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THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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Top of the hit parade

If you scan an up-to-date religious periodicals index you may notice the relative scarcity of articles on idolatry – modern idolatry, that is. This is quite odd, especially when you realise that idolatry is treated as the most pervasive spiritual problem in the Bible. It's the No 1 sin in the Law and the Prophets. Why is it, then, that for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions of all when we are discussing the spiritual forces that endanger us?

The fact is that other dangers seem more pressing. Adultery, stealing, lying and murder are more dramatic and concrete sins than idolatry and have the potential to get us into far more immediate trouble. Perhaps that's why we see idolatry as something remote from us, a spiritual problem that exists only in primitive societies. We are reasonably sure that we shall never feel any strong urge to set up an idol and bow down to it. So what need is there today for a commandment prohibiting idolatry?

Much. That fact that there are so few books and popular religious magazines devoted to exposing idolatry in modern evangelical literature serves as a warning. It is easy for a whole generation of Bible-believing Christians to fall prey to the spirit of the age. Idols are like moving targets. They never stand still. Centuries ago peo-



Robert Benn

ple found security, meaning and power in stone and wooden figurines. Today we look to heroes, politics, management, computers, marketing, psychology, money and medicine for the same things.

The essence of idolatry is to ascribe to some created thing or concept functions, power and meaning that only the true God can provide. Accordingly it's possible to have a vast number of potential idols. They can be objects, such as houses, cars or share portfolios. Attaining these things or increasing them can become the very reason for our existence; we live for them rather than for God.

Again, idols can be activities such as a sport, like football or golf, or a career. People can approach these with a religious fervour and are prepared to make such costly sacrifices as their family or their

health, when these "gods" demand more and more of their time and commitment.

Alternatively, idols can take the form of an institution like a political party, club or association which give us a sense of identity and security which we should only be seeking in God. People who trust in Marxist ideology to recreate an Eden-like paradise for humanity, or those who rely on capitalism and free-market economics to do the same trick are both idolaters. They have forgotten that the historical process is governed by God, and that true social renewal can only occur when the Spirit of God renews an individual's heart.

How, then, are we meant to overcome idolatry? According to Paul knowledge alone is not enough (1 Cor. 8:7). While it's theologically true that the "gods" and "lords" which rule us are actually "nothing at all" (1 Cor. 8:4), these "gods" and "lords" are nevertheless present, real and powerful to our imaginations if we have been brought up to trust in them. Consciously confessing the one God in "trinity" is no guarantee that we have cleaned out of the storerooms of our imaginations all the influences and desires that lead us into idolatry. Orthodox Christians can be at church twice on Sundays yet living for their career all week long.

A greater love for God must win us over and gain control of our imaginations. Only as we come to value the surpassing worth of the love, glory, majesty and holiness of God will we overcome the power of our imaginations to turn lies into truth and fiction into reality.

This issue of *Australian Presbyterian* is meant to probe the inner life of our denomination. Calling ourselves "reformed" is no guarantee that our hearts are free from idols. As both Paul Tripp and David Powlinson point out, idolatry is insidious and occurs in the most unexpected places. We will only be safe in a church when we practice the Protestant principle "ecclesia semper reformanda" - the church must always be reforming.

Robert Benn
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Idol thoughts

Idolatry takes many forms. All involve dissatisfaction with God.

Visualise the Sydney Harbour Bridge on New Year's Eve. Remember the climax of the fireworks extravaganza? One word – *eternity* – flashed forth. It was rather like the altar to an unknown god – in a city full of idols.

Paul saw images and idols aplenty in the Athens of his day. But Sydney? Full of idols? What do I mean? Buddhist idols in Chinese restaurants? Statues of Mary? Saints in stained-glass windows? If we stretch the word idol a bit we might include “worship” services at football grounds where “the congregation” sing such “hymns” as *When the Saints Come Marching In*. Add to the gods of sport so-called pop idols. Then there's Fred who spends his life looking after his car. Jill lives in front of the TV. Peter spends every spare moment on the Internet. Aren't these also forms of idolatry?

The most familiar idols in the Bible are material objects like the golden calf. It is this kind that Isaiah lampoons in Isaiah 44. A man makes an idol out of wood and worships it. Then he uses the rest of the wood to fuel his fire. The Old Testament repeatedly warns against idolatry. The concern is with images of gods and goddesses



Michael Wilson

made out of wood, gold, silver and other materials.

But idolatry is not merely tied up with manufactured images. Jesus castigated his contemporaries for being “a wicked and adulterous generation” (Mt. 12:30). He is using language familiar from the Old Testament, where idolatry is especially presented as spiritual adultery. When Israel hankered after idols, God declared: “The land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord” (Hos. 1:2).

Now here's a striking thing! By Jesus' time the Jews had completely succeeded in eradicating physical idols. Nevertheless, Jesus regards his compatriots as thoroughly idolatrous. Why? In Matthew 12:39 Jesus declared, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign.” Here he

takes us to the heart of spiritual adultery, to the core of idolatry. God had revealed himself conclusively to the Jews in Jesus. But the Jews were not satisfied with this. They wanted to access reality through another route – they sought a miraculous sign. So, first and foremost, *idolatry is a rejection of God made known*.

My children do not know a friend of my youth. It is preposterous to say they reject my friend because they don't seek a relationship with him. People can only commit idolatry if they are rejecting what they already know. Thus many find it hard to see themselves as idolaters. They know so little of the God of the Bible.

But, as Romans 1 shows, God, the Creator-Lord, has plainly revealed himself to all people in creation. Intellectual problems may be genuine. But they have never stopped people from knowing God. The fundamental problem is moral. Inexcusably, people prefer “a lie” to the revealed “truth”. They prefer to worship created things rather than the Creator. Paul also portrays idolatry as a rejection of God made known.

John's first epistle climaxes with this command: “Dear children, keep yourselves

from idols" (1 Jn 5:21). John has in mind everything he has previously said. In verse 20 he calls Jesus "the true God and eternal life". He says Jesus came "so that we may know him who is true", that is God. For John too idolatry is a rejection of God made known.

The Golden Calf reveals the same principle. The Israelites bowed down before it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you up out of Egypt" (Ex. 32:8). But God introduced the Ten Commandments with these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt" (Ex. 20:2). When the Israelites made the golden calf they turned their backs on this revelation.

Consider the Ten Commandments themselves. Remember, the spotlight first falls on God made known. In the first two commands, God prohibits his people from getting their understanding of life from rival sources – idols. For, in the ancient world people sought guidance from various gods by means of such idols. By contrast, God has revealed himself in his name. Hence the third command. To blaspheme God's name means to reject God's revelation of himself. The fourth command required the Israelites to set aside the sabbath to remember God's revelation of himself as Creator (Ex. 20:11) and Rescuer (Deut. 5:15). The fifth command follows on. Parents were the custodians of God's revelation. It is their job to pass on this revelation to their children and grandchildren (Deut. 6:7-9).

Central to the Ten Commandments, then, is the greatness of God's self-revelation. Nothing must spoil this. Idolatry must be banned because, first and foremost, it is a rejection of God made known.

God has clearly made himself known in Christ. We can know him through his Word, the Scriptures. At its most basic level idolatry takes place when people have a worldview or belief system that replaces this revelation.

Some popular ways of talking about idolatry are off track. A person spends an inordinate amount of time and money on his motor bike. People say, "That bike is Jim's idol." Many sit for hours on end in front of the TV screen. We say, "There they are, worshipping at the family shrine!" Such things may well be symptoms of deep spiritual problems. However, we cloud the issue when we simplistically refer to such preoccupations as idols. Idolatry rejects revelation. Idolatry substitutes a worldview which clashes with what God has made known about himself.



New Year's Eve fireworks over the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Not only non-Christians are guilty of idolatry. Christians commit idolatry when they venerate a Christ who does not match the Christ of the Bible. Consider how much Christ spoke about hell, yet many Christians find such a Christ uncomfortable. They prefer to live with a Christ who says only positive things. This is idolatry – a rejection of God made known in Christ.

Such a rejection results in a degraded view of humanity. We saw this in Romans 1. People swap "the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of corruptible man". The movie *The Bicentennial Man* concerns itself with the question: what is essential humanity? The philosophy presented intersects with many contemporary per-

spectives. There is not a whisper about God in the movie. *The Bicentennial Man* promotes idolatry. It is blind to God's self-revelation in Christ. Jesus is the True Man. He embodies humanity as God intended it.

Take also the common reliance on a combination of science and magic. Margaret Wertheim recently summarised a 1991 Gallup poll of American beliefs: 52 per cent believe in astrology, 35 per cent in ghosts, 19 per cent in witches, 42 per cent in communication with the dead and 46 per cent in extrasensory perception. Postmodern thinking still venerates science but is more sensitive to its limitations. Now where science and reason leave off, magic kicks in. But underlying all of this is a rejection of God's self-revelation.

The Bible does condemn the idolatry of the world. But it especially attacks idolatry among God's people. Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians, "Flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14).

Many Christians are not content to base their lives on God's word but want special guidance and supernatural insights. For example, they wait till they feel good about a course of action. They believe this feeling comes from God. Often this is presented as if it represented a higher spirituality. In fact, it constitutes yet another species of idolatry. It is a failure to be satisfied with God as he has chosen to make himself known.

Avoidance of idolatry is not achieved by following a list of don'ts. There is only one way to conquer idolatry – to delight in God. A man or woman who delights in his or her spouse will not be tempted to commit adultery. The person who is thoroughly satisfied with God will not commit spiritual adultery. All idolatry implies dissatisfaction with God.

Be careful here. Idolaters may believe they are satisfied with the gods they have adopted. Spiritual satisfaction is the guarantee, it is delight in *God made known*. It is taking supreme pleasure in the God known to us in Scripture alone. The opposite of idolatry is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" (Westminster Shorter Catechism).

Yes, Sydney is a city full of idols. So is almost every other settlement in Australia. The God of the Bible is a God to be enjoyed "forever". When you think of *eternity* flashing forth, delight in the God of eternity. Delight in Jesus who is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Michael Wilson is a Presbyterian minister in Sydney. He has an masters degree in theology for which the research area was idolatry in Paul's writing.

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Insights from idolatry

Nature, nurture or the Bible? In fact, it's all three.

One of the great questions facing Christians in the social sciences and helping professions is how do we legitimately and meaningfully connect the Bible and Christian tradition with the insights of the behavioural sciences? Within this perennial question, two particular sub-questions have long intrigued and perplexed me.

One sort of question is a Bible-relevancy question. Why is idolatry so important in the Bible? Idolatry is by far the most discussed problem in the Scriptures. So what? Is the problem of idolatry even relevant today, except on certain mission fields where worshippers still bow to images?

The second kind of question is a counselling question, a “psychology” question. How do we make sense of the myriad significant factors that shape and determine human behaviour? In particular, can we ever make satisfying sense of the fact that people are simultaneously inner-directed and socially shaped?

These questions – and their answers – eventually intertwined. That intertwining has been fruitful both in my personal life and in my counselling of troubled people.

Motivation and conditioning: The relevance of massive chunks of Scripture hangs on our understanding of idolatry. But let me focus the question through a particular verse in the New Testament, which long troubled me. The last line of 1 John, woos then commands us: “Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). In a 105-verse treatise on living in vital fellowship with Jesus, the Son of God, how on earth does that unexpected command merit being the final word? Is it perhaps a scribal emendation? Is it an awkward *faux pas* by a writer who typically weaves dense and orderly tapestries of meaning with simple, repetitive language? Is it a culture-bound, practical application tacked on to the end of one of the most timeless and heaven-dwelling epistles? Each of these alternatives misses the integrity and power of John’s final words.

Instead, John’s last line properly leaves us with that most basic question which God continually poses to each human heart. Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart’s trust, pre-occupation, loyalty, service, fear and



David Powlison

delight? It is a question bearing on the immediate motivation for one’s behaviour, thoughts, and feelings. In the Bible’s conceptualisation, the motivation question is the lordship question.

Who or what “rules” my behaviour, the Lord or a substitute? The undesirable answers to this question—answers which inform our understanding of the “idolatry” we are to avoid – are most graphically presented in 1 John 2:15-17,3:7-10,4:1-6, and 5:19. It is striking how these verses portray a confluence of the “sociological”, the “psychological”, and the “demonological” perspectives on idolatrous motivation.

The inwardness of motivation is captured by the inordinate and proud “desires of the flesh” (1 John 2:16), our inertial self-centredness, the wants, hopes, fears, expectations, “needs” that crowd our hearts. The externality of motivation is captured by “the world” (1 John 2:15-17,4:1-6), all that invites, models, reinforces, and conditions us into such inertia, teaching us lies. The “demonological” dimension of motivation is the Devil’s behaviour-determining lordship (1 John 3:7-10,5:19), standing as a ruler over his kingdom of flesh and world.

