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# Our three-way union

One of the highest-rating TV shows this century was – you guessed it – about a wedding. A royal wedding to be precise, between Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Millions of viewers from around the world tuned in to watch a festive extravaganza that included all the drama and ceremony that have been associated with weddings through the centuries. The march of progress has altered much, but not our need for weddings (along with funerals) as vital human ceremonies.

Why are weddings so significant? Not because of the folklore, tradition, or expense that have become part and parcel of the event. Nor are weddings significant because two people have decided to come together to share the rest of their lives with each other. This is a secular misunderstanding of the ceremony which is sadly becoming more widespread. No, the significance of the wedding is derived from the fact that it symbolises the union of God with his people. This is the spiritual reality to which each wedding is meant to bear witness.

For Jews in the first century AD, weddings assumed almost a sacramental status. They were seen as much more than festive occasions or opportunities for making merry. The bridal pair on the marriage day symbolised the union of God with Israel. This thought was taken over in the writings of the apostle Paul who pointed out that marriage was an earthly symbol of the eternal relationship between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:32).



Robert Benn

Indeed he called marriage "a mystery" (v.32) because it is directly patterned on the relationship between his Son and his people which God had planned from all eternity (Hebrews 13: 20). In Paul's eyes, marriage is far more than a useful social convention. It has been specially designed by God to contain and conceal a meaning far greater than what we may see on the outside. As Geoffrey Bromiley has written: "As God made man in his own image, so he made marriage in the image of his own eternal marriage with his people."

It is because of the rich symbolism that lies behind Christian marriage that the wedding and its festivities are of importance to Christians. Since the wedding is a vehicle that reveals Christ's love and faithfulness to his people, Christians need to think about how they can glorify God through this profound spiritual metaphor. The ceremony and the celebrations are an opportunity to manifest the wonder of God's salvation.

It should be no surprise to any of us that Jesus performed the first of his signs at a wedding (Jn 2:1-12), or that his own ministry was described as a wedding feast (Mk 2:19). His return at the end of the age is spoken of in terms of a marriage supper (Rev. 19:6-9).

This is a wedding feast to which you and I are both invited – those of us, that is, who are part of his church. God himself issues the wedding invitation from his throne in the words of Psalm 134:

*"Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great."*

This is a call to worship, and it is followed by a thunderous response from the gathered multitude – those saved by the blood of Christ – who join in heart-felt praise:

*"Hallelujah!  
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him the glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready."*

The vision of this wedding left the apostle John prostrate in worship. He was overwhelmed by the sheer magnificence of God's saving grace. The Psalmist felt the same way about this wedding: "My heart is stirred by a noble theme" (Psalm 45:1).

This glorious picture of the ultimate Christian wedding has profound implications. First, as Christians we must seize back the wedding ceremony from secular culture and invest it with its true meaning.

This means that a Christian wedding is primarily about worship as well as the spectacle, feasting and sensory richness that we associate with the occasion. It's good to go to great trouble with the details of a wedding – the bride's gown, flowers, music, invitations and the like, but the world does the same. The thing that is different about a Christian wedding is that all these things can be made elements of a service where the focus is on God.

Second, all the participants in the ceremony should be aware of the rich symbolism of marriage and the way that it speaks of God's love and salvation. The ceremony itself, as well as the reception, is an opportunity for Christians to show that the Lord is there as he was at Cana of Galilee. It was there that he first manifested his glory. His presence should sanctify the occasion, especially the reception where sometimes exuberance can become sin.

Third, our wedding celebrations should be occasions of great joy. After all, every Christian wedding is an anticipation of "the great feast that is to come". The music, the entertainment, the festivity and feasting should all remind us of the goodness of the Lord.

It is not enough for a wedding to be elegant, flawless and memorable. One hopes it is that, regardless of how much time, energy and money we spend. But to be truly honouring to God and Gospel-centred, it must be rooted in worship.

Robert Benn

Convenor,

National Journal Committee 

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# The wedding ceremony



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One of the greatest joys that I have experienced during my time as a minister has been my involvement with young couples preparing to marry. It is a wonderful pastoral opportunity that is full of potential. Let me introduce you to a couple I am about to marry: Andrew and Janine.

They contacted me about 12 months ago to see whether I'd be available to conduct the wedding ceremony. I was delighted to be asked. Since then I've met them on several occasions for counselling. They, in turn, have been working feverishly to arrange all kinds of things for the invitations, clothes, ceremony, reception and honeymoon.

The day of the wedding is drawing near. We've arranged the rehearsal and look forward to meeting members of the family who will come some distance to the wedding. We have discussed the music and songs together and Andrew and Janine have taken good care in selecting their own Bible-readings, with some help from me.

I am impressed with this young couple. Their stand for Christ is pleasing. I am quite excited about the fact that I have been



*Robert Benn*

given the privilege of conducting their marriage ceremony.

At the moment, my thoughts are turning to what I should be attempting to do on this special occasion for them. I am really keen to make this a Christian wedding with its own unique mark, just as the one at Cana had so long ago. And not just because I have a special soft spot for them. I really want to make this a ceremony in which the Lord is given his rightful place.

This has caused me to reassess two things.

What is my responsibility and privilege? And, how do I go about handling it?

There are a few things that immediately come to mind in respect to my role in conducting the ceremony.

First, I need to make the congregation conscious of the fact that marriage flowed from the mind of God. He said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18), so he made a partner for him. The partnership of husband and wife was to be so special that they were to leave the family circle in order to build their own. "Leave and cleave" is the old expression for this. We remember it because it rhymes!

Second, I must also make them aware that God's will for the husband is that he will love his wife as Jesus loved the church, and lead her in the same way as Christ. That certainly gives him an inspiring model to follow. Similarly, God wants the wife to follow the lead of her husband, recognising that he has the greater responsibility to lead the home and family. At the same time, the wife should be able to expect to be an equal partner in the union in which there is mutual submission and self-giving.

Thirdly, I want the guests to realise that at this wedding ceremony we have the special responsibility of focusing again on the "profound mystery" of which the apostle Paul speaks when writing about marriage. To Paul the mystery is in the fact that the



husband and wife become *one flesh*, in the same way that Christ and the church are found together in the deeper unity. Marriage is not a temporary affair or convenience that can be ended on a whim.

Fourth, just as Christ found His greatest joy in giving Himself to the Church, husbands and wives should find their greatest and most deep-seated joy in giving themselves to each other.

Fifthly, I believe that a marriage ceremony is a worship service of celebration. A Christian marriage celebrates how wonderful God is in giving us marriage. We stand in awe. We worship.

These are the things I want to communicate. But how do we go about it?

The mood of the ceremony: When we carefully consider the Psalms, for instance, we find every mood that people have ever experienced. Crying, laughing, grieving, mourning, frustration, wonderment ... the list goes on and on.

So what moods are appropriate for Andrew and Janine's wedding? Grief? Certainly not. For the poor fellow who missed out, maybe. But not for anyone else. Celebratory joy should certainly influence the tone. Solemnity has its place. Laughter? I hope so. Exhilaration? Certainly.

I recently conducted a wedding in which the bride was reduced to uncontrollable tears as her groom said strongly, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer ... as long as we live". Then although she tried, her tiny muted whisper was only heard by the groom and me, as her tears trickled down

her cheeks. It was beautiful, because it was so suffused with a feeling of love, commitment and the exciting immensity of it all.

This day is a day of mixed moods, all of which blend to glorify the One who thought of marriage in the first place. We should attempt to employ them to advantage.

Giving God the glory through the ceremony: Is it possible to express the full range of the various moods of the ceremony, and still worship the Author of marriage? Of course! Each and every one of the Psalms, expressing a vast array of emotions, ultimately grasps the hand of God in praise and surrender. None of the Psalmists seem inhibited in how they reach out for everything their Maker graciously offers them.

The language of the ceremony: Presbyterian ministers have an old book called the *Book of Common Order*, and a new one called *Worship!*. These are a guide for us, and particularly for those who are just launching into public ministry. They are profoundly helpful. Every minister has done his first funeral, and wedding, and dedication of some object to be used in church. We searched for the wisdom of those who had walked the way before us. But both of these worship guides for the most part are to help us explore the riches of the Word of God, and to give us plenty of liberty to branch out as we ourselves grasp in more depth the greatness of our God.

At the ceremony, therefore, I try to draw together all kinds of information to make this ceremony unique. The young couple have spoken to me at length about themselves and I have been their counsellor on the basis of the Scriptures. Now is the time to be creative. Whatever I do, I must make sure that my language and demeanour reflect nothing of a dour non-celebratory, heavily liturgical and funereal tone. That is not the mood of this occasion.

Moving into the ceremony: In our culture we normally organise the men to be at the church before the bride and her attendants. They wait nervously until someone whispers, "she's here". Part of the wonder of this wedding day is caught by the groom as he drinks in the beauty of his bride moving to the front to take his hand. There are other extremely attractive bridal party members there too, but he has eyes for only one. He may not actually express it, but his heart is saying, "like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens" (Song of Songs 2:2).

As the music of the procession begins, emotions and tensions are running high. This is now the time to do some special things – to ensure that everything that happens in the next 45 minutes gives glory to God in worship, as well as to celebrate the

union of two lovers as they try to grasp the truth, "my beloved is mine and I am his!".

The songs say it. The Scripture readings and prayers say it. Father God, we thank you for this union, this couple, the possibilities before them to live lives in union with each other and with their Saviour.

Participants: Marriage is a family affair. Two lovers have met. Two families are getting to know each other. Family friends are getting acquainted. This is a time where I can facilitate the process of people meeting together.

How?

Of course dad is identified because he escorts his daughter down the aisle. Other parents can be identified too by asking each set of them, "Do you give your blessing to the marriage of your daughter Janine to Andrew?" ... and then the reverse. That's helpful. Through some common courtesies I have helped to identify some of the major participants in the wedding to all.

There are other special friends there too, friends who have been mentors and confidants. For them to read God's word, to pray, to serve in some way, is both special, and lends that personal and family touch.

The attendants are there to serve. I like to discuss various ways of using them, making sure that at the rehearsal they understand their role and can perform it well.

The vows: We must make sure that the vows that are made are those that have been tried and tested, and truly reflect biblical truth about marriage. It is best to stick with the traditional vows. They've lasted the distance of time. Sometimes young people want to write their own. Latitude is permissible, but most likely theirs will have strong overtones of sentimentality and less of the strong and mature content of the vows that have stood the test of time. Wedding vows must be soundly Biblical and have a familiar ring.

Almost there: Everyone has signed the register. The bridal party are in formation. We are about to introduce "Mr and Mrs Andrew Jones". Somewhere in there I like to add a special touch by presenting the newly married couple with a Bible with words like, "Andrew and Janine, in all your preparation for today you have been attempting to honour your God. Today has been a further evidence of this. Now as you move into your marriage, keep God's Word always before you as a sure foundation for a life together, fulfilling for you, and glorifying to your God. God bless you both".

I hope that what I have written helps all the participants in a wedding. In many cases you will need to adjust to suit your own circumstances. Whatever you do, make sure that joy shines through your worship.

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# I might

*Marriage as an institution is just holding its own.*

‘Well, my dear, you’ve had a wonderful life: four successful marriages,’ said the interviewer to the actress. Cynicism about marriage today is part of our culture. Take the well-worn joke, “it’s a wonderful institution but who wants to live in an institution?” Yet, as pointed out in a newspaper editorial recently, the vast majority of us do.

We do marry, despite the high rate of failure – nearly 40 per cent of marriages end within 30 years. Yet even this discouraging fact is not a deterrent: divorced people are more likely to march down the aisle than people who have never been married. About two thirds of divorced men and women remarry within five years. But the failure rate for second marriages is even higher. When it comes to marriage, “once-bitten, twice shy” does not apply. These sort of statistics even prompted *Time* magazine to run an issue, in 1991, titled “Marriage: Under assault but fighting back”.

In the bigger picture, though, it must be said that marriage, as a trend, is declining. In the ’60s, 95 per cent of adults wed; today, about 20 per cent stay unmarried. But, as Don Edgar, former director of the Institute of Family Studies, says: “It’s a wonder marriage is still so popular at all, given the pressures working against it – no-fault divorce, female workforce participation (financial independence) and support for single parents.” He speculates that “maybe it’s a hangover from our cultural beliefs ... a hope that marriage, as a formal commitment, will give security for children”.

According to Don, the forces against marriage have come with shifts in social attitude. “It’s the whole ethos of money, pleasure, individualism. There is a growing trend for young people to focus on work and leisure. This leaves less time for commitment. Secularism is also a key factor – not many people are truly religious. The consumer mentality is brought into marriage, the idea that a relationship or person can be discarded. It’s quite frightening ... to think that you are disposable.” Don claims that this “what’s good for me” syndrome means that people are less willing or able to compromise and resolve differences, which does not bode well for marriage or even wider workplace relationships.



*Dee Gronlund*

Don says that many people consider marrying only when they want to start a family. “More than 70 per cent of couples live together before marriage. They decide to get married when they want children ... the idea of the child having a name ... but even that is dying.” He explains that in the Scandinavian countries 50 per cent of children are born in de facto relationships. “More people see marriage as irrelevant.

Sure, they want security, but they get that affirmation without the formality of marriage. Australia is following this overseas trend.”

The prediction that marriage will ultimately be passe is not new. “Sociologists have been predicting this for decades,” says Graham Cann, pastor, marriage guidance counsellor and member of the Christian Counselling Association. “But the rate of decline in marriage has been a lot slower than expected.” So why has it endured? “It’s because most people think ‘When the chips are down, I’d rather be married’.”

Graham believes there are two main reasons for this attitude: “We’re still profoundly influenced by the environment from which we come – our parents and family. Even if we are the children of broken marriages, there is still the strong belief that it should have worked. So we choose



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to marry because that's what our parents believed in." The other reason, according to Graham, is security: "What people are basically looking for, apart from love and affection, is security. And a formal commitment to each other still represents security." In fact, Graham says, this need for security can lead to people marrying for the wrong reasons – to "fix" a struggling relationship.

John Sharpe, a senior Church of Christ minister, agrees that some people see marriage as "waving a magic wand" to save a shaky union. "Or", says John, "one of the partners is getting edgy about wanting to get the other person 'nailed down', wanting to be certain that they are really committed to the relationship." John tries to dispel any misconceptions. "I have to make sure people are getting married for reasons they both understand. That it's not about some superstitious relational medicine ... that they're having some problems and if they're married it will make them better people. And their marriage will be fine."

It is healthier, John says, when people are motivated by positive reasons. "There's a sense of really wanting to belong and to be connected with another person. And I've noticed it with both Christians and non-Christians. There are very similar motivations for a sense of completeness, for a sense of companionship, for a sense of being understood and loved by another."

So why not follow the example of the Scandinavians and get those needs met within de facto unions? "I can understand there are de factos who do have that sense of commitment ... but many people I've spoken to feel that there is actually something that shifts when they speak in a very public way about what they pledge to each other. I think the spirituality of the event is

not something we make up. It's something special about two people that's unlocked in the presence of God."

So marriage is like "crossing a different line", it's a value inherited from parents, and a search for completeness, commitment and security. Talking with three couples from different backgrounds about their reasons for marrying, some of these aspects came to light.

