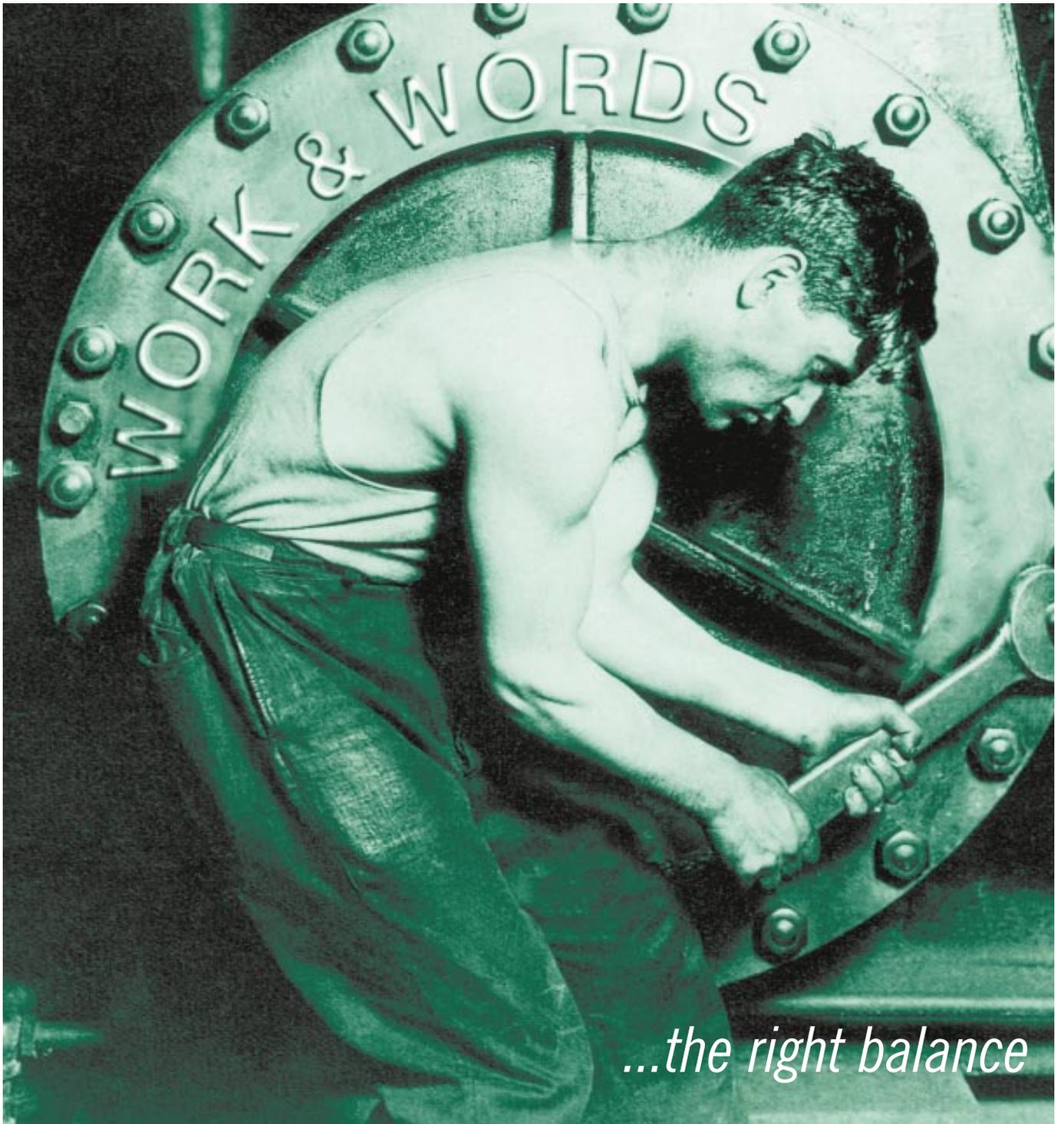


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may 2000



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A U S T R A L I A N  
**Presbyterian**

