

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

may 1999

Enjoying God



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Joy: our proper purpose

Probably one of the best-known sayings among Presbyterians today is the answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?" Most of us can parrot the answer without even a moment's reflection: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." However, knowing the answer and understanding it are two entirely different things.

As proof of this, ask yourself where does the emphasis usually lie in the explanations that are given of this answer? Isn't it true that often the focus is concentrated on the meaning of "glorify", and very little is said of enjoying the Lord? Could this explain why many people regard Christianity as an exercise in joyless duty devoid of any happiness or pleasure? Sadly, this caricature of the faith is all too common. That's why in this issue we are seeking to redress the imbalance by reminding ourselves that the distinguishing mark of a believer is his delight in God.

In Blaise Pascal's *Pensees*, the great philosopher-theologian makes the point that a desire for happiness lies behind all human pursuits. As Pascal says: "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ,



Robert Benn

they all tend to this end ... This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."

Pascal makes a telling point here by uncovering a universal law of human experience. There is nothing wrong in itself with seeking happiness: it is simply a law of the soul. There is no sin in experiencing a sense of pleasure. If any sin does arise in the pursuit of happiness, it comes in only because we make the object of our happiness someone or something apart from God. We try to find happiness in barren places and neglect the one true source of pleasure: God himself.

No doubt many Christians will be wary of the notion that we ought to seek delight and pleasure in our religious experience. We

have been so affected by the view that disinterested duty and self-denial are the highest virtues that we find it hard to believe that happiness and delight should be legitimate goals of the Christian.

Yet the Psalmist is unabashed in calling us to find our deepest pleasure in the Lord: "Taste and see that the Lord is good ... delight yourself in the Lord ... my heart is glad ... for you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Ps 34:8; 37:4; 16:11) Here we are reminded, as Jonathan Edwards points out, that "true religion, in great part, consists in the holy affections ... he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion".

According to Edwards, it is the mark of biblical Christianity that it is a religion of "joy unspeakable and full of glory". If we want to know what true religion is, we must go where there is true religion, and that is found in heaven. "There," he says "the love and joy that the saints have is exceeding great and vigorous; impressing the heart with the strongest and most lively sensation of inexpressible sweetness, mightily moving, animating and engaging them, making them like a flame of fire." In other words, Christians are meant to be profoundly happy in the Lord. This is the theme of the May issue of *Australian Presbyterian*. John Piper shows us that we honour God when we serve him out of a sense of delight, rather than out of duty. Adrian Lamrock reminds us that praising God is not simply giving him a compliment or bestowing honour upon him; rather it is the consummation of the joy and pleasure that we find in him. Have we forgotten that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise? John Davies brings to light the interesting idea that Old Testament spirituality was founded on the notion of the enjoyment of God. After all, we don't walk with people whose company we despise. Instead, we walk with friends. And Greg Goswell helps us how to find delight in God when we are overcome with despair. Our prayer at *AP* is that this issue will help you to enjoy God to the full.

Robert Benn
Convener

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Much obliged

Duty and delight are not opposites in the Christian walk.

One of the most important discoveries I have ever made is this truth: God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in him. This is the motor that drives my ministry as a pastor. It affects everything I do.

Whether I eat or drink or preach or counsel or whatever I do, my aim is to glorify God by the way I do it (1 Cor. 10:31). Which means my aim is to do it in a way that shows how the glory of God has satisfied the longings of my heart. If my preaching betrayed that God had not even met my own needs, it would be a fraud. If Christ is not the satisfaction of my heart, would people really believe me when I herald his words, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35)?

The glory of bread is that it satisfies. The glory of living water is that it quenches thirst. We do not honour the refreshing, self-replenishing, pure water of a mountain spring by lugging buckets of water up the path to make our contributions from the ponds below. We honour the spring by feel-



John Piper

ing thirsty, and getting down on our knees, and drinking with joy. Then we say, "Ahhhh!" (that's worship!); and we go on our journey in the strength of the fountain (that's service). The mountain spring is glorified most when we are most satisfied with its water.

Tragically most of us have been taught that duty, not delight, is the way to glorify God. But we have not been taught that delight in God is our duty! Being satisfied in God is not an optional add-on to the real stuff of Christian duty. It is the most basic demand of all. "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4) is not a suggestion but a command. So are: "Serve the Lord with

gladness" (Psalm 100:2); and: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4).

The burden of my ministry is to make plain to others that "The steadfast love [of the Lord] is better than life" (Psalm 63:3). And if it is better than life, it is better than all that life in this world offers. This means that what satisfies is not the gifts of God, but the glory of God – the glory of his love, the glory of his power, the glory of his wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

This is why the Psalmist, Asaph, cried out, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:25-26). Nothing on the earth – none of God's good gifts of creation – could satisfy Asaph's heart. Only God could. This is what David meant when he said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you" (Psalm 16:2).

David and Asaph teach us by their own God-centered longings that God's gifts of health, wealth and prosperity do not satisfy. Only God does. It would be presumptuous

not to thank him for his gifts (“Forget not all his benefits,” Psalm 103:2); but it would be idolatry to call the gladness we get from them, love for God. When David said to the Lord: “In your presence there is fullness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11), he meant that nearness to God himself is the only all-satisfying experience of the universe.

It is not for God’s gifts that David yearns like a heartsick lover. “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2). What David wants to experience is a revelation of the power and the glory of God: “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory” (Psalm 63:1-2). Only God will satisfy a heart like David’s. And David was a man after God’s own heart. That’s the way we were created to be.

This is the essence of what it means to love God — to be satisfied in him. In him! Loving God may include obeying all his commands; it may include believing all his word; it may include thanking him for all his gifts; but the essence of loving God is enjoying all he is. And it is this enjoyment of God that glorifies his worth most fully.

We all know this intuitively as well as from Scripture. Do we feel most honoured by the love of those who serve us from the constraints of duty, or from the delights of fellowship? Consider the analogy of a wedding anniversary. Mine is on 21 December. Suppose on this day I bring home a dozen long-stemmed red roses for my wife, Noel. When she meets me at the door I hold out the roses, and she says, “O Johnny, they’re beautiful, thank you,” and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say mat-

ter-of-factly, “Don’t mention it; it’s my duty.”

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honour those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there’s no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person; the roses do not honour her. In fact they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty.

Here is the way Edward John Carnell puts it: Suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night. Her answer is, “You must, but not that kind of a must.” What she means is this: “Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your overtures are stripped of all moral value.”



The fact is, we have failed to see that duty toward God can never be restricted to outward action. Yes, we must worship him. “But not that kind of must.” What kind then? The kind C.S. Lewis described to Sheldon Vanauken: “It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.”

None of us has arrived at perfect satisfaction in God. I grieve often over the murmuring of my heart at the loss of worldly comforts. But I have tasted that the Lord is good. By God’s grace I now know the fountain of everlasting joy. And so I love to spend my days luring people into joy until they say with me, “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4).

John Piper is the senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, and the author of Desiring God, Future Grace, and Let the Nation Be Glad.

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For many Christians today, the New Testament is our effective Bible. I don’t mean that it’s the only part of the Bible that we lug around, or even read from time to time. But the idea of turning to the Old Testament (apart from a few selected Psalms) for any spiritual input into our lives does not readily spring to mind.

For instance, can the accounts of people like Enoch, Noah and Abraham, who lived in those dim ages before the coming of Jesus, say anything that will give us much insight into normal spiritual experience? It’s easy to think that their personal experience of God must have been too vague and imperfect to be of any value to us.

Look at how depleted they were of the spiritual resources which seem so essential to us! They lacked the benefit of our modern commentaries, devotional literature, and mountain-top conventions. They didn’t even have a Bible to begin with! They hadn’t even heard the name of Jesus.

Despite all these apparent disadvantages, we may be surprised to learn that it’s precisely from such characters as these that we learn the true meaning of spirituality or “walking with God”, as the Bible puts it. The phrase “walk with (or before) God” is used in the Bible of each of these men (Gen. 5:22, 24; 6:9; 17:1). Since God doesn’t have legs like ours, what might such a metaphor mean?

To walk with someone means first that there is an agreement to walk together. “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3). There is a common consent as to the nature and purpose of the journey – if not its every turning – and as to the travelling companions who will share the trip. To walk with God is to accept the terms of his invitation to set out with him on a journey he has planned.

It is clearly God who takes the initiative. Noah, for example, “found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8)”. This doesn’t mean that God noticed Noah was a gracious person. It means God showed undeserved favour to Noah. When God told him to build that eco-preservation capsule and gather his family and other creatures into it, Noah did so, not knowing where it might end up. He only knew something of the God whose idea it was. Several times God mentions the agreement or “covenant” he has with Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:9-17) – a gracious commitment to preserve life in the midst of a corrupt world.

Then we read of Abraham that God called him to leave all that was familiar, and to step out in trust (Gen. 12:1). God’s invitation to “walk before me” (Gen. 17:1) is again closely linked with his “covenant” (v.2) or pledge to grant Abraham many descendants. And what of Abraham’s response? While Abraham’s part is sometimes downplayed, it must not be overlooked. He is to “keep” God’s covenant (v.9), and he willingly takes on the sign that he accepts the proposal.

Abraham’s agreement to walk with God goes

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A cloud of witnesses

Saints such as Enoch, Noah and Abraham knew much about walking with God.

much further than simple belief in God's existence. It means that he saw things from God's point of view. The idea of "agreement with God" may be more helpful in some senses than belief in God. All sorts of people say they believe. Unmarried couples who sleep together say they believe. Drunks often claim the same. So do people who have never been near a church in decades. All sorts of self-seeking, world-loving, church-attending people do too. But the one thing they don't do is agree with God. And this is vital to walking with Him.

Second, to walk with God will mean having the same destination.

Of Enoch we are told that he was no longer to be found, because God took him (Gen. 5:24) – just as God had "taken" Adam into his presence in the garden (Gen. 2:15). It is a picture of God reaching out and lovingly enfolding Enoch in his arms. The writer to the Hebrews understood this to mean that Enoch bypassed death (11:5).

To walk with God will have the end of death and the enjoyment of life with God forever as its ultimate goal. It was for this reason that Jesus came. His work can be summed up by saying that he "destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10)."

Noah's journey of faith led him to a restored world. In this new Eden, there was the hope of a brighter future after the devastation of the flood. It's a picture of "the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13).

Abraham's destination was a land he could call his own, a place where God would live with him and his descendants for ever. When Neil Armstrong took that "one small step for man", momentous as it was, it could hardly compare with the first step Abraham took in the direction of the promised land. For that was a journey not only of faith and courage, but of salvation. In contrast with the tower builders in Genesis 11, Abraham stepped out, looking towards the "city whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

There is an old expression that Christians are sometimes too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. I'm not sure that many of us today could plead guilty to that offence. The problem is far more often that we have our minds focused on the immediate and the material things of this world. God wants us



John Davies

to follow the example of Paul and to "press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14)." An eternal perspective will make a real difference to the way we view things in this life.

Third, walking with God will involve companionship and shared experiences along the way.

One can only wonder about Enoch's 300-year walk with God. Unlike some of the ancient myths about him, the Bible is silent, perhaps deliberately silent, on precisely how Enoch might have filled in his time. What matters is simply his enduring relationship with the living God.

Noah's experience of God was in part to know him as his deliverer and constant companion in the face of the forces of chaos which overwhelmed the world in his day. God was the one who "shut him in", who "remembered Noah" and who "blessed" him. On Noah's part, his response to God is summed up in the repeated phrase "and Noah did just as God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22; cf. 7:5, 9, 16). Noah's walk with God is closely linked with the description of him as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time" (Gen. 6:9).

Abraham, too, knew the hand of God in blessing. In part, this was experienced in material ways – those tokens of the good life God has in store for those who trust him. More significantly it was in the dependence and commitment which developed through the many ups and downs of Abraham's life.

Abraham was no plaster saint. There were a number of times when he was out of step, for example when he tried to save his own hide by being prepared to release his wife into Pharaoh's harem.

But the overwhelming impression is of a man who "believed the Lord" (Gen. 15:6),

no matter what the obstacles. The supreme example, singled out by the writer to the Hebrews (11:17-19) is the fact that he was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, the very one God said would continue the family line, and, along with him, all the great promises God had made.