"It was the way I thought it was done. It was part of my background," says Jim, a young, recently married Bible college student. His wife, Anne, concurs: "I think you grow up with the expectation that you will meet somebody ... and if you meet the person you think you can live with and commit before God for the rest of your life – that's what you do." She explains that she found "something in Jim that complements and fulfills me. And I found someone who knew me ... who's committed to knowing and caring for me, even when it isn't easy."

Unity in their calling was also important, says Jim "We were both at Bible college and looking at serving God. Marriage meant that we served in the same direction. Whatever we do to serve God, we'll do together." Although she says they had a lot of these things already in their friendship, Ann concludes that "in marriage we had that commitment to be that person's fulfiller, that completer. If we'd remained friends, we could have possibly backed out of that responsibility."

Rick and Laura chose to remarry, having each been divorced. "While my first marriage did fail," says Rick, "I felt I learned some things through it. And I got closer to God because of the marriage breakdown ... you find you are searching for answers. I prayed to God (about remarriage) and I felt

that this was a risk I had to take and a risk God would allow me to take. Then Laura came on the scene."

For Laura companionship was important: "Making the decision to marry again wasn't that difficult, given the right person. I thought it would be good not to have to grow old alone ... that was daunting." Rick adds: "I still want someone to hold me and cuddle me – someone who's there." Says Laura, "It's not even that you have to touch. Just to know you're coming home to somebody. The person can be in the other room ... You don't have to be talking to each other. It's good."

On the other hand, Sarah and Mike are not Christians. Both in their early 40s, they have few religious ties. So what made them decide to marry in their late 20s. Sarah spoke for both of them: "We were old enough to be past the silly stage. We had found the person we wanted to spend the rest of our lives with. We wanted to be a team. I think without marriage there's no commitment".

Interestingly, she adds: "Upbringing had a lot to do with it. Although we're not religious, we were brought up in families that had some religious contact – Sunday school and so on." As non-Christians, Sarah and Mike chose to cross the line for similar reasons.

But in the big picture, the issue of marriage is more complex. It is still popular, but not as it once was. Within the climate of individualism and secular attitudes, it perseveres. Yes, it is "under assault", as portrayed by Time magazine. Yet marriage may not be "fighting back" – so much as "holding on".

*Dee Gronlund is a Melbourne-based freelance writer.*

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## Dogged bridal party

*Ian Smith*

I have been faced with some unusual requests for weddings, but this one is hard to beat. It happened in Griffith about 12 years ago. A couple asked me whether there were any restrictions on who could be a member of the bridal party. "No," I said, "You're free to ask whoever you'd like." "Great," the bride said, "then I'll have my dog as bridesmaid". I gasped, and my heart skipped a beat. "I meant humans," I said. "You can have anyone who's human." "No," she said, "you told me that I could have anyone. My best friend is my dog, and I'm having my best friend." I tried as gently I

could to dissuade her, but all to no avail. The dog was coming to the wedding and that was final. When word leaked out about this novel inclusion to the bridal party, the telephone calls started coming in. First was the mother of the bride. "Can't you stop this?" she begged. "What will people say?" But it was the organist who threw down the gauntlet. "Ian, if that pooch comes in here, you can count me out. I won't be playing." That wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear. Now I had real trouble. Back to the couple. "I've got

a problem", I said. "If your dog comes in, there will be no music." "Hmm", said the bride. "That's no good." "I know," I said. "I suggest a compromise. Bring your dog as a bridesmaid, but leave her at the door. She'll get over it." "Okay," said the bride, "it's a deal." The wedding went off well. Everyone was happy, including the half-Labrador pooch, who sat dutifully at the church doors garlanded with large bow which matched the other bridesmaids' dresses.

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



# The bride's big day

*Stress is inevitable. But the wedding is worth it.*

## What was your experience of weddings before last month?

Very little, actually. I had only ever been to two weddings. One was as a guest where I didn't know anyone in the bridal party. The other wedding was of a close friend. But I had no part in any of the lead-up. So my experience was pretty limited.

## Did you realise all that was involved in becoming a bride?

Lots of people had warned me about having to put up with the "hell" of organising a wedding. But I never believed them. I thought that if I was organised enough there wouldn't be any "hell". However, I was wrong. I never realised how difficult it could be at times.

## Why is organising a wedding such a challenge?

Well, for us it was a matter of keeping down the cost. That meant we had to shop around a lot. We had to look for the best price in reception venues and that meant we had to visit a lot of places. At times, we wondered if we would ever find a place that would match the limits of our budget. The thing that I found really hard was that so many places made me feel like a cheapskate because I wanted to be economical.

## Was that embarrassing?

Yes, it was. And it was frustrating as well. I kept thinking to myself, "I'm just as important as anyone else who wants a reception. Why are you treating me like this just because I don't want to pay \$200 per head?" There were times when we got very discouraged and thought, "Why not just elope?" But only sometimes!

## What was your greatest anxiety as your wedding was approaching?

I was concerned that I may have forgotten some essential details with respect to the reception, such as food or the number of guests. Also, because my parents were divorced, I was a bit apprehensive about how they would handle a situation where the family was forced together. Lots of delicate issues come up at that point, such as the seating of the guests.

## How did you reduce the stress of preparing for your wedding?

A good way to start is by getting a number of bridal magazines to find out what has to be done. You only need to buy a few because they tend to recycle their information from month to month. They classify



*Catherine Jones*

information according to different areas so you can check off things that may be important to you such as photography, bridesmaids' dresses or hair-care.

I found them very helpful because I knew so little. They gave me a basis for making decisions according to my budget. I only bought three, and somebody gave me a couple, but they were useful. By the way, go for the Australian ones. They're the most relevant.

## What were the things that you wanted to happen on the day?

I wanted everything to happen on time and for everything to be there. I had to organise the wedding myself as well as maintain my schedule as a full-time high school teacher. So it was quite an exercise in logistics.

I also wanted my family to enjoy the occasion because some of them hadn't been able to speak to each other for many years.

## Did you have any worries about the reception?

Just last-minute nerves. I was anxious that the cake arrived safely and that all our seating arrangements were in order. I also was concerned that the speeches and Tim's family video went well. His family couldn't be with us, and so they sent a video from Canada. All our guests loved it.

## Is the cake expensive?

It can be. Ours cost \$200 and it was only one tier. If we had asked for flowers made of icing it would have cost another \$100. You can double that for a two-tier cake. We just had a plain cake with white icing and decorated it with natural flowers.

## How important were the speeches at the reception?

A lot more important than we realised. Everyone who has played a significant role in your personal life is likely to be there, so you have an opportunity in your speech to express your gratitude to God for the con-

tributions that they've made. It's also a time to say how much you love them. I guess what's said at the celebration is even more important than the food. I was glad my dad spoke so well. I think it's important to prepare your speech early on, rather than leave it to the last minute.

## Do you have any advice to people planning a wedding?

Yes. Set a budget at the beginning. That way you retain control and are not pushed around by people who want you to spend more. If you go over your budget, you can set yourself up for a lot of pressure and unhappiness.

Keep detailed lists and receipts for things you buy. Being well-organised can reduce your stress levels. Also, I think it's a really good idea to have a week off before the wedding. I only had two days and I was rushed off my feet. I should have taken more time off because I was doing so much myself. It left me less time to be with guests who had come from interstate or overseas.

## Was the rehearsal necessary?

Yes. It was essential. Not only did I need to have all our movements explained to us, but it was really helpful when the minister explained the order of service to us and why we did things the way we did. We had planned for too many things for it – like five songs – and he helped us cut it down so that it went very well.

## What place do the bridesmaids play in the wedding?

I couldn't have done without them. They were terrific. They were so understanding and thoughtful and dealt with a lot of small emergencies and tricky situations during the day. It is important to have close and sympathetic friends at a time like that.

By the way, I also think it's important when choosing their dresses that they are really pleased with them. As a Christian, I should be trying to keep their interests in mind all the time. They won't feel happy if they're forced to wear a dress which they don't like. So my wedding was an opportunity for me to show my love and concern for them by taking their wishes into account.

*Catherine Jones is a drama teacher at East Hills Girls High School. She recently became a Christian, and married Tim Grootenboer at Ashfield Presbyterian Church on 3 July 1999.*

AP

# The parents of the bride

*Bruce and Pat Christian discuss a delicate role.*

**What are your best memories of being father-of-the-bride?**

**Bruce:** I think the wedding ceremony itself. I've walked down the aisle three times. I think the first time was the most emotional. It was the first time I'd done it even though I had taken hundreds of weddings before. I think walking Stacey down the aisle was the first time I realised how nervous you become when you're the father of the bride.

**Why?**

**Bruce:** Just the thought of your daughter getting married and being old enough to have it happen. And just the emotion of what it means. The other two weddings were emotional too, but I think I was a little more used to it. For me, the thought that my daughter was leaving our family and going to live with another man was a huge step at the time.

**Pat, as the mother-of-the-bride?**

**Pat:** Our daughters' weddings have been very happy occasions chiefly because we were really happy with the husbands they had chosen. To me, that was the most important thing. The emotional thing was not in letting them go. Actually, our first daughter had already left home before she got married, so leaving home was not a problem.

**Was it an emotional time?**

**Bruce:** At certain times during the weddings, especially during the speeches. I got emotional during my speech, and Pat and I have felt tears coming to our eyes when our sons-in-law have said nice things about their own parents and us during their replies.

**Pat:** I remember feeling quite emotional when one of sons-in-law spoke about how important his Christian faith was to him. He thanked his parents for bringing him up so that he could make the right choices in life. Then he said that becoming a Christian and following the Bible was the best choice of all. I could feel the tears welling in my eyes at that point.

**How do parents tackle the delicate issue of funding the wedding?**

**Bruce:** The subject of finances is not an easy one. For one of our daughters' weddings we've had to borrow money. We didn't mind that at the time. We knew we didn't have the resources to fund the whole wedding, so we had to get help. But

it took a while to repay it, and that's made us think very carefully about borrowing money again.

As far as the other weddings are concerned, we had money available to help. Although the bride's family have traditionally paid for the wedding, we've found that's changing a bit. Sometimes the groom's side of the family wants to help share the expenses too. We've been very grateful for the kindness of our in-laws when they have assisted us with reception costs.

**Pat:** Because we've only got a limited income, we've tried to get smart about the ways you can cut corners with wedding expenses. We shopped around for a reception place that matched our budget with the first two weddings. But don't spoil the day for yourself by taking on tasks that you really can't do.



**Pat and Bruce Christian**

**Bruce:** What you've got to remember is that the word "wedding" doubles the price of everything. For example, for our latest wedding we bought a large cake with white icing on it and decorated it as a wedding cake. As a result, we had a beautiful cake for 50 per cent off the normal price. It's the same with so many other items as well.

**Pat:** The same goes for flowers. Shop around. If you are persistent, you'll find a florist who will do nice bouquets for \$30. And if you have friends who are willing to help chauffeur the bridal party, you can save a lot of money. Some of our friends have been very obliging and have helped us significantly by reining in the costs. Be very careful with photographers. They can cost thousands of dollars. If you don't do some of these things, it's possible for the expenses to get completely out of hand. Every one of our daughters' weddings has been wonderful, even though we weren't

splashing money all over the place.

**What's a realistic price for a reception?**

**Pat:** It all depends on how many people you want to have, and the time of year that you have it. Weddings are slightly cheaper in mid-winter. If you shop around it's possible to find reception centres in Sydney that will cater for a full meal at an affordable rate. But it's all the other expenses as well. It's the cost of the clothes, and the flowers, as well as the cars. For example, flowers for a wedding can cost well over \$1000. We did our own flowers in the church and had the bouquets made, and it cost a few hundred dollars.

**Bruce:** I think the one thing that Christians have to keep in mind when thinking of receptions is that there are other considerations apart from the price. What's really important are the people who share in the occasion and the speeches that are given. It's not how "up-market" the reception place is. Some of the bridal magazines have got the whole thing out of perspective. They just want you to spend money in the most ridiculous ways.

**What degree of "say" do parents of the bride have in organising a marriage when they are paying for it?**

**Pat:** It all grows out of your relationship with your children and their partners. We've got a very close relationship with ours and we really tried to be as understanding as we could in working out all the arrangements.

**Are there pressure points in the negotiations?**

**Bruce:** I think that one of the most sensitive issues is the guest list. We established some guidelines at the outset, but we were always as open as possible to suggestions and requests from each one of our daughters and their fiancés. It's almost automatic that one should invite family and relatives, but because it's the bride and groom's day, we think that having their friends is more important to them than having ours. So we gave ground there. And being a minister creates special difficulties too. The members of the congregation are close friends to us all, but it's impossible to invite all of them. So we asked representative members of the congregation because it was very important to us that they were there. Another thing that we have done is that we have always tried to include the other par-

ents in the discussions. In fact, we've tried at an early stage to befriend the other side of family because this is very important to us. **What were your concerns about the wedding service?**

**Bruce:** What we were chiefly concerned about was that it was a distinctively Christian one which made us all thankful to God for the gift of marriage. We wanted God to be honoured in the service and for the gospel to shine through. And that has happened in each one of our daughters' weddings. They were all very joyful occasions where people seemed to really enjoy singing the hymns. I also made the decision for each one that I would adopt the role of the father rather than the minister for the wedding. So I've walked down the aisle with each of my daughters and I've arranged for a colleague to conduct the service. Other ministers may or may not agree with that, but I think it was what my girls wanted me to do and I felt very comfortable in that role. It's hard to be both the minister and father of your daughter, and this is the one chance where I can be her dad alone.

**Pat:** I think it's very important in today's climate that the wedding is seen as a service of Christian worship. We need to resist the idea that it's just an expensive party. That's why the singing is so crucial. I find it really sad that so few people sing joyfully at weddings these days. We have so much to be thankful for, and yet so often the wedding hymn consists of a solo by the minister. It's woeful, really. The bride and groom often go to a lot of trouble to select the right hymns, but sometimes the guests are almost mute. I find that terribly discouraging and rude.

**Is the overall selection of music important?**

**Pat:** Yes, I think so. It can add tone to the occasion. The bride may not remember much of it because so much is happening

around her, but it can certainly help to dignify the service. Anything that adds to the sense of reverence and celebration is important. That's why I don't think pop songs are at all appropriate at weddings.

**What are your views on pre-marital counselling?**

**Pat:** I think it should start a long time before the wedding ever takes place. Actually, pre-marital counselling for your children begins when you start to explain the meaning of marriage to them when they are quite young. I have a firm belief that they should be encouraged to remain sexually pure for their future marriage partner. Young people need to be taught to keep themselves chaste, and that starts early on.

**Bruce:** Pat has touched an important point. Kids in the Christian community today are under enormous pressure to engage in pre-marital sex. Our culture expects them to be sexually experienced as teenagers, and I believe we have to resist it. In our house, we were strict about what our kids could watch on TV. I don't think Christian families should be watching shows like *Melrose Place*, *Heartbreak High* and *Dawson's Creek*. They are setting out values that are destructive of true marriage.

**Have you any views on rehearsals?**

**Bruce:** I want the wedding service to honour Christ and not just to be a performance. The rehearsal, if it's handled properly by the minister, can settle everybody's nerves for the big day. It is also an opportunity for the minister to get the bridal party in the right frame of mind for the wedding. He can explain the spiritual significance of all that's happening as well as show the bridal party where they have to stand and what they have to do. It can be used in a very worthwhile way if a minister is alert to the potential of the occasion. But if it is seen as just an opportunity to go over a routine for a special performance the next

day, then that's not very helpful.