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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THE AUSTRALIAN PRESBYTERIAN (ABN 81 498 399 755): The national magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Acting editor-in-chief: Robert Benn. Editorial committee: Robert Benn (NSW), Stuart Bonnington (WA), Peter Hastie (NSW), Guido Kettniss (Queensland), Barney Zwartz (Victoria). Graphic Design: Sandra Joynt for A&J Moody. Advertising and subscription inquiries: Walter Bruining, PO Box 375, Kilsyth 3137; Phone: (03) 9723 9684. Subscription: \$32 a year; bulk (minimum of five copies to one address) \$29 each. Overseas: \$A43. Office: PO Box 375, Kilsyth 3137. Phone: (03) 9723 9684. Fax: (03) 9723 9685. Email: austpres@bigpond.com Printed: Newsprinters Pty Ltd, Melbourne Road, Shepparton 3060. Published: Monthly except January by the National Journal Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; Convener Robert Benn. Opinions expressed are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the PCA, the editor or the committee. Acceptance of advertising does not imply endorsement. Contributions: Submitted articles are welcome. The deadline is the first of the previous month. Donations are always welcome. Print Post approved 34918100384.

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# In word and deed

In less than a year from now, on 5 May 2001, Presbyterians will remember the 50th anniversary of the death of Rev. John Flynn, one of Australia's most famous sons. Sir Robert Menzies once said of him: "He was a modern Apostle Paul."

John Flynn was a Presbyterian minister and the founder of the Australian Inland Mission. I remember learning about him in my early days at school. His name was a household word in Australia by then. However, it was not until recently that my interest was revived in him. Almost accidentally, I discovered that he regularly attended services with the congregation where I worship in Ashfield. Indeed, it was while he was here at worship that he collapsed with his final illness and died at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital several days later.

All Australia mourned the passing of John Flynn. There was a national outpouring of grief. A huge crowd gathered at Mt. Gillen in Central Australia for the burial of his ashes. Rev. Kingsley Partridge delivered the eulogy: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John ... He is not dead; his work abides; his memory is forever eloquent. For across the lonely places of the land he planted kindness, and from the hearts of those who call these places home, he gathered love."

John Flynn's witness to Christ was magnified many times by his legendary compassion. His name was the dearest one the folk of the inland knew. Others might forget them, but Flynn came to them in the name of Christ – to give them a voice, to make it safe for their families, to enable them to hear of Christ, to provide opportunities of public worship and to share in the interests of the bush through publishing a familiar literature. The results of his

ministry were significant: many people in the Australian inland listened to the Gospel and heard it gladly as ministers and deaconesses of the Presbyterian Church carried the message over the vast empty spaces of the interior.

What was said of John the Baptist was equally true of John Flynn – he was a "lamp that burned and gave light" (John 5:35). In following Christ's command to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise Your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16), Flynn showed that what God has joined together – our deeds and words – no man must put asunder.

Providing "a mantle of safety" for the people of the Inland meant that when Flynn preached the gospel, people were disposed to listen. He had made the gospel attractive by deeds which glorified God. It is easy to forget that our words must be accompanied by deeds. According to Jesus, it is good deeds, not personal confrontation or church pronouncements, that constitute the shining light which illuminates a dark world.

This is a truth that we as evangelical Christians must take to heart. In our concern to proclaim the gospel in all its purity, it's easy to overlook the fact that we also reveal the truth and power of the kingdom in our deeds. In earlier generations within the Presbyterian Church of Australia, there were some who attained this marriage of deed and word. John Flynn was one of them. This is why Stuart Bonnington has focused on his life as a powerful example of Christian witness in the first half of the 20th century.

Likewise, Peter Barnes reminds us that the history of the early church also shows the importance of the witness of good deeds. Basil of Caesarea was one of the greatest theologians of the fourth century. He made a number of significant contributions to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. But, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, he sealed his witness to Christ by his care for the sick and the poor. He gave "not only a speaking, but also a silent instruction," Gregory said.

