use us to witness and proclaim the gospel."

Over the New Year, Across the Way headed into the recording studio to cut a CD of some of their songs on a self-titled debut album, which should be on sale by mid-March.

The band plays a wide range of music styles: jazz, funk, groove, rock, acoustic, and nearly all of the material is original. The words and music are worked out as a group,



with everyone throwing in their suggestions. The band also puts new tunes to old hymns.

Nick says: "God has not stopped blessing us throughout the time we have been together. We know that He will never let us go astray; He has always been there to help us and has promised that He will always be there in the future to pull us out of any circumstance we may find ourselves in. All we have to do is put our faith in Him and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

"We are hoping and praying that God will use us to minister to people anywhere. We don't care whether it is at a huge concert with thousands of people, or out in the middle of a cattle paddock somewhere playing to only a handful of people. We just ask that those willing to do so will pray for us as we do as God has asked us to do. Prayer is very powerful."

The members of the band are praying at the moment as to what the next step should be. So far, they've played as far north as Kempsey, and as far south as Newcastle. They are asking: does God want them to tour more extensively, playing more gigs to more people?

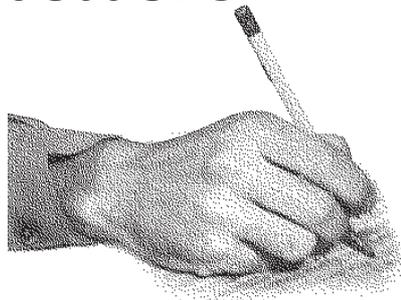
The band has played to all types of people, from church congregations with old people and families, to a pumping crowd at the Battle of the Bands. Nick says: "The band doesn't find it a problem playing to a wide number of groups. It just seems to flow and everyone seems to enjoy our music. Non-Christian people at our gigs have come and told me that they didn't know that Christian music was all right to listen to, and we've had old people dancing at church events."

To find out more about Across the Way, order a CD or have the band play in your area, contact Nick Weatherstone on (02) 6585 2745; fax (02) 6585 2421; email wweatherstone@nor.com.au.

ap



Letters



All for Christ

The article by Neil Benfell (*AP* February) hits the nail on the head. Christian schools have to be distinctively Christian. There is no other rationale for their existence.

Our school council has faced two disappointments over the years. The first is that very few Presbyterian teachers have applied when positions were advertised. The second is that in interviewing prospective teachers who are committed Christians they show little understanding of how Christian concepts must permeate the whole of our teaching and set a Christian tone for the operation of the school.

What is the answer to these problems? The solution is long term. We need to encourage our young people who already are following the Lord to consider training as teachers. They should aim at getting good qualifications, but they also need to understand the implications of the Christian faith for the whole task of teaching. During their training they need to supplement the secularist approach of universities with a distinctively Christian approach to education. A good starting point is Noel Weeks' *The Christian School*.

Allan M Harman
Chairman, St Andrews Christian College
Burwood, Vic.

Value of church schools

On several occasions each week, I set aside my administrative responsibilities to teach year 10 and year 7 Divinity classes. My year 10 students are examining the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and the related question of the authenticity of the New Testament documents. Later these students will be confronted with the teaching of Jesus concerning heaven and hell and a biblical perspective on suffering and evil. In each topic, the unique claims of Jesus as Lord and Saviour are made clear to the boys, many of whom will only hear the

gospel at school in Divinity classes and weekly chapel services.

Mr Benfell (*AP* February) will hear no disagreement from many of us who work in Presbyterian Church schools that our aim should be "to develop Christian minds [in our youth] so they are better equipped to serve the Lord in their vocation, families and the wider community". For some students, this may indeed mean striving to get into the best university courses, not to earn high incomes, but to serve. For example, last year Scots honoured the work of a Christian old boy, Professor Graeme Clark, the developer of the bionic ear, as a means of inspiring in our present students service to others.

Furthermore, anything less than a standard of excellence in all that it seeks to do is an insufficient goal for a Christian school.