In contrast, to “keep yourself from idols” is to live with a whole heart of faith in Jesus. It is to be controlled by all that lies behind the address “Beloved children” (see especially 1 John 3:1-3,4:7-5:12). The alternative to Jesus, the swarm of alternatives, whether approached through the lens of flesh, world, or the Evil One, is idolatry.

An internal problem: The notion of idolatry most often emerges in discussions of the worship of actual physical images, the creation of false gods. But the Scriptures develop the idolatry theme in at least two major directions pertinent to my discussion here. First, the Bible internalises the problem. “Idols of the heart” are graph-

ically portrayed in Ezekiel 14:1-8. The worship of tangible idols is, ominously, an expression of a prior heart defection from YHWH your God. “Idols of the heart” is only one of many metaphors, which move the locus of God’s concerns into the human heart, establishing an unbreakable bond between specifics of heart and specifics of behaviour: hands, tongue, and all the other members.

The First Great Commandment, to “love God heart, soul, mind, and might,” also demonstrates the essential “inwardness” of the law regarding idolatry. The language of love, trust, fear, hope, seeking, serving – terms describing a relationship to the true God – is continually used in the Bible to describe our false loves, false trusts, false fears, false hopes, false pursuits, false masters. If “idolatry” is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then “desires” (*epithumiai*) is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for the same drift. Both are shorthand for the problem of human beings.

The New Testament language of problematic “desires” is a dramatic expansion of the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting (*epithumia*). The tenth commandment is also a command that internalises the problem of sin, making sin “psychodynamic”. It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes it in Romans 7. Interestingly (and unsurprisingly) the New Testament merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires. Idolatry becomes a problem of the heart, a metaphor for human lust, craving, yearning, and greedy demand.

A social problem: Second, the Bible treats idolatry as a central feature of the social context, “the world,” which shapes and moulds us. The world is a “Vanity Fair,” as John Bunyan strikingly phrased it in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan’s entire book, and the Vanity Fair section in particular, can be seen as portraying the interaction of powerful, enticing, and intimidating social shapers of behaviour with the self-determining tendencies of Christian’s own heart. Will Christian serve the Living God or any of a fluid multitude of idols crafted by his wife, neighbours, acquaintances, ene-

mies, fellow members of idolatrous human society ... and, ultimately, his own heart?

That idolatries are both generated from within and insinuated from without has provocative implications for contemporary counselling questions. Of course, the Bible does not tackle our contemporary issues in psychological jargon or using our observational data. Yet, for example, the Bible lacks the rich particulars of what psychologists today might describe as a “dysfunctional family or marital system” only because it does not put those particular pieces of human behaviour and mutual influence under the microscope. The “lack” is only in specific application. The biblical categories do comprehend how individuals in a family system—or any other size or kind of social grouping—work and influence one another for good or ill. For example, the life patterns often labelled “codependency” are more precisely and penetratingly understood as instances of “co-idolatry”. In the case of a “co-idolatrous relationship”, then, two people’s typical idol patterns reinforce and compete with each other. They fit together in an uncanny way, creating massively destructive feedback loops.

The classic alcoholic husband and rescuing wife are enslaved within an idol system whose components complement each other all too well. There are many possible configurations to this common pattern of false gods. In one typical configuration, the idol constellation in the husband’s use of alcohol might combine a ruling and enslaving love of pleasure, the escapist pursuit of a false saviour from the pains and frustrations in his life, playing the angry and self-righteous judge of his wife’s clinging and dependent ways, the self-crucifying of his periodic remorse, a trust in man which seeks personal validation through acceptance by his bar companions, and so forth.

The idol pattern in the wife’s rescuing behaviour might combine playing the martyred saviour of her husband and family, playing the proud and self-righteous judge of her husband’s iniquity, a trust in man which overvalues the opinions of her friends, a fear of man which generates an inordinate desire for a male’s love and affection as crucial to her survival, and so forth. Each of their idols (and consequent behaviour, thoughts, and emotions) is “logical” within the idol system, the miniature Vanity Fair of allurements and threats within which both live. Their idols sometimes are modelled, taught, and encouraged by the other person(s) involved: her nagging and his anger mirror and magnify each other; his bar buddies and her girlfriends reinforce their respective self-righteousness and self-pity. The idols sometimes are reactive and compensatory to the other person:

he reacts to her nagging with drinking, and she reacts to her drinking by trying to rescue and to change him. Vanity Fair is an ever so tempting ... hell on earth.

Spiritual counterfeits: Idols counterfeit aspects of God’s identity and character, as can be seen in the vignette above: Judge, saviour, source of blessing, sin-bearer, object of trust, author of a will which must be obeyed, and so forth. Each idol that clusters in the system makes false promises and gives false warnings: “if only ... then ...” For example, the wife’s “enabling” behaviour expresses an idolatrous playing of the saviour. This idol promises and warns her, “If only you can give the right thing and can make it all better, then your husband will change. But if you don’t cover for him, then disaster will occur.”

Because both the promises and warnings are lies, service to each idol results in misery and accursedness. Idols lie, enslave, and murder. They are continually insinuated by the one who was a liar, slave master and murderer from the beginning.

The simple picture of idolatry – a worshipper prostrated before a figure of wood, metal or stone – is powerfully extended by the Bible. Idolatry becomes a concept with which to comprehend the intricacies of both individual motivation and social conditioning. The idols of the heart lead us to defect from God in many ways. They manifest and express themselves everywhere, down to the minute details of both inner and outer life.

In sum, behavioural sins are always portrayed in the Bible as “motivated” or ruled by a “god” or “gods”. The problem in human motivation – the question of practical covenantal allegiance, God or any of the substitutes – is frequently and usefully portrayed as the problem of idolatry. Idolatry is a problem both rooted deeply in the human heart and powerfully impinging on us from our social environment.

This brings us squarely to the second kind of question mentioned at the outset. This second question is a consoling question. How on earth do we put together the following three things? First, people are responsible for their behavioural sins. Whether called sin, personal problems, or dysfunctional living, people are responsible for the destructive things which they think, feel and do – if I am violent or fearful, that is my problem.

Second, people with problems come from families or marriages or sub-cultures where the other people involved also have problems. People suffer and are victimised and misguided by the destructive things other people think, want, fear, value, feel, and do. These may be subtle environmental influences: social shaping via modelling of attitudes and the like. These may be acutely

traumatic influences: loss or victimisation. My problems are often embedded in a tight feedback loop with your problems. If you attack me, I tend to strike back or withdraw in fear. *Your problem* shapes my problems. Third, behaviour is motivated from the inside by complex, life-driving patterns of thoughts, desires of the world, and the like, of which a person may be almost wholly unaware. We may be quite profoundly self-deceived about what pilots and propels us. My behavioural violence or avoidance manifests patterns of expectation that own me. “You might hurt me so I’d better keep my distance or attack first.” My behaviour is a strategy which expresses I: my trusts, my wants, my fears, my “felt needs”. Such motives range along a spectrum from the consciously calculating to the blindly compulsive.

How are we – and those we counsel – simultaneously socially conditioned, self-deceived, and responsible for our behaviour without any factor cancelling out the others? That is *the* question of the social and behavioural sciences (and it is the place they all fail when they excise God). It is also *the* question that any Christian counsellor must attempt to answer both in theory and practice in a way that reflects Christ’s mind. The Bible’s view of man – both individual and social life – alone holds these things together.

A three-way tension: Motives are simply what move us, the causes of or inducements to action, both the causal “springs” of life and the telic “goals” of life. The notion of motivation captures the inward-drivenness and goal-oriented nature of human life in its most important and troublesome features. All psychologies grapple with these issues. But no psychology has conceptual resources adequate to make sense of the interface between responsible behaviour, a shaping social milieu, and a heart, which is both self-deceived and life determining.

Here are some examples. Moralism – the working psychology of the proverbial man on the street – sticks with responsible behaviour, underplaying complex causes. Behavioural psychologies see both drives and rewards but cast their lot with the milieu, taking drives as untransformable givens. Both responsible behaviour and a semi-conscious but renewable heart are muted. Humanistic psychologies see the interplay of inner desire/need with external fulfilment or frustration but cast their final vote for human self-determination. Both responsible behaviour and the power of extrinsic forces are muted. Ego psychologies see the twisted conflict between heart’s desire and well-internalised social contingencies. But the present milieu and respon-

sible behaviour are muted. It is hard to keep three seemingly simple elements together.

Unity 'with respect to God': The Bible – the voice of the Maker of humankind, in other words – speaks to the same set of issues with a uniquely unified vision. There is no question that we are morally responsible: our works or fruit count. There is no question that fruit comes from an inner root to which we are often blind. "Idols of the heart", "desires of the flesh", "fear of man", "love of money", "chasing after...", "earthly-minded", "pride", and a host of other word pictures capture well the biblical view of inner drives experienced as deceptively self-evident needs or goals.

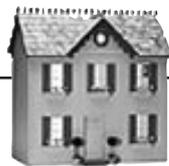
There is also no question that we are powerfully constrained by social forces around us. The "world," "Vanity Fair," "the counsel of the wicked," "false prophets," "temptation and trial," and the like capture something of the influences upon us. Other people model and purvey false laws or false standards, things which misdefine

nomenon that the human sciences pursue. It is encountered and observed in actual life as an intrinsically binary phenomenon: faith or idolatry. The only unitary point in human motives is the old theological construct: human beings are worshipping creatures, willy-nilly. Seeing this, the Bible's view alone can unify the seemingly contradictory elements in the explanation of behaviour.

The deep question of motivation is not "What is motivating me?" The final question is, "Who is the master of this pattern of thought, feeling, or behaviour?" In the biblical view, we are religious, inevitably bound to one god or another. People do not have needs. We have masters, lords, gods, be they oneself, other people, valued objects, Satan. The metaphor of an *idolatrous* heart and society capture the fact that human motivation bears an automatic relationship to God: Who, other than the true God, is my god? Let me give two examples, one dear to the heart of behaviourists and

biological or psychological. Perhaps my father modelled identical attitudes. Perhaps my mother used food to get love and to quell anxiety. Perhaps they went through the Great Depression and experienced severe privation, which has left its mark on them and made food a particular object of anxiety. Perhaps food has always been my family's drug of choice. Perhaps food is the medium through which love, happiness, anger and power are expressed. Perhaps I am bombarded with provocative food advertisements. The variations and permutations are endless.

Membership in the society of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam ensures that we will each be a food idolater in one way or another. Membership in American consumer society shapes that idolatry into typical forms. A complex system of idolatrous values can be attached to food. For example, we characteristically lust for a great variety of foodstuffs. Food plays a role in



value and stigma, blessedness and accursedness, the way of life, and the way of death. They sin against us. God quite comfortably juxtaposes these three simple things which tend to fly apart in human formulations. I am responsible for my sins: "Johnny is a bad boy." My will is in bondage: "Johnny can't help it." I am deceived and led about by others: "Johnny got in with a bad crowd." How can these be simultaneously true?

The answer, which all the psychologies and psychologies miss, is actually quite simple. Human motivation is always "with respect to God". The social and behavioural sciences miss this because they themselves are idolatrously motivated. In a massive irony, they build into their charter and methodology a blindness to the essential nature of their subject matter.

Human motivation is intrinsic neither to the individual nor to human society. Human motivation is never strictly psychological or psyche-social or psyche-social-somatic. It is not strictly either psychodynamic or sociological or biological or any combination of these. These terms are at best metaphors for components in a unitary phenomenon, which is essentially religious or covenantal. Motivation is always God-relational.

Thus human motivation is not essentially the sort of unitary species-wide phe-

the other dear to the heart of humanistic psychologists.

Hunger as idolatry: When a "hunger drive" propels my life or a segment of my life, I am actually engaging in religious behaviour. I – "the flesh" – have become my own god, and food has become the object of my will, desires, and fears. The Bible observes the same mass of motives which the behavioural sciences see as a "primary drive". Something biological is certainly going on. Something psychological, and even sociological, is going on. But the Bible's conceptualisation differs radically. I am not "hunger-driven". I am "hunger-driven-rather-than-God-driven".

We are meant to relate to food by thankfully eating what we know we have received and by sharing generously. I am an active idolater when normal hunger pangs are the wellspring of problem behaviour and attitudes. Normal desires tend to become inordinate and enslaving. The various visible sins which can attend such an idolatry – gluttony, anxiety, thanklessness, food obsessions and "eating disorders," irritability when dinner is delayed, angling to get the bigger piece of pie, miserliness, eating to feel good, and the like – make perfect sense as outworkings of the idol that constrains my heart. Problem behaviour roots in the heart and has to do with God.