**Any recommendations for parents of brides-to-be?**

**Pat:** It's hard the first time. Try to find some friends who have had children who have been recently married. They can pass on a lot of useful information, especially on how to save costs. There's no point ending up in massive debt over something which is just a family celebration. The other point is that if you have a close and caring relationship with your daughter, then many of the potential conflicts will never arise. I found that each of my daughters wanted to know my opinion on a number of matters before they made a decision, and I was careful to respect their wishes. So we had a very good mutual understanding that made decision-making fairly easy.

**Bruce:** I think it's really important for the father-of-the-bride to make an uplifting speech. Sometimes people use the speeches to vent their frustrations, often after they've been drinking, and they cause a lot of hurt and embarrassment. It's good when parents can seize the opportunity to say something positive about their son or daughter-in-law. When they don't, it almost always backfires on them. They end up with egg all over their face, and people lose respect and sympathy for them. So the speeches are very significant.

The question: "who will be the master-of-ceremonies?" is also important. He should be someone who knows the bride and groom well, be sensitive, and especially be aware of what is in good taste. The same goes for all the speakers. They can either make or break the reception, so choosing them needs to be done very carefully.

*Bruce Christian is minister of St Andrew's, Rose Bay, NSW, and Moderator General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Bruce and Pat have had 3 daughters Stacey, Rachel and Elise, marry in the last 9 years.* AP

## Caught short

*Peter Hastie*

I was standing in the vestry arranging the table for the signing of the register when there was a knock at the door. The groom sheepishly peered around the door and muttered something about a problem. "What sort of problem?" I asked. Just then the door opened wider and "the problem" walked in. "Hmm," I said, "We have a major problem."

Standing before me was a groomsman who had just flown in from Queensland, picked up his wedding suit only half an hour before. When he tried it on, he got a

nasty surprise. The bottom of his pants reached half-way up his shins and he couldn't do up his fly or waist-button. He looked like he was dressed for a comedy show.

We had 15 minutes until the bride arrived. "Quick," I said, "jump in the car and race down to Burwood shopping centre. Find a formal-hire place and get another pair of pants." All the groomsman bundled into the car and took off at

break-neck speed in search of new trousers.

I walked back to the church and announced to the congregation. "Owing to a slight technical hitch, we are delaying the wedding for 40 minutes. Ashfield Mall is next door. Enjoy a cup of coffee. We'll see you soon"

There was a happy ending. The bride was 35 minutes late anyway, and the groomsman came back with the right pants on.

*Peter Hastie is minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney.*

# A text for the day

*The best balance is a biblical, pre-evangelistic message.*

The voice at the other end of the line is a cheery young woman. "I wonder if I could speak to the Reverend," she says. "Speaking," I reply. "My fiancé and I would like to get married in your church and I'm ringing to see if I can arrange a time to see you." (The woman always seems to get the job of ringing the minister.) "Sure," I say. I arrange a time with her and hang up.

It's a standard scenario which any minister has experienced many times. But what do you say when they come? Most people who ring me do so because they want a church wedding, not a Christian wedding. Our building is an attractive old church with nice gardens, an ideal setting for the special day.

Because of that I make one thing immediately clear: "I'm only licensed to perform a Christian wedding which means several things: One, the Bible will be read; two, I will give a short message based on the Bible relating to marriage; three, we'll pray. As long as you're happy about that I'm happy to marry you, but if you're not it may be that you really want a celebrant."

Usually they say they're happy, and we proceed. Now and again they'll look at the church and decide the decor doesn't go with the bridesmaids' dresses and they'll go looking somewhere else. Either way, we're



*Grant Thorpe*

off on the right foot. It is the Bible that makes a Christian ceremony Christian.

A wedding conducted by a celebrant will have the exchange of vows: "As this ring has no beginning and no end, so I promise my love to you will be undying." Often they'll have music (even if it's only a tape recording of Bette Middler singing *The Rose*), but they won't have a Bible reading and message from it.

Mind you, having a Bible reading and message presents you with a whole series of problems: no audience is more difficult to preach to than the crowd at a wedding. At a funeral the reality of death often leaves people much more open to the gospel than at other times. But at a wedding people are in party mode. The ceremony is a necessary evil. The party afterwards is their main focus and so you have to work doubly hard to communicate. How do you go about

preaching an effective wedding sermon? Here are a couple of points to keep in mind:

Make sure you pick a relevant passage. Lots of couples want "that love passage" (1 Cor 13) which has nothing to do with marriage, but with using gifts in the church. There are however passages that speak more directly about marriage and it's important that we handle the Bible accurately. A few suggestions are:

Matthew 18:21-35, forgiveness.

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12, two is better than one.

Proverbs 23:3-4, how to build a happy home.

Work hard at engaging the audience early on. It's important to grab attention in any preaching context, but for a wedding a sharp introduction is critical. Remember you're competing with images of sumptuous food and icy-cold VB bottles. It won't be easy! I usually start with a joke because people appreciate a light touch at weddings when they're feeling joyful and relaxed. Other things that could work though are an arresting statement, a really good quote, and maybe even a song. I have a friend who began his message recently by singing the old Foreigner song *I Want to Know what Love Is*. He certainly got their attention.

Faithfully open up the text and apply it. The great temptation in public ceremonies like weddings and funerals is to assume that people aren't interested in what the Bible has to say. That prejudice may be correct. But if you can simply and carefully work through a passage, and show how it is able to be understood and applied, that will be a revelation to people! You will have exploded the myth that the Bible is irrelevant and unintelligible. Leave them with something to think about.

Regard the sermon as a pre-evangelism rather than evangelism activity. This helps avoid falling into one of two extremes. The first one is seeing the wedding as a mini-Billy Graham Crusade. Sometimes that's what the married couple want: "Preach the gospel, no holds barred, to all our friends" they say. But it's not what the friends and relatives are expecting and it may do more harm than good.

The other extreme is to have no gospel at all which is obviously a greater error.

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The way to go is to see it as pre-evangelistic, that is, giving people a taste of the good sense of the Christian faith and a glimpse of the wonder of the Saviour.

About a third of the audience will have experienced a failed relationship, and

attending a marriage ceremony may well dredge up feelings of failure, loss and guilt. If you can confront them with the themes that tie gospel and marriage together: forgiveness, selflessness, sacrificial love, relationship and peace, then you may well leave

them with a taste for something better than they're experiencing, and hopefully they'll want to come back for more.

Certainly that's what I hope to achieve when I preach at a wedding.

Here's an example you may find helpful.

**T**he key to a happy and lasting marriage is not so much finding the right person as being the right person. Is that correct? Yes, I think it is. Certainly Proverbs 24:3-4 would lead us to believe that:

*"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."*

It's clear that the writer is not talking about material things. He's not talking about cars and stereos and new lounges. Those things don't make a home. They are not the glue that sticks two people together. The secret lies not in what you have but in what you are.

Imagine that you drive home one afternoon and as you turn into the street where you live you see great billowing clouds of smoke coming from the direction of your house. Being the eternal optimist, you think "it's not our place", but when you get a bit closer you realise it is. An electrical fault has caused a fire and nothing is left. Books, clothes, appliances, furniture all are just smoking embers. It would be a devastating experience. But the point the Proverbs are making is that even if that did happen the home would still stand. The pleasant and precious riches, which fill the house, would still exist because they are made of stuff that fire can't destroy.

What are those things? There are three mentioned here. The first is wisdom. Wisdom is skill in living. It's marvellous to watch someone who's skillful at something, isn't it? They make it look so easy. One day I followed Greg Norman around the golf course and it was a delight to watch his skill. He was playing in a program with a businessman and this man hit into a deep bunker, so Greg Norman got into the bunker with a practice ball and

## Building blocks for a rich marriage

*Proverbs 24:3,4*

gave him a lesson. I decided when I went home that I'd try what he had shown the man. It was not a pretty sight. He had skill, I didn't.

Just as it's a delight to be around a skillful person so it's a delight to live with a wise person. With a person who has skill in living. The wise person knows when to speak and when to be silent. She knows when to give criticism and when to offer encouragement. A wise person is skillful in relationships. Wisdom builds relationships.

Second, homes are built by understanding. The Indians have an expression: "You don't understand a person until you have walked a mile in his moccasins." The understanding person puts herself in another person's shoes so that she can feel what the other person is feeling and respond with compassion. It's easy to be a Rambo figure and bludgeon your way through life with little regard for others, but Rambos don't make good marriage partners. Rambos don't build houses – they blow them apart. Understanding is what's required to build a happy fulfilling relationship.


The third thing that our proverb says builds a house is knowledge. Unless you know your partner you won't be able to please her. Knowledge is crucial to a happy relationship and the only way knowledge is available is through commu-

nication. You have to talk, you have to share. Your joys, your sorrows, the things you like, the things that frighten you. Knowledge is only achieved through communication, but when that knowledge is present then a home is filled with rare and beautiful treasures

Recently, I was looking at *Time* magazine and it had an article on Buckingham Palace. The article was full of pictures of opulent rooms decorated with enormous chandeliers, gold-trimmed chairs, precious paintings and soft leather lounges. It was filled with rare and beautiful treasures. As I was looking at it I thought, "wouldn't it be great to live in a place like that?" This proverb says I can. You can. It's not riches that fill a house with rare delight. It is knowledge. With knowledge your house and my house can be a palace.

Wisdom, understanding, knowledge. These are the three things that make a successful and happy marriage but how do we get them? Through a relationship with God. That is the only place they're available. You won't find them in *Barbara's House and Garden*. You won't get them as a supplement with *Vogue Living*. They are available from God by personal request. In fact the New Testament tells us that God has put all of these characteristics into one person: his son Jesus. "In Jesus are hidden all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). And so the best advice I can give you today is to invite Jesus to be a part of your marriage so that it can be the rich relationship you want it to be.

"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."

*Grant Thorpe is minister of Ballina Presbyterian Church, NSW.* 

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# A joyful noise

*The musical choice is much wider than the Bridal March and O Perfect Love.*

**A**s organist at various Sydney churches (mainly Presbyterian, but also Anglican and Uniting) for some 30 years, I have played for at least 500 weddings.

In more recent years I have observed a few trends emerging, “for better or for worse” (but mostly for the better). Interestingly, there has been something of a return to more “traditional” or at least “classical” music in preference to the gimmicky or way-out. For instance, during the signing of the register I seem to be playing more organ music and fewer pop ballads on piano than a few years ago. Perhaps now that the church has taken on board various styles of popular music in its worship, it has lost some of its novelty value. One hopes that all styles of music can be judged on merit and appropriateness, rather than what merely may be fashionable. Popular favourites are, of course, still requested and played, sometimes in their original recorded form, with the bride entering to music from a CD. There is no reason why recorded music cannot be used to complement (but not replace) the contribution made by the organist through voluntaries and hymns.

Fortunately, now practically extinct is the mother of the bride who believes that the final choice of music is her prerogative! Rarely nowadays does an engaged couple come with preset ideas on what music they want. Rather they display an openness in discovering what options may be available. Sometimes the bride will say that she definitely doesn’t want “traditional” wedding marches, and after having heard a variety of suitable music played, the “traditional” is exactly what she chooses! As an organist I may tire of playing much of the same music over and over again, but I have to remember it will still sound special and unique to the couple, their families and friends.

**F**or the bridal procession, the piece most frequently requested would undoubtedly be the *Trumpet Voluntary (The Prince of Denmark’s March)* by Jeremiah Clarke. *The Trumpet Tune* by Purcell (sometimes confused with the Clarke piece) is quite short but effective. If the bride wants something in a similar style but not quite so well-known, a trumpet piece by the 18th century composer John Stanley, or one of his



*Heather Moen-Boyd*

contemporaries, would serve well. Such works are available in the series *Old English Organ Music for Manuals* (Oxford), and several volumes entitled *Baroque Album* (Concordia) available either for manuals and pedals, or manuals only. All are under \$25. Even if the organ doesn’t contain a trumpet stop, these works still sound joyful and dignified when played on a very modest instrument (indeed, most were written for small instruments), and are comparatively easy to play.

Other appropriate pieces include Prelude to the *Te Deum* by Charpentier, Minuet from the *Music for the Royal Fireworks* by Handel, the *St Anthony Chorale* by Haydn, Spring from *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi, and of course we musn’t forget *Here Comes the Bride*, or to give it its proper title, the Bridal March from Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin*, which still enjoys considerable popularity.

I think perhaps that the younger generation is no longer so familiar with the parody of the overweight bride and her undignified encounter with the banana skin; even less well-known is the *Lohengrin* story, where the groom vanishes and the bride dies!

Some brides prefer to make their entrance to less martial and more lyrical music, such as *Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring* by Bach, or Pachelbel’s *Canon* (this latter piece increasing greatly in popularity since it was heard in the movie *Father of the Bride*). It is important that the bridal procession be a short piece, or one with a series of short, clearly-defined sections, so that it can be adapted to the length of the aisle, the number of attendants, and the speed at which they all proceed up the aisle on the day (which will probably be a different speed to the rehearsal).

The famous Wedding March by Mendelssohn from his incidental music to

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* still tops the list as a concluding processional. However, other music well worth considering is the Hornpipe from *The Water Music*, excerpts from *The Royal Fireworks*, both by Handel, Bridal March and Finale by Parry, Choral Song by Wesley, *Now thank we all our God* by Karg-Elert, Wedding March by Guilmant, The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba from Handel’s *Solomon*, and the Toccata from Symphony No. 5 by Widor. The last two pieces in particular require a reasonably-sized instrument and a secure technique.

Of course, any of the useful and versatile trumpet voluntaries make as suitable recessional as they do bridal marches. If you are lucky enough to have a trumpeter, make sure that the trumpet part (if a B flat trumpet) is written a tone higher than the organ part. Two books which make things considerably easier by having a special lift-out trumpet part are *Wedding Music for Trumpet and Organ* (Mayhew) and *The Joyous Wedding* (Hope Publishing). Both are available for around \$25.

**S**everal excellent collections of wedding music for solo organ have been published in recent years. All of these are available from The Open Book, a Lutheran enterprise which has stores in most capital cities and some regional centres. The Sydney location is just alongside Rhodes train station (near the Olympic site). In my experience they stock the most comprehensive supply of resources for church organists and choirs. Fine Music Australia is also excellent, and is located in McKillop Street, Melbourne. (Ask for Simon Colvin in the organ and church music department.)

Some titles which may be useful: *The Organist’s Wedding Album* (in two volumes, Cramer); *The Essential Organist: Sixty Pieces for Weddings, Funerals and Everyday Use* (Mayhew); *Music for the Bride* (Mayhew); *A First and Second Book of Wedding Pieces* (Oxford); *The Oxford Book of Wedding Music* (in two versions – with or without pedals, with very similar repertoire in each); *Wedding Music – Selected Pieces* (Kalmus); *Wedding Miscellany – An Album of Organ Pieces* (Novello); *The Best of Wedding Music* (Allans). They range in price from \$13.99 for the Kalmus book (containing five

pieces including the Mendelssohn and Wagner but not the Clarke or Purcell works) to \$49.99 for *The Essential Organist* with 60 items. *The Best of Wedding Music*, though not containing the Wagner and Mendelssohn pieces, has several short pieces by Italian composers; it was edited by the eminent Italian organist Sergio de Pieri who lived in Melbourne for some years. The remainder mostly contain not only all the standard wedding fare but also a wealth of attractive music suitable for preludes and for during the signing of the register, as well as normal Sunday services. Many of the famous melodies by Bach and Handel are there, as are slow movements from the organ sonatas of Mendelssohn, chorale preludes by Brahms, Parry and Karg-Elert; and arrangements of well-loved music by Gounod, Franck, Elgar, Berlioz, Schubert and Faure. The Novello *Wedding Miscellany* provides some wedding processions slightly more “off the beaten track”, with works by Edwin Lemare, Martin Dalby, Peter Dickinson and John Cook.