Mr Benfell has raised a number of ideals and issues pertinent to the current debate on the role of Christian schools. While space does not permit a detailed discussion of these, there is much in Mr Benfell's article with which I would agree. However, while there may be shared ideals, there is no one way of educating Christianly. Among Christian schools there are very different patterns of historical development with varying cultural traditions. These cannot be ignored in understanding the current functioning of a school.

There are many Christians working in our church schools and faithfully developing "Christian minds". Let us discuss key issues relevant to ensuring a Christian foundation, Christian focus and Christian epistemology of knowledge in our schools, but not in a way that may be interpreted as questioning the value of the work of Christian staff in traditional church schools. At Scots many of my staff strive to function in a manner that evidences our commitment that the gospel is the "heart beat" of our school.

Finally, may I join with Mr Benfell in issuing a call to Christian young people to consider a career in teaching. Ultimately, ensuring that the gospel is the "heart beat" of our schools depends upon having well trained, committed Christian teachers in our traditional church schools, other Christian schools and, indeed, government schools.

Dr Robert Iles
Principal
The Scots College, Sydney

State schools for Christ?

I refer to articles in *AP* in February on Christian education. I am becoming increasingly aware that by and large we are selling out the large bulk of Australian

children who are in the state system.

I am greatly burdened for a Christian presence in the state system. Helen Colquhoun said it extremely well in her article, *For the Public Good*, particularly in her reference to Matthew 28:19 and 5:14. The public school system is the most open door of opportunity for the Christian church. By and large we as a Church are neglecting our charter, particularly in state high schools, and shall be answerable to our Lord and Judge on this matter. He calls us to seek and save what is lost and that is the very centre of our objective as a church. We have the potential to labour in the P & C and to be involved in weekly Scripture teaching as well as assist in reading programs and so on.

As church leaders we should be encouraging those Christians who teach in public schools, particularly those who actively promote the gospel in this environment. Not all our political leaders in education are opposed to us, and many are anxious to support the churches in their desire to impact the public education with the Christian message. The breakdown of the public system in some part is our doing as a church because of our neglect in carrying out the leavening influence required of us by the Lord.

Evangelism is the foundation of Christian educational strategy, whether in church schools or state schools. It is not sufficient to educate from a Christian worldview. We must evangelise children whether they are of covenant family background or not. Australian children, wherever they are, are all our responsibility!

Rev Doug McPherson
Manilla, NSW

Troubled times

Recently I sat in the home of Mr and Mrs Kho who visit our congregation from time to time when visiting Australia. We discussed the work of their home church, a Presbyterian congregation in Indonesia. They were relieved that their congregation had escaped friction and persecution from the Islamic fundamentalists but mentioned that a number of church congregations in their area of Indonesia had been persecuted. The news on ABC Radio the next morning said there had been more trouble in that area of Indonesia.

The Sudargo family also visit our congregation when they are in Australia from Indonesia. Their story is quite different – the Presbyterian church they attend in Jakarta has been burned to the ground. Two of the vehicles owned by the congregation were also torched, though mercifully no one was killed or injured.

Reports number at 500 the congregations that have been attacked and buildings burned or damaged in Indonesia. It is hard for us in Australia to imagine a situation where people are so antagonistic to the Christian faith that they physically attack the people and buildings. The Apostle Paul experienced the same type of reaction to his preaching as he took the Gospel to the pagan world (Acts 16 & 18). When he writes this Epistle to the Romans his experience of this darkness and animosity seems to come through in his description of human depravity in Chapter 1.

Please remember the Indonesian Church in prayer.

*Rev. Alan Perrie
Whitfords Presbyterian Church, WA*

Theological nonsense

As a visiting professor at Talua Ministry Training Centre from January. I just came across your December issue concerning Jesus under attack. I appreciate very much your stand against the theological nonsense of the Jesus Seminar.

There is an orthodox saying: "There is nothing new in theology except it is false!"