The idolatries inhabiting our relations with food, however, are as social as they are

the images of beauty and strength, which we serve, in desires for health and fears of death. Food – the quantities and types prepared, the modes of preparation and consumption – is a register of social status. Membership in a famished Ethiopian society would have shaped the generic idolatry into different typical forms. Membership in the micro-society of my family further particularises the style of food idolatry: for example, perhaps in our family system hunger legitimised irritability, and eating was salvific, delivering us from destroying our family with anger. Yet in all these levels of social participation, my individuality is not lost. I put my own idiosyncratic stamp on food idolatry. For example, perhaps I am peculiarly enslaved to Fritos when tense and peculiarly nervous about whether red food dyes are carcinogenic!

In convicting us of our false trusts and acknowledging the potency of the pressures on us, the Scriptures again offer us the liberating alternative of knowing the Lord.

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The traumatic teens

Parental idols can make adolescence much more difficult.

If we are ever to be effective for Christ in the lives of our teenagers, it is important to be honest about our own idols – the places where we have tended to exchange worship and service of the Creator for worship and service of created things. Too often when we seek to understand the struggles of adolescence, we only look at teenagers and their problems. In reality, it is time for us to take a look inside and ask, “What really rules our hearts?”

Now, surely, every Christian parent would spontaneously give the correct theological answer. We are God’s children. He rules our hearts. Or does he? This is not about a theological affirmation, but about our day-to-day worship. At the level where the rubber meets the road – in the bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, and hallways of life – what really controls our hearts?

Start with your heart

It is a waste of time for us as parents to think about strategies for parenting our teens without first examining ourselves. If our hearts are controlled by something other than God, we will not view the golden parenting opportunities of the teen years as opportunities at all. Instead they will be a constant stream of irritating hassles brought on by an incredibly self-centered person who is neither adult nor child, but who has the uncanny ability to make even the most unimportant moments of our lives chaotic.

The cynicism of our culture toward teenagers not only reveals something about who teenagers are, but what we as parents are serving. Our hearts blind us to the opportunities all around us during the teen years. There is an important principle here that is taught all through Scripture, but enunciated most clearly in Ezekiel 14:4: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him in keeping with his great idolatry.”

Let me put this passage in my own words. The leaders of Israel have come to God to hear his words to them, but as they come, God recognises that their hearts have been captured by idols. So, God says, “Because there are idols in your hearts, the only thing that I am interested in talking



Paul Tripp

about is your idolatry.” Why? There is a little phrase here that clues us in. God says that when a person sets up an idol in his heart, he also puts “a wicked stumbling block before his face”. The principle revealed here is the principle of inescapable influence. What controls my heart will control my life. An idol of the heart will always put a wicked stumbling block before my face.

Imagine that you have placed your hand, with fingers narrowly separated, in front of your face. When you attempt to look through your fingers, your vision is obstructed. As long as your hand is in front of your face, no matter where you turn to look, your vision will be altered by your fingers. So it is with an idol in my heart. It will exercise inescapable influence over my life. Wherever I go, whatever I am doing, the idol will influence what I do and how I do it. This is the reason God says, “It makes no sense for me to talk about anything else, because whatever I say somehow, some way, will be used to serve the idol that rules your heart. Therefore, I want to deal with your idolatry. That is my priority.”

We cannot ignore this central issue. I am deeply persuaded that our idols have caused us to see opportunity as trial and caused us to strike back at our teenagers with bitter words of judgment, accusation, and condemnation, behaving toward them with intolerance and anger. While God is calling us to love, accept, forgive, and serve, we are often barely able to be nice.

Let’s consider some typical parental idols and the way they shape our responses to our teens.

The idol of comfort

Secretly in our hearts, many of us want life to be a resort. A resort is a place where you are the one who is served. Your needs come first, and you only do what you want

to do when you want to do it. The only demands you deal with in a resort are the demands you put on yourself. At a resort, you live with a sense of entitlement. You’ve paid your money, and you have the right to expect certain things. I am afraid that many of us live for comfort and bring this entitlement mentality to our parenting. We reason that we have the right to quiet, harmony, peace, and respect, and we respond in anger when we do not get it.

Scripture warns us that life is far from being a resort. Life is war. This is clearly demonstrated in the teen years. I have said to my teenagers many times as they are leaving home, “There is a war out there; it is being fought on the turf of your heart. It is being fought for the control of your soul.” The tumult, chaos, and unrest of the teen years are not only the result of significant biological changes taking place, but because of a dramatic spiritual war going on as well.

Parents who demand comfort, ease, regularity, peace, space, quiet, and harmony will be ill-equipped for this war. They will begin to see their teenager as the enemy. They will begin to fight with him rather than for him and, even worse, they will tend to forget the true nature of the battle and the identity of the real enemy. They will act out of frustrated desire, doing and saying regrettable things, and they will fail to be effective and productive in those strategic moments of ministry in which God has placed them.

The idol of respect

The father had stomped on every one of his daughter’s CDs. He had locked her in her room every night, and had publicly shared her sins with the whole church at a prayer meeting. He had slapped her in the face in front of her friends, and tried to goad and belittle her into submission. He never failed to remind her that he had been a model teen. In my office, he told me with great energy and resolve, “I will get her to respect me if it is the last thing I ever do!”

Respect is what ruled his heart. He was convinced that he was entitled to it. Thus, every issue became an issue of respect. He saw disrespect where there was none. Life became a series of final exams in which he never gave his daughter better than an “F.” He viewed all of the development, insecur-

riety, and awkwardness of his daughter as a personal affront. There was no vertical, spiritual dimension to his thinking. He saw his daughter not in terms of her relationship to God, but only in relation to himself. He did not see himself as an agent to lead her to a life-saving fear of God. His heart was driven by the goal that she would fear him and give him the respect he thought he deserved.

Is respect a good thing? Of course! Is it something that parents should seek to instill in their children? Yes! But it must not be the thing that controls my heart or I will personalise what is not personal, I will lose sight of my role as God's representative, and I will fight for and demand what only God can produce.

Sadly, the father's eyes were blind to the god that ruled him and to the fact that in his quest to get respect, he encouraged the exact opposite response.

The idol of appreciation

We've been there when the calls have come from school. We've been there in the wee hours of the morning when the nightmares have hit. We've changed the bed that had been wet once again. We've gone out in pyjamas and slippers to the all-night drug-store for medicine. We've made the special skateboard-shaped birthday cakes. We've cleaned up vomit from the bedroom carpet. We've sat in on meetings with the principal. We've spent hours making the papier-mache volcano. We've provided transportation to thousands of events. We've sat through scores of painful recitals, spent thousands on memorable vacations. We've walked miles and miles in the aisles of the super market so mouths would be fed and stomachs filled. We've trudged hours through malls looking for "cool" clothes. We've washed enough clothes to fill the Grand Canyon! We've given up our dreams to pay for musical instruments and braces. Isn't it about time that we get some credit?

I cannot tell you how many times I've heard parts of this list recited to me by parents, always with that same, final punch line. It seems so logical, so harmless, so right. Children should appreciate their parents. Yet being appreciated cannot be our goal. When it becomes the thing we live for, we will unwittingly look with hyper-vigilant eyes for appreciation in every situation.

Teenagers don't often burst in the door at the end of the day and say, "Do you know what I was thinking about on the bus ride home today, Mom! I was thinking about how much you and Dad have done for me over the years. You have been with me and for me from the very first moment of my life until now. On the bus I was flooded with gratitude and I just couldn't wait to get home and say thank you!" If this happens to you, erect stones as a lasting

memorial, or light an eternal flame!

On the contrary, the trend for teenagers is to be much more filled with self-orientation and self-interest than to be filled with an awareness and appreciation of others.

If parents have forgotten their own vertical relationship with God as they've ministered to their teens, if they think of it all as an "I serve, you appreciate" contract between parent and child, they will struggle with lots of discouragement and anger during the teen years. Just when parents expect their almost-grown child to give a little something back, they seem to be more selfish and lacking in gratitude than ever before. Again, every parent needs to ask, "Why am I doing what I am doing? Who am I serving? What are the things that I have come to expect and demand! Whose desires rule the moments of opportunity with my teenager – God's or mine?"



PHOTOGRAPH: THE AGE

The idol of success

I listened as the father said to me in the presence of his teenage son, "Do you know what it's like to go to church and know that everyone there has been talking about and praying for your rebellious son? Do you know what it's like to enter a service with all eyes on you, knowing that people are wondering how it is going and how you and your wife are coping? This is not the way it is supposed to be. We tried to faithfully do everything God called us to do as parents, and look what we ended up with! I ask myself, if I knew that this was the way it would all turn out, would we have ever chosen to have children? I cannot describe how disappointed and embarrassed I am."

That afternoon, with his son listening, that father spoke what many parents have felt but never verbalised. We tend to approach parenting with expectations as if we had hard and fast guarantees. We think that if we do our part, our children will be model citizens. Yet in a fallen world, this is not the way it works. We tend to approach parenting with a sense of ownership, that these are our children and their obedience

is our right.

These assumptions pave the way for our identity to get wrapped up in our children. We begin to need them to be what they should be so that we can feel a sense of achievement and success. We begin to look at our children as our trophies rather than God's creatures. We secretly want to display them on the mantles of our lives as visible testimonies to a job well done. When they fail to live up to our expectations, we find ourselves not grieving for them and fighting for them, but angry at them, fighting against them, and, in fact, grieving for ourselves and our loss. We are angry because they have taken something valuable away from us, something we have come to treasure, something that has come to rule our hearts: a reputation for success.

It is so easy to lose sight of the fact that these are God's children. They do not belong to us. They are given not to bring us glory, but him. Our teenagers are from him, they exist through him, and the glory of their lives points to him. We are but agents to accomplish his plan. We are but instruments in his hands. Our identity is rooted in him and his call to us, not in our children and their performance. The ultimate rejection that should make us weep is not that they have rejected us, but him.

As parents, we are in trouble whenever we lose sight of these "vertical realities", when we lose sight of God, his ownership of our children, and his call to us to be faithful parents no matter what the outcome.

Whenever parenting is reduced to our hard work, the teen's performance, and the reputation of the family, it will be very hard for us to respond with selfless faithfulness in the face of our child's failure. God-ordained moments of ministry will become moments of angry confrontation filled with words of judgment. Instead of leading the needy teen once again to Christ, we will beat him with words. Instead of loving, we will reject. Instead of speaking words of hope, we will condemn. Our feelings will be flooded much more with our own embarrassment, anger, and hurt than with grief over our wayward child's standing before God.

We need to start with an examination of our own hearts. Do we have an attitude of ownership and entitlement? Have we subtly become ruled by reputation? Is there within us a struggle to love our teenager? Is there distance between us that is the result of that struggle? Are we oppressed by thoughts of what others think? Have we even doubted the principles of the Word and why they haven't "worked" for us? These questions need to be faced if we are ever to be what God has commanded us to be in the lives of our teenagers, who are sinners living in a fallen world.

The idol of control

I am increasingly persuaded that there are only two ways of living: (I) trusting God and living in submission to his will and his rule, or (II) trying to be God. There is little in between. As sinners we seem to be better at the latter than we are at the former! This spiritual dynamic hits right at the heart of parenting. Successful parenting is the rightful, God-ordained loss of control. The goal of parenting is to work ourselves out of a job. The goal of parenting is to raise children who were once totally dependent on us to be independent, mature people who, with reliance on God and prayer connectedness to the Christian community, are able to stand on their own two feet.

In the early years of parenting, we were in control of everything, and although we complained about the stress of it all, we liked having the power! There is little that an infant chooses to do, other than spontaneous bodily functions. We chose their food, times of rest, manner of physical exercise, what they saw and heard, where they went, who their friends were, and the list could go on and on.

However, the truth is that from day one

our children are growing independent. The baby who once was unable to roll over without assistance now can crawl into the bathroom without our permission and unravel the entire roll of toilet paper! This same child will soon be driving away from the house to places well out of our parental reach. It creeps up on us. We expect our kids to turn out just like us. I love sports, played sports in school, and like to watch them. I remember the first time my oldest son Justin said that he did not want to watch a football game with me. What? No love for football! I wanted to say, "It's not right! I raised you to be a fan of organised sports! Don't you want to be like me?" Or I remember when my daughter Nicole first announced that she did not like peanut butter. It was almost like saying that she didn't like Christmas or summer vacation. There almost seemed to be something theologically wrong with it! I determined that I would convince her that peanut butter was great. Before she left this home she would have a deep and abiding commitment to spreadable crushed peanuts!