This lesson must not be lost on us. To preach with integrity, people must not only hear what we say, they must also see our good deeds. In better days, our forefathers

led the way. They were not only active in evangelism and mission, they also cared for the sick, the elderly and the orphans. Such a ministry has enormous potential for building bridges between the church and the world.

Of course, we must always be aware of the temptation to forget the importance of evangelism in the pursuit of good works. It is possible to forget the gospel when surrounded by so much pressing need. That's a path that we must avoid.

Nevertheless, the church must have a witness of love to its neighbours. It is costly deeds of sacrifice that reveal the glory of our God. Among Bible-believers, this idea is hardly new. In the 18th century, the famous American pastor Cotton Mather encouraged Christians to come together to do good in the areas around their local churches. He suggested that believers should band together regularly in small groups to canvass the question: "What good is there to be done?" He wanted every Christian to develop an eye for human need and a compassionate heart that would seek to relieve it. Can you imagine how the gospel might be received in our neighborhoods if we followed the advice of a leading Korean pastor to his congregation: "Before you witness to anyone, try to do three good deeds for them?"

*Peter Hastie.*

## From the Convener

Nearly four decades ago in Perth a terrible injustice was perpetrated when John Button was sentenced to 10 years' hard labour for killing his girlfriend. Not only did he protest his innocence, but a serial killer admitted on the gallows that he murdered her, yet police and judges refused to accept this. Now Perth journalist Estelle Blackburn has published a book that has led to a new opportunity to clear his name. His story – and hers – starts on page 17.



*Robert Benn,  
Convener*

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# Get to work

*In the workplace you need courage, perseverance, and some simple strategies.*



I own two business suits: one has stripes while the other is plain, and they are different in styling. One of the most embarrassing days of my life was the time I mixed them up. I was running a bit late and was in a hurry. It was a dark winter morning and I must have reached into the wardrobe without really thinking too hard. It was not until a while later, sitting on public transport on my way into the office, that I happened to notice something was wrong. To my horror, there I was wearing the jacket from the plain suit with the trousers from the striped suit.

In the past, I had occasionally found myself wearing mismatched socks perhaps, but this was ridiculous. It was too late to turn back. The thought of facing the office suddenly became terrifying. What would they say? Were there any important meetings that day? How would I live this down? Why did it feel as if everybody was staring at me? (I thought, Lord, could you possibly consider bringing forward the Second Coming to, say, the next half hour?)

The feelings I experienced about my two-tone suit are not unlike those which most of us have felt at one time or another about witnessing as Christians in the work-



*Kim Hawtrey*

place. Our natural social inclination to blend in with the crowd, and the awkward sensation associated with being marked out as different or perhaps even “odd” on account of our faith, trigger very strong impulses within us. We do not welcome the idea of becoming personally vulnerable or isolated by our workmates. And, quite probably, some of our past attempts at evangelising at work are now high on our own list of life’s most embarrassing moments.

What are the special features of the workplace that might help us understand its challenges better? There are at least three.

First, there is the long-term nature of workplace relationships. We will need to

live and relate to this group of people five days a week for a long period of time, usually years. So the perceived cost of making a Christian stand seems to us that much higher and long-lived. It is not like a beach mission or outreach rally: we do not have the “luxury” available to the itinerant evangelist, who can raise the offence of the gospel in one location, then move off to the next town to address another group of strangers. The workplace is an intense context, where our behaviour will be on constant display.

Second, there is the problem of our own idolatry. Perhaps we fear the consequences for our career if we let ourselves become stamped as “religious”. People may begin to question our professionalism. Decision makers (especially superiors or customers) may shy away from us. Or we may simply not have the time for witnessing because we are so consumed with succeeding in our career.

Third, there is the thorny practical issue of how to put Christianity on the agenda, so to speak. In the office and on the factory floor there is often an unwritten rule not to raise topics such as politics and religion. How do we break the ice? When should we



Speak and when be silent?

The matter is further exacerbated by the shortage of role models and “how-to” guides for workplace ministry. Our churches seem to cater well for training some types of ministers, especially full-time local pastors, but offer far less training for tent-making ministries. Even if we are fired up to witness at work, how do we start? This is not a trivial question.