Among the many books about Jesus, however, I would very much like to recommend the book of the German New Testament scholar from Heidelberg University, Klaus Berger, *Wer War Jesus wirklich* (Quell Verlag, Stuttgart). Here the gospels are taken seriously and Berger expresses the confusion of modern NT science.

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Hospital visitors

Having successfully completed the hospital visitors training course run by Rev. Morris Key and Presbyterian Social Services in NSW, I would like to share how this course has helped me to understand and sympathise with others in their hour of need.

I find I have a much closer relationship with our dear Lord, who has been at my right hand all during the course. I was very apprehensive at first but as I progressed I became more confident. I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge. The two books set as course reading, *Good Grief* and *Stuck for Words* were a great help. Rev Morris allows you to set your own pace, so you have time to study between each module.

So come on, brothers and sisters in Christ, ask your local minister about doing this course and help those in need.

*Mrs Patricia Weir
Tuross Head, NSW*

Compassion

Debate is good, indeed necessary. Jesus and Paul were experts at a time when debating was a popular pastime. Your articles in *Jesus under attack* (AP, December) are timely and necessary. One sentence which stood out to me was Bishop Paul Barnett's "I think it's easy to get the impression that some of the leaders of the Jesus Seminar are speaking out of hurt hearts." Christian debate must be tempered with compassion such as this, otherwise it remains cold and harsh.

If Jesus' character could be summed up in one word it must be "compassion", and we need to imitate that. It is hard not to listen to someone who offers unconditional love. This has often been lacking in His church for too long.

*Mrs Daphne Maslin
Gumly Gumly, NSW*

Household of faith

I was somewhat concerned by the AP report on the activities of Foundations for Israel and the encouragement for Christian congregations to "adopt a settlement" – that is, Jewish settlements in what are now Palestinian-controlled areas. The implication is that the Jews are our friends whereas the Palestinians are not.

Perhaps readers should read *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian, to gain a balanced view of the real relationship between Jew and Palestinian – a relationship that has been

nothing short of attempted genocide of the Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians, by Jewish extremists.

I would have thought that as Christians our first responsibility is to our Christian brethren, whether Israelite or Palestinian. When it comes to the gospel, the Jews (by religion) are its enemy just as much as those of Islam. To support one against the other is wrong, and to support Jew against Christian, albeit Palestinian Christians, is I believe a grievous offence against our Palestinian Christian brothers and against Almighty God.

*Rev Peter Dunstan
St David's Presbyterian Church,
Toukley, NSW*

Mission children

Late last year I received a letter from a person seeking information about our church's missionary work among our native people. Unfortunately, the letter has gone astray and I wish the writer would contact me again as I cannot recall his name. I believe that he is one of the many people in our church who have been greatly disturbed by news media statements about the "stolen generation".

People have been led to believe that children were taken from parents and sent to church missions. It is true that in the 1920s quite a number of children, mostly girls, arrived without notice at Mornington Island where my parents were missionaries. Their only contact with the outside world was their 46 foot sailing lugger.

Quite often when the vessel returned from its monthly voyage to Burketown for mail and supplies there would be some young passengers aboard. I can still remember my parents' concern when the boat arrived with six teenage girls. There were already about 70 children in the dormitories, all of whom had to be fed and cared for.

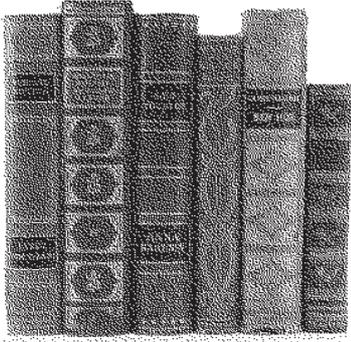
The missionaries did not have the desire or the means to "kidnap" children from the mainland. In years past Queensland had a Chief Protector of Aborigines and he, through the police force, was the one who could authorise removal of native people.

I can give assurance that children from elsewhere fitted in very well on the mission and were happy.

I believe our church can be proud of what our missionaries accomplished on Cape York and Mornington Island.