How many parents have struggled with the friends that their children have chosen! Yes, the choice of companions is a very seri-

ous matter, but it is also a place where we surrender control to a maturing child. The goal of parenting is not to retain tight-fisted control over our children in an attempt to guarantee their safety and our sanity. Only God is able to exercise that kind of control. The goal is to be used of him to instill in our children an ever-maturing self-control through the principles of the Word and to allow them to exercise ever-widening circles of choice, control, and independence.

I regularly work with parents who want to turn back the clock. They think that the only hope is to go back to the former days of total control. They try to treat their teenager like a little child. They end up more like jailers than parents, and they forget to minister the gospel that is the only hope in those crucial moments of struggle. It is vital that we remember the truths of the gospel: First, there is no situation that is not "under control", for Christ "rules over all things for the sake of his body, the church" (Eph. 1:22).

Second, not only is the situation under control, but God is at work in it doing the good that he has promised to do (Rom. 8:28). So I do not need to control my teenager's every desire, thought, and action. In every situation he is under the sovereign control of Christ, who is accomplishing what I cannot.

Third, I need to remember that the goal of my parenting is not to conform my children to my image, but to work so that they are conformed to the image of Christ! My goal is not to clone my tastes, my opinions, and my habits in my children. I am not looking for my image in them; I long to see Christ's. We cannot consider the teenage years, with their tumult and struggle, without honestly looking at what we, as parents, bring to the struggle. If our hearts are ruled by comfort, respect, appreciation, success, and control, we will unwittingly hunger for our teens to meet our expectations instead of ministering to their spiritual needs. Instead of seeing moments of struggle as God-given doors of opportunity, we will view them as frustrating, disappointing irritants, and we will experience growing anger against the very children to whom we have been called to minister.

Paul Tripp is a counselor and academic dean at the Christian Counseling and Education foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania. He is also lecturer in practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and a popular conference speaker. This article is an edited extract from Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997).

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The first commandment

Master this, and the others are within reach.

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

Exodus 20:2,3

It'll create more interest than you imagine – taking your congregation through the ten commandments. Preaching through the commandments was harder than I thought. It created strange reactions among the congregation when I first did it. One lady was surprised that I preached on adultery for a whole sermon, expecting me to skip the seventh altogether (for decency's sake!). One of my elders shouted at me and walked out in protest during the fourth (I think I may have made a clumsy effort at applying the sabbath day principle to dairy farmers).

Whatever form it takes, reaction will come.

What about the first? "Preaching the first commandment is absurd!" I'm sure you've heard it all before: "We're under grace now, not law" ... "All these 'shall nots', it'll put people off."

People give many reasons for not preaching the first commandment. We should resist them all. Preaching the first commandment is one of the preacher's chief pastoral duties.

First, it explains the essence of sin. It helps us see it as a horrible offence against God the provider, maker and lover of his people.

Second, the commandment exposes the gross sin of idolatry – the key sin that leads to all others.

Calvin, along with many others, takes the preamble along with the words concerning "no other gods" as together properly outlining the sense of the first commandment. We meet first with God, and a thorough knowledge of him will prompt us to eliminate idols from our heart.

True knowledge of the person makes all the difference to devotion. As a young man, embroidery was not my thing. I scarcely noticed such skills. Displays of fine handwork – patchwork quilting, embroidered cloth, wall tapestry – all meant nothing to me. In my narrow desire to pursue the more "blokey" things of footy and cricket, these fine talents escaped my attention. I'm now, having married a practitioner, an admirer of tal-



John Wilson

ented needlework. It's my knowledge and love for my wife that frees me to enjoy and appreciate the hobbies and interests that mean something to her. I'm no longer indifferent or dismissive because of my love and commitment to my wife.

The commandment begins by reminding the people of the glory of the supreme and self-existent God who has provided for them and safely led them out of the land of slavery. From this basis they are commanded not to be devoted to anyone or anything else. Pastors who bring their people into the knowledge of the true God by preaching that exalts his character and ways are safeguarding them from the sin of idolatry.

The preamble uses two different words for God. First, the word "LORD", which the Hebrew people would have pronounced something like "Jehovah", signifying the supreme and self-existent one. The name suggests his eternal and all-sufficient character. Second, the word "God", which is the Hebrew "Elohim". This name suggests the one we worship, the supreme object of our devotion. It is this God who has acted in love and mercy by bringing the people of Israel out of slavery into freedom.

The first commandment, therefore, is based on a vision of God. A true appreciation of God will lead us to devotion to him. It is inconsistent to be devoted to something else while seeing God as the supreme, eternal and self-existent one. If God is supreme and sufficient then we can't have another who is supreme.

Placing another higher in devotion than God is like committing adultery. In marriage we commit ourselves to one person, for life. Having committed ourselves to one person, we cannot then be committed to two.

Calvin called the human heart a "factory of idols". Although he lived before the industrial revolution where the modern concept of a "factory" was forged, the term is apt. It's clear he meant that the human heart produces idols in abundance, that it is no trouble for the human heart to devise new ones and put them into service.

We all need a god. Our hearts are made to be devoted to something. It's part of our makeup. Without the knowledge of the true God leading us to worship him, we will inevitably place something else there to worship.

What's there now? For some it's sport, whether as participator or spectator. For those who are devoted to sport, athletics training becomes more important than church. Friday night football becomes more enjoyable than God.

For others it's being seen as cool. This desire to be accepted by peers is often a muffled cry for help and a battle to find oneself. This desire is often reflected in choice of clothes. For some, then, clothes become a god. We should dress simply and appropriately and, as with everything else in life, dress to please God and to work for him. Instead dress is used to make a statement, to gain attention and acceptance.

In a similar way, good marks in studies can become our god. The squeeze is placed on daily devotions, and corporate worship slips because of the "pressure" of assignments and exams. Whatever we put ahead of God has already become our idol. Whatever dictates our choices, and influences our decisions is our god.

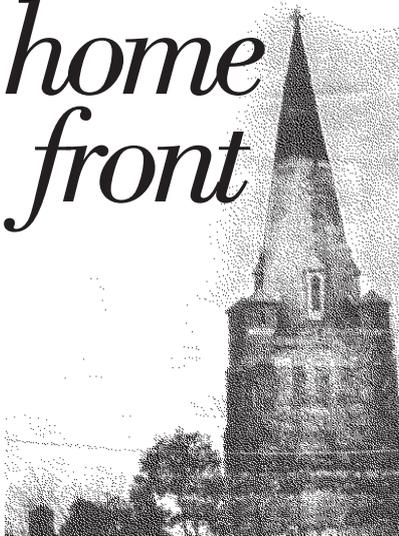
The first commandment teaches us to worship God alone. Devotion to him will then help us make choices in all areas of our life. Obedience to the first commandment is really the key to obedience to them all. Master this one and the rest begin to fall into place. Skip this one and the battle is lost.

Edith Schaeffer writes in *Lifelines*: "Before all else, we are to love him, think about him, do things differently because of his existence, make conscious choices in the light of his existence."

John Wilson lectures in practical theology and church history at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

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home front



Congratulations Cecily

OMF International has shown its gratitude for the excellent service of **Cecily Moar**, a member from Toowoomba, who has served within the Presbyterian Churches of Korea for 25 years. Some testimonials: "Encourager." "She served." "She was humble." "She was an example of a servant leader." "She taught me how to do Quiet Time." Cecily says, "the Lord called me to be a missionary when I was 10, in Sunday School. I kept that dream, and made it to the field when I was 30. I thank God for his faithfulness." OMF asks: "What is a successful missionary like? Maybe a successful missionary looks like Cecily – one who teaches the Word of God, one who meets with the God of the Word, one who serves God by serving others, one who loves the country she is working in and its people."



Cecily Moar

Collegial approach

Queensland has established a partnership in theological education. The **Consortium of Reformed Colleges** consists of the Reformed College of Ministries (a teaching institution of the PCQ) and the

Westminster Theological College. CRC offers theological and pastoral training for ministry candidates and missionary training, as well as a range of studies for lay people including preaching courses and elders' studies.

Vanuatu-bound

Rev. Andrew and Rosemary Williamson have been appointed by the Australian Presbyterian World Mission to take up duties at the Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu. The **Thatcher** family has moved from their home at Talua to make it

available for them. **Joanne Cutler** will return for her final term of service at the same time as the Williamsons, so will be at the centre to help the Williamsons settle in.

Service in India

John and Lynette Ellis (Clarinda, Vic.) are presently at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Dehra Dun, India. This seminary was established in 1969, and has 70 students. John will teach there for 16 weeks. **Ewen Brown**, convener of the NSW APWM committee recently visited the seminary, and while John and Lynette

Rev. Ernest Lyle Noble

1928-1999

Rev. Ernest Lyle Noble, known to all as Ernie, was born on 6 July 1928 to a Free Kirk family in South Grafton. From his infancy, God blessed him with a thorough grounding in the Scriptures, an unerring faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the discipline of a dairying family.

Ernie joined the Presbyterian Church of Australia through the South Grafton congregation in 1949 and there used every opportunity to proclaim the gospel. His godliness and gifts were recognised early, and he was appointed superintendent of the Sunday School and an elder.

In 1965 he became a home missionary and began training for the ordained ministry. He had left school after the sixth grade, so now he had to complete his School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. He did so while serving in the parishes of Nyngan and Dundas. There, too, he completed his theological training and in 1970 received an exit appointment to the south-western town of Wentworth where he was ordained.

Four years later he was called to Bowenfels (Lithgow) where he remained for 16 years. His last pastoral charge was at Terrigal. There, once again, he endeared himself – and, more importantly, his Lord – to a large number of people. "Retiring" in 1994, Ernie pressed on with chaplaincy work at the East Gosford Retirement Village and pastoral supply in churches far and wide.

Ernie's contribution to the church was not only through pastoral ministry, however. He was an ardent supporter of Presbyterian Youth and also fulfilled demanding responsibilities within the



Ernest Noble with his wife Faye

Assembly. Elected to the Ministry and Mission Committee in 1989, he became the convener in 1995, in which role he was still serving when he died. In 1989, he was elected NSW moderator, which he followed with two terms as trustee until 1996.

Through all his labours in ministry, Ernie was lovingly blessed by his wife, Faye. With her he delighted in their three children, Jennifer, Linda and Andrew. Together they faced the toughest struggles as illness repeatedly pressed upon them, especially over the last five years. But they consistently demonstrated faith, fortitude and fellow-feeling, and many a person struggling with weakness found help in the way they gave themselves as well as their wise counsel.

We who knew Ernie rejoice before God for the privilege of sharing this pilgrimage with him and for the certain confidence that he now rejoices in God beyond all earthly limitation.

Bruce Meller, superintendent of ministry and mission, NSW

are there **Shirley Benn** and **Jan Langbridge** (wife of Queensland moderator John Langbridge) will visit to teach quilting and other home-crafts.



John and Lynette Ellis

Pigram role put on record

The Queensland Commission of Assembly has requested Queensland's Moderator, **Rev. John Langbridge**, to thank **Joan Pigram** for her highly skilled contribution to the Queensland church as archivist through most of the years since the formation of the Uniting Church.

Appointments

Rev. David Griffin was inducted into the parish of **Wentworthville-Girraween (NSW)** in November. About 140 people, including members of the local ministers'

fraternal, and chaplains of the armed forces, attended the service. The parish looks forward to David and Margaret's arrival as heralding a time of spiritual renewal and growth.

Rev. Paul Ridgeway was inducted into the Essendon charge in December, ending the 11-month vacancy caused by **Rob White's** move to St Johns Hobart.

Rev. Colin Spragg has accepted the position of director of training and development with Presbyterian Youth in NSW, thus creating a vacancy at the **Druin** congregation in Victoria.

Indonesians flourish

A very small group of Indonesians came together in Sydney about 10 years ago to form a Christian fellowship and plant a church in Hurstville. They are now a recognised congregation of the Presbytery of Sydney South. They budgeted \$6000 for the Christmas outreach programme, at which time the Hurstville church was filled with more than 250 Indonesian people who took part in a high-tech presentation of Christ through drama, song, choirs, and the preaching of the Scriptures by the resident minister, **Rev. Rudy Djajadi**. Then they were all fed!



Hurstville Indonesian Church Christmas celebration

Moving

NSW Church Offices are relocating this month. The new postal address is PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills NSW, 2012

PLC appoints chaplain

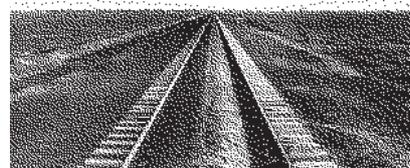
PLC Sydney has added to its Christian leadership team with the appointment of a school chaplain. **Dr Greta Gaut**, a member of the Presbyterian Church, will have responsibilities to girls from pre-school to year 12, as well as providing pastoral care to the families of PLC girls.