The organist or bridal couple looking for something different (and with the added spice of modern harmony) might also consider pieces from the following albums: *Fanfares and Processionals* (Novello); *Processionals for Organ* (Novello); *An Album of Praise* (Oxford); and *A Festive Album* (Oxford).

Most of the included works are by 20th century British composers such as Francis Jackson, Gordon Jacob, Sidney Campbell, Herbert Brewer, John Ireland, William Lloyd Webber, Eric Thiman and Arthur Wills. The British love of pomp and ceremony is most effectively displayed in these pieces – and surely a wedding deserves such a sense of occasion! The shorter fanfare pieces would be appropriate as the bridal entry, with the more extended works as recessionals.

Less experienced organists, or those having to play a small organ, perhaps a ‘spinnet’ electronic, a piano, or a digital keyboard will find the arrangements for manuals most useful. Here the standard wedding pieces, although simplified, still contain the essence of the music. (When buying organ music, unless it states otherwise you can generally assume that it is written for an instrument with two 5-octave keyboards (manuals) and a 30-note pedalboard.)

If you want to plan your wedding music but don’t know where to start, an excellent resource is the CD *Just Married – Organ Music for a Wedding*, played by the brilliant young organist Thomas Heywood on the organ of St Mary’s, West Melbourne (MOVE MD 3149).

A word of warning – if planning to have bagpipes playing outside the church before

or after the ceremony, remember to tell the organist beforehand. The sequencing of musical items must be such that both instruments are not playing together, if you don’t wish to damage the ears, nerves and goodwill of your guests inside the church! Organ and peals of bells are similarly incompatible.

Whether or not the couple have a church background, they are generally keen to have at least one hymn for the congregation to sing. All too frequently this leads to the unfortunate minister virtually having to sing a solo if most of the guests are not regular church attenders, unfamiliar and uneasy with the concept of hymn-singing. To try to prevent this, very well-known hymns such as *Amazing Grace* or Psalm 23 to *Crimond* are sometimes chosen. There are however, more suitable choices for such



PHOTOGRAPH: SOHO PHOTOGRAPHY

a joyful occasion as a wedding – particularly if a well-known tune is found. Our minister at Beecroft, Martin Levine, introduced several such hymns which he brought from his home country, South Africa. These include (with tunes in brackets): *Vows have been spoken* (*Morning Has Broken*), *Lord of love, we ask thy blessing* (*Cwm Rhondda – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah*), *As wedding music fills our hearts* (*Crimond*), *This happy day of wedding celebration* (*How Great Thou Art*), and *Lord of heaven, our great Creator* (*Ode to Joy*). Contact Martin for copies of the words if you are interested.

Other good contemporary wedding hymns can be found in current collections. New words, even when set to an old tune, give freshness and new insights. You might consider the following: *Together in Song – The Australian Hymn Book 2* (HarperCollins) which has just been launched.

Two items by leading American hymn-writer Brian Wren are included: *As man and woman we were made* (*Sussex Carol*), and *When love is found* (*O Waly Waly*). *When the light of first creation* (*Ode to Joy*) was

written by an Australian, Churches of Christ minister Shirley Ludgater. John Bell and Graham Maule of The Iona Community have given us *God beyond glory* (*St Elisabeth – Fairest Lord Jesus*). Two more of their wedding hymns are to be found in another Australian publication, *As One Voice, Volume 2* (Willow Connection). They are entitled *Blessing the Marriage* (*Sussex Carol*), and *Bridegroom and Bride* (*Slane – Be Thou My Vision*).

A further Australian volume, *Praise For All Seasons* (Acorn Press), includes *Prayer for Love*, and other wedding songs which would make appropriate solos. More suited also to a soloist than a congregation is *On this day of happiness* by Graham Kendrick, from *The Source* (Mayhew). The widely-used hymnal *Mission Praise*, surprisingly has no wedding hymns at all. The prolific New Zealand hymn writer Shirley Murray, in a book of her hymns entitled *In Every Corner, Sing* (Hope Publishing), includes *Come to a wedding* (*Morning Has Broken*) and *Come, on this wedding day* (*Down Ampney – Come down O love divine*). Once again, The Open Book is the best source for obtaining most of the publications. Otherwise, contact the publisher directly. If still having difficulty, contact me on (02) 9871-8278, and I’ll try to assist.

As you can see, when choosing a wedding hymn you are not limited to *O Perfect Love*. As couples are encouraged to examine the wide variety of choices and possibilities of both words and tunes, they can be drawn into a deeper understanding of the significance of the wedding service, as well as the part God rightly has in their forthcoming marriage. If it is felt that a tune is insufficiently known, or that the guests may not be entirely comfortable with singing, then a soloist could be invited to sing such an item, with the words printed for the congregation to follow and reflect upon.

Couples planning for marriage spend a great deal of time (and money) so that the dress, the cake, the invitations, the reception and the honeymoon will be as close to perfection as possible. If, with the help of the minister and organist, the same thought and care is put into the order of service and the music which surrounds the most important part of the day – the vows they make to each other and before God – the wedding service will not only be a celebration of their love for each other, but also an offering of joyful praise to God and a witness to his love.

*Heather Moen-Boyd was on the committee that selected material for Together in Song – The Australian Hymn Book 2. She worships at Beecroft Presbyterian Church, Sydney.* <sup>ap</sup>



# Marriage bonds

*Managing money for better, not worse.*

Just as our attitude to money can spoil our relationship with our heavenly Father, so also it can also undermine our marriage partnerships. The Scriptures contain many telling passages on the subject of money, though few represent specific advice for married couples. However, Paul provides an invaluable framework in Philippians 2:1-4, which ends: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others."

Thus, a husband or wife should not undertake financial transactions which may prejudice the other party unless you have both fully discussed the matter and understand and accept the risks. If you adhere to Paul's principle of looking to the needs of the other, this will count out secret gambling by either spouse, which practice is a time-bomb under countless marriages. It will also give you a greater sense of true partnership to know that you have the power of veto on financial transactions which could have adverse ramifications for you both.

The following ideas may be helpful for married couples and those contemplating this noble estate:

Communicate freely with each other about the disposal of the family's total income, whether it be from one source or several, as this is essential if you are to avoid over-spending. However, don't talk about money more than is absolutely necessary, as this sort of conversation can become very boring and even obsessive. Don't ask what your spouse paid for clothing, entertainment or the like, as we all need scope to exercise common sense and individuality. However, if you have a restricted income, just set clothing and entertainment budgets for yourselves.

Keep good records of taxable income and tax deductions. Update your computer files as transactions take place, as this makes the preparation of tax returns a breeze. Poor records can easily lead to frustration and friction! While on the subject of tax, never invest in a venture simply to reduce your tax liability. Invest only on the merits of the investment itself. (I've seen people lose their shirts on pine forests!)

Try to tithe the family income, i.e. to give at least one 10th of income after tax to the Lord's work, either via the church, or



*Russell Lander*

through church agencies or other charities. Choose a credit card which gives you some tangible benefits such as Frequent Flyer points, Fly Buys etc. Each month, check all the entries on your card statement together to make sure you haven't been over-charged. Make sure you understand how interest is being charged on your credit card – this may come as quite a revelation.

If you own a home, put it in joint names, as this gives both parties a sense of belonging. Make sure that you've adequately insured the bricks and mortar, bearing in mind that under-insurance will result in under-payment in the event of claims. Take out term life cover to at least match the cost of paying out the mortgage.

In addition to making normal superannuation contributions, try to put aside additional funds for retirement, which could come earlier than you expect in this modern age of rapidly changing technology! This could be in the form of real estate, shares or investment products such as unit trusts.

If you decide to build and manage your own share portfolio, bear in mind that the best gains overall tend to come over long periods of time from quality stocks in well-run companies where management has a vision for the future. Patience pays off in the sharemarket. Inevitably, such stocks tend to exhibit low yields and high price-earnings multiples, but don't be daunted by this. In my experience, if you buy shares with high dividend yields, they rarely generate above-average returns – as the Bible advises, you have already received your reward in the form of the dividends. Try to diversify your shareholdings across a number of sectors to minimise risk. Understand what you're doing by careful research, and never blame others for the failure of your

investments. You're in charge and the buck stops with you!

Within your share portfolio, consider making room for at least 500 Coles Myer shares, 1000 Gowing Bros. shares and 1000 Harris Scarfe shares as these three companies offer various generous discounts for holders of parcels of this size or greater on a vast range of goods. Some banks also afford shareholders privileges. These include ANZ Banking Group, Bank of Queensland, Bendigo Bank, Colonial, National Australia Bank and Westpac.

Pacific Dunlop gives a range of discounts to shareholders with at least 100 shares on items such as tyres and batteries, electrical accessories and auto spares sold through the Repco chain, while OPSM Protector gives shareholders discounts on eye wear and protective clothing. If you're thinking of buying a home unit, it may be worth buying 10,000 shares in Walker Corporation. Once you've held them for 6 months, you become entitled to a 5 per cent discount off property.

Those interested in health foods may like to buy a parcel of shares in Blackmores which offers shareholders a discount card entitling them to a 25% discount off its products.

Don't over-indulge your children – allow them to experience a struggle and the pleasure of succeeding. If they ask you to go guarantor, be very careful and make sure you read Proverbs 22:26,27 before succumbing! There are many sad stories of elderly parents losing their homes and being turned out into the street. Don't become a statistic yourself.

Don't borrow money unless you can see your way clear to paying it off. As banking is such a competitive industry these days, your friendly bank could well lend you more than you could service should there be exigencies such as ill-health or job loss.

Budget for going out together at least once a week even if it's only for a snack. This may be one of the few opportunities you get for sharing precious time together in an increasingly complex world.

Finally, encourage each other to have special interests rather than doing everything together. This may cost money but represents a safety valve for married couples. Do many things together but have your own activities as well!

ap





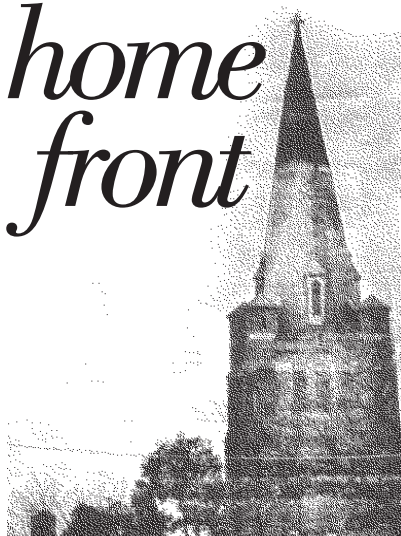








# home front



## Bexley kids' club

What do you do with 40 bored city young people on a wet July school holiday? You invite them to the country, to help out with a kid's club. That is what young people from Bexley (NSW) and Tuross Heads did recently. Organisers Revs Peter Barber and Ewen Brown provided a great time at camp with fishing and hikes. The Tuross Heads folk made some new contacts in their area.



Mini-olympics at Tuross Heads

## Cape York patrol

The patrol ministry of the Church is very active in the Cape York Peninsula, with missionaries Ron and Jean Lyons travelling large distances regularly in very difficult terrain. In June and July they covered nearly 4000 kilometres from Cairns to Bamaca, Lockhart River, Weipa, Mapoon, and Aurukun. They divide their time between encouraging people they know and meeting new people. Often folk are given literature, and the missionaries will pray and read the Scriptures with the people. In June-July, the mission had the assistance of a team from the Navigators, who helped share the gospel in many places.

Prayer requests are for safe travel, God's work in the hearts of teens and children in Aurukun, and for pastors and Christians living in Aurukun and other places.

## PKs chew it over

Thirty-two Preacher's Kids met at "morning Glory" near Campbelltown after the NSW State Assembly in July. They took the opportunity to have fun and fellowship together, and enjoyed studies presented by William Morrow. The only drawback – it wasn't long enough!



NSW PK camp at "Morning Glory"

## Elders at Epping

The Epping, NSW, congregation, has recently ordained and inducted Peter Boulden, Susanne Camden, Robert Coleman, Rosemary Copper, Timothy Keith, Barbara Neasmith, Alexander Shaw and Craig Wannan, as elders.

## PWA helps library

The then New South Wales moderator, Rev. David Tsai, and guest speaker Mrs Ruth White, formerly of AIM, gave the main addresses at the PWA Conference in July. Proceeds of the 2000 Market Ballot were directed to the Theological Education Committee to preserve books in the Gillespie Library.

## Planting in Tuggerah

The Presbytery of The Central Coast (NSW), seeing a possibility of establishing a new parish in the northern area of the presbytery, last year began to fulfil their vision. A new church is being planted in what will be called the Westlakes Parish. It encompasses the area west of Tuggerah and Budgewoi Lakes and takes in parts of the

bounds of both Gosford and Toukley parishes.

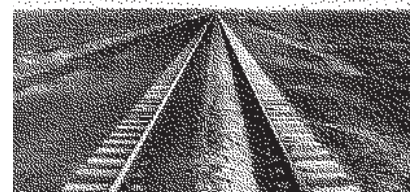
The Central Coast Presbytery has appointed an interim session and has the support of the Joint Task Force on Church Planting. Wyong Shire's population is expected to reach 165,000 in 2011. The Roman Catholics have secured land for a church and school complex to serve the area, and the Uniting Church and Assemblies of God are also present.

The interim session seeks support for the ongoing effort in the new Westlakes Parish and needs finance for this exciting venture to proceed. Prayer is also requested for a church planter/minister to establish a vibrant evangelical reformed ministry in 2000. For further details, contact Rev. Phil Paul (interim moderator) 02 4385 2240, or Edward Radford (interim session clerk) 02 4368 4140.

## Woody Point makes 50

The Peninsula Presbyterian Charge is celebrating 50 years of worship at Woody Point, Queensland, in May, and would like to hear from past members and friends interested in the celebrations. Contact elder Keith Gillies at 7/18 Arthur Street, Woody Point, Qld 4019, or phone 07 3283 1017.

# across australia



## Mixed-marriage agreement

In what is hailed as a historic first, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Roman Catholic Church have signed an agreement on marriages between members of the two denominations. Previously, some couples in inter-church marriages have been refused communion or received demands relating to worship or baptism of children. In addition, the Uniting Church has approved a 'Service of Healing' format for those whose marriage is ending or has ended.

## More Mormons

Growth rates in Mormonism round the world make it one of the fastest-increasing faiths. Worldwide membership is said to be ten million, with 100,000 in Australia. **Mormons** believe that God was once a human being who progressed into divinity. Followers of the faith may travel a similar path. This cult says the gospel involves humans striving to be perfect to merit God's grace. In a seminar at St Matthew's Anglican Church in Beverley Hills, Sydney, **Philip Johnson** said there were 1000 Mormon missionaries in Australia, and "their zeal and dedication puts Christians to shame". **Gospel Outreach to Mormons** fosters witness to Mormons. A second seminar is being held at Castle Hill Baptist Church on 25 September. Contact PO Box 10, Mosman NSW 2088.