At numerous points, we find Abraham "calling on God". This happened not only when he was in a tight spot, as almost anyone might do. Sometimes he poured out his heart on behalf of others (Gen. 18:22-33; 20:17). At other times, Abraham spent time communing with God for no stated reason, apparently for the sheer delight of being in personal contact with him (Gen. 12:8; 13:4). To walk with God will mean nurturing a living relationship, sustained by a prayer life which goes way beyond a shopping list of our personal desires.

In these examples of the shared journey, and the intimacy with God which this involves, we catch glimpses of what an ideal relationship with God in a perfect world might have been like before sin made its awful entry. The focus is not on some "feel-good factor," though there will be emotional aspects to a walk with God. The focus is on the personal dealings, the friendship even (James 2:23), which on God's part shows itself in astounding goodness, and on our part in learning the way of trust and obedience.

We sometimes imagine the Old Testament only to be concerned with the outward, the ceremonial, the legal for its own sake. These Old Testament saints show us the true meaning of spirituality. Their walk with God should in some ways be mirrors of the experience of all of God's people (see Lev. 26:12).

The walk of faith in the Old Testament was undertaken with far less knowledge and with far fewer props than you and I enjoy. Yet the faith of these great saints is not diminished, but heightened by this fact.

Surrounded as we are by so many forms of security, have we eliminated all reminders of our dependence and lapsed into a self-satisfied and shallow religious experience? We would do well to learn again what it is to walk with God.

John Davies is the principal of the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, and lecturer in Old Testament.

Lift your voices

Great hymns and prayer uncover the secret of enjoying God.

A vacuum cleaner is at its best when it is vacuuming. I do not use a vacuum cleaner to clean windows or, even more ludicrously, to make a cake. Thus it is with us. If the Shorter Catechism is correct, we were first of all created to “glorify God and to enjoy Him forever”.

In praising God we are doing what we ought to be best at, because we are purpose-built for it. As Isaiah reminds us, God made us with this in mind. “Bring my sons and daughters, everyone called by my Name, whom I created for my glory” (Isa. 43:6,7). Again, his goal in redeeming us is that we will be rescued from pride and ingratitude so that our tongues “will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11). Praise should be our delight and our destiny.

For many Christians, however, “praise” has become more a duty. Somewhere in the rush of the latter end of the 20th century we may have lost the joy that should be



Adrian Lamrock

ours in praising God.

Many of the Christians who were great influences on me as a young Christian were adept at praising God. Looking back at them now, after more than 30 years, it is clear that these people found great joy in praising God because they were so well acquainted with both his character and his work. They had a deep understanding of his word and a sure experience of his work in their own lives. Their lives simply reflected that in a natural way. Praise was no effort. It was as natural as breathing.

If we are to enjoy God in praise, we first of all need to gain a clearer focus of what God is like. We find this, ultimately, in the Scriptures. We are called to worship a God who is not a creature of our own imaginations but one who is so far beyond our imaginations that when we are confronted with everything about him, it is almost too much for our minds to grasp.

One of the challenges we face in reaching people with the gospel is that they see the Christian faith as some kind of duty which is, at best, acceptable and, at worst, just plain dreary. This is especially the case with young people in our “instant satisfaction” generation.

On the other hand, one of the great pleasures of teaching Christian Studies in schools over a number of years is to see how young people are amazed when they are confronted with the different aspects of God’s character, as it is revealed in Scripture. It is possible that we have become so knowledgeable about the character of the Trinity, over a period of years, that we sometimes lose the impact of the utter awesomeness of the Godhead.

If we focus for a moment on how marvellous our God is, our only response can be to worship him and to give him the praise that should be part of our nature. Praise is much more than just giving God a compliment or exchanging social niceties with him. Nor is praise something about which we can say “I’ve done enough of that”. We do not measure the praise of a sunset or a seascape. Nor do we decide whether or not we will praise a wife or husband because of the love we have for them. Our praise of anything in life springs from our delight in it. Our praise of anything in life overflows into the rest of our lives. Our praise of God, then flows from our delight in him. Anything less is not really praise.

How can we enjoy God in praise? One way must surely be through the music of our corporate worship. It is an enormous gift from God himself that we are able to praise him through song. The Psalms are a great example of this.

Corporate worship through music – and I refer specifically to the singing of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” – is a vital part of Christian congregational life

permanent trustee

today. We are more likely to remember the words of the hymns from last Sunday's service than the content of the sermon. As we sing Christian music together we are teaching and encouraging each other as a reinforcement to biblical teaching.

Yet, for a good part of this century, Christian music has not been taken as seriously as it might. In the hymn books of the 21st century, what will survive from the 20th? Possibly not a lot. Looking back over the past 30 years there has been little of lasting significance on the Christian music scene. We have seen an increasing secularisation of Christian music as a genre.

A 10-minute trip through *Rejoice* or any other hymn book, tells us that very little hymn music has come from this century. The great hymns, by the Wesley brothers (now there's a good name for a Christian band!), the reformed slave-trader John Newton or Dr Watts have stood the test of time, as have those by the American writer Frances Van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby). These were people for whom the character of God was clear and the redemptive work of Jesus paramount. Their hymns reflect this.

Their hymns are a response of great joy in what God has done for them. They are not cheap "feel-goods". The writing of many great hymns has come as the result of great sadness or adversity. This adversity helps the hymn-writers focus on the constancy of God or the splendour of his being compared to the tawdry world of everyday life. They have been struck by the unfathomable nature of the salvation offered in Jesus.

For us, the singing of those hymns can produce a joy which is just as great. That joy comes from the recognition of God's work in our lives. The words may be another's but they speak of a truth that is deeply-seated in our lives. The music and the words together strike a chord in us that it is sometimes difficult to express in any other way.

Is it possible that the general shortage of good hymns and songs of praise from this century reflect a movement away from biblical theology? Is it that we are so busy trying to entertain our congregations through the music of our corporate worship, that we have fallen over in terms of providing real substance in our church music? Is it that we have become such an egocentric society that our "worship" becomes more focused on ourselves than on God? Fortunately there are some Christians around at the moment who are trying to correct this imbalance. They are people like Timothy Dudley-Smith and Graham Kendrick in England, Bryson Smith in Dubbo, Salley Trethewey, Nicky Chiswell,



PHOTOGRAPH: THE AGE

Rob Smith and others.

The really great hymns of praise are those which centre on the nature of God and his work in our lives. They are those which extol the aspects of God's character and of his redemptive work through Jesus.

Most Australian Christians enjoy a "really good sing" at a Sunday service. Why? Because there is great joy not just in clearing out one's lungs but because they are responding to the truth of God as it is expressed in Scripture and expanded and expounded through the words of the hymn or song.

Of course, the other way of enjoying God through praise is prayer. Whether public or private, our communication with God, stemming from the depths of our hearts, should begin and end with praise.

Most Presbyterian services will plan

prayers of praise somewhere in the service – usually near the beginning. The challenge for the service leader is to lift up the congregation through the praise that is offered to God.

I worship at present in a congregation where the minister is able to inspire us every Sunday because of his enthusiasm in praise of God. His prayers inevitably lift our hearts because he is addressing God in terms of his wonderful nature and splendid acts. If we work towards such a pattern in our private prayer life, the reality of God will be much clearer to us and our enjoyment of him much greater, much more central to our lives and ultimately, nearer to our ultimate purpose.

Adrian Lamrock is the principal of the Scots School, Bathurst. He is an elder of the Presbyterian Church at Bathurst. ap

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The psalmist's portion

The certainty of judgment enables us, with Asaph, to rejoice always

No portion of Scripture better illustrates and exemplifies the highs and lows of the spiritual life than the Psalter, and in Psalm 73 both extremes find expression. In the same psalm, Asaph says, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence" (v13), but then, a little further down, we hear him saying, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (v26).

Now it would be all too easy to accuse the Psalmist of mood swings, but far more is involved than that. Before we rush in and psychoanalyse the unsuspecting author, whose words and phrases are available for us to weigh and measure, we would do well to notice the indications in the text that it is not all in his head nor just a problem that Asaph has. The placement of the psalm within the Book of Psalms, at the head of Book III (remembering how the Psalter is arranged into five "books", namely Psalms 1-42, 43-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150), serves to highlight this psalm as particularly important.

Thus the issues raised in Psalm 73 are more than personal. This psalm heads "a book" in which, by its end (Psalm 89), the "theological problem" of the prosperity of the wicked and the seeming failure of God's covenant promises to righteous David have become a major stumbling block for faith (89.46-51). Notice how in Psalm 74.1 Asaph is again asking the hard questions – "Why have you rejected us forever, O God?"

Indeed, the whole book of 17 psalms refuses to be satisfied with easy answers, and anything like a complete and adequate answer is not found until Book IV. The issue of how to enjoy God in a fallen, broken world is not just the concern of this one psalm, or even of a number of the psalms, but it is the problem of the Psalter and of the whole Bible. Psalm 73, however, has a contribution to make to the wider problem and the total solution.

But if it is a wider problem, every believer's problem, a problem for faith in general, it is also a personal problem, and there are few psalms that use the first person pronouns ("I, my, me") quite so much as Psalm 73 (note vv 2, 3, 13, 14, 15 etc.). So, then, we are witnessing the personal



Greg Goswell

struggle of the author in a composition which arises from the experience of an individual, but applies to Israel and the nations.

The whole Psalter moves from lament to praise. Most of the early psalms of David can be classified as laments or complaints (see Psalms 3, 4, 5, 6), however, the last we hear from "the sweet psalmist of Israel" is in joyous Psalm 145, to be followed up by five whole psalms of praise.

The Psalter can be considered a movement from the one state to the other – with a series of steps along the way – and so we can think of Psalm 73 as the Psalter in microcosm, as a controlled experiment in one individual's experience, as he moves from despair and frustration to delight in God. We make the journey with him.

The psalm opens with a proverbial statement – "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart" – but what is supposed to be a tried-and-true statement of experience (which is what a proverb is) seems to be challenged by the experience of life. The wicked go unpunished. They go on from strength to strength (vv2-12).

Asaph wonders why he bothered being so good, because it does not seem to pay (v13). He is sorely tempted to argue in the same way as the wicked who say: "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" (v11). But, though he resists this temptation (v15), the attempt to think through the problem makes his head hurt, for it is not easy to mesh experience with accepted doctrine (as given in verse 1).

Verse 17 is the turning point in the Psalm – "till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny". In the verses that follow, we have a very different description of the wicked (vv 18-20), and we discover the "strange comfort" contained in the doctrine of judgment. We can

never be happy until we believe that there will be a judgment – until we know that truth and right will have the final say.

Knowing there is a judgment day, it is possible to enjoy God in this sinful, fallen world. Without such a prospect, which satisfies our God-given moral nature, enjoyment would be impossible. In the sanctuary of God, in God's presence, Asaph is given eyes to see things from God's perspective.

Finally, verses 21-28 reveal something of the quality of the psalmist's relationship with God (which earlier verses might have called into question). He had wronged God with his doubts and accusations (vv 21, 22), but Asaph realises now that he is always with God and God is always holding on to him. Further, this is a protection from which not even death can rob him – "afterward you will take me into glory".

We are not going to get embroiled in arguments over the views of immortality and the afterlife in the Old Testament. Yes, its views are undeveloped; granted, its understanding is sketchy – but it does know that the relationship of a believer with God is not ended by death.

The "afterward" of verse 24 – "and afterward you will take me into glory" – brings to mind "their [the wicked's] final end" (a related word). In contrast to the fate of the wicked, Asaph believes that God will "take" him (as Enoch and Elijah were "taken", see Gen. 5.24; 2 Kings 2.9). Why does he want that? Because he wants to be with God.

As Edward D. Griffin could write in August 1839 after his wife's death and in the year of his own, "it is because he [God] is in heaven that I wish to be there". The statements of the psalmist leap across the centuries and strike a chord of recognition in every truly converted heart: "God is my portion forever" (v26); "it is good to be near God" (v28).

This is a fledgling faith, not as well-informed as ours (without New Testament revelation), but the same faith for all that. Thus we can recognise here a kindred spirit, a man who could rejoice in God regardless of circumstances.

Greg Goswell is minister of Campbelltown Presbyterian Church and lectures in Old Testament at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Sydney.

Caught in the Net

Many Christians may be online but off the point.