Correction

A news item in December's *AP* headed 'Biblical counselling' was a brief summary of an article written by **Rev. Phil Paul**

(Terrigal, NSW) for the Presbytery of the Central Coast News. The article expressed his personal views, not the presbytery's. The article said biblical counselling courses developed from the nouthetic counselling movement were available through colleges, correspondence, video and Internet. In fact, the original article said only that there was scope to develop such courses in Australia through these means.

across australia



Timor invitation

The church in East Timor has invited **Rev. Robert Benn**, the director of Australian Presbyterian World Mission and convener of the National Journal Committee, to visit the troubled island. **Rev. Arlindo Marcal** wrote in January: "As you know the Protestant church in East Timor represents a small minority. We have been targeted by the militia and the Indonesian Army. Most of our seven pastors are in West Timor. And they are not ready to come back to East Timor. Many church buildings were destroyed and some have had their doors and windows taken. Through this message I would like to invite you to come and see us. It will be good if you come to know us and our situation. Your presence will be a moral support for our congregation in this difficult situation."

Geoff Bullock's new song

Christian music! That's what **Geoff Bullock** is famous for. He is also on the way to a discovery that will continue to affect the content of his words. For Geoff has discovered and experienced the reality of grace, or as he would prefer to say, "grace discovered me". Watch for the change!

True Calvinism

Ministers planning their preaching programme are challenged by John Calvin, quoted by James Packer: "It would be better for a preacher to break his neck while mounting the pulpit if he did not himself intend to be the first to follow God."

Presbyterian Church of Queensland in Australia

The Committee for Ministries Training is seeking the right person to fill the position of

Professor of Systematic/Pastoral Theology

for our Reformed College of Ministries Brisbane (Commencement date 1st January 2001)

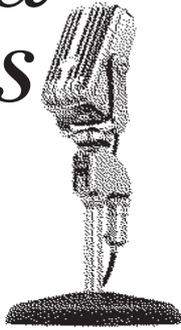
For information leaflet please write to:

The Secretary
Rev. Andrew Gardiner
4 Michaela Crescent

The Gap Queensland 4064

Closing date 29 February 2000

world news



Evangelising Jews

The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism recently held its sixth international conference. About 130 participants from around the world reaffirmed their commitment to Jewish evangelism. They also sought to coordinate global strategies, exchange information and express their support for the Jewish community in the light of recurring reports of violence.

Help to the helpless

In 1999, through the Meal for Mission programme, the Australian Presbyterian Church supported a programme for presenting the gospel and reorientating women caught up in the so called "sex industry" in Burkina Faso. News has just come through that three missionary families in South-East Asia have created model programmes to liberate prostitutes and keep young women out of the sex tourism industry. As many as 35,000 girls, mainly recruited from the mountainous areas of northern Thailand are effectively enslaved in this horror.

Persecution in Burma

New Life reports that "the military junta has formed a Buddhist Sacred Mission and issued a high level decree which contained 17 points to be carried out by the military to destroy Christianity in Burma". APWM is working closely with the Free Reformed Church of Myanmar (Burma) in their attempts to take the gospel to the up-country Buddhists. They have seen the conversion of more than 500 in the past couple of years. It is possible that one recent convert will begin studies at the Mizoram Theological College.

AIDS menace

In Zimbabwe about 1200 people a week die of AIDS. In Zambia there are an estimated 700,000 AIDS orphans. More than 40 per cent of all households in Zambia are caring for one or more orphans.

Timor project

Compassion Australia aims to raise \$250,000 to help rebuild families after the recent violence which left East Timor in ruins. Project Restoration consists of a range of measures in partnership with local churches and other agencies which will include self-help bundles containing building materials, cooking utensils and household items. Compassion will also focus on the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of these traumatised people.

Hijacker demanded forgiveness

Last month's hijack of Indian Airlines Flight 814 by Kashmir separatists had a bizarre conclusion. For days hostages feared for their lives inside the stinking, cramped cabin swinging between forced joviality and abject despair. Then, after days of death threats and beatings, the armed terrorists ordered the hostages to pardon them! "Sorry, but everyone has to say that I am forgiven ... you must all say, 'I forgive you'." The passengers did what they were told.

Rethink on homosexuals

The first church in the United Kingdom to vote to accept practising homosexuals into ministry is considering rescinding its policy. The United Reformed Church voted last month to reconsider a previous decision from 1999 to ordain active homosexual ministers, because "there is not a sufficiently clear mind in the church at this time to affirm the acceptability of homosexual practice".

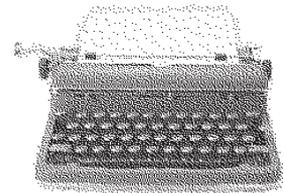
Coexistence with Islam

With the rapid growth of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, one of the critical challenges for the next century will be finding a way to live in peace with Islam. Twice in the past 10 years, in 1991 and 1995, religious fighting that killed hundreds has erupted in West Africa. Churches and mosques were burned to the ground in the last round. There are glimpses of two distinctly different futures, from the bloody warfare of Sudan to the peaceful coexistence of Benin. According to some estimates, about 300

million of Africa's 763 million people are Muslims, another 350 million of them Catholics and Protestants.

Church condemns Milosevic

As pressure mounts to oust Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian Orthodox Church has moved beyond its preliminary criticisms of the indicted leader to outright appeals for opposition to his regime. From village rallies to capital demonstrations of more than 100,000 protesters, Serbians are expressing their discontent over Milosevic's warfare with NATO and Serbia's resultant loss of Kosovo.



AP family ads

Accommodation Wanted

Young Christians seek accommodation during the Olympic Games in Sydney area.

To place your "ad" here see details at the bottom of this column.

Seeking employment, or are you looking for that mature aged Christian to give you that 'honest day's' work?

Advertise here!!

AP Family Ads is THE cost-effective way of informing the Presbyterian Family of God about your news or needs. For ONLY \$25 you have 12 lines or 45 x 60mm and support this information ministry.

Phone: 03 9723 9684 Fax: 03 9723 9685

Email: austpres@bigpond.com

No prayer, no power

John Piper highlights the strategy for attack and defence in spiritual warfare.

I rearranged my study at home, but I did not remove the prayer corner or the prayer bench. I made it more private. All I have ever read and experienced teaches me that deep spiritual influence for the good of sinners and the glory of God comes from men and women who give themselves to prayer and meditation.

My longings often exceed my actions, I admit, but I will not give up without a fight, and making a place is part of the war effort.

I just read, for example, about the secret of Charles Simeon, who endured hardships in his powerful 54-year pastorate in Cambridge, England (1782 to 1836). His friend, R. Housman, stayed with him for a few months and tells us something of this man's devotion: "Never did I see such consistency, and reality of devotion, such warmth of piety, such zeal and love. Invariably he arose every morning, though it was the winter season, at four o'clock; and after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of the Scriptures. Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source, and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials, and prepared for every duty."

It is true for individuals and churches. No prayer, no power. Consider the story of Mark 9. The disciples had been unable to cast out an unclean spirit from an afflicted boy. Jesus came on the scene and cast it out. The disciples asked, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus answered, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29, RSV). There are spiritual forces that Jesus says are very hard to overcome. His disciples asked why they could not overcome the evil. Jesus answered, "Insufficient prayer!"

What did he mean? Probably not that they hadn't prayed over the demonized boy; it seems that would have been the first and basic approach. Probably he means that they had not lived in prayer. They had been caught in a prayerless period of life or a prayerless frame of mind.

Notice that Jesus cast out the demon without praying: "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you to come out of him, and never enter him again" (Mark 9:25). Yet Jesus had prayed. He lived in prayer. He spent whole nights in prayer. He was

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



ready when evil came. But apparently the disciples had become weak and negligent in their praying, so they were powerless in the face of such strong evil forces: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

In other words, without persistent

prayer we have no attack in the battle with evil. Individually and as churches we are meant to invade and plunder the strongholds of Satan. But no prayer, no power.

The same is true of defence. Consider the words of the Lord to Peter, James and John when they fell asleep in the garden instead of keeping up their guard on the defence against evil. "Watch and pray," Jesus said, "that you may not enter into temptation" (Mark 14: 38, RSV).

If we are not vigilant, we will be ensnared by temptation. Our defence and our attack is an active, persistent, earnest, believing prayer force.

Let the example of Charles Simeon, the words of our Lord, and the chastisement of the disciples spur us on not just to periodic prayers, but to a life of prayer. As Housman said, to "a consistency and reality of devotion".

This extract is reprinted from A Godward Life (Multnomah Press, 1997).

ap

ptc graduation

Suffer the children (and they do)

Christian volunteers provide help and hope in a ravaged land.

Islands in a sea of humanity! Thirty-three little faces peered up at me from a space marginally bigger than my lounge room back home in Australia – unkempt babies and small children, sitting, standing, lying about on cold concrete flooring partially covered by thin vinyl-covered mats, with little to occupy them except a few toys that had seen better days.

The smell was sickening, the noise deafening. Not from laughter of children at play but collective misery – high-pitched screams of children clamouring for attention and muffled sobs of anguish from those too sick to compete in the fray.

I was overwhelmed! Nothing quite prepared me for the despair and hopelessness written on such young faces. Nor could I take in my stride the reality of their deprivation. This stark, sparsely furnished and uninspiring room was the world of their waking hours. Rotating shifts of three or



Bronwyn Lee

four carers were expected to attend to all their needs – obviously a physical impossibility.

Left to their own devices as they had been, these children showed all the signs of institutionalisation – insecurity, delayed development and lack of normal responsiveness.

This is reality today for thousands of children in Romanian orphanages – hapless legacies of communist dictator Nicolae

Ceausescu, executed in 1989 by his countrymen for atrocities against the Romanian people.

As a volunteer I was there to lend a hand, but just getting started presented a problem! The enormity of the physical, emotional and spiritual destitution before me shattered any preconceptions I might have had about personal adequacy for the task. Where would I begin?

The tragedy I witnessed was in fact evidence, to more enlightened eyes, that the door has closed forever on Romania's past. A change in philosophy at the heart of government following Ceausescu's demise brought with it improvement on the appalling conditions in orphanages revealed for all the world to see in 1989. And there will be no turning back.

But, despite the implementation of family-securing strategies, including foster care and adoption, designed to see the closure of orphanages within 10 years, more than 100,000 children are still accommodated in hundreds of orphanages right around the country – just as many as in 1989.

Recovery is painfully slow. Romania's history haunts her at every tentative step. It will take decades to work itself out of the country's psyche, so deeply is it entrenched in the thinking and lifestyle of the people. Nicolae Ceausescu, totalitarian leader from 1965 to 1989, made sure of that. Every woman was expected to produce four to five children. Population by procreation was part of a grandiose dream to recreate Romania as the showpiece of communism in Europe.

But things went horribly wrong. Industrial projects for which billions of dollars had been borrowed from the west yielded dismal returns. Romania was plunged into crushing debt. Everything saleable, including natural resources, consumer goods and food, was exported in a debt repayment scheme intended to discharge the liability in five years.

Widespread poverty resulted. Charities, said to be counter-productive when "the state will provide", were illegal. Devastated families and unwed mothers, with nowhere

Covenant Homes

Construction

begins in mid January 2000 for six Victorian style cottages built on the former manse site at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church – Williamstown. They are two bedroom homes within easy walking distance of the railway station and close to bus stops.

An added advantage is sea views from Hammer Street and just a stroll from Nelson Place, the historic precinct.

Occupants will be welcome to attend services and share in the social life of the Church.

Those who wish to live within an active Christian community should contact elder John Hill-Murray for further information and/or registration of interest. Registration after February will attract some GST depending on how far into the four month construction period they have entered.

John Hill-Murray,
37 Railway Cresc., Williamstown,
3016

else to turn, placed their children in state-run institutions and tried to get on with their lives.

Microcosms of Romania at large, these institutions – misnamed orphanages since the parents of two thirds of the children are traceable – unmistakably reflect the nation’s ongoing trauma. The worst may be over but there is still a long way to go by western standards, a fact only too well known to international aid agencies committed to partnering until sustainable development is achieved.

The opportunity to contribute to such grass roots need fulfilled a long-held desire of mine to share my blessings from the Lord with those less fortunate. The vulnerability of children abandoned in Romanian orphanages touched my heart. The chance to go providentially presented itself last year through my workplace, World Vision Australia, when short-term placement became available with Operation Helping Hand, a volunteer program managed by World Vision Canada.

With the prayerful support of my home church, I joined a team of nine expatriates to work in Orphanage Number 5, Craiova, south-west Romania. Our purpose: to provide basic care and simple life experiences for the children.