*Rev Andrew R Wilson OBE
Wynnum Qld*

books



Biblical Eldership An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership

By Alexander Strauch
Colorado: 1995.

Strauch convincingly shows from Scripture that local church leadership by spiritually caring elders, and that form alone, is presbyterial and apostolic. Part 3 (152 pages) expositis parts of Acts, four Pauline letters, James, Peter and Hebrews – all showing elders leading personally, discerningly and corporately. By contrast, some churches do have elders in name, but reduce them to mere “board members”, contrary to New Testament “pastoral eldership”. This contrast looks a bit like our Code Book model.

Strauch notes that soon after New Testament times, “churches began to assimilate both Roman and Jewish concepts of status, power and priesthood resulting in “clericalised and sacralised” leadership”. Church historians will probably agree, but must then face the question, did the Reformation really free us from this?

Part 1 (83 pages) sees elders jointly as shepherds. They lead, protect and feed the flock. They are spiritually alert and courageous; and show management skills, hard work and love for the people – since they are the pastors! A study of Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5 supports this point.

Chapter 3 has a useful, tabulated comparison of 1 Timothy, Titus and 1 Peter on qualifications for elders; with practical applications for character, ability and motivation. Strauch explores Jesus’ teaching on servant leadership, leading to Paul’s impres-

sive example and a spotlight on the servant aspect for all leaders – now.

This book unveils aspects of biblical eldership on which previous writers, including Reformers, did not really focus. They were great pioneers but like all pioneers, could not achieve everything. Martin Lloyd Jones is quoted on the spiritual dangers of not emphasising the right things. By emphasising the Scriptural principles and data about eldership, Strauch would reduce such dangers for all responsive readers – and multiply their fruitfulness.

Bernard Secombe worships at the Hurstville Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

Walk in the Way Songbook

By Colin Spragg
PCA Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee
Reviewed by David Balzer

For those who choose modern songs for congregational singing, tiptoeing through the minefield that is contemporary Christian worship music is indeed a delicate exercise!

It’s littered with releases, which are a great rock concert experience but are too radical for many churches. At the other extreme are choruses that are easy to learn and sing, but whose tunes are mind-numbingly boring and predictable.

Other new collections are too theological. Yes, the great old hymns are theological, but they express these truths beautifully and poetically, without sounding like the composer has swallowed Berkhof’s theology and now has a bad case of indigestion!

Into this minefield comes a new release which, by and large, sidesteps the danger spots. *Walk in the Way* is a collection of songs by Colin Spragg. It is available in songbook (complete with overhead masters) and CD. There is also a useful CD which contains the instrumental track only and is designed for use in churches without musicians. The songs are biblical, and the suggestions for how they might be used in a worship service are helpful. My two criteria for a good tune are “stick-ability” and “whistle-ability”. Many of the tunes in *Walk in the Way* pass these tests. At the same time, the tunes are simple enough to be learned easily by congregations. *Walk in the Way* is the first venture into the recording industry for the Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Let’s hope it’s not the last! When it comes to walking through the minefield of choosing new songs for congregational singing, let me suggest that you *Walk in the Way*.

David Balzer leads singing at Caringbah Presbyterian Church, NSW, and is studying at the Presbyterian Theological Centre.

For more information: Paul Cooper, c/- Presbyterian Theological Centre, 77 Shaftesbury Road, Burwood, NSW, 2134, Australia; phone: (02) 9744 1977; email: pcooper@ptsyd.wow.aust.com