It is almost an article of faith with Australians that mobile phones, computers and the Internet make everything easier, faster and better. To criticise the technological revolution invites a charge of heresy or the epithet of Luddite. Parents who deny their children the latest Pentium computer are made to feel guilty of depriving them of the chance to become more imaginative, more knowledgeable and more creative? But have we become so mesmerised with the microchip and fibre optic cable that we have forgotten that imagination, literacy and numeracy existed before their invention?

Christians have not been slow to join the communication revolution. Many ministers (the younger ones, usually) carry mobile phones which occasionally ring in Presbytery meetings and even in church services. A knowing grin and the guilty party rushes from his seat to leave the room. One congregation I know of in Melbourne has a cellular phone tower outside the church disguised in the shape of a cross for which they receive about \$8000 rental a year. I know because the Presbyterian Theological College was offered a similar deal by one of the big phone companies.

Or what about the church in Madrid recently featured in a *Newsweek* article. Offerings in the collection plate were down because of the fear of being mugged on the way to church. The solution – a phone line and a credit-card terminal. Church members can now swipe their cards and select an appropriate amount off their visa (with frequent flyer points?). And the bank that installed the machine gets a two per cent fee (rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's?).

You can now go to church on the Internet from the comfort of your own home. You can visit one of the virtual church websites and with a click of your mouse select your denomination. Yes, even Presbyterians are represented in cyberspace! Then go to the sanctuary link and listen to hymns in real audio, say prayers, hear sermons of your choice, and receive the sacraments in cyberspace.

So what about the offer of a virtual spiritual experience? Can you be touched by God in cyberspace? Is worship online any different to worship in church? Do we



Tony Bird

need to continue church membership when it is so much more convenient to meet in an Internet chat room? Can the Internet save souls?

Many claim that it can. Participants in prayer circles on the Internet do claim that online healings often occur.

The Internet was originally designed as a defence network which would continue in the event of war preventing normal communication. Today the Internet is the largest single structure that humans have ever built. It conveys telephone messages, radio, television, mail, faxes, financial dealings as well as new forms of communication and consumerism. People are united (networked) by access to a vast amount of information and an enormous number of brains. But is the Internet a new form of the Tower of Babel?

“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’” (Gen. 11:4)

And if it is another Tower of Babel, is the millennium bug a judgment from God on this fallen and fading human endeavor?

And are there any downside effects to this information technology? What about the possibility of people retreating into imaginary worlds? What if they lose touch with reality, and begin engaging in new kinds of virtual anti-social behavior.

Besides the social implications, how about the moral issues? There has been a recent outcry on children's access to pornography on the Internet. The Australian Government has promised to tackle this particular issue, though some say that such attempts are fruitless and that censorship on the net is impossible.

Such matters are important, but they are only one of many ethical problems

caused by this new technology. For example, there are other forms of information in cyberspace that tell you how to build explosive devices, or manufacture drugs, or commit suicide.

Then there is the problem of the 10th commandment. It is almost a preoccupation with some that they have to have the latest microchip with the greatest amount of RAM or hard-drive space. They keep upgrading and are never satisfied with their existing set up. With bigotry and zeal they defend the use of Macintosh or IBM or the superiority of Windows 98 as an operating system. Others succumb to obsessional time wasting. You can easily amuse yourself to death with computers and squander time tinkering with your system, fixing bugs, getting rid of viruses and playing games. In severe cases, the sufferer assumes a zombie like posture and sits transfixed in front of the computer monitor for hours.

As you can tell, I admit to an ambivalence about computers and the Internet. Although I use them both myself, there are some issues that continue to concern me. In particular is the myth that computers save time and help in Christian ministry. They often don't. Some information can be far more easily found in a book. Most ministry is better done on a personal level. Our corporate fellowship with God cannot be conducted in front of a computer screen.

It strikes me that the information and communication revolution has not brought any greater godliness or holiness of life. Access to vast amounts of knowledge does not necessarily bring any greater wisdom. It is the fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom. If anything the personal disciplines of Bible study, prayer and meditation can be so easily diverted, subverted or substituted for a virtual experience which is no blessing at all.

Tony Bird lectures in New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

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Travelling mercies

Treat cyberspace like the road: be careful, but use it.

It took two fatal bus crashes, one after the other, to make New South Wales authorities realise how dangerous the Pacific Highway was. What should have been a super-highway was a series of narrow winding roads of another era – the era when the telephone was a great advance in technology. The phone is now like a scenic country road compared with the super-highway of the Internet. Many of our children will want to travel this information highway. Part of our parenting must be seeing that they can drive safely and skilfully.

The Net, like other technological developments before it, is neither good nor evil. Of itself, it is neutral. It is what we do with it that works for good or ill.

We give our children driving lessons so that they might use a car on the road. In the back of our mind is the knowledge that they could be maimed or killed on the road. Danger is ever present, but this does not stop us letting our children go out. Many parents are nervous about letting their children out on the Net. There is danger. There is cause for concern. But there is a big world out there, and many of our children will want to explore it. Let's show them how to do it right. Let's deal with our concerns in prayer and dependence on the One who can be beside them in any kind of danger.

It's best, of course, if you yourself can travel this road with them at first. It can be



Marion Andrews

a family activity. If not, find a suitable mentor who can guide them skilfully and safely. Our children were blessed to have a computer enthusiast in our congregation, who gave them time and the odd game. Teenage boys, particularly, benefit from men they respect other than Dad who will reinforce the values their parents have instilled. These days, the computer is an excellent venue for mentoring.

It is good for Internet mentoring to happen in the family home, in the middle of family life. If a dark, sleazy cyber-space alley presents itself on the screen, a child has a strong sense that this does not fit here, in our home. He or she feels uncomfortable. This is the delicate but strong work of God's Spirit on the conscience.

The Internet began in the 1960s as a US Department of Defence communication network. Gradually, university professors and researchers used it more and more to share information. By the 1990s, the Web made on-line information accessible for

Helpful hints for surfers

- 1. Children must never give out personal information or use a credit card on-line without your permission.**
- 2. They must never share their password, even with friends.**
- 3. They should never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet on-line unless you approve the meeting and go with them to a public place.**
- 4. They must never respond to messages that make them feel confused or uncomfortable. They should ignore the sender, end the communication, and tell you or another trusted adult right away.**
- 5. They should never use bad language or send mean messages on-line.**

everyone. Today, millions of people across the world are connected.

No authority is in charge of the Internet; it's growing and being changed by its users every day. The US Government has provided helpful advice to parents so that they can guard and guide their children from "stranger danger" on the Net (see panel).

As parents, we must set standards and time limits for TV, movies, videos and even reading, so that children do not neglect their home and school responsibilities. The Net needs to be added to that list. It can be a great time-waster. You can set up an alarm-clock or oven-timer near the computer to help.

As Christians, we have recourse to prayer and the Word of God to help us set and maintain standards. Many a mother has been driven to her knees to plead for a son or daughter in danger on the road. Travelling the information super-highway is no different. We know the dangers our children face. Let us cast this care upon the Lord.

4P

Presbyterian Church in NSW

Director of Christian Education

This half time position will become vacant in mid 1999.

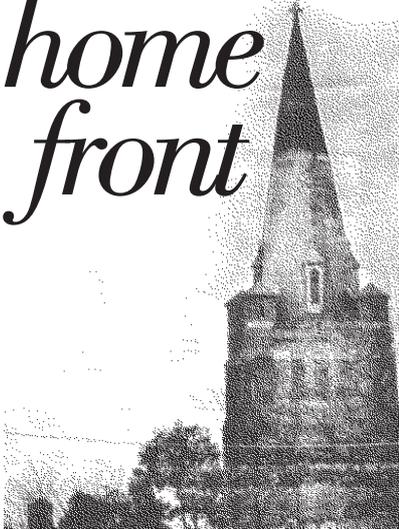
Applications close on May 11th.

Details of the position, including application procedures are available from the present Director:

Rev David Burke
GPO Box 100
SYDNEY 2001.
Ph 02 4871 3380

email: dburke@hinet.net.au

home front



Washed by the lamb?

Soap suds, buckets and lots of enthusiasm set the scene for a service and outreach when the senior youth group of the Donvale parish (named 7Up, for years 7 and up,) wanted to serve the community. They offered a free car wash to anyone who drove past the church, on a busy corner in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, plus a free copy of an audio tape by Sydney media personality Kel Richards entitled *What has God ever done for you?* – a clear presentation of the gospel. The morning was a great success, reports Donvale's minister, **Rev. Gerald Vanderwert**. The young people were kept very busy, and those who had their cars washed were happy to enjoy morning tea while chatting to others from the church. People in the community were very impressed to see the church at work in this way. Above all, we praise God that 33 copies of the tape were given out, together with a brochure about the church and its ministry.



Donvale parish's free car wash

Long-running Sale

St. Andrew's, Sale (Vic), which is nearing its 150th anniversary, celebrated the opening and dedication of its new building on Sunday 21 March 1999. More than 150 peo-

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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.*

ple attended the service with the moderator of Victoria, the **Rt Rev. John Woodward**, preaching. He was assisted in the service by **Rev. Jared Hood**, moderator of the Sale congregation, and **Rev. Peter Swinn**, part time minister to the congregation. The Bible readings were given by the Sale congregation elders, **Mr Neil Mansfield** and **Mr Ron Stone**.

The Presbyterian Church in Sale began in the 1850s when the first service was conducted in a bark hut. This first edifice served for the next five years. A second building, **St. Andrew's**, was erected in 1859 and the bark hut was finally pulled down. In 1956 some of the current Sale Presbyterian Church congregation were involved in erecting a third church, **St Columba's**.

In 1977, with the formation of the Uniting Church, the Sale Presbyterians who wished to continue worshipping God according to Presbyterian principles reformed as a small group. Having lost all property and funds, it has taken 22 years of hard work and dedication for this small group to have finally completed its new building.

People and places

Chatswood charge (NSW), has appointed **Mr Jeffrey Read** as assistant to the minister for 1999. Mr Read has qualifications in theology, law, and arts, and is completing his final year at the PTC. He and his wife Carmelina are involved in evangelical outreach in the Chatswood central business district, and in Lane Cove. The parish has re-established an evening service, and has begun two additional Bible study groups.

When **Rev. Arthur George Ingram** went to be with the Lord in November last year, the NSW church lost a long-serving minister, Inland missionary, and past moderator. After an active ministry, Mr Ingram continued serving in various ways, including work for this journal.

Rev. J. E. Webster, minister at Hamilton, NSW, is moderator-nominate of the 1999 NSW General Assembly.

The Presbytery of Darling Downs has installed **Rev. Keith Harris** as a home mission appointee to the **St George** charge.

The Presbytery of Melbourne East held its annual picnic in Wattle Park, Surrey Hills, with 150 adults and children present from 10 congregations. A six-piece band also attracted visitors to the park to join in the "jam session" along with their children.

The **PWA Tasmania Conference**, is on Wednesday 12 May.

Presbyterian WEC missionary **Joan Campbell** has had her home assignment time extended until January 2000. Joan is preparing for four months' work at the WEC Korean sending base, and is to help the Victorian director of WEC teach a world missions course.

Rural Sunday school

The **PWA (NSW) Christian Education Committee**, continues to send out country Sunday school lessons. Children number 114, with new families joining the system. Lessons are sent to small Sunday school groups at Tahmoor, Eden and Bingara, as a way of supporting the rural families teach their children about Christ. The Letterbox Lessons secretary is Miss H. Howie, 18/18 Essex St, Epping 2121.

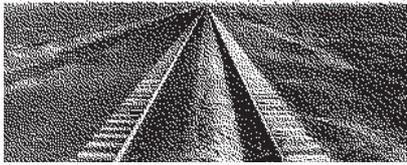
Benns visit Asia

Rev. Robert Benn and wife **Laurel** returned from a recent visit to Western Australia only to depart on 14 April to Asia (Japan, Myanmar and Cambodia) for three weeks. There they met the mission teams, and investigated with them new opportunities for service, and how better to conduct our Presbyterian and associated ministries in the Asia setting.

From 14 to 19 April, they visited **Hugh** and **Hannah Price** in Japan, who were celebrating "magnificent progress in planting a Presbytery" during the past 10 years. Australian Presbyterian World Missions is looking for workers from Australia to join the team, especially in that Hugh and Hannah will be extending their home assignment time to four years to minister to the Japanese congregation in Melbourne.