The way out of this apparent minefield is to consider how to turn these workplace threats into opportunities. Consider the three-priority lifestyle described by Jesus in his soliloquy in John 15:

Abide (verses 1-8)

Love (verses 9-17)

Testify (verses 18-27)

The first essential of Christian living, according to the passage, is to abide in Jesus, or remain in him. He is the vine, we are the branches, and apart from him we can do nothing (v.5). We are to abide in him by letting his word abide in us (v.7) or, as Colossians 3:16 puts it, we are to let the “word of Christ dwell in us richly”. The second element of Christian discipleship in John 15 is love (vv.9-17). Principally, Jesus is talking about loving our fellow believers. The model for such love is that shown between the Father and the Son. Twice in the passage Jesus commands us to love each other, after the example he was to set by laying down his own life for us. And the third essential element of the Christian life is to testify to Jesus (vv.18-27). There is an unavoidable division between believers and unbelievers, deriving from the world’s rejection of God (v.18). We are called to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ despite opposition (v.27) and in the face of unbelief (v.24).

This framework is helpful for underpinning our approach to ministry in the workplace.

First, consider the implications for our workplace ministry of abiding in Christ. This is the key to preventing ourselves slipping into idolatry of career, or having our motivation to witness dulled by a desire for the empty praises of men. Abiding in Christ should be the most effective antidote to the spiritual diseases of workaholicism and professional elitism, which can cripple our witness. It will help us avoid the trap of secular humanism which tends to see work as a person’s primary source of meaning and purpose, especially in white-collar circles in advanced industrialised societies.

We need to help the modern rich man see his spiritual poverty. And we need to acknowledge that in God’s eyes our core “vocation” is to be a Christian, not a member of such-and-such profession, be it butcher, baker or candlestickmaker. Ultimately, it is only by anchoring our identity in Christ that we can guard fully against the workplace shaping us in its own image.

Abiding in Christ is not only our weapon against workplace idolatry, but will also be our foundation for workplace morality. Like Zacchaeus, we will find that faith must shape new values. Social ethics are a feature of the workplace that make it especially opportune for Christian witness. Almost all secular jobs have an ethical dimension, some more than others. In the case of professions the moral issues tend to be more obvious: in medicine for instance, there are the issues of euthanasia, abortion and IVF; in economics, Christians must grapple with wealth, poverty, equity, taxation, and so on. Scripture urges us to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2), and an integral part of this is thinking rightly about ethical choices within our sphere of personal influence on the job.

Ethical judgments may also arise from union membership associated with the job. An example is where a Christian employee needs to weigh the morality of the union’s policy against the desire not to burn bridges of communication with fellow workers (for the sake of the gospel). Another example is probably found in the New Testament, in the episode in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. This was the matter of joining in social meals in pagan temples, where the food had first been sacrificed to idols. Notable for our purposes is that these probably would have included meetings of trade guilds which Christian tradesmen would have been expected to attend. This was probably an instance of a clash between Christian beliefs and trade norms.

Another dimension is corporate ethics. There is currently a widespread reassessment of the importance of ethics in business, both in Australia and overseas. Harvard University recently made ethics a compulsory subject for MBA students and the Securities Institute of Australia is about to introduce a course on ethics. In the 1989 annual KPMG Global Capital Markets Survey, corporate morality emerged as the major new challenge faced by chief executive officers of world financial institutions, incorporating issues of the environment, excessive profits, insider trading and fraud.

Can Christians make a distinctive ethical contribution? Ethics by themselves can be counterproductive if we simply succeed in reinforcing existing misconceptions that Christianity is about mere morality. However, ethics can be a powerful tool if used to point to deeper theological truths.