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MARCH

- 21 Sue Poynter from Canterbury, Melbourne, APWM missionary in Japan, teaching music and English as a means of contact.
- 22 Presbytery of Kilnoorat, western Victoria; 6 parishes, totalling 15 congregations with 1015 communicants, 220 adherents, 130 children and youth and 63 elders; Ian Smith clerk.
- 23 Wynnum parish south Brisbane; about 120 communicants, about 50 children and youth and 10 elders; George and Lucille Logan.
- 24 Presbyterian Youth, Vic., Martin Murany, Fiona Meeuwissen, David Graham and other state leaders, and all branches.
- 25 Joan Campbell from Cranbourne, Melbourne, WEC worker encouraging Indonesian Christians in missionary work.
- 26 PLC Armidale, NSW, principal Mrs C.L. Tisdell, all staff and pupils, and the council.
- 27 The Classis (Presbytery) Victoria of the Reformed Churches of Australia – with churches at Dandenong, Doveton, Langwarrin, Moe, Narre Warren, South Gippsland and Tecoma.
- 28 The Pres. Women's Assoc. in NSW, Evelyn Mills, Rae Moore and other state leaders, and work at presbyterial and local levels.
- 29 The progress of the Gospel among the 1.2 billion people of China, through both official and unregistered churches – maybe 26 million Protestants and 6 million Catholics.
- 30 Belconnen home mission station, Canberra; about 35 communicants, about 10 children and youth and 5 elders; John Baillie moderator.
- 31 Wavell Heights parish, Brisbane; about 30 communicants, about 30 children

and youth and 3 elders; Martin and Judith Duffield.

APRIL

- 1 Presbytery of Moree, northern NSW, 5 parishes, 3 home mission stations, totaling 22 congregations with 620 communicants, 250 adherents, 210 children and youth and 66 elders; Elizabeth Styles clerk.
- 2 Pray that the powerful message of reconciliation with God through the death of Christ may change many lives at services, camps and conferences this weekend.
- 3 Tablelands parish, Atherton, N. Qld; about 45 communicants, about 10 children and youth and 5 elders; John Trappett.
- 4 Pray that the reality of Jesus' resurrection may come home to multitudes today in Australia and worldwide.
- 5 The expatriate and local staff and all students at Talua, Santo, Vanuatu.
- 6 Effective ministry to children and families in your parish and those adjoining it.
- 7 Hamilton parish, western Vic; about 125 communicants, about 25 children and youth and 6 elders; Keith and Jenny Bell.
- 8 Dr Jacque McLeod from Armidale, NSW, anaesthetist at Bembereke, Benin (W. Africa) seeking to improve her French to train local staff.
- 9 Williamstown parish, Melbourne; about 65 communicants, about 6 children and youth and 8 elders; Scott Kroeger interim moderator.
- 10 Protection and effectiveness (accuracy and forcefulness) for those translating the Scriptures into the more than 6500 languages of the world – well over 2000 languages have some Scripture so far.
- 11 Peppermint Grove Parish, Perth;

about 50 communicants, about 10 children and youth and 3 elders; Keith and Ann Morris.

- 12 Presbytery of Penola, SA; 4 parishes, totaling 11 congregations with 430 communicants, 160 adherents, 115 children and youth and elders. Philip Daffy clerk.
- 13 St. Andrew's parish, Rockhampton, Qld (3 preaching places); about 155 communicants, about 60 children and youth and 17 elders; Charles and Marion Kennedy.
- 14 The West African country of Cote d'Ivoire – 15 million people – 39% Muslim, 30% traditional religionists, 21% R.C., 5% Protestant, 5% syncretistic ("Prophet Harris").
- 15 Blackburn appointment parish, Melbourne; about 30 communicants, about 7 children and youth and 5 elders; Peter and Yvonne Barclay.
- 16 All those in authority in federal, state and local government – wisdom, integrity and Christian values for them.
- 17 Doctors Patrick and Jennie Fung from Chinese Presbyterian Church, Sydney, home director in Hong Kong for Overseas Missionary Fellowship.
- 18 Hamilton parish, Newcastle, NSW, including Adamstown; about 275 communicants, about 40 children and youth and 22 elders; John and Lynne Webster.
- 19 Bob Munro from Queensland, OMF missionary in Malaysia.
- 20 Kingsford-Maroubra parish, Eastern Sydney, 2 congregations; about 30 communicants; about 10 children and youth and 5 elders; Johnnie and Ellen Li.

Send details of prayer requests to John Campbell, 53 Bristol Tce, Oakden 5086; phone 08 8261 3045.