The Benns were in Myanmar from 20 to 23 April, meeting the newly formed Free Reformed Church of Myanmar with a view to forging partnership in the gospel in this land where the military junta rules. Next they visited Cambodia to visit APWM missionaries there (the **Chipp**s from WA and **Clark**s from Victoria) and investigated ways working with them in the TEE programme.

across australia



Christian channel on Optus

Australia Christian Channel is the nation's first dedicated Christian TV channel, launched at Easter on Optus TV. The line up of programs includes magazine style shows, documentaries, general entertainment, testimonies, teaching, and Christian music. Managing director **Mike Jeffs** hopes the channel will deliver a "unique blend of creative, entertaining and positive programming that will appeal to the majority of Australians. It will become a major vehicle to touch the hearts of our nation and to provide support to the local church. From day one approximately 25 per cent of programming will be Australian produced and this will increase steadily over time". Australian Christian Channel is a not-for-profit organisation, and is available in the basic Optus TV package screening on channel 30.

40-hour famine

World Vision's 40-hour famine aims to raise \$6 million for projects in Rwanda, Sudan, and other developing nations. The famine is on the weekend of 14 to 16 May.

Cyclone relief

Cyclone Vance in WA, has brought the Salvos into action, with a team of four officers, and three truck loads of supplies for Moora. Exmouth has also received assistance for the army, which has been supported by donations from several leading Australian companies, including Coles Myer, Harvey Norman, Crown Movers, and the Lotteries Commission. One company donated the use of four campervans.

Gunning for Calvary

Cardinal Clancey, head of the Catholic Church in Australia, was guest speaker at the **Wesley Mission's** annual Easter breakfast. Also as part of the mission's Easter celebrations, students re-enacted the pro-

cession of Christ to Calvary in modern style, with some dressed in soldier's uniforms and carrying sub-machine guns.

Rights for schools

The Christian Democratic Party has defended the rights of Christian schools in its policies, arguing for the right of parents to choose an education that supports the beliefs, traditions and values of the home. The party urges that registration issues should be restricted to those concerned with student safety and health, and the provision of a broad-based curriculum provided by trained teachers. No legislation should be allowed to restrict the right of parents or Christian schools to maintain the ethos of the schools by limiting the right of schools to discriminate in the selection of staff or the enrolment of students.

CMS bicentenary

The Church Missionary Society in Adelaide attracted 500 parents children and friends to a special children's day during March. In an afternoon of picnics, fairy floss and jumping castles, the main event was a colourful 50-minute gospel presentation using puppets. The day was part of the CMS 200-year celebrations, and the society called it "the biggest event of the decade for us". Victoria CMS held a similar gathering in February which attracted 300 people.

Rock eisteddfod

The Bible Society has joined forces with the NSW Juvenile Justice Centre chaplains and NSW high schools students to help raise funds for providing Scriptures for young offenders. The focus is on a Christian rock eisteddfod at Hills Centre Performing Arts Centre on 7 May. Singer



Students from the Pymble Ladies College School performing in the Bible Society Youthforce Christian Rock Eisteddfod in 1998

Sir Cliff Richard endorsed the event. "Discovering the relevance of the Bible for your own life is vital for everyone – including the young people at the eisteddfod," he said. Each school will present a day of the story of the Creation. They will have researched the Bible and created their own dramatic interpretation of that day through drama, dance, and music. Money raised will support young people at a difficult time of their life.

NCC fights heroin trial

The National Council of Churches has welcomed the news that the NSW trial on Naltrexone (the quick heroin-detoxification drug) has achieved a 90 per cent success rate. Council chairman **Rev. Ross Clifford** said the news confirmed the council's view that the "supply of heroin to drug addicts, no matter how it is administered or policed is not the answer to the problem. The churches fully support both (NSW Premier Bob) Carr's and (State Opposition Leader Mrs Kerry) Chikarovski's stand opposing the introduction of a heroin trial in NSW. To the Premier we say 'don't change your mind on this issue and stand firm to your widely publicised resolution not to endorse any heroin trial in NSW now or in the future'."

Aid for Kosovars

ACT (Action by Churches Together) International is being assisted by Australians in airlifting tents food and medical supplies to help the Kosovars fleeing their homeland. The National Council of Churches in Australia supports ACT in its efforts.

L'Abri conferences planned

The Francis Schaeffer L'Abri Fellowship in Australia has organised a series of conferences entitled *What in the World is Real?*, for different venues around Australia in July. Speakers include L'Abri staff from the Netherlands, Australia and Britain. Details from L'Abri at 10 River Road, Elderslie, NSW 2570, or phone 02 4658 0227.

Uniting Church loses 20,000

The Uniting Church newspaper *Journey* highlights recent studies which show the Uniting Church membership as ageing, and in a decline of 12 per cent in the years 1991 to 1996. This equates to a loss of about 20,000 attenders over the period. Overall, Anglican and Protestant attendance has declined two per cent for the

same period. Pentecostal, Salvation Army, and Wesleyan Methodist churches showed the most growth, with the latter registering 18 per cent.

Abortion compensation

Light, the journal of the Festival of Light, reports that a Melbourne mother recently won compensation after a hospital failed to warn her that an abortion might harm her mental health. The journal says that the Royal Women's Hospital and a gynaecologist agreed to pay her undisclosed damages. The case is believed to be the first in Victoria, and the woman's lawyer, Charles Francis QC expects it may encourage hundreds of other women to sue for poor counselling over their abortions.

'City of despair'

The Sydney Wesley Mission says Sydney is becoming a "city of despair". Superintendent Gordon Moyes said at a mission breakfast recently that many people are "suffocating in the influences of our secular world". Dr Moyes argues that the general church community ignores the poor, the mentally ill, the unstable and the disturbed. "Many churches do not want to become involved. They want to build a membership of people who are happy, married, affluent, and family based ... they advertise themselves as the Happy Family Church." In his Easter message, Dr Moyes also reminded the city that through the resurrected Christ, "if you live in the city of despair, you can relocate to the city of hope without changing your address".

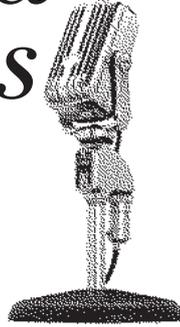
Jesus in Tasmania

The film *Jesus* was given 10 showings in Devonport, Tasmania last month, and at least 1500 school children were scheduled to see the film free of charge at sponsored screenings. Fourteen church denominations cooperated on the project.

All things new

Looking beyond the year 2000, the Reformed Ecumenical Council has chosen 'Making All Things New' as its theme for its assembly in Jakarta that year. The theme will feature in worship and Bible study sessions. Member churches (which includes the PCA) will be invited to share the story of their churches with the others.

world news



Bombs in Belgrade

Evangelicals in Yugoslavia are scorned as a cult but, as bombs fall on Belgrade, Christians are finding the citizens responsive. One local evangelical relief worker found her apartment full of neighbours seeking comfort in words of hope she read from the New Testament. Many Christians fear for their lives, regardless of their ethnic origin. Messages on email tell the story. Belgrade pastor **Ragodan Bogdanovic** of Faith Church believes the gospel is the answer to the situation. "It is time for Evangelical Christians in Yugoslavia to rise up and shake the nation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... His word can take out every hostility and desperation."

Pastor Miodrag Stankovic of Leskovac, Serbia, reports his flock cleared out an old World War II bomb shelter, and has offered it to women and children in the town, including non-Christians.

In neighbouring Croatia, **Peter Kuzmic** from the Evangelical Theological Seminary says that graduates from the seminary planted churches in Kosovo's capital Pristina. "These brothers are now living in the darkness we experienced in Croatia in 1991, and Bosnia in 1992-1995. We desperately ask for your prayer support as we seek practical means to bring them aid and food and to minister to thousands of people. We are pleading with God for mercy for the Serbs and the Albanians alike"

Brave aid

Serbian evangelicals in Yugoslavia are praying and fasting that "the desire for political power be replaced by a passion for peace, justice, and the preservation of God's miraculous creation human life". **Jasmina Tosic** of Bread of Life, a humanitarian outreach ministry of evangelical Christians in Belgrade, continues to deliver aid to war victims. The work is carried on at great risk, especially efforts to aid

Kosovars. By receiving aid from Serbians, and worshipping with other Christians, the **Kosovo Christians** are regarded as spies by the nationalist ethnic Albanians. "The important thing is to be faithful and know that the final victory will be God's," Tosic says.

Kosovar plea

A passionate plea for prayer for Kosovo was received on the Internet from the **Evangelical Churches in Kosovo**, with "greetings and love from tourmanted (sic) Kosovo". As shells and bombs fall on Pristina, holding many refugees, the cry comes. "Please raise up and join us in prayer to God for peace in Kosovo ... Please pray for Christians to remain strong seeing this war coming towards us. Pray for more humanitarian aid. We have given all we had. Now we have run out of food and so many new people came ... Please pray against the nationalistic spirit that raises to call for war and bloodshed everywhere in the Balkans. We beg you in tomorrow's Sunday service to focus your prayers in Kosovo situation. Hope to hear from you soon". The information officer for the churches, **Driton Krasniqi**, can be contacted on bashkesia@dardania.com

The **Assemblies of God** foreign missions division reports several young military-age evangelists missing in Kosovo, and several Christians unaccounted for. Missionaries for the Assemblies in Albania report many spiritual encounters with refugees, and urge prayers for the Serbian Government. In one Albanian congregation, 25 Kosovar Albanian men attended their first Christian service, and were touched by prayers for peace.

Reaching the refugees

The director in Eastern Europe of **Christian Aid Mission**, Ray Miles, who has served as a missionary in Albania, says that the refugee tragedy will enable evangelical missionaries to reach them with the gospel. He reported a case of a suffering Muslim family who were "utterly disarmed" by the compassion of evangelical Christians.

In Albania, **Radio Iliria** became the first Christian radio station to broadcast in the once officially atheistic nation. The station is Pentecostal, and aims to be religious, informative, educative, and cultural, but all with full Christian background.

Lutherans oppose bombing

The general secretary of the **World Lutheran Federation** Dr Ishmael Noko, has urged all parties in the Kosovo conflict to return to negotiations, and said, "a strategy which pins its last and only hopes for securing peace and justice upon the threat and use of violence, is a bankrupt strategy". A **Southern Baptist** chaplain who witnessed the launch of his ships first Tomahawk missiles against Yugoslavia, reported that a "deathly silence" fell over the ship. "There will not be any cheering tonight," he emailed home. The chaplain reported that the servicemen are more open to discuss their faith before operations than at almost any other time.

Gospel restriction fails

In **Israel**, for the second time in two years, the retirement of a member of the Knesset has eliminated a proposed law seriously restricting religious freedom in Israel. The Pinchasi Bill against religious witnessing faced apparent withdrawal when its sponsor declined to register his candidacy for elections in May. Rabbi Pinchasi had gathered many votes for his bill, including the entire Cabinet. Christian commentators thought it was extremely unlikely the bill could be reprocessed before the elections.

Resurrection faith

A survey of British church leaders revealed that 99 per cent believe that Jesus Christ was raised to life on the third day after his crucifixion, leaving an empty tomb. The director of the **Evangelical Alliance**, **Rev. Jowl Edwards**, said the evidence for the historical physical rising of Christ from the dead on the first Easter Day is incredibly strong. "So strong in fact, that a former Master of the Rolls, Lord Darling said that any intelligent jury would return a verdict concluding that the resurrection did happen."

An evolving witness

The gospel is reaching the Galapagos Islands whose fauna reportedly inspired **Charles Darwin** to write his *Origin of Species*. Christian leaders from Ecuador are working to take the gospel to what might be called the cradle of evolution. Missionaries and pastors are gathering funds to build the first evangelical church of the Galapagos in Puerto Baquerizo, the capital of the province. The gospel is already preached on a local Galapagos radio station.

Persecution in Indonesia

The **Voice of the Martyrs** reports Islamic mobs in Indonesia are continuing to kill Christians and damage churches. Recent attacks occurred in Bandung, 160 kilometres from Jakarta. Church camps, Christian schools, and churches have all become targets in various attacks. In Ambon, youth leaders returning from a children's camp were attacked, dragged from their car, and two were killed. **Voice of the Martyrs** continues to support persecuted churches and pastors, and assists in rebuilding.