So how did I cope? Coming down with a virus just days after arriving in Craiova was not part of my plan! But the Lord’s timing is always perfect. While recovering, I reflected on my first few days at the orphanage: the daunting need, scarcity of the most basic resources and, above all,



Bronwyn Lee with Romanian orphans.

insufficient carers to give the loving attention and affection the children craved. Innocent victims, robbed of normal childhood – it was as if they were grieving their loss. I grieved with them.

Reading *Boundaries* (Dr Henry Cloud, Dr John Townsend) only highlighted the urgency of the children’s plight:

“We are built for relationship. Attachment is the foundation of the soul’s existence ... the first developmental task of infants is to bond with their Mom and Dad. They need to learn that they are welcome and safe in the world. To bond with baby, Mom and Dad need to provide a consistent, warm, loving and predictable emotional environment for him or her ... The emotional picture developed by infants forms from thousands of experiences in the first few months of life ... All those experiences of constant loving pay off in a child’s inner sense of security. It’s been built in.”

A sobering thought came to the fore – did I really believe that by coming to Romania I could do something for the children! How absurd! Whatever I might do was too little too late – being there a lifetime would hardly make an impression on their need. Then the Word came to me, “whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me” (Mt. 25:40).

Slowly it became clear. Yes, it was true, what I was doing was insignificant but wasn’t I there first and foremost to serve the Lord because I loved him. Whatever I did, I did for him – any multiplication of my gift of love was entirely in his hands. I found that both liberating and comforting. It gave me the freedom to love the children the best way I knew how and leave the outcome with the Lord.

Bronwyn Lee works with World Vision in Melbourne and worships at Donvale Presbyterian Church. 

“All you need is love ...” and similar refrains from songs of the ’60s put love on centre stage and gave it new meaning. More than 35 years later, I am convinced that the transforming power of love, God’s love, is indeed all we need. The kind that changes people from the inside out. The kind that acts. The kind that gives without expecting reward in return.

Volunteerism embodies love of that ilk. Regardless of motivation, silent labour, given without expectation of financial gain, to further purpose or cause, is the backbone of humanitarian work, unsung or celebrated, secular or Christian. Such work ensures that society’s soul remains intact.

Furthermore, aid organisations, charities, community groups and churches will testify that the extent of any achievement they attain is in no small part due to the faithful support of unpaid staff. Often outnumbering those on payroll many

Yes, you can help

times over, volunteers commit to the cause with equal enthusiasm and vigour and stay for the long haul. A multiplicity of gifts, talents, skills, abilities and experience is willingly given to serve the ends in mind.

World Vision Australia, like so many other Christian aid organisations, nurtures a vast team of national volunteers. Volunteers increasingly handle day-to-day work in the community. Their task it is to interact with schools, churches and other community groups to encourage response to international need, responsibility for which lies squarely with us as members of the privileged world.

Opportunities for international volunteerism are less accessible. This is the case with most charities. External placements require an increased commitment of resources and there is understandable hesitancy. But international aid organisations must be able to second expatriate staff in times of crisis, or long-term development assignment, and they usually have well-developed structures for these eventualities.

International volunteerism, however, requires its own focus, its own procedures, its own rationale. The need is well established, and the value is clear.

Some agencies specialise in international volunteerism, others manage it as one component of their voluntary program on offer. Either way, qualified professionals as well as those with non-specified qualifications are given an opportunity to do more than send their substance. Going provides an opportunity to love the bruised and suffering in a unique way.

In his footsteps

Visiting the Holy Land must inspire reverence.

What proof is there, outside the four gospels, that Jesus of Nazareth ever lived on this earth? The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius makes a passing reference, calling Jesus “a doer of wonderful works”.

If you want proof of the gospel record, then visit modern Israel, stand where Jesus stood, and re-live the Gospel stories. The accuracy and believability of the accounts will astound you.

A few months ago, I had the privilege to lead a group on a tour of the biblical sites and, as we stood at each place where events occurred, I read aloud the relevant passage. The simple words fitted so easily into where we were standing.

I had expected controversy over sites. I anticipated over-commercialisation. But the local traditions were believable and understated.

The Church of the Nativity, just up the hill from where the shepherds heard the choir singing, is built to mark the grotto where Jesus was born. Underneath the floor, there is a hole in a rock, with the emblazoned Star of Bethlehem, and a simple candle burning – the light that destroyed the darkness.

The Mount of the Beatitudes is marked by a circular place of worship in Italian marble, standing at the top of a natural amphitheatre falling away to the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. What a perfect



Brian Burton

acoustic setting from which to deliver the Sermon on the Mount.

The hazardous road from Jerusalem down to Jericho – driven by a bus driver in a hurry, on a narrow strip of bitumen, with deep ravines on each side – is the perfect place for the story of the Good Samaritan – if only you don’t meet another bus roaring up the hill.

In Jericho, near where Moses caught his first sight of the Promised Land, there still stands a sycamore tree, like the one that Zacchaeus climbed up above the crowd. I had always pictured the Sycamore tree as a spindly trunk, hardly able to carry a man without swaying in the breeze. In fact, it is more like a Moreton Bay fig that could easily hold a football team.

At Caesarea Phillipi, there is a spring in a huge cliff face which is the source of the Jordan River. The Greeks and the Romans built pagan altars in the face of the cliff. Standing before that mighty rock, Jesus

told Peter that he would build his Church not on rocks like that but on the rock foundation of people like Peter.

The Garden of Gethsemane still provides shade for the weary. Standing there, looking across the Kedron Valley at the walled city of Jerusalem, you could still hear the echo of the words of Jesus: “take this cup from me, and yet, not my will but thine.”

The pool of Bethesda still stands near the Sheep Market. One of the pillars is being reconstructed, under which the impotent man took shelter, and tried to win the race into the health-giving water.

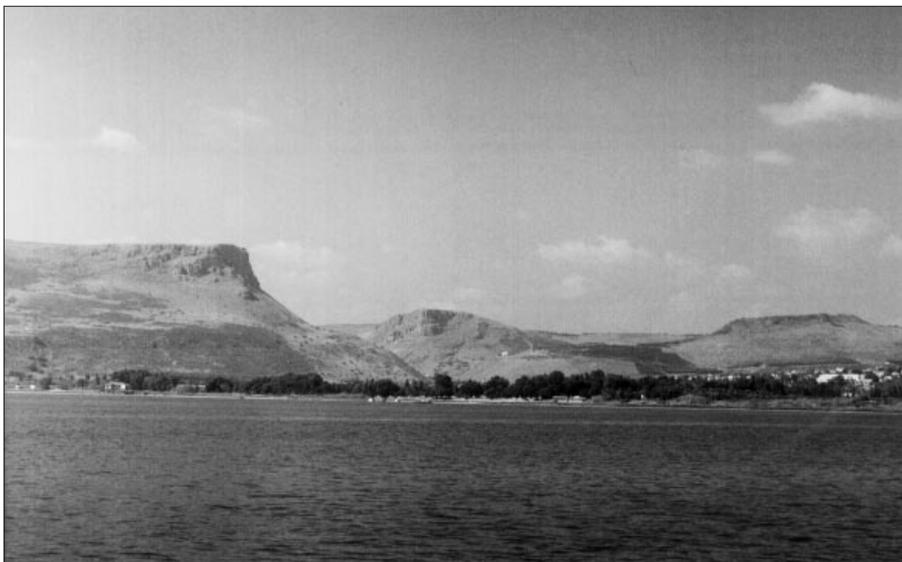
The Upper Room is near the Zion Gate, and was preserved by the Crusaders, and used by the Moslems. It might have been the meeting place for the local Essenes, and the breaking of bread on that fateful night was continuing the custom of the Qumran monastery.

The Sea of Galilee is still surrounded by bare hills, with deep gullies in between, down which have always rushed cold winds to replace the hot air rising above the water, and to bring on such sudden, violent storms. To sit in a boat in the middle of the sea and listen for the wind is to be reassured of the peace that the Master can bring.

There is still Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jairus’ daughter was raised and the Centurion’s servant healed, and where Peter’s house still stands, where the man on the stretcher was let down through the roof. There is Tabgha where the multitudes were fed, and Nazareth, and Cana, and the Jordan where the baptism took place. And the narrow canyon of the Via Dolorosa – the route a man unjustly condemned to death walked through Jerusalem to Golgotha. My only regret is that I did not visit these places at the beginning of my ministry. If only we had a scholarship fund today to allow young ministers, before they began their preaching, to experience these holy places – then we might begin to see the powerful preaching of the gospels in a way that would motivate people to live the way of the Master.

Brian Burton is a minister emeritus of the Presbyterian Church and lives at Callala Bay, NSW, where he maintains a writing ministry.

ap



The Sea of Galilee with the hills and deep gullies that create winds on the water.

Walk with a giant

Nearly five centuries on, John Calvin's stocks keep rising.

This may sound strange for a share-market analyst but one of my few significant achievements in 1999 was to read Calvin's towering masterpiece, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This was no mean feat for one out of university for 40 years and apt to fall asleep on trains.

This great work, first published in 1536 in Latin when Calvin was only 27, is still required reading for Bible college students. For those who have not explored the *Institutes*, I thought it might be of interest to savour the majesty of Calvin's prose, the crystal clarity of his biblical exegesis and some of his piercing observations on humankind.

Non-clerical readers may find themselves simply unable to resist buying a copy. For clergy it may well serve to jolt the memory. The best edition for today's reader is the Ford Lewis Battles version published by Westminster Press.

John Calvin was born in 1509 and enjoyed a humanist education, embracing law, languages (French, his native tongue, Greek, Latin and Hebrew), classical literature and theology. Since Calvin was a pre-eminent figure in the Reformation movement, his theology is embedded in the teachings of the Presbyterian and Anglican churches. Calvin has been described as "Solus inter theologos" – on his own among theologians. John Murray, a past professor of systematic theology at Westminster has commented that "the debt we owe Calvin in establishing sound canons of interpretation and in thus directing the future course of exegetical study is incalculable..." and "he is always careful to take account of the unity and harmony of Scripture teaching".

What strikes me about Calvin is his profound respect for the Bible, his deep reverence for God, his consistency in biblical interpretation and his own humility. In the introduction to the 1545 French version, Calvin comments: "I dare not bear too strong a testimony in its favour, and declare how profitable reading it will be, lest I should seem to prize my own work too highly. However, I may promise this much, that it will be a kind of key opening up to all the children of God a right and ready access to the understanding of the sacred



Russell Lander

volume." That has certainly been my reward.

Calvin challenges modern man, basking in his technological achievements, with his description of the nature of God: "His essence indeed is incomprehensible, utterly transcending human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse." Those who cannot see God in the creation, come under the heading of "mankind enslaved by error (who) walk blindfold in this glorious theatre."

He certainly describes Australia today when he observes: "It is indeed true that the brightest manifestation of divine glory finds not one genuine spectator among a hundred." However, far from succumbing to pessimism, Calvin warns: "If at any time, then, we are troubled at the small number of those who believe, let us, on the other hand, call to mind that none comprehend the mysteries of God save those to whom it is given." On this theme he states: "All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation."

Many today find this concept thoroughly disagreeable, seeing it as unfair. It must have been the same in Calvin's time because he elaborates. "What do you imagine that God owes to man if he is pleased to estimate him by his own nature? As we are all vitiated by sin, we cannot but be hateful to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty, but the strictest justice. But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are naturally liable to sentence of death, of what injustice, pray, do they complain?"

On the nature of man Calvin has some striking and often humorous observations. Take vanity, for example. "There is nothing

more acceptable to the human mind than flattery, and, accordingly, when told that its endowments are of a high order, it is apt to be excessively credulous." On self-indulgence: "Many are so devoted to luxury in all their senses, that their mind lies buried. Many are so delighted with marble, gold and pictures, that they become marble-hearted – are changed, as it were, into metal and made like painted figures." Big spenders, take note!

I asked a friend to attend our church on Christmas Day. He declined, as he considered himself as good as the next man. If my dear friend had read the *Institutes*, he might have stumbled on the following lines, to his profit: "Man cannot arrogate anything, however minute, to himself, without robbing God of his honour, and through rash confidence, subjecting himself to a fall." And again, "the human heart has so many recesses for vanity, so many lurking places for falsehood, is so shrouded by fraud and hypocrisy, that it often deceives itself."

In contrast, says Calvin, "he seems to me to have made most progress who has learned to be most dissatisfied with himself".

Calvin has some very important things to say about the ministry of all believers. The modern church has been relatively successful in harnessing lay people for spiritual ministries within the church and service ministries of crisis relief outside. Yet it has not prepared believers for the greater part of life, which includes the world of work.