Second, consider the importance for the workplace of Jesus’ next imperative: love. In a recent article, Kel Richards argued that the best way to reach so-called Yuppies is to surprise them with generosity; to be marked by a spirit of graciousness, in order that those who are prisoners of greed might be caused to reflect when they see our Samaritan heart. Spurgeon’s description of grace was “surprising generosity”, that quality which mirrors something of God’s unmerited favour towards us. It stands in stark contrast to the typical culture in the workplace, humorously epitomised by the *Alex* cartoon published daily in the *Australian Financial Review*. Christians can bring a reminder in a materialist world that the heart of reality is a Person, and the heart of life is relationships. Against the background portrayed by the film *Wall Street*, we can model the difference between being “driven” and being “called” (see Prov. 30:7-9; Col. 3:5-10; 1 Tim. 6:9-10).

A positive, thankful attitude in the face of daily pressures can speak volumes. In

place of envy, jealousy, selfishness, and ruthlessness the Christian can portray love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self control. As Joseph Aldrich put it in his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, "We must be Good News if we are to share Good News" (See 1 Pet. 2:12).

In the case of Christians who are in charge of subordinate staff, it is important to model God's character by communicating an attitude of total acceptance and forgiveness to employees, at the same time as not compromising company performance standards. This is a difficult balance to strike. Importantly, the command to love our work colleagues should lead us to pray for them.

**T**hird, we need to bear verbal testimony in the workplace. It is not enough simply to "model" Christianity by our lifestyle. Eventually, like Daniel, we must speak the truths of the gospel in words. The gospel is unavoidably propositional in content, not existential or allegorical (2 Pet. 1:16). God has put us in our workplace to be his ambassador, to be ready to give a defence of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). For many of our fellow workers, we may be the only Christian contact in their lives, and such a large chunk of our time is spent at work that it is a forum which cannot be neglected.

Next, the gospel is also unavoidably eschatological in nature, and somehow we need to communicate truths about eternity to folk whose mindset is bound up in the present. Our aim must be to help fellow-workers look beyond the present moment, to matters of final destiny.

There is a saying that the wise look not just to the minutehand of history, but to the hourhand. By God's grace, the believer is able to look beyond the daily routine of "earning a crust", to the Bread of Life. Somehow, we need to tell our workmates it is five minutes to midnight.

Here are some practical ideas about how to do this.

Two fundamental practical ideas follow from the preceding discussion: to pray and to include God in our conversation. Prayer for our workmates is something all of us can do. It is also the first step God wants us to take. It is challenging to follow the motto: "Pray as if it all depends on God; plan as if it all depends on you." A good procedure is to make a list of work colleagues and professional contacts, then pray systematically through the list as part of a daily devotional. Another idea is to form a prayer triplet with two other like-minded believers. The very exercise of praying for someone has the effect of giving us a fresh view of that person and may also prompt us to look for openings we

might otherwise have overlooked.

The next vital step is for references to God to become an integral part of our personality and conversation, rather than an afterthought or a secret hobby. This is not to say that all of a sudden we should take on an excessively laboured kind of public pietism, but simply that our relationship with God ought not be omitted from our everyday social discourse.

When asked on Monday morning what kind of weekend we had, our church meeting should be the first thing we talk about, described in much the same way another colleague might describe a soccer match he enjoyed. When talking about plans for the future, we can add the qualification, "God willing" (James 4:15) and so on. If we pepper our conversation with such references, work colleagues will not be completely surprised when we eventually raise deeper spiritual matters with them, and our personality will more accurately reflect the truth we seek to profess, namely that Jesus is more important to us than anything else. Our lives will raise questions in the minds of unbelievers.

Beyond these two basic steps, we need to try various creative ways of breaking the "so-what" barrier. At a recent conference on this subject, a brainstorming session produced the following list of ideas for promoting evangelistic opportunities at the workplace:

- Place a suitable "curiosity raiser" on your desk, e.g. a Christian book.
- When a colleague leaves or gets married, take the opportunity to give him or her a Christian book;
- Be on the lookout for people struck by loneliness or personal tragedy;
- Take time to build relationships over morning tea or lunch;
- Draw out the ethical values inherent in union issues or sociopolitical events;
- Advertise lunchtime Bible studies on the staff noticeboard;
- Be trustworthy; confidential; not judgmental;
- Write a suitable article in the company staff magazine;
- Watch carefully one's behaviour when under heavy pressure of work;
- Organise an outreach meeting at lunchtime with a guest speaker.