## School churches

A number of Anglican schools have announced plans to begin their own congregations. Among them are two leading Sydney independent colleges. The new congregations share two characteristics. First, they are separate to normal school chapel services, being open to parents as well as students. They are also a stark challenge to the traditional geographically based parish notion. The aim is to be contemporary in communicating the gospel, and to build bridges to the school community and among the Christian families. Other schools with no such plans are exploring ways to strengthen ties with local churches.

## South Park 'corrupting'

**Charles Colson** of **Prison Fellowship Ministries** has described the film *South Park* as loaded with perversity, wall to wall obscenities, and blasphemous references. He sees it as the most extreme example of the way Hollywood deliberately corrupts our children. A New York film critic described the film as "undoubtedly one of the filthiest mainstream films ever released". In Australia, **Rev Fred Nile** has called on the federal censor to reclassify the movie from MA to R, thus keeping it away from 15-year-olds.

## Homeless Governor-General

The Governor-General, **Sir William Deane**, showed his sympathy with the homeless during a night with **Sydney's City Mission** team. A patron of the mis-

sion, Sir William spent a night in July identifying not only with the mission, but with the estimated 166,000 homeless Australians. More than a third of these are young people, and breakdown in families is a major cause. Sir William said: "The ultimate test of our worth as a democratic society is the extent to which we are prepared to assist the most disadvantaged and vulnerable among us. Helping the homeless is one of the most important ways by which we can help our nation pass that test."

## Christianity.net

A new evangelistic Internet site has been developed by Anglican Media in Sydney, with assistance from various Christian organisations. The address is [www.christianity.net.au](http://www.christianity.net.au) The aim is to be available to Net surfers, and to be a referral source for Christians when witnessing. There is a variety of content, and the site is expected to grow in scope. This provides Christians with an alternative to handing out a tract or inviting people to a meeting.

world  
news



## Hope for Burmese women

**Trans World Radio** has begun broadcasting to Myanmar, formerly Burma. The program aims to help Burmese women discover spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ. The program features "Women of Hope", designed to touch the hearts of oppressed women. The broadcasts encourage them to experience God's love and salvation through Christ in spite of cultural or social situations and inspire them to face life's daily challenges from a biblical perspective. Each broadcast is a 30-minute magazine style program, with music and features. Interviews, testimonies, discussions and devotionals are featured, and "Lessons for your soul" offers scriptural teaching.

## Luther's legacy

Forty-three works by **Martin Luther** have just been published in French, a third of these for the first time. The Reformers writings will also be available in Chinese in future, with the translation work being undertaken in Hong Kong.

## Bible marches on

**Walk Thru the Bible** ministry is aiming to train and send out one Bible teacher for every 50,000 people in the world. The mission is working towards having trained at least 120,000 Bible teachers by 2008. The "World Teach" program is already under way in 16 countries in Asia Africa and Europe. The ministry in Australia is at PO Box 125, Milperra, NSW 2214.

## Arrests in Turkey

Two Christians manning a religious bookstand at a local fair were arrested in a suburb in Istanbul and detained by Turkish police for selling books in a public place without permission. One is Australian English teacher **Ian McLure**, who has worked in Turkey for 12 years. Released on one charge, Ian has been detained in Turkey on another book-selling charge, and his passport confiscated. The arrests follow a spate of other police actions against local Christians and Christian tourists in the past several weeks. European tourists were called to police stations and subjected to hotel searches and confiscation of New Testaments and Christian materials in their possession.

## Saudi tops repression list

**Open Doors** has rated Saudi Arabia as the most oppressive regime in the world for Christians. The Saudis easily outdistanced all others in the mission's ratings of the 10 most oppressive countries. Others in the 'top 10' are Afghanistan, Sudan, China, Yemen, Morocco, Arabia, Iran, Tunisia and Egypt. Sudan has come in for special attention from the US Senate in recent months because it has created the world's largest refugee population, and is supporting slavery and oppression of various kinds. It is believed 4.3 million are homeless in Sudan as a result of the troubles. Christian and other non-Muslim populations have suffered the most. The UN World Food Program says that 150,000 refugees in southern Sudan are in imminent danger of starvation as a result of the civil war.

## Filipino jailed in Riyadh

A Filipino Christian, **Romeo Macabuhay**, will have to wait two months before coming to court in Saudi Arabia. He was arrested in May by the Muslim religious police, who reportedly found a photo of him preaching from a Christian pulpit. He is the only Christian in his jail section. His friends say they are still not sure what the charges are. Saudi Arabia is the only Islamic nation that strictly forbids non-Muslims to worship within its borders.

## Chinese children forbidden

In July the children of a Chinese village called Li Xi learned a difficult lesson, reports **Voice of the Martyrs**. In the small village nearly 100 children attend Sunday School run by one of the house churches in the area. The authorities banned the children from attending. They told the local headmaster to attend the church meeting, then on Monday they visited his school. Every child the headmaster recognised from the Sunday School received a punishment. Each was severely slapped by the headmaster and told not to return to the Sunday School. They also received a 20-mark reduction in their grades. The authorities then tried to force the teachers in the school to follow the children on weekends and monitor their activities. They refused. Even so, attendance has dropped from 100 to 20.

## Germans elect Christian

**Johannes Rau**, an evangelical Christian, is Germany's newest president. He was elected to succeed Roman Herzog, also a Protestant. Rau is the son of an itinerant preacher, and is well known for his knowledge of the Bible, according to the **German Evangelical Alliance**.

## 'Blasphemous' dessert

Two Pakistani Christians have been jailed on charges they blasphemed against the prophet Mohammed during a dispute over ice cream. A vendor refused to serve the Christians in the same bowls used for Muslims. "I do not have any bowls for Christians," said Maqsood Ahmed. "If you want to buy ice cream from me you have to bring your own bowls." The pair were arrested after the vendor claimed they made "bad remarks" against the prophet and Islam. They have been in jail since 2 June, according to Legal Aid Assistance in Lahore. Many strictly orthodox Muslims consider dishes used by Christians contam-

inated, since they may have been used to consume pork or alcohol, which are forbidden in Islam. The families of the two brothers are terrified, and have fled their homes for fear of retaliation by local extremists. The two in prison are married with three and five children respectively.

## 'Jesus' in Mexico

The *Jesus* movie, well known for its evangelistic impact, received around 2500 showings in Mexico in July. The showings project was financed from First Baptist Church in Midland USA. Portable screens were used in outdoor showings, and screens are made of a material that allows viewing from both sides.

## Cuba bans McDowell

Cuba closed its borders to **Josh McDowell** earlier this year when the evangelical speaker tried to gain access to visit churches and distribute Christian books. His efforts to join in the first Cuban Evangelical Celebration, attended by **President Castro** were frustrated at Havana's airport, where he was told to catch the next plane back Mexico. The 1.5-million book shipment sent by McDowell's ministry remains in customs.

## Koreans hunt Christian 'wolves'

North Korean authorities have issued a warning that "Christian missionaries must be ferreted out and reported without fail because they are a cunning wolf that serves as tools of imperialism". The North Koreans claims Seoul is training underground guerrillas disguised as missionaries. The severe famine has created a toe-hold for Christian charities to provide aid. In addition thousands have fled to China to escape the famine, and they know to make their way to Christian churches, where they will find help. Many have returned home as Christians.

## Kennedy a seeker

**Billy Graham** was questioned by the media concerning the death of **John F Kennedy Jr.** recently. Dr Graham spoke of meetings with Kennedy Jr, describing him as a man with a religious faith who was searching for something more definite. Graham also related an occasion when President Kennedy had asked the evangelist if he believed Christ was coming back to

earth again. Graham replied, "Yes, I do. I believe the Bible teaches that." He said, "Does my church believe that?" "I said, "Yes, it's in their creeds." He said, "Well, why don't I hear more about it?" I said, "I don't know. I wish that we all could look forward to that day when Christ is going to come back." Graham said friends who knew the younger Kennedy well had described him as a seeking Christian.

## Chechnyan kidnapping

In Chechnya, the last remaining Orthodox priest has been kidnapped along with other church workers. Hundreds of Russians and foreigners have been kidnapped for ransom since the chaotic lapse of the province after its declaration of sovereignty. An American missionary was held for seven months, and his hand was mutilated before his release – kidnappers cut off a finger to prove their sincerity. Christians have been increasingly targeted as kidnap victims, prompting all but a handful of evangelical Protestants in Grozny to flee.

## Good news in Arabic

**MERF** (Middle East Reformed Fellowship) is publishing three important Arabic books to strengthen the reformed witness in the Middle East. The first is *The Second Coming and The Blessed Hope of Christ*, by Rev Stanfos Zaki. The second by Rev. Mahrous Habib, deals with the biblical doctrines of justification and sanctification, and exposes Arminian and perfectionist teachings. The third is a translation of G. I. Williamson's work on the signs of the end in the New Testament. Soon to be completed are also *Confessing Christ*, by Calvin Cummings, and a work by Melbourne's Rev. Dr Douglas Milne on the Pastoral Epistles.

## Open Doors in Ambon

**Open Doors** requests continued prayer for the situation in the Indonesian island of Ambon. Muslim threats of Jihad (Holy War) are very real, and the Christian population is also in an aggressive mood after the troubles. Tension, resulting in frequent clashes, has the island at boiling point. In some cases, it is believed violence against Christians has been staged in an attempt to provoke retaliation, thus bringing the police and army against the Christians. The media inflames the situation with constant false reporting, Open Doors says. Christians are asked to pray that God will dampen down the tensions, and allow wise leadership to prevail.



# Monkeying about

*Evolutionary naturalists hear no truth, see no truth and speak no truth.*

There is a deep divide running through the church in Australia today regarding whether the theory of evolution can be reconciled with the Genesis account of creation. Leading evangelicals such as Dr Broughton Knox, the former principal of Moore College, have criticised any attempt to accommodate evolution with God's special act of creation.

In his Moore College Lectures for 1979, Dr Knox said: "Just as the idolaters could not see the foolishness, indeed the stupidity, of worshipping gods of wood and stone, which have no life, nor purpose, nor mind, so modern believers in the theory of evolution cannot see the foolishness of that theory, which not only lacks evidence to support it, but also runs counter to such evidence of origins as is available."

For Dr Knox, compromise was impossible. But now, new voices are calling for a different approach: an approach that essentially links Christians with modern naturalistic science. I was recently shown a state-



*Clarrie Briese*

*Clarrie Briese, former Chief Magistrate of New South Wales, begins a three-part series on the inadequacies of the theory of evolution. In the next two issues, he will examine the scientific data and their social and legal implications.*

ment by an influential evangelical scholar who said, "It seems to me that the evidence of science currently weighs against a six 24-hour day creation period ... The evidence for evolution, on the other hand, is comprehensive and powerful, and in my opinion, persuasive."

His solution for dealing with the inherent contradictions between the theory of evolution and the Genesis account of creation was the tried but untrustworthy method of limiting the authority and reliability of the Bible to matters of salvation and ministry. His proposal is not novel. But it has enormous consequences, one of which is to undermine the believer's trust in the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Is there a better solution to hand?

There is an alternative that treats the biblical literature seriously. As a lawyer, I have spent much of my professional life interpreting documents and evidence, and I believe that a correct hermeneutical approach is the only way to resolve these issues. We must first try to understand the genre and literary context of the early chapters of Genesis. However, at the outset we must realise how the dispute over these first chapters of the Bible arose.

During the Reformation in the 16th century, theologians of all persuasions understood Genesis 1 and 2 to be God's account of creation. They believed that in these chapters God provided through Moses the details of how, in the exercise of

his omnipotent power, he created the world in six ordinary days ex nihilo (i.e. out of nothing).

Although these scholars were battling over other issues of biblical interpretation at the time, there was no disagreement about the six-day miracle. They all accepted that Genesis was a factual account of how the world began.

But in the centuries that followed, scholars who called themselves Higher Critics challenged the authority of the Bible. Then in 1859 Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, casting doubt on the reliability of the scriptural account of origins. Later in the 19th century, archaeologists discovered some ancient Near Eastern creation myths that seemed to have some similarities to the creation account in Genesis. Was Genesis dependent on them in some way? And if so, was Genesis also a myth? Many theologians and churches decided this issue by abandoning the traditional way of interpreting the Bible as God's revelation. Instead, they saw it as a fallible document.

No longer was Scripture allowed to be its own interpreter. The world-view of modern science and the self-understanding of modern man became the principles by which to interpret the Bible. Genesis 1 and 2 were moved from the category of "narrative" to "myth" or "poetry". Scholars said that these chapters only tell us "who" created the world and "why". If we ask "how", we are told that Moses never intended to provide any such information (despite evidence to the contrary), and to go to the theory of evolution for guidance and understanding.

Radical theologians such as Bultmann and Tillich didn't stop at creation. For them the Bible was full of myth and had to be demythologised if its message was to be correctly understood. While many evangelicals have rejected their approach, some find it difficult to resist what amounts to a demythologising of the Genesis creation account by replacing the Genesis "how" with the scientific (so-called) theory of evolution. Is that justified?

Not according to a number of Bible-believing scholars. They reject the modern classification of Genesis 1 and 2 as myth, poetry or ancient hymnody. These scholars,

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whose approach to Genesis is based on literary type, have found Genesis 1 and 2 are in the form of narrative prose, and should be interpreted accordingly.

One of them, a leading Old Testament scholar in the USA, Dr Walter Kaiser Jnr, has said, "Genesis 1-11 is prose and not poetry. The use of the *waw* consecutive with the verb to describe sequential acts, the frequent use of the direct object sign and the so-called relative pronoun, the stress on definitions, and the spreading out of these events in a sequential order indicates that we are in prose and not in poetry. Say what *we* will, the author plainly intends to be doing the same thing in these chapters that he is doing in chapters 12 to 50. If we want a sample of what the author's poetry, with its Hebrew parallelism and fixed pairs, would look like, Genesis 4:23-24 will serve as an illustration."

Other Old Testament scholars agree. Professor John Currid from Reformed Seminary, Jackson, has said, "There is no indication of figurative language in Genesis 1." Likewise Dr J. Barton Payne has pointed out that "the rest of Scripture ... assumes throughout its (Genesis 1 and 2) literal historicity." This has led Professor Douglas Kelly to conclude that "the writer of Genesis means what the historic Christian Church (until the mid-19th century) believed he said. That is, he intended to speak factually of what happened at the beginning, with no less historical reality than the Chronicler speaks of Hezekiah or Luke speaks of the Virgin Birth of Christ."

Obviously, what Moses intended to convey and what influences the Near-Eastern mythologies may have had on the way he compiled his material are important questions. However, God's intention ultimately overrides all of that. Jesus told us, quoting the God of the Old Testament, that "men shall not live by bread alone but by *every word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God." For us today, that means every word of the Bible. To "live" by Genesis 1 on the issue of origins, for example, means examining and understanding the words of Genesis 1 in the context from which they come (i.e. the whole of Genesis, and in particular, the first 11 chapters).

Significantly, I have noticed that there is a tendency by theologians and churches who say the early chapters are something other than narrative, not to give a great deal of attention to Genesis 1-11, much less to "every word" in Genesis 1. Are the words of Genesis 1 too embarrassing for modern, scientific people?