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What about the unevangelised?

‘What about our forefathers, before the missionaries came?’ It was the sort of question I both longed for and dreaded. It gave me a chance to explain again the wonder of God’s grace but it was also an emotionally charged issue.

The young man who asked the question had begun life in a cargo cult in Vanuatu. His family had left the cult when he was a boy but had not accepted Christianity. Now he had somehow ended up at the bible college where I was teaching. While there, he heard the gospel taught and came to faith in Christ. As he began to think through the implications of his new found faith, the inevitable question arose, “if I am saved by faith in the Lord Jesus, then what about my forefathers who never heard of Jesus?”

For most of the students it was only about 100 years since the gospel had first come to their villages. They rejoiced greatly in the gospel. They held in high regard those foreign missionaries and local evangelists who had spread the good news around their nation. But the question was always there in the background. What was the final destiny of their great-grandparents and the generations before them who had not heard of Jesus Christ?

The question of what happens to those who haven’t heard the gospel has long troubled the church. It is one we need to think about again. Increasing numbers of children, young people and adults in Australia have little or no contact with the gospel. What will be their fate if they never hear it?

We may be tempted to think, or at least wish, that the universalists are right and everyone will get to heaven, eventually. But such a weighty matter cannot be determined by sentiment or wishful thinking. We must turn to God’s word.

There is no simple, definitive statement in the scriptures regarding the destiny of those who have not heard the gospel. But here are a few things that can help us to consider the question.

First, the way that Jesus himself describes hell shows that it is real, eternal, and a place of terrible suffering. For instance, he says it is “the eternal fire” (Mt 25: 41), a place “where the worm does not



Robert McKean

die and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:48), and a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:12). This is the place where God’s wrath on sin is poured out.

Second, Paul several times reminds Christians of their position before they heard the gospel. To the Ephesians, he says: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.” He then includes himself in the description and adds, “like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Eph 2: 1,3). Those who have not yet heard and responded to the gospel are spiritually dead and destined to experience God’s wrath in hell.

If this is true of all Christians before they hear the gospel it would seem rather arbitrary to say it is not true of those who have never heard the gospel.

Third, the Scriptures make it clear that the only way to escape from God’s wrath is through faith in the Son of God. Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Peter, speaking of Jesus Christ, said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12).

The idea that sincere belief in some other religion, or living a morally upright life, or simple ignorance, is somehow sufficient to allow entry into heaven is contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible. All have sinned. All stand justly condemned before a righteous God. All are deserving of his wrath in hell. But all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

We cannot limit the sovereign ability of God to save those whom He has chosen. But He has revealed only one way by which a person may be saved. That is through faith in His Son.

It is the consistent testimony of the

Scriptures that those who are without Christ are without God and without hope in this world – regardless of whether they have heard the gospel.

An understanding of this truth has spurred on many in the work of mission and evangelism. After a missionary career of nearly half a century, Hudson Taylor affirmed: “I would never have thought of going out to China had I not believed that the Chinese were lost and needed Christ.”

There are, of course, other motives for taking the gospel into the world, such as concern for the honour of God’s name and obedience to the command of Christ. But surely, it is also right that we, who have received a free pardon in Christ, must have a compassion for those who are still lost in their sin.

Paul demonstrates such compassion in his concern for the Jews: “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom 9:2,3). Again, to the Corinthians, he says, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). Paul was passionate that men and women should be saved from eternal punishment.

Such a passion for the lost is a reflection of God’s own concern for this lost world. It was out of His love for this world that God sent His only Son to die for the sins of the world. Can we, who are being re-made in the image of Christ, have any less compassion for the lost than God did when He sent His only Son?

The young man who had asked the question in my class pondered God’s judgment on sin and the wonder of his saving grace in Jesus Christ. While he could do nothing for the past generations, he was convinced that the only hope for his people was for them to hear the gospel. When he graduated he returned to his village determined to plant a church there. We need such conviction here in Australia.