Cuban celebrations

Cuban evangelicals are preparing a series of joint public celebrations to mark 100 years of evangelical witness on the island. Some 54 churches are taking part under the slogan, "Jesus Christ for everyone". The plans include printing and distributing three million tracts, and also posters for evangelical families to hang on their doors.

OM chief in Sydney

Sydney has recently hosted the founder and international director of Operation Mobilisation (OM), **George Verwer**, who spoke at several different Sydney venues over the weekend of 9 to 11 April. The Sydney MV Doulos organising committee invited him as part of the build-up to the July visit of this historic OM ship.

OM traces its roots to the faith of a housewife from Ramsey, New Jersey. Dorothea Clapp prayed for 17 years for students at her local high school, that the Lord would save some of them and send

them overseas as missionaries. One day she sent 14-year-old George Verwer a copy of John's Gospel, which he read regularly for three years until, in 1955 (at a Billy Graham rally in New York), he was "born again".

The day after his conversion, he began a task that ever since has been the main thrust of his work. He invested a large portion of his money in gospels to give both to other students and to send to Africa. With a group of students, he began to witness at his high school and around 200 young people came to the Lord, including his father.

It was while a student at the Presbyterian College at Maryville in Tennessee that George's burden for world evangelism really started to grow. Beginning with gospel literature distribution in Mexico during his summer holidays in 1957, he next turned his sights towards Europe and the Middle East. Under the title Operation Mobilisation, the work gradually developed to cover all five continents. Today, OM is involved in more than 85 countries and, with more than 2800 international workers, can claim to be one of the most thoroughly globalised evangelical missions. As a result of OM's work, more than 500 million pieces of literature have been given out and thousands of people brought into touch with the living God.

On American Independence Day, 4 July, the Doulos will visit Sydney's Circular Quay for a three-week visit. This unusual ship is home to 300 Christian volunteers from 35 countries and is registered in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the oldest active passenger ship in the world (built in 1914, just two years after the Titanic sank). The ship, with its large bookfair, will be open to the public each day from 10am to 9pm (Sunday 2pm to 9pm) and admission is free.



The Doulos

Our daily war

Prayer is the heavy artillery in our titanic struggle with darkness.

Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives us the significance of front-line forces, and gives God the glory of a limitless Provider. The one who gives the power gets the glory. Thus prayer safeguards the supremacy of God in missions while linking us with endless grace for every need.

When Paul came to the end of his life, he said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith." In 1 Timothy 6:12 he tells Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life to which you were called." For Paul, all of life was war. Yes, he used other images as well – farming, athletics, family, building, shepherding and so on. And yes, he was a man who loved peace. But the persuasiveness of war is seen precisely in the fact that one of the weapons of war is the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). Yes, he was a man of tremendous joy. But this joy was usually a "rejoicing in the tribulations" of his embattled mission (Romans 5:3; 12:12; 2 Corinthians 6:10; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 1:24; cf, 1 Peter 1:6; 4:13).

Life is war because the maintenance of our faith and the laying hold on eternal life is a constant fight. Paul makes clear in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 that Satan targets our faith for destruction. "I sent that I might know of your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain." Satan's attack in Thessalonica was against the Christians' faith. His aim was to make Paul's work there "vain" - empty, destroyed.

Paul encouraged Timothy to see his whole ministry as war. Timothy my son ... wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). "No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits" (2 Tim. 2:4). In other words, missions and ministry are war.

Probably the most familiar passage on

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



the warfare we live in daily is Ephesians 6:12-18 where Paul lists the pieces of the "whole armor of God". We must not miss the forest for the trees here. The simple assumption of this familiar passage is this: life is war. Paul simply assumes this, and then tells us what kind of war it is: "not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God" (vv. 12-13).

Then all the precious blessings of life that could be thought of in other contexts besides war are drafted for the battle. If we know truth, it is for a belt in the armor. If we have righteousness, we must wear it as a breastplate. If we cherish the gospel of peace, it must become a soldier's footwear. If we love resting in the promises of God, that faith must be fastened on our left arm as a shield against flaming arrows. If we delight in our salvation, we must fit it securely on our head as a helmet. If we love the word of God as sweeter than honey, we must make the honey a sword. Virtually every "civilian" blessing in the Christian life is conscripted for the war. There is not a warfare part of life and a non-warfare part. Life is war.

But most people do not believe this in their heart. Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are in peacetime, not wartime.

In wartime the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines and write to them and pray for them with heart-

wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime we spend money differently – there is austerity not for its own sake, but because there are more strategic ways to spend money than on new tyres at home. The war effort touches everybody. We all cut back. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier.

Very few people think that we are in a war that is greater than World War II, or any imaginable nuclear war. Few reckon that Satan is a much worse enemy than any earthly foe, or realize that the conflict is not restricted to any one global theatre, but is in every town and city in the world. Who considers that the casualties of this war do not merely lose an arm or an eye or an earthly life, but lose everything, even their own soul and enter a hell of everlasting torment?

Until we feel the force of this, we will not pray as we ought. We will not even know what prayer is. In Ephesians 6:17-18 Paul makes the connection between the life of war and the work of prayer: "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints." In the original Greek, verse 18 does not begin a new sentence. It connects with verse 17 like this: "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying through all prayer and supplication on every occasion..." Take the sword...praying! This is how we are to wield the word – by prayer.

Prayer is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God. That's the connection between the weapons and prayer in Ephesians 6. Prayer is for war.

This is an extract from Let The Nations Be Glad by John Piper (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

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It's time

The question of roles for women within the church must be revisited.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia has come of age. Or has it? Just over 21 years ago a decision was made to unite the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Australia, resulting in a change in direction for all three denominations and the creation of a fourth, the Uniting Church in Australia.

Circumstances were providential for the Presbyterian Church. The upheaval – losing members, even whole congregations, plus buildings, schools, theological training colleges with their well-established facilities including libraries, and the altered allegiance of most academic staff and students – demanded a re-evaluation of the church's goals and purpose. This led the PCA to be re-established on firmer foundations.

The theological colleges in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria had long been the training ground for men called into pastoral ministry. Courses were also available for women, particularly at Rolland House in Melbourne, but the opportunities for subsequent service were fairly narrow. In theory, training continued after union; in practice, operations began afresh. Of crucial importance was the introduction of strong biblically-based teaching to replace the emphasis on sociology and psychology. In time, ministers emerged from training with a new enthusiasm for evangelism and a healthy biblical desire to equip their flocks for "works of service".

The increasing number of Presbyterian Churches demonstrating a renewed vitality today is a direct consequence of this period of uncertainty. The genuine spiritual growth in the pews has brought with it spontaneous and wholehearted desire by both men and women to glorify and serve the Lord. The question is: How prepared was the church for this welcome and much-sought outcome?

In its desire to return to biblical standards, the church saw it as a priority to restore lead-



Bronwyn Lee

ership roles to godly men. The process involved removing a number of opportunities women previously exercised to teach and lead a congregation, halting a trend developed during the previous era of church life. Ministry opportunities available to women dwindled further.

So where does that leave women today?

This question raises two points. First, now that men have been actively encouraged to lead, it follows that men become urgently aware of the responsibilities of leadership and are given opportunities not only at theological college but at home-church level for training to learn and develop confidence. This places an added responsibility on men to discharge their leadership responsibilities as well as possible. But, it is difficult for women to endure leadership that does not aspire to excellence, especially when sometimes they could perform the particular task better themselves.

Second, while the General Assembly of Australia in 1991 ruled that women were ineligible to be admitted to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament – that is, to be ordained as pastor-teachers of a local congregation – it did not specify what ministries were left open to women. And, it is still by no means clear where the lines are drawn on a variety of ministry opportunities faced by ordinary women at the dawn of the 21st century.

It is understandable that the church was reluctant to continue the debate on the subject of ministry for women at the height of

the controversy. But time has moved on. Now, more than ever, is an appropriate time to explore and clarify what roles women should play. The failure to do so, and lack of recognised pastoral ministry opportunities and encouragement in appropriate training, can easily be misinterpreted as a failure to affirm women or, worse still, a negation of them.

If the church is truly seeking to present a plausible witness to the world, it cannot afford to let this state of affairs continue. We are faced with a clear choice: we can either affirm the crucial ministry women can have in the church or we will wane in influence because of failure to address an issue of basic importance.

Nor is it just our external witness. The clamour from within the church for definitive answers on male-female roles is increasingly impatient. Christians are living in a world in full-blown identity crisis, where traditionally held beliefs regarding the family structure are being challenged at every turn. These people want answers.

The pre-1960 versions of family, as well as male and female identities, preserved to some extent by the church, are unrecognisable in today's society. Male dominance and female subservience is no longer tolerated. Nor, assert students of the Bible, should it be. No one generation of believers has a monopoly on the correct biblical perspective and carries it out faultlessly. An aspect of being sinners in a sinful world is that we must bear the stamp of the period in which we live.

Today's Christian young men and women have a radically different mindset from previous generations. Expectations of each other have entered a new phase. The point of no return has passed. But is that such a calamity? It gives us another chance to learn from the Lord through whatever means he wills, then divest ourselves of sins of the past, re-evaluate interpretations as well as applications and move on to new strengths. We are forever in

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the process of discovering the will of God.

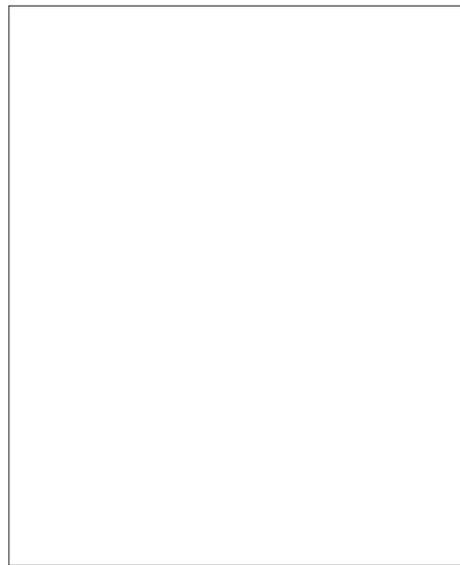
But if the church is already one step ahead and genuinely has an unambiguous stand on the equally valuable yet different contributions men and women make in ministry, then why not make more of the fact? The strength of such equality is teamwork.

Teamwork, hardly a new concept, is the key to viable shared pastoral ministry. Apart from providing a needed perspective, such an approach reduces the need for men to minister in inappropriate circumstances.

But regrettably, this doesn't seem to be the case. For men, opportunities to enter recognised ministry in the church appear to be limited only at the level of choice. Training is promoted and supported, positions are available. But single women considering serious ministry – if they are paralysed by an instinctive uncertainty about the value or desirability of their service – need to look further afield to train and serve. Women with husbands in recognised ministry have the option of serving in partnership by default. In any event, Presbyterian churches have few places for women in recognised pastoral ministry – and little thought seems to have been given to develop them.

This is perplexing for women, particularly for those maturing in the faith who are acutely aware of the church's loss through its hesitancy to use available God-given potential. It seems that the role of homemaker and child-nurturer remains the most valid form of

ministry for women. The expectation is that these home-related activities, along with unofficial church ministry, will fill the greater part of a woman's life. Certainly, a contribution to church ministry of inestimable value has been, is being and will continue to be



made by faithful women in this category. But the number of Christian women willing and, more particularly, able to fulfil these voluntary part-time ministry roles in the church in conjunction with raising their families is diminishing.

Other women fit this category for a far shorter time than previously, or not at all. A

higher percentage of women today will not marry, and those who do tend to have small families. Time spent in direct care of children is reduced, giving women years of availability for pastoral ministry.

Sometimes wives are forced to work because husbands are unemployed or have low-paid jobs or because families break up (no longer the exception even in the church). But for these women, recognised pastoral ministry in the church is not an option.

Women have to look elsewhere. Many take up secular work, others serve in parachurch organisations. More young Christian women are taking higher degrees and becoming leaders in business and service industries. Ineligible by virtue of gender to teach and lead within the church, they find affirmation in the world where the floodgate of opportunity is open. Double standards or not?