One of the most persuasive arguments in favour of Genesis 1 and 2 as historical narrative is that the rest of Scripture assumes its literal historicity. As Douglas

Kelly points out, "No amount of exegetical straining can find the slightest poetic view of Genesis 1-11 in the books of the New Testament. One can disagree with the New Testament's literal, historical usages of Genesis 1-11, but one cannot honestly find in its pages anything less than a straightforward reading of these chapters as literal, relevant facts." Jesus himself referred to both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 in a way which indicates that he understood those chapters in a straightforward literal way as well. (Matt. 19: 4-5)



Secular specialists in Hebrew agree that the Genesis account is historical narrative and should be read accordingly. James Barr, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, and a hostile critic of evangelicals, says, "so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writers of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that (a) Creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours that we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the Biblical story; and (c) Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark. To put it negatively, the apologetic arguments which suppose the 'days' of creation to be long years of time, the figures of years not to be chronological, and the flood to be a merely local Mesopotamian flood, are not taken seriously by any professor, as far as I know."

One final consideration deserves mention. I have noticed that apart from Genesis 1 and 2, the God of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament continually demonstrate their power and control over the natural world by the use of miracles. God uses miracles throughout the history of the Bible as part of the way he works. We note that miracles take place instantly on command. In criminal law that kind of evidence is called "similar fact" evidence. As the late Mr Justice Lionel Murphy of the High Court explained, "events may occur which constitute a sequence or pattern in which the only common factor is the accused. These may be such that as a matter of Euclidean proof or certainty, the accused is responsible, that is, the cause of the events ... Such methods of reasoning are acceptable." By analogy, and using ordinary common sense, should not God's demonstrated power to create instant miracles in the rest of the Bible be regarded as significant evidence on the question of how to interpret what God says in Genesis 1 and 2 and Exodus 20: 11?

In my judgement, the evidence for accepting Genesis 1 and 2 as narrative prose, to be understood in a straightforward and literal manner, far outweighs the suggested evidence for a contrary view. Indeed, the evidence is so strong that one looks to other reasons as to why so many evangelicals reject the traditional straightforward interpretation. The major reason, conceded or otherwise, is that these scholars have accepted the reigning world-view on origins, the belief that the world came into existence over billions of years through macro-evolution.

It is important, therefore, to examine the evidence for macro-evolution. Does it justify the conclusion that it should be accepted today as fact, or is it a theory which has become a world-belief system, a new religion masquerading as science? We will look at this evidence next month. <sup>ap</sup>

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# Beyond Samaria

*Cross-cultural ministry is seldom tidy, but it is rewarding.*

It was an afternoon at Easter 1996 with the sun streaming through the windows that, at the kitchen table of her friend, Cathy prayed to receive Christ as her Saviour. Asian dark hair bowed close to Sue's Aussie gold locks as they prayed together and as Sue pointed out passages from Psalms, Proverbs and the Gospels to encourage and help Cathy. It was, for all, an Easter for rejoicing, and the culmination of four years' contact with Cathy.

We first saw Cathy in 1992 when she came to our church-based English language school in an inner west suburb of Sydney. Though she had a ready smile and a friendly out-going manner, she felt utterly alone and miserable. She had come from China to join her husband, who had been studying at the university for two years, having left Cathy in China. He had never seen his son, born after he had left; Cathy, herself had been forced to leave her two-year-old in China to be cared for by his grandparents – and she missed him painfully. They lived in a cramped, inner city flat with another family and, while she was excited by the adventure of living in another country, she felt frightened and isolated. This was her first crisis time.

Attending the language school three mornings a week brought her into contact with other immigrant women as well as her Australian teachers and language helpers. It was there that she first heard about Jesus, although she admits that she didn't understand much of what she read and heard; but



*Leah Balzer*

she did understand the love and friendliness shown to her there and remembers it her as her "second home".

She claims that she learnt English much faster than her friends who studied at TAFE and other private language schools because of the warm acceptance there and the socialising in such a caring atmosphere. She attended Bible Studies in private homes and, with her husband, was invited into Aussie homes for meals. They, in turn, returned the invitation for Chinese New Year celebrations.

During these early years, she longed to have her son with her. (This was the time when the Australian Government was being especially strict with the Family Reunion Scheme.) We wrote official letters on her behalf to the Department of Immigration. After the birth of a beautiful daughter, and a trip home to China, she was able to bring him back with her in 1995. She was overjoyed to see he loved being with them, and with his new baby sister. Cathy, herself an electrical engineer in China, was

studying pattern making and design at TAFE, attending a Bible class to keep up her English and also sometimes an Easy English service on Sundays.

Her second crisis came at the end of 1995 with the visit to Australia of her parents-in-law, bringing with them all the cultural expectations of old China. She found herself the object of criticism and scorn, with her husband taking his parents' part. Distraught, she grabbed her two children and fled, eventually ending at the house of her Bible teacher. Members of the church were able to effect a reconciliation in the marriage but the relationship remains difficult to this day.

It was out of her tremendous need and anguish she remembered what she knew about Jesus. She expresses it like this: "I felt so dark in my life. At that time, I became a Christian; my life changed, sadness went away from my heart. The people at the church saved my life and I live again, but this life is different."

Today, at her husband's insistence, Cathy lives in an outer Western suburb far from her friends and has just started a dressmaking and alteration business in the inner west where she does have friends. She works a 10-hour day, six days a week. She doesn't attend church or a fellowship group, because she doesn't want to upset her husband and also she is obliged to work to provide money for the family.

When she goes to China she no longer feels Chinese; yet although in Australia she feels comfortable she realises that she's not quite Australian. Her children, on the other hand, are real Australians, but are treated as Chinese in school. She is happy with her day-to-day life, and we are delighted to renew contact with her, at least during her working hours.

If Cathy's story sounds unfinished, with lots of loose ends, that's because it is. Cathy, like us, is a "person in process"; God hasn't finished with her yet, nor with us.

Reading Cathy's story, perhaps you can pick out some of the areas where we were able to be of help to her.

**Some suggestions for cross-cultural ministry**

- We should aim to meet the needs of any newcomer, for language, friendship and

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help with the culture, soon after their arrival when their needs are greatest.

- Although much can be done by one person, it is best to have several people involved in cross-cultural ministry together. Thus, when social problems need solving, there are many shoulders to help; and the burdens don't fall only on one person.
- It is very important to be friends with the whole family. Most nationalities who come to Australia have a stronger family life than Australians do. Husbands and children should be included in outings and invitations.
- It is possible to "help too much" so that an obligation is forced on the other person, either an obligation to return hospitality or even an obligation to accept Christ to please you.
- Be aware of the cultural problems associated with settling into Australia. Many men feel threatened in their position as head of the family and react in different ways to limit and restrict contact between Australians and their wife and children. Also, many men are in jobs far below their level of training and competence, resulting in anger and frustration within themselves.

Men have special needs, too, in their new society.

- Australia is an egalitarian society; we tend not to give honour nor do we know how to receive it. We have to learn how to do both.
- We find it difficult to realise just how far people from other religions (or as in Cathy's case, no religion at all) have to travel to become Christians. When they trust Christ, we need to teach things like how and when to pray, how to teach your children, the need for time spent with other Christians. For some religions, becoming a Christian means being cut off from the family and culture completely, so a whole new lifestyle and family need to be arranged for the believer. A gentle, understanding touch is important.
- Working in cross-cultural ministry is frequently an on-off experience. People tend to drift in and out of our sphere of influence – and then frequently back in again – rather like a revolving door! Continued prayer for them and trusting in the continued ministry of the Holy Spirit to them is an essential part of our ministry. "Never give up" is the motto of one cross-cultural worker I know.


Working with people from other cul-



Cathy Gao

tures is a privilege and a joy. A good sense of humour, a malleable attitude, a good listening ear (and frequently a closed mouth), a sense of calling are all important qualities for those who seek ministry in this area.

The first step is to be involved – and then watch how God enriches your life!

*Leah Balzer is involved in multi-cultural ministry at Ashfield Presbyterian Church Sydney.* 

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# Blameless?

*Dodging responsibility is a characteristic of our age.*

Just when everyone thought the Bill Clinton soap opera had finally ended, it started up again as Hillary Clinton offered an encore. Mrs Clinton told a reporter that there was a terrible conflict between Bill's mother and his grandmother. A psychologist once told her that "for a boy to be in the middle of a conflict between two women is the worst possible situation. There's always a desire to please each one".

So there we have it. The President's mum and grandmother are the real culprits. Journalists, who up to now have watched the cool detachment of the First Lady, are simply stunned that she could use pop psychology to blame the President's affair with Monica Lewinsky on his difficulties as a boy.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that Hillary Clinton is playing the "blame game". We all do it at times. She still loves her husband and wants to repair his damaged reputation. There's nothing wrong with that. But blaming his sexual escapades on his dysfunctional early life has echoes of Eden in it. Adam's first response when God accused him of sin was to point the finger at someone else who could conveniently shoulder the blame, his wife. But Eve wasn't too keen to wear the responsibility, so she passed the blame down the line. Thus began the game of blame-shifting. Finally, Satan was made to wear it. Eve protested to God: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13).

This process of blame-shifting and dodging responsibility has become characteristic of our age. People are encouraged to regard themselves as the victims of each other's wrongdoing, even when they've done wrong themselves.

This reinforces what John MacArthur calls the victim status of sinners in our society (*The Vanishing Conscience*). The universal counsel of our generation is, "it's not your fault". "Society encourages sin, but it will not tolerate the guilt sin produces."



*Marion Andrews*

Thus, the billion-dollar therapy industry has grown up, encouraging people to do what they feel like, and blame any one or anything but themselves for the consequences.

This culture of blame takes all sorts of weird twists. Jim Wilson was battling prostate cancer. A well-meaning friend gave him a copy of "You can heal your life" by Louise Hay. Jim's wife read the statements about the causes of prostate problems: "Mental fears weaken the masculinity. Sexual pressure and guilt." She laughed at the bit about masculinity – no one was more masculine than her tall, handsome man. However, she could not so lightly dismiss the statement about sexual pressure and guilt. She felt that this book blamed her for his suffering and early death.

There are many things for which we ought to accept blame before God. There are other things for which we are not culpable. Some people, including Christians, are plagued with false guilt imposed by Satan or other people who want to control or hurt them. A New Age priestess like Louise Hay, whether or not she realises it, encourages false guilt.

However, true guilt is another matter altogether. We become aware of it when we search our lives in the light of God's commandments. His law reveals our spirit of independence and rebellion, and unmask all our shortcomings. It reminds us that we are to blame every time we fail to please God. The glory of the gospel is that God removes our sin and blame when we believe that Christ died as a guilt-offering on the cross. Whether we are Presidents or ordinary citizens, this is the only way to deal with our guilt.

God has gone to great lengths to remove blame from our lives. God's purpose for us, when he chose us before the

creation of the world, is that we be blameless (Eph. 1:4). This word shines through time and eternity.

Probably the time we most need to remember this is when crisis or tragedy strikes the home. False blame is a terrible curse that can destroy family happiness. Stress seems to make it grow worse. When, as Christians, we insist on carrying false blame ourselves, or loading it on others, we make little of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One person in our century who has created a lot of false guilt is Sigmund Freud. He laid a heavy burden of blame on the parents of homosexual men with his Oedipus complex. What do Christians do with such a heavy weight? In *Blame it On The Brain* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1998), Edward T. Welch reviews the modern trend to attribute many behaviours to problems in the brain. Some of the behaviours he examines are depression, attention deficit disorder, alcoholism and homosexuality.

He shows the need to distinguish between chemical imbalances, brain disorders and disobedience. He notes that 10 years ago, people blamed their problems, disabilities and shortcomings on their upbringing. Now, experts blame it on some problem in the brain.

In Chapter 9, Dr. Welch describes the common, unbiblical view of homosexuality, where sin is, if at all, considered a secondary cause. However, he insists that sin be recognised as sufficient cause, while genetics, peers, family and self-esteem be seen as possible necessary influences. He recommends that in all areas where relationships with loved ones are threatened, we get as much reliable information as possible on the behaviour, distinguish between spiritual and physical symptoms, address the issues of the heart before God, and then, if relevant, maximise strengths and consider treatment for physical symptoms.

So often Christians feel paralysed when confronted by these difficult problems. They don't know where to lay the blame. Human ways of dealing with blame and guilt are at best weak and ineffectual, and at worst, cruel. By identifying what is sin, and what isn't, we can make a start in finding where the fault lies. But only in Christ do we find the help of One who lifts the blame from us and sets us free from guilt. ap

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# Movie Watch

## Arlington Road

Reviewed by Kate Harris



Jeff Bridges in *Arlington Road*

Oklahoma, Kansas. The World Trade Centre, New York. King David Hotel, Jerusalem. If the 20th century has produced anything well, it has fashioned an efficient terrorist machine, greased by national political systems that have built blocs with the leverage of nuclear force. In fact, the “big business” of terrorism has historically fascinated scholars and journalists alike. Not until well after the dust settled on Oklahoma’s rubble did journalists choose to swing their attention to a disconcerting fact: convicted bomber Timothy McVeigh wasn’t the stereotypical terrorist from a vaguely Middle-Eastern country. He wasn’t part of a dedicated IRA explosion of violence against American bureaucracy. One article described Timothy McVeigh as the “face of average America looking in the mirror”.

For a nation that has pointedly declared the right of personal freedom while nurturing a hotbed of racial violence, the inference is more terrifying than a bomb. *Arlington Road* takes this rare moment of self-examination a step further into the filmic realm and places terrorists in their perfect breeding ground – the seemingly “faceless” American suburb.

Michael (Jeff Bridges) is a history professor who specialises in terrorist studies, and who harbours a wealth of anger over the tragic death of his wife, an FBI agent killed in a gun-raid gone wrong. Too often, he tells his students, acts of well-organised and sophisticated terrorism are conveniently labeled as one-man crimes. Why? To appease our sense of personal security. To avert a national panic and possible retaliations. To avoid upsetting the bureaucratic appletart.

So his suspicion of his genial new neighbours (Tim Robbins, Joan Cusack) is tempered with denial when the whole family increasingly turns out to be more Stern Gang than Brady Bunch. Reports to

authorities – particularly to his dead wife’s employer, FBI chief Whit – show Michael’s escalating sense of paranoia rather than his neighbours’ culpability.

The neighbours inveigle themselves into the lives of Michael and his son with frightening ease, wielding an emotional blackmail more convincing than an AK47. Suddenly, the professor who has neatly dissected international terrorist groups in the classroom is powerless when he confronts it in his own backyard (or at least his street). After an unnecessarily long time spent establishing Michael as a lone prophet in the wilderness, doubted by all to whom he confides his fears, the plot goes into overdrive and delivers a climactic half hour of action, car chases, and suspense-building edits – all the elements we have come to expect from this genre.


*Arlington Road* makes its departure from this tradition by circumventing our expectations at the final moment. Without spoiling the film for readers, this film doesn’t buy into the pretence that the good guys win and the baddies lose. In a suburban community – that paradoxical combination of cooperation and estrangement – the line between good and evil is blurred. As in all well-scripted movies, you may find yourself pouring pity upon the neighbours, who seem to be so maligned by the paranoid Michael. We can never be sure, insists *Arlington Road*, of our security, our safety. To believe in order for order’s sake is a self-delusion that can be shattered at any moment.

Realistic and thoughtful performances, a well-rounded if heavy script, and appropriately banal domestic settings make for an effective viewing experience that offers a small taste of irony. The producers had the

grace to resist the lure of satire, so the film is kept relatively innocent in tone. It is genuinely earnest, particularly in the scenes near the end, and it invests some time in the human devastation of terrorist attacks.