Robert McKean is the minister of Strathfield Presbyterian Church in Sydney. He and his wife, Pam, served at Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu from 1992 to 1997. He taught in a number of areas including evangelism and theology.

A matter of time

Soundbite sermons do no one a service, suggests Chris McGillion.

There is a body of opinion which holds the view that shorter church services and snappier sermons will salvage Christianity. In fact, this approach would represent a form of surrender to secular pressures rather than a strategy for survival, but it has some influential proponents nonetheless.

Among them is the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey. Writing in a book on how to revitalise the Church for the new millennium, *New Era, New Church*, which was published in Britain recently, Dr Carey called for a "less churchy, less clerical, less overtly religious" presentation of the faith.

He suggested that "more people would come to church if they knew the service would not go on more than an hour".

Anyone who has sat through a stuffy church service on a hot Australian summer Sunday would certainly be tempted to agree. Often boredom is a problem and brevity, at least in part, would be a solution.

But what about those who presently don't go to church? Would a church service of, say, 45 minutes bring them to the pews?

Probably not. After all, the reason people don't go to church is that they don't regard it as relevant to their lives.

This conclusion, however, could have something to do with attitudes to time in a more general sense.

Certainly the Anglican Bishop of Monmouth in Wales, the Rt Rev. Rowan Williams, thinks so. In a recent interview in Sydney, he said "the soundbite culture is the great enemy" of the churches, but not because it encourages short attention spans.

"Time, it feels now, is fragmented bits of a commodity," Bishop Williams said. "We don't have very much sense now of a liturgical year; we don't have the weekly

rhythm with the Sunday pause, and I think that is one of the most secular things about modern society."

All religions, at some level, are essentially about memory. It is by recalling events in sacred time that religion seeks to help people deal with their own lived time.

Thus the week in both Judaism and Christianity is based on the Genesis story of how God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

Saturday for Jews becomes a day of prayer and rest that recalls God's grace towards creation; Sunday for Christians becomes the day to celebrate (re-enact) and reflect on the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

The Jewish year is divided into holy days ordered in such a way as to encourage repentance in anticipation of the messianic promise of redemption.

Similarly, the liturgical year in the Christian calendar follows the events in the life of Jesus from His birth (at Christmas), through His death and resurrection (Holy Week and Easter) and His empowerment of the Church to bring the Good News to all nations (Pentecost).

Christianity, like Judaism, sees history as heading toward an ultimate conclusion – but its notion of the everyday is cyclical. The ritual life of the Church is designed to repeat the same eternal truths.

But secular culture holds to a linear view of time in which all spheres of life are seen in terms of movement towards some goal. In this view, the past is something that necessarily must be escaped in the interests of progress.

The general social consequences of this attitude were noted by the American sociologist Daniel Bell in the 1960s.

"For millennia," Bell wrote, "children

were initiated into stable ways and ritualised routines, and maintained a basic familiarity with place and family. Today, not only is there a radical rupture with the past, but a child must necessarily be trained for an unknown future." Thus religion's purpose in bringing the present into conformity with an unchanging sacred reality is anathema to modern society.

What about religion's role in preparing people for eternity?

Here, too, secular attitudes to time work in the other direction. Because the only future worth worrying about is always imminent, secular culture compresses time into an all-consuming present. Neither the promise of heaven, nor the threat of hell, holds the power it once did.

One way to counter this challenge is to distinguish more rigidly between sacred time and ordinary time. Judaism, for instance, forbids certain practices on the Sabbath such as work, lighting fires or even travelling.

For this approach to succeed, however, the believing community must be far more closed and self-regulating than is the case for most Christians.

But Christians could, perhaps, re-emphasise those parts of their tradition that provide a respite from the demands of secular time. Rather than tinkering with Sunday services, why not popularise retreat centres, meditation and a variety of rituals that help people to reflect on the larger questions of life.

Rather than seek to be "less overtly religious", why not strive to be more religious as an antidote to the ephemeral nature of modern secular culture?

Chris McGillion is religious affairs editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. This article is reprinted from the Herald with permission. 

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