There are no easy answers to these questions. But a beginning must be made. Now is the time to continue the discussion about women's roles in the church. The challenge is not to revisit the past, which would be fruitless, but to encourage, motivate and train women to engage in creative and fruitful ministry opportunities with the endorsement of the whole church. Women need the freedom and resources to explore those opportunities. Will we take this step?

Bronwyn Lee works for World Vision Australia and worships at Donvale Presbyterian Church, Melbourne. 

Opportunities for ministry

*These suggestions for ministries open to women are taken from
Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.*

To the **handicapped**: hearing impaired, blind, lame, retarded.

To the **sick**: nursing, doctor, hospice care (cancer, AIDs etc), community health.

To the **socially estranged**: emotionally impaired, recovering alcoholics, recovering drug addicts, escaping prostitutes, abused children and women, problem children and orphans.

Prison ministries: women's prisons, families of prisoners, rehabilitation to society.

To **youth**: teaching, sponsoring, open houses and recreation, outings and trips, counselling, academic assistance.

Sports ministries: neighbourhood teams, church teams.

Therapeutic counselling: independent, church-based, institutional.

Audiovisual ministries: composition,

design, production, distribution.

Writing ministries: freelance, curriculum development, fiction, non-fiction, editing, institutional communications, journalistic skills for publications.

Teaching ministries: Sunday school (children, youth, students, women), primary school, secondary school, tertiary institution.

Music ministries: composition, training, performance, voice, choir, instrumentalist.

Evangelistic ministries: personal witnessing, parachurch groups, home bible studies, outreach to children, visitation teams, counselling at meetings, telephone counselling.

Radio and television ministries: technical assistance, writing, announcing, produc-

Theatre and drama ministries: acting, directing, writing, scheduling.

Social ministries: literacy, pro-life, prodecency, housing, safety, beautification, drug rehabilitation.

Pastoral care assistance: visitation, welcoming and helping newcomers, hospitality, food and clothing and transportation.

Prayer ministries: praying, mobilising for prayer events, helping with small prayer groups, coordinating prayer chains, promoting prayer days and weeks and vigils.

Missions: all the above, across cultures.

Support ministries: countless secular jobs that undergird other ministries.

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Movie Watch

Not So Pleasantville

Reviewed by Bob Long



The movie *Pleasantville* is, on the surface, a pleasant and interesting story. It begins with a cable TV trivia competition about the hit series *Pleasantville*. The show portrays a town where, of course, everything is predictable and pleasant. The husband comes home from work at the same time every day, and gives the same greeting. His dinner is always ready on the table. There's no family fighting, the town has no crime. The town doesn't even have any fires – all the fire department knows how to do is rescue cats from trees. *Pleasantville* is an idealised version of America in the '50s.

Back in the real world, brother and sister David and Jennifer are in conflict over the TV. David wants to watch *Pleasantville* so he can cram for the trivia competition; Jennifer wants the place available so she and her boyfriend can watch a rock concert. Their divorced mum has left on a weekend date. As David and Jennifer struggle over

the remote controller, they drop it and break it. Suddenly, a strange TV repairman appears at the door with a new remote control – one that he promises will give their favourite programs more “oomph”. In the background, *Pleasantville* is running, with the brother and sister there fighting over the use of a radio. David and Jennifer resume their battle too... when suddenly, with a press of the button on the new controller, the two realities merge. David and Jennifer suddenly find themselves inside the TV show, where they've become Bud and Mary-Sue.

Bud warns Mary-Sue that she should go along with the script. As a long-time fan who's seen all the episodes, Bud fits in well. Thoroughly '90s girl Mary-Sue immediately feels constricted by the conservative standards of *Pleasantville* (it's not just the picture that's black and white). It's not long before her basketball-captain boyfriend has lost his innocence in the back seat of the car – an incident that changes everything in the town. Suddenly, the team that always won, and always scored every basket, is fallible. Worse, splashes of colour start to appear in the black and white *Pleasantville* world.

More and more, the people of *Pleasantville* start doing things they would not have dreamed of in the past. For example, Lovers' Lane becomes more than just a parking place for people on a date. When Mary-Sue's mother asks her what happens there, she replies “Sex!”... to which her mum innocently responds, “What's sex?” Very soon after she has had this explained to her, she becomes coloured too.

On the surface, at least, this all appears very nice. After all, what's wrong with some colour and excitement in your life? But this is a movie with a strong sub-text. It's a salvation story – not by Christ, but by man. And not by doing something good, but by doing wrong. The fall – complete with forbidden fruit imagery – is seen as the liberation of people from oppression. As Bud warns his sister early in their time in *Pleasantville*, “You don't understand... you're messing with the whole universe.”

To use the words of the movie trailer, “paradise gets lost” – the garden of Eden isn't exciting enough, and Mary-Sue's healthy rebellion is just what it needs.

In effect, *Pleasantville* is an attack on Christianity. It's an attack on moral values. But it's all done so cleverly and insidiously that, in a way, it's a dangerous movie. By portraying the morals, predictability and blandness of *Pleasantville* in an unreal way, the audience cheers on the citizens of *Pleasantville* to ... well, sin.

Right at the end of the movie, after Bud returns to the real world (interestingly, Mary-Sue decides to stay), he has to comfort his real mother, in tears over her ruined marriage. “Life just hasn't turned out the way it was supposed to,” she sobs. “Mum,” says the now-wise David, “There is no way that it's supposed to be.” There's no way we can know right and wrong ... no way we're expected to know how to run our lives ... no script. It's all just relative.

In summary, *Pleasantville* is a thought provoking, well-made movie, with brilliant special effects – and a dangerous message.

Bob Long worships at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church, Brisbane



Mary-Sue

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Second Opinion

Phil Campbell



Bud

Funny, isn't it. I thought all those old TV shows were in black and white because we didn't have colour TV back then. But in reality, it's because the people and the places we were watching were just dull shades of grey in real life. Well, that's the way it is with *Pleasantville*, anyway. Remember the song "I've seen fire and I've seen rain"? If you live in this TV town, you haven't. You've only seen "pleasant" ... you've only been "pleasant". Passions of any kind, along with any form of self-expression, just don't fit in

with the script.

It's easy to see *Pleasantville* as a movie about discovering sex – most teens I know who have seen the movie don't look any deeper. But as more and more people and objects in the town break out in glorious colour, the viewer is being challenged to crack the code. What is it that brings colour to this monochrome world? Ultimately, the answer is ... passion. It's not just sex. It's art, it's learning, it's love ... it's even honest anger. Being forced to be "pleasant" means living in grey. Passion is colour.

The challenge for us as Christians is to ask some tough questions. Was the morality of the American – and Australian – '50s simply a product of repression? Sometimes it was. Does adopting a Christian morality necessarily involve sacrificing passion? Sometimes you'd think so.

What we really need if we're ever going to correct the stereotype at the heart of *Pleasantville* is a Christianity that's much more rugged, a gospel-centred faith that springs from a well of passion, that engages with life in a way that sometimes isn't just ... pleasant. Let's be coloured Christians.

Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor.

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The Board of St. Andrews CCS invites applications for the position of Secondary School English/history teacher, to commence in Term 3, 1999. The applicant may also be required to assist the Headmaster in the further establishment of the Senior School.

Further details and application forms may be obtained from the Chairman of the Board, Mr John Wood, 8 Aries Road, Junction Hill, N.S.W. 2460 or the Presbyterian Minister at St. Andrews, the Rev. Bob

The School, founded in 1998 with 24 students, is a growing Christian School with 106

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A friend of my son actually entered a McDonalds outlet and naively asked: "How much does a \$2 meal deal cost?" Poor chap, he was overheard, and he was never allowed to forget it!

Jesus said that "the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). He then said, "make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness (i.e.money), that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings" (v9). Jesus tells us to use money to make friends. If you are a missionary, you will know that a deep and precious bond of friendship been created between you, and those who have supported you through the years.

But let's return to the \$2 meal deal, and even more importantly to the "McScots \$2 mission deal". What's the deal? It's very simple, and the results are almost unbelievable.

According to the 1998 Year Book & Church Directory (page 100) we have 43,209 communicants and adherents in Australia. Let's call this figure 40,000, and let's say that potential non-participants are made up for by some of the 11,000 children and youth who would join in. If each one of these 40,000 Presbyterians placed \$2 each week in a Mission Box at the church door (call it the "McScots \$2 Mission Deal"), then we would have \$4,160,000 a year income.

On the expenditure side we have 134 missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in many countries and with many different missions (see pages 238-240 of the Year Book). We will over-estimate the annual budget for each missionary at \$30,000 (\$50,000 for a couple). In fact, if mission societies divided their total expenditure by the number of missionaries, these figures may not be inflated.

Using these figures, the total expenditure on Presbyterian missionaries in any year would be \$3,540,000 against an income of \$4,160,000. This would actually leave \$620,000 each year for expanding the work, opening new fields, meeting social needs,



Len Pearce

and doing something for our missionaries in retirement (many still retire with negligible superannuation, and no home). All this for just \$2 a week a person!

What are some of the directions in which we spend \$2 each week? A coke? An ice-cream? A Mars bar? A special loaf of bread? A special can of cat food? Somewhere, whether you are a pensioner, student, job-seeker, home maker, missionary at home, or on a wage, there has to be a way you can save, and hardly notice that \$2 has gone into the mission box.

Most of us would save more than \$2 a week if we switched off lights in the home when not in use!

So, where to from here? How do we sincerely request every church, and every member and adherent, to joyfully take part in such a plan? This method would mean the beginning and the end of our Presbyterian mission budget! Each church treasurer could present the plan to the church, and with congregational support, empty the box weekly. Every three months the funds could be sent to the Presbytery

treasurer, who forwards in bulk to the APWM mission deal desk at headquarters in Sydney. Our missionaries will never again have to go round the churches, cap in hand, begging so they can leave for the field. Does a child continually go to his parents pleading for money to meet basic needs? What would happen if we asked our ministers personally to obtain guaranteed support from the local church, with a list of donors up to 100 per cent of their stipend before a call could be issued? I suggest we would have a nationwide revolt. Yet we ask this of most of our missionaries!

Under the mission deal, home time would be spent entirely in refreshment, and ministry to the churches and to our people. A beautiful bond of fellowship would be created and cemented between our Presbyterian churches and their missionaries. Why should the sons of this age be wiser than the sons of light in this matter?

Even more importantly, notice what Jesus declared, to apply verse 9: he who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much ... if therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? (Luke 16:10,11).

This \$2 mission deal is an appeal to the Presbyterian Church of Australia to be faithful in a very little thing – two dollars a week a person for missions. Every Sunday morning more than 40,000 Australians put on their shoes, and go out the door to attend a Presbyterian church. Why not, at that very moment, think of the "beautiful feet of him who brings good news and announces salvation", and put \$2 in the pocket or purse for the mission box, apart from the congregational collection?

Let's be faithful in a very little thing, and the Lord will entrust to us the true riches. What blessing in the churches! What an example to the nation! What a glory to Christ!

Len Pearce is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, member of the Reservoir congregation, and is serving in Melbourne with the Red Sea Team International.

Grace without measure

It's as well for us that God does not measure as we do.

Many regular churchgoers regard the quality of their lives as the key factor in their salvation, rather than the grace of God. This is one of the surprising findings which has come out of my visiting members of the church I attend, in their homes. It is astonishing because the doctrine of salvation by grace, unearned and totally undeserved, has been preached countless times over the years in our church but has obviously gone over many heads. Nor is our church unique, judging from discussions I've had with friends who have undertaken parish visiting in their own parishes. That many have ears but simply don't hear is as much a reality in our day as it was in Christ's time on earth.

We live in a world where everything is measured – our net worth, our return on funds employed, sales per employee, hours on the job, our intelligence, our physical condition, our spending habits, our potential. Hence, it should come as no surprise that many measure their spiritual worth in terms of worldly standards. It seems that there are many who imagine that God will reward them with eternal life provided that they do not commit any of the "serious" sins and measure up well in the light of the Golden Rule!