There’s a modicum of boom and bang, but the real drama is found in the tightly strung dynamics of fear, suspicion, self-doubt, powerlessness, rage, and despair. The face of “evil”, when it is exposed, is chillingly average. Little surprise that groups which incite organised acts of political terror are becoming more and more attractive to young recruits. As the argument goes, in a powerless, insecure world, those with the guns prevail.

Christians do, and must, resist the secular worldview that might equals right. Although largely despairing in tone, *Arlington Road* inadvertently emphasises the fact that the first place to start – over and above campaigning against national revolutionary and reactionary political violence – is our own backyards.

Kate Harris is a Brisbane-based communications consultant. 



Tim Robbins and Joan Cusack in *Arlington Road*

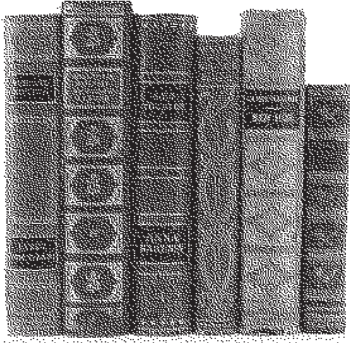
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# books



## The Faith of a Heretic

Ian Edwards  
Sydney: 1998  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

In *The Faith of a Heretic: The Life and Work of the Rev. John Edwards and Some Thoughts on the Presbyterian Church in Australia*, Ian Edwards has written a study of his grandfather. Rev. John Edwards was the Presbyterian minister at Rose Bay in Sydney from 1914 to 1937, and one of the strongest supporters of the arch-liberal Professor Samuel Angus. John Edwards believed in Freemasonry and in what he thought was theological progress. In his moderatorial address of 1921, Edwards repudiated the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. He considered that "revelation is not a book at all. It is a human experience of God". Creationism, everlasting punishment, vicarious punishment, the

two natures of Christ, the physical resurrection – all these and more Edwards set aside. Like all liberals, Edwards was an optimist about human nature. Hence, he considered that the gospel of Jesus teaches "man's natural birthright as a child of God". Faith was separated from doctrine, and doctrine was discarded.

Edwards' brand of theology has been passed on to his grandson, but unfortunately without the erudition. Ian Edwards writes in a very self-conscious style, and portrays himself as one of the vanguard of the cause of freedom and progress. He falls victim to conspiracy theories, and sees himself as a champion standing up to the Inquisition. He claims that fundamentalists would like to forget that the Angus case ever happened. On the contrary, it is an illustration of the power of the Fall, and the capacity for human beings to resist the light. Edwards illustrates the same point by applauding Barbara Thiering as a great thinker – which at least shows that he is daring, but not particularly wise.

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

## Green Eye of the Storm

John Rendle-Short  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

This is an unusual book: in many ways it is neither strict history nor strict science, but an interesting ramble through both. It deals with the lives of four men: Philip Henry Gosse (1810-88), George John Romanes (1848-94), Arthur Rendle-Short (1880-1953), the author's father; and John Rendle-Short himself, the author. Each of the men struggled to understand the issues raised by the compatibility or otherwise of Christianity and evolution. Romanes descended into atheism for a time, and brooded what he called "the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it". Later, he clawed his way back to some kind of faith, and almost his last words to his wife were: "It is Christianity or nothing."

Throughout his life, Arthur Rendle-Short tried valiantly to reconcile Christianity and some kind of evolution, but he had great troubles with the Fall. So too did John Rendle-Short, until he met A. E. Wilder-Smith, and ultimately became convinced of six-day creationism. The

impact of the evolutionary hypothesis on Church and society cannot be overestimated. It is as Michael Denton calls it, "no more or less than the great cosmogonic myth of the 20th century". The tragedy is that something that is unproven and unprovable has become the foundation for so many people's worldview.

In 1890 B. F. Westcott wrote to Edward Benson, the Archbishop of Canterbury: "No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history – I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did." That kind of cavalier dismissal of the historicity of Genesis provides the background for John Rendle-Short's helpful work. Darwinism makes for bad religion and bad science; Genesis provides the foundation for what Francis Schaeffer felt obliged to call "the truth".

## Let's Study Mark

Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999  
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

The Banner of Truth Trust has recently released two commentaries by Sinclair Ferguson – the first on Philippians and now this one on Mark. One could be excused for thinking that there are already too many commentaries on the market, but Sinclair Ferguson's work deserves to be published, read and studied. *Let's Study Mark* is not a detailed work of exposition, but it is perceptive and clearly expressed, and full of helpful and challenging applications. Sinclair Ferguson writes with an enviable clarity of style which avoids any self-conscious attempt to be clever or arresting – the bane, surely, of some modern evangelical preaching. The picture is painted with a few deft strokes; and the focus is always on Scripture, not the commentary on Scripture.

*Let's Study Mark* is succinct but always stimulating. For example, in Jesus' debate over what to render to Caesar, the image on the coin is related to human beings as the image of God (Mark 12:13-17). The message is that coins belong to Caesar but human lives belong to God. Ferguson considers that Mark's Gospel finished on the note of fear in Mark 16:8, i.e. Mark 16:9-20 is not regarded as authentic. Mark is thus treated as a rather enigmatic book. At the end of Ferguson's book, there is a study guide which can be used in group discussions, and which adds to its usefulness. This is a work which deserves to be widely used.

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# Other-wise

*The Trinity shows that relationship is the ultimate reality, advises Broughton Knox.*

The doctrine of the Trinity is the glory of the Christian religion. It tells us that ultimate reality is personal relationship. God is ultimate reality, and is the ground of all other reality, and yet God is not a single monad or an impersonal absolute, but God is relationship. God is Trinity. He is not the unconscious unmoved mover of Aristotle; nor is He the ground of our being, the one who lets be, of modern theology, but he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That God is a living God becomes plain when he addresses us. That he is a God of infinite goodness becomes plain not only from the content of his Word to us, but also from our confirmation of that goodness through our reflection of our own experience in the world.

Through the revelation of the Trinity we learn that the living God, the good and true God, is a God who has relationship within himself and that values of relationships ultimately belong to reality in its most absolute form. In the light of this doctrine, personal relationships are seen to be ultimate, are seen to be the most real things that are.

The characteristic of true relationship is other-person-centredness. God is good, God is personal, God has relationship within himself, and because God is good these relationships within the Trinity have the characteristic of other-person-centredness. Thus the Scriptures reveal that the Father loves the Son, he gives all things to the Son (Jn 3:35), he shows him all that he does (Jn. 5:20). The Son in response does always that which pleases the Father (Jn 8:29). His obedience springs from his love: "I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (Jn. 14:31).

There is complete other person-centredness in this relationship of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father. The Son does nothing of himself, but as the Father taught him (Jn. 8:28). The same is true of the relationship of the Spirit to the Father, and the Son. The Spirit is self-effacing. He does not speak from himself, but he takes the things of the Son and shows them to believers; he glorifies Christ (Jn 16:13, 14).

Ultimate reality is good, personal, relational. And these relationship are other-person-centred, as all good true relationships must be. This is the character of God

## IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



and this is how creation has been made. We have been created in God's image for relationship and this relationship must be other-person-centred.

The doctrine of the Trinity contradicts modern philosophical and social concepts. The idea of self-expression as the primary objective of life is very popular nowadays. Even in Christian circles we are being told that the first thing is to love ourselves. But these modern ideas are in contradiction to reality, to God in Trinity.

Similarly, the humanist ideal of the balanced complete life as the object of living is again contrary to what is actual, for humanism is self-centred in ultimate analysis. God is Trinity; Trinity is relational. The relationships are good and personal and other-person-centred.

The famous slogan of the French Revolution, which was the fruit of the Enlightenment, namely, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, is in fact a denial of genuine relationship. Bestsellers today reflect the modern ideal of expressing yourself, of loving yourself, of liberating yourself from your relationships with other people, which constrict the development of your own personality.

Through the revelation of the Trinity believers can see that this popular philosophical concept and social objective is contrary to reality and therefore will not bring the hoped-for benefits of happiness or peace. A renewal of understanding of the Trinity and its implications for the way human life should be based will lead to the recognition that personal relationships which are other-person-centred are ulti-

mate in value for living, even though it should turn out that in serving these relationships it becomes impossible to pursue the chimera of gracious living, the balanced life, and so-called authentic existence. Even life itself may be lost, but eternity will vindicate the reality of the basis of such actions.

The modern philosophy of life known as existentialism concentrates on self-expression, "living an authentic life", and this is translated into everyday language by the phrase "doing your own thing" This is a very popular way of understanding true living today. People feel that they must express themselves, that they cannot be trammelled by their relationships with other people, whether with husband or wife or children. They must be independent and pursue their own goals.

This is not the way in which the Trinity relates. Eastern religious popular in the Western world today have the same concept of reality. The doctrine of the Trinity contradicts and corrects these modern thoughts and attitudes. It teaches that reality seeks the welfare of the other person. Reality is good, it does not serve itself but serves others.

*Dr Broughton Knox is a former principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney. This extract is taken From The Everlasting God (Evangelical Press, 1982)*

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# The big day

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## How important is pre-marital counselling?

I believe it's the single most important thing that I do with the couples as I prepare them for the wedding day. I think that there's two types of preparation. The first one is where I talk about the Christian concept of marriage with the couple. That's the normal sort.

But there's another type as well. I like to encourage couples to become involved with group discussions on marriage. In some of my previous parishes, I have been able to conduct these type of groups where the bride and groom are able to talk with other Christian couples who are experienced in marriage. This has been very helpful preparation. At the moment, where I am at Castle Hill, I tend to direct couples to a counselling programme run by the Anglican Church. It's a first-rate course and I am very happy to recommend it.

The reason why I am so convinced of the need for pre-marital counselling is that statistics from the Institute of Family Studies show that good marriage preparation is a key factor in assisting people to have a long and satisfying marriage. As a minister, I am keen to support any process that will assist the longevity of marriages.

## What do you think about marrying non-Christian couples?

I think it's OK in most cases. People need to remember that marriage is not a sacrament that's restricted to believers only. Being in the Reformed tradition, I regard it as a creation ordinance which God has given for everyone, believers and unbelievers alike. It's a sign of his common grace. So I'm happy to meet non-Christians and talk with them about God's purpose for their lives in marriage. It's a great opportunity where people are starting a new life together. I have the privilege to explain God's claims upon them and how they can find true fulfilment in him.

## You see it as an opportunity to announce the Gospel to them?

Yes, most definitely. This is one of the few occasions in people's lives where they are likely to step inside a church. So I seize the moment and explain what God requires of every one of us, and also how knowing Christ can make a difference to your family life. In other words, I believe that ministers of the Gospel should use this God-



*Ron Keith*

given opportunity to prepare the couple for life as well as marriage. And you can only truly live when you are rightly related to God through Christ.

## Is it appropriate for a minister to use a wedding service as an opportunity for evangelism?

That's a difficult question. Ministers who do it run the risk of alienating people. The congregation may feel it is being exploited. Sometimes a minister finds himself under pressure because the bride and groom want their non-Christian friends to hear the gospel. I think that the gospel can be explained in a wedding ceremony without the service being overtly evangelistic. I like to think of weddings as pre-evangelism. I take the opportunity to be open and loving in explaining God's good purposes for us in marriage and how Christ can make a difference to your home. I want to be seen as transparent in my dealings. If people think I am using the occasion unfairly, then they will just ignore me.

## What about unusual circumstances, such as same-sex marriages or serial divorcees?

As far as same-sex marriages are concerned, the answer is simple. I would hope that no minister would participate in them. I think that they're an abomination before the Lord. Divorce presents me with a different problem, and there's no easy answer for that one. There's lots of scriptural and personal factors to consider before deciding any one case.

## Do couples need a wedding rehearsal?

I always try to have a rehearsal. A rehearsal can be very useful for some couples and their bridal parties in developing the right attitude for the wedding, but for others it's nothing more than showing them where to stand and what to do. Of course, that's important too, but a wedding is so much more than that. I want people to capture the spiritual significance of the

event. That's what really counts. That's why I always run through the vows and explain their content. Rehearsals also give the bride and groom an opportunity to calm their nerves before the big event and that's helpful.

## When is the best time to hold a rehearsal, and how long do you need?

I normally try to do it a day or two before, usually on the Thursday night. It takes about 30 to 45 minutes. That's sufficient in most cases to ensure that everyone understands his or her role.

## What's the best way for the wedding party to proceed into the church?

I don't think that there's any one way to do it. Of course, a lot will depend on things like the design of the church building and the availability of special people. There were special circumstances in my own case, because my own wife's father had been dead for a number of years. So Jackie and I walked into church together, and I escorted her to the front. That seemed quite natural. However, normally, the groom and groomsmen stand at the front of the church and wait for the bridesmaids and bride to come down the aisle. I think people are safer sticking to traditions because the congregation expects certain things to happen. But I do notice a number of variations creeping in these days.

## Is there any significance in the bride coming down the aisle on the arm of her father?

Historically, it was understood to symbolise that a woman was under the care and keeping of her father until her husband assumed that care. I'm not sure that many women would see it that way today, but I'm comfortable with it as a gesture of her parents' love and care for her. It's a fitting way for a family to mark the leaving of one of their children to begin a new life in a family of her own. I wouldn't read into it any more than that in today's climate.

## Should a couple write their own vows and design their own service?

No. I'm not really comfortable with that. I'm happy for them to select their own hymns and music, and I'm prepared to receive suggestions about Bible readings, but by and large I feel better equipped to be handling the service as a whole. I have taken many weddings and have had a lot of experience in handling public ceremonies.

After a while, you get a feeling for what will work and what won't. So I think I am the best person to make these choices. But I am always willing to discuss these matters.

If people want to experiment with different vows, I give them a choice of vows that I think are appropriate. It's up to them at that point. They can choose what seems most suitable for them. If they want to negotiate further, that's OK. But I won't water down the Christian content and I certainly won't allow purely sentimental ones. Vows are promises about what you can do, not about how sentimental you will feel for the next 50 years or so.

Personally, I think that the traditional vows are the best. The fact that they've been around for so long shows how good they are. The reason for this is that they are so expressive of the Christian nature of marriage and they say it so well. Some of the modern versions are appalling in comparison. There's a document floating around with over a thousand vows on it. A lot of them are just rubbish.

#### **Should rings be exchanged at a wedding ceremony?**

Yes. I think they're important signs and symbols. You probably know the traditional explanation: "As this ring has no beginning and no end, so should our love be." I think the rings symbolise the promises that we make to one another of life-long love and commitment. They should be a moment-by-moment reminder of a promise and covenant that we have made to each other.

#### **Is a wedding service a private ceremony or an act of public worship?**

I view it as a worship service. As such, it is not entertainment. People should be very conscious that God is present, that he is Lord, and that he has given us the gift of marriage and each other. I want everybody to understand that so that the service can be a genuine response to God's grace.

#### **What about private weddings?**

If I hold a wedding outside the physical environment of the building that we normally call "church", I still follow very much the same format. That's not negotiable. Sometimes there are special circumstances when compassion dictates the need for flexibility. For example, I once took a ceremony at the hospital bedside of a dying parent because they needed to be at their children's wedding. There was no other way to do it, so the couple were married there.