In some fields – teaching, medicine, law and business – Christians are readily found, but our influence is far less than it could be. To encourage us to share our faith, Calvin draws upon Augustine: "Because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be, with us, a partaker of peace."

In closing, here is a test for us all: "This, however, let us hold as fixed, that no man has made much progress in the school of Christ who does not look forward with joy to the day of death and final resurrection..."

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

ap

Teenage terrorists?

Don't follow the world in fearing teen conflict.

One trend in parenting today that Christians must resist is the widespread fear that adults have of teenagers. It comes across in a variety of ways, some of them amusing. Recently, I heard a woman refer to her son as "a seething mass of hormones". I think she uses humour as a way of dealing with ticklish teenage problems. It helps her to laugh about her relationship with her strong-willed son. I know that she is enormously proud of him, but she also has her moments of anguish and disappointment.

Why are parents so afraid of the teenage years? Why do so many of us decide that there is nothing that can be done when our kids become the "victims" of the biological forces that kick in at puberty? Should Christian parents simply hang their heads in despair and go into survival mode when their children crash through the "13 barrier"?

I, for one, am not happy with this cynical view of adolescence. It puts the physical side of things before the spiritual, and ultimately the created before the Creator. Who said that hormones rule? They are only part of the equation. Parents should never be daunted by any part of the physical world. God is in control, not the things that he has created. And that includes teenage hormones.

Of course teenagers will be difficult at times. Take the "report card" scenario, for instance. You read the report card your usually placid teenager brings home. As always, you respond with encouragement, tact and discretion. (At least you think you do!) Your reward is an out-of-character emotional reaction from a distraught teenager. Sometimes, it's reasonable to put this down to hormones.

However, if you start to get an emotional over-reaction every time you speak to this child, it's reasonable to assume that



Marion Andrews

there is a deeper spiritual problem. It is not helpful always to ascribe chronic bad behaviour to hormones. Christians, of all people, should appreciate the distinction between physical and spiritual causes, and address the issues of the heart as a priority. This was Solomon's advice. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life" (Prov. 4:23). This is where our focus as parents should be, especially if the gospel has the power to renew human nature – and that includes teenagers' hearts.

Of course, some conflict is inevitable in a household of teenagers. When conflict arises, it is important to keep in mind two similar words. They are "react" and "respond". To react is to put yourself up against the wall where defending your position is the only option. To respond is to go out and meet the other in neutral territory. To react is to pre-empt battle. To respond is to make negotiation possible.

Recently, I read about a father and son who came for counselling. At one point the father rose to speak to his son about his report card. He stuck the failing report card in his face and said, "how dare you do this to me after all I've done for you?" Unfortunately to react like this is to close the door on discussion. It also ignites an explosive mixture of anger, pride and self-pity for those concerned.

There is a close relationship between all these emotions. This father got angry because his son threatened his personal standing in the eyes of others. Pride usually comes to the fore, as it did for this father, when you see your child's failure as a threat to your reputation as a parent, a Christian or a citizen. His response to his son was being driven essentially by two forces – pride and fear.

Every parent has felt them quite deeply at times. All of us are vulnerable, especially to fear. But fear should never undermine our confidence in God's power to change a teenager's heart. Teenagers are becoming Christians regularly, and undergo tremendous changes in their attitudes and behaviour as a result.

God has filled Scripture with many great and precious promises for our children. As Douglas Wilson points out in *Standing on the Promises*, God does not deal out his promises by the teaspoonful, he pours them out in overflowing measure. We should hold on to them for our teenagers.

The Bible is overwhelmingly optimistic about family life. At the same time, it leaves us with no illusions that there is a conflict, though not primarily the "father-son, mother-daughter" conflict we have come to expect (Gal. 5).

As parents, we are to join battle against the deeds of our own sinful natures. We are to defeat pride in our own reputation, selfish ambition for our children and self-pity for disappointed hopes. We are to ignore the culture of fear generated by this world, and its emphasis on the physical and material.

Instead, we are to rest in the power of the gospel. Unless we do, we will miss the many opportunities that God gives us to meet the tremendous spiritual needs of our teens, and play a constructive role in their spiritual growth. ap

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Movie Watch

The Blair Witch Project

Reviewed by Kate Harris



Even the movie-jaded cinema attendant was looking forward to seeing this one. When I rang the cinema last September to find out the starting date of the notorious *Blair Witch Project*, the attendant enthusiastically chatted about the film that she and her girlfriends – who had, she volunteered, recently formed a ‘white witch’ coven – were dying to see. Not exactly what I had expected to hear, but an example of the publicity-generated frenzy that has distinguished this folklore fright-tale – and something that should set off warning bells for concerned culture-watchers who realise the manipulative powers of movies.

The film has been something of a coup for its two young directors, Daniel Myrick and Edward Sanchez, who made *Blair Witch* with the help of unknown actors, then unleashed it into the independent film world, known for its encouragement of alternative film-making. *Blair Witch* cost its young producers/directors something like \$50,000; when it sold to a major studio for distribution, they received millions of dollars. If box office figures are to be believed, it is the highest-grossing film in the US to date.

But that’s the problem with *Blair Witch*; you don’t know what to believe. Trailers leading up to its December release were brief and obscure, text narration supplying a basic overview. Viewers were told that more than two years ago three young filmmakers had ventured into the Blair woods (that’s near Boston, in the goblin-soaked north-eastern corner of the US) in search of proof of an old yarn about a baby-stealing witch haunting the area. They disappeared, however – surprise, surprise – their camera (with film intact) was found a year later.

This was their, apparently unadulterated, story. The shaky-cam vision of two figures running screaming through the night, close-ups of truly terrified faces, and interviews with “friends” of the missing

filmmakers seemed testament to the basic veracity of this story. As the film advertising slogan went: Everything you’ve heard is true.

Moviegoers – and young people in particular – helped crank up the pre-release publicity by “word of mouth” (research shows this is 80 per cent believable, compared with 20 per cent for orthodox advertising). Incidentally, the pre-release period in Australia was a long one, which might normally spell the kiss of death for a film. In this case, the hole was plugged with trailers, pamphlets and posters, a website, and an onslaught of US reviews and press releases. By the time the film hit cinemas here, schoolkids, film students, and the largest constituent of gothic-looking viewers seen in one place were queueing up.

Depending upon their expectations, they may or may not have been disappointed by the film. In itself, the film is an admittedly absorbing and clever “autobiographical” chronicle of the frustrations, confusion and terror of its three characters, Heather, Josh and Ben.

The directors let these actors loose in the woods with cameras and basic supplies, and left little notes for them each day, perhaps... “Heather, the map is lost.” “Josh, you can’t take this, you’re cracking up.” Viewers may also share a sense of true panic and rage when the group find the map has been lost.

The relations between Heather, Josh and Ben fragment as their days and nights in the woods lengthen. Heather’s smug self-composure slides away in helplessness, Ben alternates between aggression and passivity, and Josh retreats behind a black depression. When the team start stumbling into bizarre and symbolic little occult “offerings”, supposedly from the Blair Witch, their fear seems authentic, a natural and fresh depiction of the descent into chaos and terror.

Artistically, it’s also fresh. Its film stock is gritty and grainy, angles of shots are imperfect, there’s a cacophony of sound

“noise”, and characters often deliver the inane straight-to-camera patter that is a hallmark of a self-made and unrehearsed film. It makes for a more absorbing watch than other “scaries” such as *Sleepy Hollow* and *End of Days*, precisely because it is so unrehearsed. Admittedly, this has its flip side; after 150 minutes of dialogue such as “What was that?” “Did you hear that?”, interspersed with banshee-like screams, the impending doom of these three characters couldn’t be close enough for my liking.

Nevertheless, for all its merits as a film that breaks the Hollywood mould, it never quite lives up to its marketing. And as much as the documentary style of film-making is taking off for a second round, it hasn’t fully arrived yet for a large percentage of the movie-going population.

For young audiences who’ve been brought up on a steady diet of computer-generated effects and more graphic gore, it’s just not scary enough. For older viewers or film-buffs, it’s been done before: Jean-Luc Goddard of the New Wave period, or even Orson Welles’ pseudodocumentary radio broadcast Mercury Theatre on the Air, which caused a nation-wide panic on Halloween night in 1938. Ho hum.

In all, *The Blair Witch Project* is less haunt than hype, less spook than spin, and certainly less mystery than marketing. The film is less frightening than its audiences are; the disappointment of finding the saga wasn’t real was a bitter blow for many viewers. As with the recent *The Sixth Sense*, the obsession with all things occult is penetrating many levels of our culture, and finds a friendly reception with the young. If your teenagers are apt to appreciate this film, you should also make them clear as to the mechanics of the marketing that propelled a relatively benign film exercise into cult – and occult – status.

Kate Harris is a Brisbane based communications consultant, and worships at Mitchelton Presbyterian Church. 

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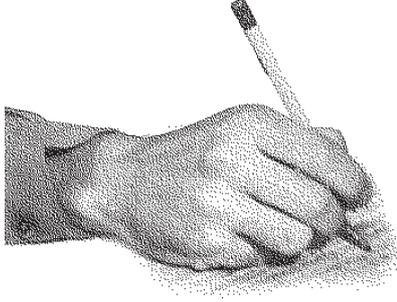


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letters



Unity needs one “alone”

A newspaper report in November headed ‘Churches end dispute’ claims that “an accord between Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches” (note the generalisation and no mention of the Pope!) ends a 500-year “dispute” that launched the Protestant Reformation. It was actually almost total disagreement on doctrine that resulted in separation from Rome.

The accord acknowledges that “in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit”. The statement sounds good but leaves out one important word ... Christ’s saving work *alone*.

Shall we now wait with bated breath to hear the Pope declare that all Roman Catholic teaching on salvation by works (religious ritual, penances), worship of idols and saints, and the mass are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits? Is this a sign of reformation in the Roman Catholic Church?

Alas, no! Because by carefully leaving out the word “alone” the Roman Catholic Church does not have to renounce any of its doctrines. The separation from Rome must continue for true Protestant Churches.

*Tom Aldons
East Malvern, Vic*

The proven path

I would like to congratulate the Committee for the wonderful improvements to our magazine. I really enjoy reading the inspiring articles which are so relevant to our present day situation.

I was especially impressed with the wonderful essay of Dr Dallas Clarnette (*AP*, Nov.). His description of how and why he entered the Presbyterian Church struck a chord because it was the same motivation that made me join our Church in 1977.

His description of the Presbyterian Church and what it stands for as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith is spot on. However, I am afraid that the reality is quite different. How many ministers and elders in our Church today really know and adhere to the confession? And, of those who do not, how many of those would be disciplined by the Church for their failure.

If the Church believes that it is not the teaching of Scripture to ordain women as ministers and elders, then why is this practice still maintained in many of our churches? Is that not compromising the truth?

There was a time when all Presbyterian churches used the same Bibles and hymnbooks and order of service in their worship. But is it not so that today every minister can do, and does, what is right in his own eyes, that uniformity in Reformed worship has almost disappeared, and that discipline has become obsolete?

Could that not also be the reason that God is withholding his blessings from our Church and that we are losing members instead of gaining them?

A lot of questions, I know, but unless we can find the answers, and unless we return to the proven ways, we may find that the Church is moving in the wrong direction.

*Pastor W. Posthuma
Toowoomba, Qld*

A long night?

John Yeo (letters, *AP*, Nov.) states that our salvation does not depend on adherence to a particular interpretation of the duration of the days of Creation. He also suggests that Genesis 1 was written deliberately in a manner that allows for different interpretations of the duration of the days of Creation.

Genesis Chapter 1:3 tells us that God said “Let there be light; and there was light.”

God does not reveal to us the source of that light, but it is obvious that it brought into being day and night and evening and morning, and the first day. On the fourth day of Creation, God made two great lights, the sun and the moon, to take over the role of “light givers”. Nothing else changed – the transition was smooth. The “morning” of the third day merged into the evening and morning of the fourth day and to the fifth and sixth days. And so, in the first chapter of the Bible we can read simple words that need no interpretation.

Then comes the \$64 question. Did God create a 1000-year or a million-year Sabbath Day? Surely the duration of the Sabbath day must have been the same as the other

six days? Reference to the Sabbath throughout the Bible clearly does away with any thought of a Sabbath Day of indefinite duration.

Relevant to the whole discussion are God’s words through the prophet Jeremiah (33:20-21) where he speaks of the permanence of his covenant with day and night – indicating that it is just as permanent as the covenant he made with his servant David. Might I suggest that the length of a day or a night would not have been a subject for discussion in Jeremiah’s day!

Incidentally, the argument for a Creation Day of indefinite duration nearly always ignores the fact of the existence of “Night”. How long was a Creation night? Our salvation does not depend on the truth relating to a Creation Day, but I submit that it does depend on the truth of the whole Bible – not a Bible subject to a variety of interpretations.