For many, changes in moral codes have blurred the concept of sin and therefore the need for a saviour. What has become acceptable to society must be OK for everyone, some would argue. Perhaps, another reason could be a lack of Scriptural knowledge. The Bible is the world's best-selling book, but how deeply is it really being studied? The pace of living as we approach the new millennium is accelerating, a fact that is most striking to those of us who were in the workforce in the 1950s. It seems to me that longer working hours, increased demands on parents to take part in their children's education and a wider range of entertainments available are taking their toll on time for daily Bible reading and personal devotions for Christians.

The visits I make to people in our congregation are by appointment, and people are informed before the event that we are going to share our faith with them as well as enjoy fellowship. We use the Evangelism Explosion method of witnessing, a time-honoured, excellent way of structuring a



Russell Lander

discussion on Christian beliefs. At the outset, this entails asking two diagnostic questions and drawing upon designated Bible passages for the answers.

The first question which will probably be familiar to many readers is: "Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that, if you were to die today, you'd go to heaven?" Responses vary between a straight "yes" for a Christian believer to "No, I'm not worthy" or "When you're dead, you're dead" at the other extreme. In between, however, there is a wide range of answers which appear to be "yes" but are actually "no". Examples here are "I certainly hope so!", "I'm almost certain", "I would like to think so", "I would like to", and "I just don't know – nobody has ever asked me that before!"

The second question is somewhat more armour-piercing: "Suppose you were to die today and stand before God and He were to ask you: 'Why should I let you into My heaven?', what would you say to Him?" A Christian response would be something along the lines of a simple "Because Christ died for my sins." Answers which do not revolve around the work of Christ are inevitably self-centred. Fairly standard lines include: "I've done my best and I know that God would appreciate that", "I've made my share of mistakes but I'm confident that God would overlook them because I've never done anything really bad, like killing someone" and "I've been a good person, helping the underdog, giving generously to the poor and showing a real concern for my fellow man. Mistakes, yes, but I've never really hurt anyone."

Answers to the second question often reveal the un-Biblical notion that some sins are much heavier than others and should carry a much greater penalty under God's

judgment – murder, incest, rape, genocide, armed robbery. Again, we see here the late 20th century idea of measuring everything down to the last gram! Scripture contains no such table of weightings; all sin is abhorrent to God – "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil" (Habakkuk 1:13).

Most churchgoers know the parable of the workers in the vineyard as recorded in Luke 20. On the surface some might well construe this as simply Jesus' radical contribution to improving industrial relations and setting wage awards. The real punchline, of course, is that the Master gives generously to those whom he chooses, rather than to those who consider themselves worthy. The Master's reward is not based on family connections, tertiary qualifications, hours of labour, skill or productivity but simply upon his kindness. It would not have mattered how hard those employed from 9am had worked; they would each have received only one denarius, one day's pay for a Roman soldier. Those hired at 3pm also received a denarius much to the chagrin of those hired earlier who had "borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day".

In a 20th century context those workers who claim that an injustice has been done are just like those who would argue that they are at least as good as many Christians who claim to have been saved and therefore have an equal right to God's favour at the Judgment. Mercifully, the rat race stops well short of the Kingdom of Heaven as only those who have trusted in Christ alone for salvation can look forward to a place in his eternal kingdom.

Russell Lander is an investment analyst with Dicksons, a Sydney stockbroker. He worships in Wabroonga, Sydney. 

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A difficult harvest

I found the features very interesting in the Jan/March issues of *AP* on church schools and church planting. I'm the wife of a farmer with children in our local public high school and a Christian primary school. I understand the principles of growing crops first hand. I know the work involved in planting crops for harvest. Praying and waiting for rain, preparing the ground by eradicating the weeds as best you can, applying the right mix of fertilizer and lime, sowing the seed into the earth, praying for the light constant rain (so the seed is not washed away) and the warm sunshine. Trusting God to germinate the seed and being so thankful and relieved when the seed shows signs of growth. It doesn't finish there, we need to continually pray and watch for pests, weeds, lack of rain – Praying for just the right growing conditions, and then protection until the harvester has been through.

Last year, on 28 October, our best crops in 10 years were hit by a freak frost. It wiped out a year's work; after a drought year, it was devastating. It was heart breaking. It's times like these you hit rock bottom, safe place to be when Jesus is your rock. Only he can give us the courage to get up and start preparing to plant another crop this year. God has proved he is faithful in the past and is today and tomorrow.

I teach Scripture in the local schools, then carry that contact through into the Kids' Club and Sunday School. For the past 10 years I have experienced draught, storms and the unexpected harsh frost. It is hard, heart-breaking work to continually go into the rocky, weed-infested fields of our public school system, to plant the seed of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. God gives you the courage to enter a classroom

full of unchurched year 8/9 students. We certainly wouldn't choose to go there ourselves, it's a scary place to be on your own. It is much more comfortable at my son's Christian school, but is that where God wants his workers to congregate?

I am mostly thankful that God wants to use me to sow his seed in the hostile fields of the public school system. He does give me rare glimpses of growth when I least expect it. I do thank David Thurston for his honest interview in the March *AP* on planting a church. It was David and Kathy who planted the gospel in me, many have nurtured and prayed for continual growth since. Sowing the seed of the gospel is a continual process and I'm so relieved that the harvest is God's and we are the workers. God really is in control.

Faye Willis
Henty, NSW

40-hour famine

World Vision is committed to helping the world's poor and needy. Our motivation comes from God, and our faith in him is at the very heart of what we do.

Working within a Christian context allows World Vision to put into practice the teachings of Jesus. Our commitment to Christianity also gives us the strength to continue our valuable work even in the most heartbreaking and difficult conditions.

During a trip to Rwanda in 1997 I saw things I wish I never had to see. But I can tell you World Vision has made a difference there and elsewhere.

On the weekend of 14 to 16 May churches and youth groups have the opportunity to take part in World Vision's 40-

hour famine. Your support is absolutely integral to the success of the venture.

We are aiming to raise \$6 million this year to fund projects in Sudan, Rwanda and other developing nations. It will also allow World Vision to respond immediately to emergencies and to support relief and development projects around the world.

I urge *AP* readers to support World Vision's 40-hour famine by going without food for 40 hours or sponsoring others to do so. This is a great opportunity of experiencing what others are forced to endure and helping to create a better world for them.

Lynn Arnold
Chief executive officer,
World Vision Australia
Melbourne

For more information or for famine booklets, phone 13 32 40.

Romans on rock

Rock music is something like meat offered to idols. There are some people, brought up in a strict tradition or recently converted from paganism, whose consciences would condemn them if they used it. There are others who, maybe because they most often use it in a Christian setting, are not worried by non-Christian associations.

If I am right, there are two relevant commands in Romans 14. Don't condemn, don't despise your brother who thinks differently (v.10) Don't destroy God's work for the sake of music (v.20). In related passages (Acts 15, 1 Corinthians 8-10, Colossians 2:8, 3:17, 1 Timothy 4:1-5, Revelation 2:19-29) I see two facts on which these commands are based: it's not wrong in itself, it's wrong to use it if it harms God's other children. Very wrong. (I've done the equivalent at least once.) Beethoven's music was condemned by some for its "unruly" emotionalism (probably wrongly). If his Ninth Symphony was condemned as humanistic (by people who know German and can make out the words of mass choirs) they are probably right. But the music has been redeemed and is now used to praise God. African drums used to be Satan's medium, but have been redeemed in most parts of Africa (I love them). Three practical suggestions for redeeming rock music: 1. Make the words clear 2. Keep it and other genres in balance. 3. Don't add unnecessary trappings if they could offend – like way out clothes and megabells in the 11am service.

Rhondda Price
Nairobi, Kenya

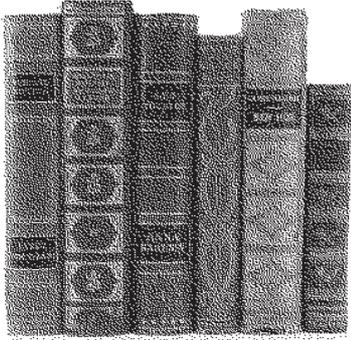
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books



Guidance and the Voice of God

Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne
 Sydney: St Matthias Press, 1997
 Reviewed by Deborah Letcher

I vividly remember a conversation about guidance that I had with a good friend while I was in my third year of university. For a couple of years my friendship with a young man had been developing and everything seemed to be pointing towards a serious relationship. But how could I be sure that this was God's will? What if this wasn't what God wanted and I was just letting my emotions carry me away?

This type of anxiety is not uncommon to many Christians and of course the answer lies in a clear understanding of how to know God's will. The new edition of Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne's book on guidance has the aim of outlining "God's will for our lives, how he guides us in it, and what we are to do in response". A tall order for only 150 pages! There is no doubt however that the book provides a well argued and biblical blueprint for understanding God's will.

The authors' main argument is that Jesus formed God's final and climatic guiding word (the book's previous title, *The Last Word on Guidance*, was a reference to Jesus). Dealt with, and dismissed, are some common notions of guidance, including "laying a fleece", words of knowledge, inner promptings, visions and feelings of peace. These views of guidance are very popular in many Christian circles. Even Christians who would reject the idea of modern day prophecies or visions will sometimes talk about "a sense of peace" about a certain action. The book therefore makes challenging reading for anyone who believes that God promises to guide us today in ways other than Scripture alone.

Jensen and Payne put a case against individual leadings and revelations and argue

for the Scriptures as the authoritative and sufficient guide for life. In doing so, they underline the importance of Christ as God's ultimate revelation to humanity. I was reminded of what a wonderful privilege it is to have the Scriptures as a sure guide for this life's journey.

You will not find lengthy quotes from various theologians. In fact the overwhelming majority of the quotes are extracts from Scripture, and this fits in well with the book's overall message. The book is highly readable and easily managed in a Sunday afternoon or two.

Having a solid understanding of guidance relieves the needless anxiety that springs from a fear of missing God's "best" plan for our lives. What wonderful assurance it is to know that God has given us all the guidance we need.

Deborah Letcher is a teacher at Heathdale Christian College and worships at Wyndham Vale Presbyterian Church, Vic.

Pentecost—Today?

Iain Murray
 Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998
 Reviewed by Peter Barnes

There has long been a need for this book. In Christendom of late there has been much talk of revival, especially in Reformed and Pentecostal circles. Some have reacted adversely to this, and claimed that the

whole notion is a distraction to the real work of reformation and evangelism. To such people, Pentecost is in essence unrepeatable, so, as Abraham Kuyper wrote, "He that came and abides with us can no more come to us". That is, a Christian has the Spirit and can ask no more of him. Revival is not really a possibility.

The subtitle to Murray's work is *The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival*, but it actually deals with as much history as Scripture. Iain considers that there were no revivals as such in the Old Testament period, and also claims that we cannot usher in a revival by our obedience. As he puts it: "Revivals come unheralded." This is not to say that we are not responsible; Iain concedes that there is truth even in views that he rejects.

Iain's work is full of good biblical sense, and backed up by his deep grasp of the history of revivals. The baneful influence of Charles Finney is dealt with, and there is a fascinating chapter on Hindering Revival: Evangelical Fanaticism. In fact, every chapter is helpful and heart-warming.

One does not have to agree with everything – for example, I am not sure that we can so easily dismiss the notion of revival from the Old Testament. For all that, this is a work, which deserves to be read and studied. I know of nothing else quite like it. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones might be given the final word: "The more powerful Calvinism is the more likely you are to have a spiritual revival and re-awakening."

Peter Barnes is minister of Nambucca River Presbyterian Church, NSW

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MAY

- 21 Launceston parish, Tasmania including Kirklands; about 365 communicants, about 165 children and youth and 17 elders; Steven & Robyn Nicholson, Philip & Lavena Mercer, Bruce Spalding, Brett Rutherford, Alastair Christie-Johnstone.
- 22 Inverell parish, northern NSW – 4 centres including Ashford; about 190 communicants, about 95 children and youth and 26 elders; Peter & Maureen Thorneycroft, Garry White.
- 23 On this Day of Pentecost pray that God may send on our denomination and all Christians of Australia, “times of refreshing from His presence” (Acts 3:19).
- 24 Continued progress of the gospel among the 6 million people of Honduras, Central America (85% R.C., 11% Protestant) and greater unity among Evangelicals.
- 25 Bendigo parish, Vic; about 95 communicants, about 30 children and youth and 5 elders; Andrew Clarke.
- 26 Hay Home Mission station, south-west NSW including Carathool; about 35 communicants and 5 elders; Mark & Janette Armstrong.
- 27 Mavis Price from Victoria, W.B.T. translator of Scripture into the Girawa language, PNG, with Pat Lillie; she has been teaching at Ukarampa High School.
- 28 Presbytery of Flinders, Melbourne; 11 parishes, 1 home mission station, 1 special charge totalling 18 congregations with 880 communicants, 126 adherents, 255 children and youth and 66 elders; 2 ministers in special roles, 5 retired ministers; John Ellis clerk.
- 29 Mt Evelyn parish, Melbourne; about 65 communicants, about 40 children

and youth and 6 elders; Warwick & Val Davidson.