#### **What place does Scripture have in a marriage ceremony?**

Scripture should always be read. If we take the Bible seriously as the Word of God, we know that God has some serious things to say about marriage. It sets the pattern for a life-long union, and I want the

couple and their parents to hear that. That's why I think it's better for the Bible to be read and the address given before the couple make their vows. I know it's fashionable in many weddings to have the vows first. The Anglican service does that. I have tried it that way and it doesn't work as well. The vows need to be said in a context, and the reading of Scripture and the preaching of the Word provides that context. In this way, the vows come as the climax of the service. That's why I like to have the Bible reading and the address first. Mind you, that may put a little more pressure on the bride and groom. They're usually quite nervous until they've said their vows. Finally, I don't mind who reads the Bible as long as they read it clearly, memorably and well.

#### **What's an appropriate address at a wedding?**

I think a wedding sermon should be shorter than normal, about 10 to 15 minutes. You need to keep the audience in mind all the time. They are not tuned in for a long message. The sermon also needs to be distinctively Christian, that is, full of the goods news of God's grace for sinners, as well as setting out God's demands for us.

Sometimes, it's appropriate for the bridal party to be seated at this point. That can be helpful at times, especially if any of them are feeling faint. I have had a couple of groomsmen pass out on me and that's a major distraction.

#### **What about music in the ceremony?**

The minister has the right to approve all the music that will be played. I am happy to take suggestions, but some music is unsuitable for Christian occasions. For example, I won't have Bette Midler's *The Rose*, and I draw the line at some of the mushy pop rubbish around at the moment.

But really, there's a fantastic wealth of Christian music available. Some of it is superb. One thing I should mention. Try to choose a hymn other than *O Perfect Love*; it's been done to death. Jackie and I chose *Amazing Grace* at our wedding because it was expressive of our faith. You should be able to find other suitable hymns as well.

#### **What about when one or both partners have been divorced?**

That's the hard question. People should be aware that divorce is a serious issue and that I'll want to discuss the reasons why their previous marriage broke down. I expect them to be honest and open about that. Sometimes I will not feel free to remarry a person if they have left their former partner and have committed adultery in the process. That's a cause of great concern to me and makes me feel very uneasy. But there are occasions where I will remarry divorcees who I think can be legit-

imately remarried on the basis of Scripture (eg Mt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15).

#### **Should ministers and organists be paid honorariums?**

Every congregation will have its own policy on these things. Some ministers and organists see it as a fee for service. Their charges vary considerably too, but it's usually around \$100. Others donate their fees to the Committee of Management to help missionaries or support FES students. Again, others provide their services voluntarily as a gift to the couple and as an opportunity to commend Christ. I don't think there is any standard practice. Everyone should be persuaded in his own mind. Having said that, I am always irked when I hear of clergy or organists who charge exorbitant fees, especially if they are in a fashionable church for weddings. Greed never commends the Gospel, and word does get around.

#### **Do you have any advice about receptions?**

Yes, make sure that Christ is honoured at the reception in the same way that he was in the service. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. People drink too much, say foolish things, and often read telegrams in very poor taste. I am offended where that occurs. A reception should be an occasion like the feast in Cana of Galilee where Jesus was present. It's a celebration in the presence of the Lord. Would you honestly read out some of the telegrams that I have had the misfortune to hear over the years if Jesus was there? And I hear too many put-downs and risqué stories about the so-called former wild days of the groom. All of that is unnecessary. The same goes for drinking stories of the groom and groomsmen. Use the reception to commend Christ. After all, that's where he first chose to reveal his glory.

*Dr Ron Keith is minister of St. Columbas, Castle Hill, NSW. He is also chairman of the Board of Presbyterian Aged Care, Sydney.* <sup>ap</sup>

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# prayer

## SEPTEMBER

- 21 Cecily Moar from Toowoomba West congregation, Qld, OMF missionary in Korea since 1974, working on Christian education materials in Brisbane while on medical leave, and hoping to revisit Korea.
- 22 Presbytery of Brisbane: 11 parishes, totalling 16 congregations with 890 communicants, 185 adherents, 395 children and youth, 77 elders, 8 retired ministers, 1 deaconess, 1 missionary; Guido Kettmiss clerk.
- 23 Redlands parish, Brisbane – Cleveland and 2 other congregations; about 85 communicants, 140 attenders, 8 elders; Brian and Annette Enchelmaier, Gordon and Railee Jackson.
- 24 An effective youth work throughout our parishes – the availability and training of leaders.
- 25 Classis Tasmania of the Reformed Churches of Australia, with congregations at Devonport, Hobart, Kingston, Launceston, Margate, Penguin, Smithton and Ulverstone.
- 26 Scots School, Bathurst, NSW – the students (around 300), staff and council; Adrian Lamrock principal.
- 27 Graham and Irene Haywood from Hurstville, NSW, working in PNG with Wycliffe Bible Translators (since 1972 – Maluc-Kilenge language) involved in administration at Ukarumpa and Lae.
- 28 The Presbyterian Mens' League (NSW – C. McGuirk, R. Packham), Men's Brotherhood (Vic. – J. Woodward, G. Bell) and ministry to men in all congregations.
- 29 Political and economic stability, the maintenance of religious liberty and advance of the gospel in Russia (155 million people) – 55% Orthodox, 33% non-religious, 9% Muslim, 1% Protestant.
- 30 Tuggeranong (Isabella Plains) parish, ACT; about 35 communicants, about

22 children and youth, 4 elders; striving to build bridges into its community; Tim and Leonie Abbey.

## OCTOBER

- 1 Phillippa Crossan from Ashfield congregation (European Christian Mission) working among migrants in Sydney through E.C.M. bookshop and English teaching.
- 2 Theological Education Committee, NSW – Bruce Christian convener, Heather Thompson secretary.
- 3 St Andrews, Townsville, including Cardwell; about 360 communicants, about 65 children and youth and 22 elders; Arch and Heather McNicol, Walter and Christine Jones.
- 4 The Victorian General Assembly meeting this week – Moderator (Rt Rev John S. Woodward), clerks (E. Pearsons and J. Wilson), business convener (G. Lawry); all members, debates and decisions.
- 5 Talua Ministry Training Centre, Vanuatu: Darrell and Margaret Thatcher, Joanne Cutler, Andrew and Rosemary Williamson (2000) and other staff and students – discipline, growth in biblical knowledge and skills and plans for Mission 2000 in NSW (Talua and PTC Sydney).
- 6 Presbytery of Central Coast, NSW: 5 parishes, with 800 communicants, 125 adherents, 195 children and youth and 53 elders; 5 retired ministers, 1 candidate. Neville Wilce clerk.
- 7 Heywood-Portland parish, western Victoria: about 70 communicants and 7 elders; Ian and Val Johnstone.
- 8 Alan and Laurelle Kilborn, Guildford NSW, chaplain to the deaf, and all work among the aurally impaired.
- 9 Melton parish, western Melbourne: about 25 communicants, about 35 children and youth and 1 elder; Peter and Ruth Owen.
- 10 Bible Society work in Australia: the full use of the available Scriptures in 43 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and 15 ongoing

translation projects.

- 11 Robyn Davies from Strathfield NSW, Wycliffe Bible Translator (Ramoaina language), returned from furlough along with Lisbeth Fritzel as they work on the Luke video soundtrack and reestablish routines with colleagues Apep and David.
- 12 Presbytery of Tasmania: 6 parishes, 5 special (home mission) parishes totalling 19 congregations with 970 communicants, 450 adherents, 560 children and youth and 61 elders; 3 retired ministers. David Turner clerk.
- 13 Len and Wendy Pearce from Reservoir congregation, working among ethnic folk in Melbourne, including prison and hospitality ministry.
- 14 Theological education in Brisbane: Ian McIver, Guido Kettmiss and others as they discuss joint work with the Westminster Presbyterian Church.
- 15 Croydon Hills parish, eastern Melbourne: about 30 communicants and 2 elders; Richard and Rosemary O'Brien.
- 16 Central Sydney church which began in February 1999 and meets in a public school at Newtown, ministering to 7 suburbs where many university students live; David and Kathy Thurston, Paul and Melinda Spackman.
- 17 The Presbyterian Inland Mission Board, based in Queensland. Jack Knapp convener; Gordon Dunkley secretary.
- 18 St Andrews parish, Newcastle NSW: about 140 communicants, about 20 children and youth and 12 elders; Duncan and Pamela Blakey, Neville and Joan Aubrey.
- 19 Marilyn Schache from Manly/Lota congregation, Brisbane, literacy worker with Pioneers at Tari PNG, while her husband Andrew looks after property maintenance.
- 20 Bondi parish, Sydney: about 30 communicants and 3 elders; John and Katie Graham and the outreach to the many local Jewish people.

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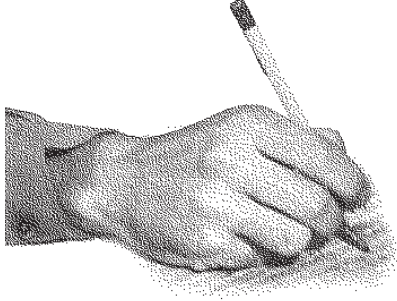
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# letters



## False theologians

I wish to thank Russell Lander for the good insights he offered into the problems of prosperity gospel in his article "God's Curse" (*AP*, August). It is a wide-reaching problem in our churches and is proving detrimental to the heart of the good news of Jesus.

Certainly we have seen the popularisation of this "other" gospel in many churches through the mediums of early morning TV, seminars and books. But one small point, if I may. Russell says that "According to some well-known charismatic theologians, a life of obedience to Christ is a passport to riches and prosperity."

I trust that Russell is using the term "theologians" in the loosest possible sense. My guess is that he is referring to several popular Pentecostal faith teachers, such as Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin. Sadly, to a lot of people, these fellows do function as "theologians". For the sake of presenting a balanced case, I direct Russell to the work of AOG scholar Gordon Fee (*The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*) and Australian Apostolic churchman Gary Althorp (*The Devil's Playground: the Church*). Both these Pentecostal Bible teachers, well-known and respected, actively campaign against prosperity teaching. These are but two of a whole swag of respected Pentecostal and charismatic theologians whom I know adamantly reject the "gospel" of gold-plated dog kennels and weekly facelifts.

In truth, all believers are "theologians", but I think to serve Russell's purpose, he could have chosen his words a little more carefully at this point. We need to be thankful to God for those Bible teachers within the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions who uphold the gospel of grace without the slightest whisperings of prosperity doctrine.

*Adriaan Schepel  
Somersby, NSW*

## Rising crime

Victoria's escalating crime rates, especially witnessed in the dramatic increase of rapes and other violent assaults, stresses more than ever the illogical foolishness of abandoning tough deterrents such as adequate censorship of excessively violent movies like *South Park*, proper jail terms and capital punishment.

*Luke Martin  
Cranbourne, Vic.*

## Passing the baton

Ralph Winter's short and simple article on retirement ("A Dead End", *AP* August) is high on theory but low on practicality and indeed, on Biblical interpretation. He seems to forget that the Lord brought Paul's ministry to a rather abrupt end about the current retirement age, and that when we read (Deut 34:7) that "Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone" this is seen to be the exception rather than the rule.

There comes a time when God's servants by reason of mental and physical fatigue can no longer cope with the exigencies of full-time ministry today, and in the interests of the further growth of the church they should lay aside their work.

In my address at our last congregational meeting in Armidale in March 1998, I said "Some say I am too young to retire. No. But I am young enough to realise that I am too old to continue in a leadership position ... I am still sufficiently in touch with the young and growing church to realise that I am out of touch."

Some of us may not appreciate this and continue in a position of authority when we are too old and cannot or will not see that for the furtherance of the gospel we should let another take responsibility. It takes grace to acknowledge that a younger fellow will do a better job than we are doing.

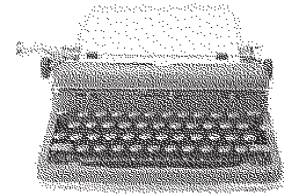
In my first Presbytery in Australia we had six retired ministers and six of us who were active in pastoral ministry. The retired men ruled the roost. Those to whom the ongoing work in the parishes had been entrusted contributed little. We tended to be backward rather than forward looking.

On sessions too we may have elders who cannot see that they are no longer in touch with what is happening in the life of today's church, while they insist that no-one else is able to do the job. They remain out there on the playing field, supposedly leading the team, oblivious to the fact that on the sidelines there are younger men who would do a far better job. Sadly, these younger men may one day lose patience

and slip off to another church where they will be given responsibility, leaving the Presbyterian Church so much the poorer.

It is of course true that if we are called of God we may never fully retire. Other areas of ministry open up within the church and community. I am looking forward right now to preaching at least 25 sermons in the next 20 weeks. but am very happy to let the excellent younger men who are active in ministry within the church today get on with the job of setting the pace, and leading us on into a glorious future.

*Charles Abel  
Minister Emeritus  
Former NSW moderator*



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# What a pity

*When self-service is the slowest way*

Self-pity in suffering is the taste left after your sacrifice goes unadmired. There are two ways to get rid of it. One is to make sure you get admiration. The other is to make no sacrifices. Or could there be a third way? Like seeing the sacrifice in a new way?

Take being a pastor, for example. Are there sacrifices? Is there any suffering? Well, that depends. Let me tell you a story that has punched (for a season, at least) the air out of my self-pity.

Irving Hetherington was born on 23 July 1809 in Scotland. He became a preacher in 1835 and felt called to leave Scotland for missions in Australia. He wondered if his fiancée would go with him. Her name was Jessie Carr, and she said, "Where you wish to take me, there I wish to go." They sailed for Sydney on 24 March 1837, aboard the John Barry, immediately after their wedding.

In the first week of May, Jessie developed a sore throat, then the dreaded fever. "Have you no fear of death, Jessie?" Irving asked. "No, dear," she replied. "And how is it that you are-not afraid to die?" he asked. "I have long taken Christ for my portion and set my hopes on Him," she said. Irving wept. Jessie died that night, and in the morning they buried her at sea.

In Sydney, alone, Hetherington was assigned to a district 50 miles long and 30 miles wide. He rode a horse to his little groups of believers in rain and heat. When



*John Piper*

a drought weakened the horse, he walked. He tried to study on the way and get his sermons ready. His biographer tells the following story. "One Saturday night he had to walk 30 miles; and, after climbing a hill, and while resting on a log at the summit, the idea of ministers in Scotland complaining of being Mondayish after two services, and without other fatigue, struck him as so ludicrous that he could not help bursting out into a loud guffaw of laughter, which sounded strange in the darkness and loneliness of the bush."

What this powerful story did for me was to put the pressures of my ministry into missionary and biblical perspective. How easy it is to begin to assume that I should be comfortable. How quickly I can start to expect an easy and hassle-free ministry.

But I tell missionaries just the opposite. Life is war. Life is stress: the language-learning is stress; the culture is stress; the food is stress, the kids' education is stress; relationships are stress. Get ready for incar-

nation and crucifixion.

Yet here in America, where everybody speaks English and eats pizza, I bellyache over an extra meeting, an ill-timed hospital call, and too many choices. Then I read of Irving Hetherington, and I think of "normal" missionary life. I see my "sacrifices" in a new way. I recall Jesus' rebuke of Peter's pitiful, "Behold, we have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10:28). Jesus was not impressed by the sacrifice. He said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mk 10:29-30).

Before the words of Jesus and the example of Irving Hetherington, my self-pity goes up the chimney. And in its place? A passion to have the mind of Christ. "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many... It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Mt. 20:28, Acts 20:35, RSV).

*John Piper is minister of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. This article is an extract from A Godward Life (Oregon: Multnomah Press Sisters, 1997).* <sup>ap</sup>

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