*George Hennessy
Wahgunyah, Vic*

A modest uncertainty

The series of articles by Clarrie Briese has provided a clear, non-polemical account of the position of the six-day creationist. He has outlined (*AP*, September) his understanding of Genesis 1 and 2 and has warned against possible dangers of the theory of evolution (*AP*, October, November and December).

He quotes a number of theologians who interpret Genesis 1 and 2 within a six-day Framework. Among evangelical biblical scholars who believe the biblical evidence compels them to reject this framework are Henri Blocher, Gordon Wenham and John Thompson. The highly structured accounts of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 suggest they belong to other literary genres than either non-figurative narrative or imaginative poetry as proposed by Briese. Even John Currid, an expert favourably quoted by Briese, wrote recently: “Architectural imagery is also found in the creation account of Genesis 1 . . . The Hebrew conception of the universe as an architectural structure is clearly figurative.”

Briese claims that questioning a literal six-day creation did not occur until the 19th century under the impetus of the higher critics and evolutionary theory, and he implies that the six-day framework represents the natural (and therefore correct) understanding of Genesis. However, well before this time, Origen, Athanasius and Augustine rejected the literal reading of Genesis 1 and believed that all things were created simultaneously. Internal problems in the text (such as whether there could be days before there was a sun) led them to

interpret the six days allegorically rather than literally.

Briese takes God's declaration that what he created was "good" to indicate a perfection where suffering and death did not exist. Many evangelical scholars oppose this. For example, Bill Dumbrell argues that it means "as God intended" and therefore has no direct implication about whether suffering and death existed at that stage. Francis Schaeffer adopted a similar point of view. In fact the Bible says little about the suffering and death of animals and, according to Psalm 104 (vv.21, 27-28) the provision of food for wild animals (such as lions) is something for which we should praise God.

Briese illustrates one argument used widely by six-day creationists – Luther's statement that biblical doctrines are so tightly related to each other that an error in one point will ultimately lead to an error in all, and questioning one doctrine will lead us to question them all and so reject the faith. However, this view presumes that our knowledge of the doctrines, their implications and how they relate to each other is perfect which, of course, it is not.

It would not be out of place for us to confess uncertainty while we learn more about difficult doctrines without jeopardising our faith. This attitude is beautifully expressed, in the same issue, by James Ward when asked about his understanding of the Genesis account of creation.

There is much that we do not know about how Genesis is meant to be understood and how it relates to the science of today. Articles such as those by Briese indicate how one group of Christians tackles these problems but we would be foolish to presume that, at this stage, the six-day creation framework represented the final answer to the problems in this area.

Colin Gauld
Kiama Downs, NSW

Time for 'true' science

It is understandable, yet sad, that Rowland Ward supports creation over long ages (not six days) and a local flood (not worldwide). His main reason seems to be because this agrees with the opinions of selected theologians and scientists (*AP*, Dec.).

It is understandable because we are all continually confronted with dogmatic statements that science has "proved" that the earth is millions of years old. If this is true, then the plain historical statements of the Bible must indeed be "interpreted away".

However, a little searching reveals that science has *not* proved this great age. In fact, the scientific experimental method can never prove or disprove any past event. The best way to find out about the past is to listen to a reliable eyewitness – in this case, God himself.

Those who say the earth is millions of years old have chosen to twist or ignore the plain statements of a trustworthy eyewitness. What indirect evidence do they base their guesses on? Radiometric dating of rocks is the most important. Substance A decays to substance B at a constant rate, so if scientists measure the proportions of both substances present in a rock, they can then calculate how long it has been decaying, and that is its age. But what if God created some of both to start with? And how do we know that rates measured for less than 100 years have remained constant for millions? And what if some of either substance has been added or removed, perhaps during a catastrophic worldwide flood? These are all unknowns, beyond the reach of present scientific calculation.

The other important dating method uses index fossils. But this assumes that macro-evolution is a fact. And anyone who believes in a Creator God knows that macro-evolution did *not* occur. Modern molecular biology has shown that genetic mutations (mistakes) never produce new improved genetic information to enable upward evolution.

These matters are not merely incidental to the big picture. How can we say God's Word is inspired and perspicuous, if contradictory interpretations are needed to understand its hidden meanings? Once this process is begun, it will be inconsistent to stop it being extended to other ("scientifically impossible") historical events, such as a virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, and his physical resurrection – regardless of what any reformed stalwart pronounces.

In fact, Rowland Ward's recent book

Foundations in Genesis reveals several other surprising interpretations. This road takes us gently along toward the positions of Bishop Spong and Barbara Thiering. God's Spirit of truth will then leave us, and work through wiser people, who are "foolish" enough to believe what God has plainly said. All the scientific evidence, rightly understood, is on their side.

Frank Savage
Wavell Heights, Qld

No more, thanks

I have decided not to renew my subscription.

While the standard of most of the articles is quite high and they are probably of great interest, when their particular subject or pet theory is preached, to those with an academic bent, I feel that many people who would read *AP* are being overlooked.

Historically, and particularly during those years when the magazine was growing, there has been a good content of news of the congregations across the country, changes of ministers and elders and the sort of news that let the average worker in the church know what was happening. Today this seems to have diminished almost to the point of extinction.

There are numerous forums for those with the aforementioned academic bent (surely the time spent by ministers in researching and writing particular papers could be better spent in their parishes in any event), but there is really only one vehicle by which the members of this church can become aware of what their brothers and sisters are doing in the other states.

Ian Fraser

Yes please

While keeping *AP* readable, you have lifted the quality in a way that is calculated to raise readers' capacity – and likely to succeed in this. The national journal is now a ministry. You are all to be warmly thanked for your dedicated work.

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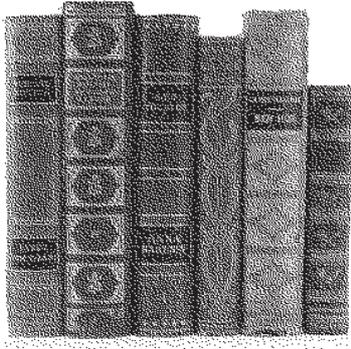
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Age of Opportunity A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens

Paul D. Tripp
Presbyterian and Reformed
Reviewed by Peter Hastie

Not every book that I read leaves me feeling convicted of sin and yet confident to press on because of God's grace, but this one does. It's got more punch per square inch of print than many because it's crammed with realism and written for both head and heart.

Tripp deals with the crucial issue facing all parents – how to deal with your children during the challenging phase of their

teenage years. Increasing numbers of parents today dread this task because we have bought into the cynicism of our culture regarding adolescence. But this is a recipe for despair.

The author suggests that we should look at this phase in our children's lives as years of unprecedented opportunity where we can make a vital contribution in preparing them for productive and God-honouring lives as adults. The power of the Gospel can work in teenagers as well as in anyone else.

This is not a superficial "how-to" book. It is deeply grounded in the theology of grace and contains penetrating insights of wisdom. It is also an uncomfortable book because it lays bare a parent's heart and calls for more change in us than in our kids.

Age of Opportunity belongs to a series entitled "Resources for Changing Lives" published by Presbyterian and Reformed. If this book is any guide to the quality of the series, I know where I will be spending my book allowance in the coming months. A definite buy.

Peter Hastie is issues editor of AP.

Studies in Scottish Church History

A. C. Cheyne
Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999
Reviewed by Peter Davidson

This book will prove rewarding reading for all Australian Presbyterians, regardless

of how long we have identified ourselves with the denomination or where we stand in the theological spectrum.

Though it is a series of 13 studies in Scottish church history, it illumines many of the paths we each have trod, both in our own generation or in pursuing – knowingly or otherwise – those of our fathers. Even the new convert to Presbyterianism will find much here to enlighten and provoke. Equally, the life-long adherent to our church will be rewarded in discovering just how we all got to where we are.

Having held the chair of ecclesiastical history of New College Edinburgh, Professor Cheyne can be relied on to be strong on the Free Kirk roots, and on events before and after the trauma of the 1843 Disruption. Yet he has a clear grasp on the view of the "moderates". These elements have all contributed to both historic and contemporary Australian Presbyterianism.

Cheyne takes us from the immediate post-Reformation days right through to the 1960s, heresy trials included. Those who found encouragement or challenge from the '30s to the '60s in the Free Kirk Manse-born Baillie brothers will appreciate two studies on them. At the same time, those of a more conservative view will find much here to give meaning, encouragement and historic reference for themselves too.

Presbyterians who have lived in or through the last 25 years may be surprised to find there is little that is new in our experience – but there is much to learn and understand about it from our past.

Peter Davidson is a retired minister who lives in Canberra.

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Be prepared

How to listen to a sermon.

Jesus said, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen" (Luke 8:18). Here are some cautions and directions, in order to help you hear sermons with profit and advantage.

1. Come to hear them, not out of curiosity, but from a sincere desire to know and do your duty. To enter his house merely to have our ears entertained, and not our hearts reformed, must certainly be highly displeasing to the Most High God, as well as unprofitable to ourselves.

Hence it is that so many remain unconverted, yes, unaffected with the most evangelical preaching. Like the ground near Gideon's fleece, they remain untouched, while others, who came to be fed with the "sincere milk of the word" (see 1 Peter 2:2), like the fleece itself are watered by the dew of God's heavenly blessing, and grow thereby.

Flee therefore, my brethren, flee curiosity and prepare your hearts by a humble disposition to receive with meekness the engrafted Word (see James 1:21), and then it will be a means, under God, to quicken, build up, purify, and save your souls.

2. Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God. If an earthly king were to issue out a royal proclamation, and the life or death of his subjects entirely depended on performing or not performing its conditions, how solicitous would they be to hear what those conditions were! And shall we not pay the same respect to the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and lend an attentive ear to his ministers, when they are declaring, in his name, how our pardon, peace, and happiness may be secured?

3. Do not entertain even the least prejudice against the minister. For even if a preacher could speak with the tongue of men and angels, if his audience was prejudiced against him, he would be but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal (see 1 Cor. 13:1). That was the reason why Jesus Christ himself . . . could not do many mighty works, nor preach to any great effect among those of his own country; for they were offended at him. Take heed therefore, and beware of entertaining any dislike against those whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers over you.

Consider that the clergy are men of like passions with yourselves. And though we

George Whitfield (1714-70) was a British Methodist evangelist whose powerful sermons fanned the flames of the first great awakening in the American colonies.

should even hear a person teaching others to do what he has not learned himself, yet that is no sufficient reason for rejecting his doctrine. For ministers speak not in their own, but in Christ's name. And we know who commanded the people to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees should say unto them, even though they did not do themselves what they said (Mt. 23:1-3).

4. As you ought not to be prejudiced against, so you should be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or think more highly of him than you ought to think. For though this be an extreme that people seldom run into, preferring one teacher over another has often been of ill consequence to the church of God. It was a fault which the great Apostle of the Gentiles condemned in the Corinthians. For whereas one said, "I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos: are you not carnal," says he? "For who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but instruments in God's hands by whom you believed?" (see 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:3-5). And are not all ministers sent forth to be ministering ambassadors to those who shall be heirs of salvation? And are they not all therefore greatly to be esteemed for their work's sake?

5. Make a particular application to your own hearts of everything that is delivered. When our Saviour was discoursing at the last supper with his beloved disciples and foretold that one of them would betray him, each of them immediately applied it to his own heart and said, "Lord, is it I?" (see Mt. 26:22). And would that persons, in like manner, when preachers are dissuading from any sin or persuading to any duty, instead of crying, "This was intended against such and such a one!" instead turn their thoughts inwardly, and say, "Lord, is it I?" How far more beneficial should we find discourses to be than now they generally are!

6. If you would receive a blessing from the Lord when you hear his word

preached, pray to him, both before, in, and after every sermon, to endue the minister with power to speak, and to grant you a will and ability to put in practice what he shall show from the Book of God to be your duty.

This would be an excellent means to render the Word preached effectual to the enlightening and enflaming of your hearts; and without this, all other means before prescribed will be in vain. No doubt it was this consideration that made St. Paul so earnestly entreat his beloved Ephesians to intercede with God for him: "Praying always, with all manner of prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and for me also, that I may open my mouth with boldness, to make known the mysteries of the gospel" (see Eph. 6:19-20). And if so great an apostle as St Paul needed the prayers of his people, much more do those ministers who have only ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If only all who hear me this day would seriously apply their hearts to practise what has now been told them! How ministers would see Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven, and people find the Word preached sharper than a two-edged sword and mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the devil's strongholds!

This excerpt is from Sermon 28 from The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, published by E. and C. Dilly, London, 1771-1772.

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