- 30 Honesty, wisdom and godliness among those in authority in the community – in national, state and local government.
- 31 Relief work among the tragic refugees from Kosovo.

JUNE

- 1 Millicent parish, South Australia, including Rendelsham; about 70 communicants, about 20 children and youth and 8 elders; Andrew & Jan Slater.
- 2 Bible Society work in Hungary (10 million people, 99% literate) to foster greater interest among young people and produce a completely new Hungarian translation.
- 3 A bold but loving Christian witness by the 33 million Christians (4%) of India among a population of more than 1 billion – 78% Hindu, 12% Muslim, 2% Sikh etc and protection from persecution.
- 4 Werribee (Wyndham) parish, Vic., about 40 communicants, about 15 children and youth and 4 elders; Barry & Sharon Porter.
- 5 St Paul’s parish, Brisbane; about 160 communicants, about 50 children and youth and 24 elders; Andrew & Elaine Gardiner.
- 6 The Southern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (“Free Church”) with churches in Wantirna, Glen Huntly, Narre Warren, Geelong and Hamilton (Vic.) and Ulverstone (Tas.).
- 7 Robert & Beverly Harvey from Annerley, Brisbane, W.E.C. missionaries in Brazil since 1967, regional Secretaries for all Latin America.
- 8 Presbytery of Dubbo, western NSW; 7 parishes totaling 19 congregations with 416 communicants, 379 adherents, 259 children and youth and 39 elders; 1 retired minister and 1 under jurisdiction; Vic Johnson, clerk.
- 9 Peter & Anne Davies from Launceston, missionary doctor and midwife at Galmi Hospital, Niger, West Africa with SIM. Pray for the

new dental clinic there and possible new leadership roles for Peter.

- 10 Corowa parish, southern NSW, including 4 congregations; about 215 communicants, about 60 children and youth and 22 elders; Arnold & Joy Bartholomew.
- 11 Christian influence in state schools through believing staff and pupils and visitors who provide religious education.
- 12 Harland and Marie Kerr, veteran (1954) Wycliffe Bible Translators for the Wiru people for PNG.
- 13 John and Pat Warner from Brisbane, formerly SIM, among Somalis in Africa, now engaged in ethnic ministry in Sydney.
- 14 Western Newcastle home mission station, NSW, including Cardiff, Wallsend, and West Wallsend; about 20 communicants, and 3 elders; Ross & Sue Tucker.
- 15 Colin & Cathy Mackay from Condobolin, NSW, educational missionaries with Action Partners (the former SUM) in Nigeria.
- 16 Cherrybrook parish, Northern Sydney; about 65 communicants, about 50 children and youth and 6 elders; John & Sharon Irvin.
- 17 Kerri Somerset from Toowoomba, Qld, SIM missionary in Nigeria, responsible daily for the kitchen in the largest guest house in West Africa.
- 18 Presbytery of Mowbray, Southern Brisbane and Gold Coast; 12 parishes, 7 home mission stations, totaling 26 congregations with 1408 communicants, 482 adherents, 545 children and youth and 100 elders; 9 retired ministers and 3 others under jurisdiction; 2 defence chaplains; Brian Enchelmeier clerk.
- 19 Bald Hills parish, Northern Brisbane; about 100 communicants, about 35 children and youth and 9 elders; Peter & Lesley Bloomfield.
- 20 Peace, political and economic stability in our neighbour Indonesia – with some 220 million, the world’s fourth most populous nation. Protection and witness of the 12.5% of Christians among some 80% Muslims.

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Can a Christian be demon-possessed?

A follower of Jesus commanded in Jesus' name that the evil spirit leave the boy. Immediately the boy thrashed around on the floor and then suddenly went still and silent. In a few minutes he was sitting up in his right mind.

This incident occurred not in first century Palestine but in suburban Melbourne in 1980. The boy was a senior high school student who had become involved in witchcraft and Satan worship. The man who cast out the demon was a pastor I knew.

The boy had met some Christian students and seeing the contrast between their life and his, had gone to the pastor for help. The pastor had never encountered anything like this before in his ministry. But, given the boy's background, it seemed that demon possession was a reasonable, biblical explanation.

Most Christians in Australia today do not encounter such tangible manifestations of evil. We are used to thinking of the work of Satan in terms of inner attacks such as temptation, doubt, and accusing thoughts, but not in outward manifestations such as demon possession.

However there has arisen within the church in recent times a growing interest in the work of evil spirits. This has been popularised by Christian novels such as Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness*. Whole strategies of spiritual warfare, to combat these evil spirits, have been developed by people such as Neil Anderson and Peter Wagner.

Along with this renewed interest in spiritual warfare has come a number of vexing questions. One is whether a Christian's behaviour, speech or thoughts can be directly controlled by an evil spirit. This possibility may be described in a variety of ways such as, demon possession, demonisation, attachment, control, indwelling, etc. But the effect claimed is basically the same: that an evil spirit has gained an influence over some aspect of a believer's life. This influence, it is said, can only be stopped by having the evil spirit cast out.

While such a possibility is quite frightening, there is also something attractive about it. If a demon of anger or a spirit of



Robert McKean

lust is controlling my behaviour, then I am no longer responsible for these particular sins. Complete and instant freedom from these sins seems possible, if I can get some one to cast out the demon that is causing me to behave in this way. However we must ask, is this understanding of the work of demons and their influence on believers in accord with the truth that God has revealed in his word?

That it is possible for an individual to be possessed and controlled by an evil spirit is evident from the cases reported in the Gospels and Acts. However when we examine all the cases in the New Testament, there is not one that we could say is the case of a Christian whose life is controlled in some way by an evil spirit. We also find no warnings by the New Testament writers that such a thing would be possible. In fact there are no passages that could be construed to be commands or instructions for believers to cast demons out of fellow believers, not even in Paul's most detailed passage on spiritual warfare (Eph. 6: 10-20).

But we must look further than just the few references to demon possession. Of particular importance are passages that speak of the nature and extent of the salvation that Christ has won for us.

Paul writes to the Colossians that God has "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13). To say that we have been "rescued from the dominion of darkness" means that the powers of darkness can no longer exercise authority over us. Paul goes on to say that through the cross Christ "forgave us all our sins" and "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Col. 2:13,15). Christ has not only defeated

the power of sin, he has also defeated the power of Satan and his demons.

It is true that we are still involved in a spiritual battle with the powers of evil, just as we are still involved in a battle with sin (Eph. 6: 10-20, 1 Pet. 5: 8,9). But our enemy is a defeated enemy. He may tempt, he may frustrate, he may accuse, but he is no longer able to exercise control over our behaviour. We are responsible for our own sin. The way to deal with sin in the life of a believer is to confess it, repent of it and claim the forgiveness found in Christ (1 Jn. 1:9).

Along with providing forgiveness of sin and victory over the powers of darkness, Christ has also joined us to himself. Paul can say "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2: 20). If Christ is living in us, how could an evil spirit also occupy some part of a believer's life?

Further to that, our bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6: 19). The Holy Spirit does not sub-let his dwelling place to evil spirits! As Paul asked the Corinthians "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God." (2 Cor. 6: 15,16).

The scriptures make it clear that a radical change takes place when a person becomes a Christian. There is a transfer of authority. There is a change of ownership.

The boy at the beginning of this article did not experience such a change. Even though he found some immediate relief from his suffering, he refused to submit to the Lord Jesus. The allure of the witchcraft and Satan worship was too strong. He soon went back to them and was worse than before.

However for the person who has submitted to the Lordship of Christ and accepted the salvation he offers, the change is complete. The believer belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ who has defeated the powers of evil. It is impossible then that evil spirits could take some sort of control over a believer's life.

Robert McKean is minister of Strathfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 

And so to bed

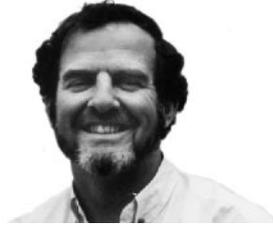
Reflections on the blessings of sleep

God has constituted us in a strange way. Think of memory, for example – as Augustine did in his *Confessions*. Where would we be without it, yet who can understand it? The same goes for sleep. Why do we have it? What purpose does it serve? It is necessary for us to carry on with life, but it resembles death in some ways.

It can come upon us at inappropriate times. I once hopped off the bus at Central Station at 6.30am, made my way to the Presbyterian Theological Centre at Burwood, and soon began holding forth on the English Reformation. By about 11am I was terribly weary, and made the mistake of sitting down while continuing to teach. Before long I had fallen asleep during one of my own lectures! The students have forgotten most of what I said that day, but they have never forgotten what I did.

Some surprising things can happen during sleep. When Adam slept, God made him a wife (Gen. 2:21-22). When Jacob slept, God gave him a vision of a ladder reaching to heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:10-22). As Jesus explained to Nathaniel, this pointed to the work of Christ on the cross (John 1:51). Joseph too dreamed a dream which came from God, which told him of his future exaltation (Gen. 37:1-11). One of the ways in which God spoke to His prophets of old was through dreams (Num. 12:6). These incidents remind us that whenever God creates something or reveals Himself, it is always an act of grace in which he takes the initiative.

God Himself never sleeps (Ps. 121:4), but gives His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:2). The Christian who trusts in the sovereign care of his heavenly Father can sleep well. When David was on the run from his rebellious son, Absalom, he rested in God: "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sus-



Peter Barnes

tained me." (Ps. 3:5) Worry is a draining and pointless activity which is actually an assault on faith. Instead, we are to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7). It is necessary for us at times to rest, as Jesus Himself acknowledges (Mark 6:31). Indeed, Christ Himself shares in our humanity to the point where He too became weary (John 4:6) and fell asleep (Mark 4:38).

Yet we are told not to be sluggards, but to work hard (Prov. 6:6-11). The sluggard switches off his alarm, sleeps in, and is generally reluctant to get to work, and so slips into self-inflicted poverty. Sleep at the wrong time can thus be not only inappropriate but wrong. Another example is found when the disciples fell asleep while Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:37, 40, 41).

Sleep is a recognition that we are finite and that we rely utterly upon God for daily strength, spiritual insight and grace to overcome our sin. In the parable of the growing seed, the farmer sleeps at night, and the seed sprouts and grows, yet the farmer does not know how (Mark 4:26-29). It is the same with the growth of the gospel. We can plant, we can water, but it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). W. C. Burns preached in Scotland from 1839 to 1846, and saw remarkable revivals. Yet after he went to China, he laboured there without much success until his death in 1868. Our

task is not to do God's work for Him. We cannot. I have been in the ministry long enough to have gone through the frustration of trying to entice someone to think seriously about the gospel, only to find that my efforts come to nothing. But the compensation is often that someone with whom I have had nothing to do begins to seek a right relationship with God.

We must adopt the view of the puritan giant, John Owen: "Our duty is to apply ourselves unto his commands and his work is to enable us to perform them." Indeed, it is a surprising fact – which ought not to be misused – that James Robert at Kilsyth in 1742 reported that prayer for revival had actually declined before the Cambuslang revival broke out. Evangelism is our task; revival is in God's hands. Is this not a spiritual lesson from sleep?

Yet sleep also points us to the reality of the infinite. The image of "sleep" is used in the New Testament to point to the Christian's death. The Christian who dies is really, as it were, only asleep (see e.g. Luke 8:52; John 11:11-13; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 15). Christ will raise His people as if their bodies had only been sleeping. Again, sleep reminds us that the power and the initiative always lie with God.

In both the temporal and eternal sense, the Christian says with the Psalmist: "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." (Ps. 4:8) Physically, we are to sleep and also to work hard, in the appropriate proportions. Spiritually, we are to rest on Christ (Matt. 11:28), but also to press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14).

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