Timely opportunities can arise by joining in the corporate golf day, or when travelling with a colleague on a business trip.

Helpful role models are found in the examples of Bible characters who were godly models of success (Joseph), ambition (Paul), power (David), and leadership (Nehemiah), making these instincts God-centred rather than self-centred. Useful books to give away include Paul Barnett's *Is the New Testament History?*, Josh

McDowell's *More than a Carpenter*, John Chapman's *A Fresh Start*, and Gordon MacDonald's *Ordering Your Private World*.

At the same time we must be careful in our speech not to be insensitive or overbearing. Colossians 4:5 urges us to "be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity". Our conversation is to be full of grace, the Apostle Paul writes in verse 6. We should accept our colleagues for who they are, and be prepared to show humility by admitting our own mistakes and not pretending we know all the answers.

While we know ourselves to be different, we should not think of ourselves as better, and our difference should be only in our Christian calling, not in any spurious cultural eccentricity. We should not stand on our rights and should studiously avoid gossip.

*Kim Hawtreys is director of Impact Ministries, Sydney. He has written several books, and trains people in evangelism, especially for the workplace. This is an edited version of an article published in Interchange in 1991.* ap

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# For Christ and the Continent

*Pioneer John Flynn provides an Australian paradigm for combining works and words.*

Next May sees the 50th anniversary of the death of John Flynn, a man remembered for many achievements, not least his gentle yet consistent witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Flynn, who died on 5 May 1951, was perhaps Australia's most winsome witness to Christ.

John Flynn was born on 25 November 1880 in Moliagul, Victoria. He made a commitment to Christ when a teenager, and soon after decided to enter the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. In 1903 he became a home missionary, serving in the Otway Ranges and Gippsland.

These appointments were invaluable for his future development. They gave him first-hand experience of ministry outside of the normal Presbyterian setting. They also brought him into contact with a wide range of pioneers who would never be found in the pews of a "normal" church. His surviving sermons from this stage of his ministry reveal a simple but sincere faith rooted in the biblical text, focused on Christ and calling for a down-to-earth faith that reached out to fellow human beings in love and practical Christian sympathy.

In 1907 Flynn began his studies at the Presbyterian Theological Hall in Melbourne. The director of home missions came to know Flynn and noticed that he had distinctive qualities that suggested he would find a normal parish frustrating. In 1909, as Flynn struggled with his Greek and Hebrew, Jessie Litchfield, a member of the Presbyterian Church in Richmond who had moved to Darwin, wrote to the wife of a minister in Melbourne. She asked if it would be possible for a Presbyterian minister to be based in the town. He could work as a missionary to visit those in the outlying districts throughout the Northern Territory. The letter was given to Flynn, and he opened correspondence with her to learn more about the spiritual needs of this remote part of Australia.

In 1910 with help from the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union in Victoria, Flynn began the Mailbag League, where city folk would write to those in the isolation of the outback. He also published the *Bushman's Companion*. A small, blue linen-covered book, it brought all sorts of spiritual help (with Bible readings, hymns,



*Stuart Bonnington*

prayers, a funeral service) as well as practical advice (how to make a will, a calendar, postal information and First Aid information) to its readers. Flynn distributed it for free. His name became well known in the outback.

As Flynn's final year at the hall drew to a close, the question of his exit appointment came up. He was certain he should become a missionary to someone, somewhere. The Smith of Dunesk Committee in South Australia approached the Home Mission Committee with a view to appointing Flynn as the missionary there. The call from God was very clear. In late January 1911 he took the train to Adelaide and then on to Beltana.

Flynn threw himself into the patrol work with great enthusiasm and began to visit the widely scattered members of his 'parish'. To keep in contact with the scat-



**The flying doctor brought emergency care to the outback.**

tered congregation he published from April 1911 *The Outback Battler*, which bore the sub-title 'A quarterly magazine issued in bush interests'. It contained news of the work of the mission, general chit-chat about people, the children's corner, obituaries, and information about other pioneering mission works.

December saw the opening of a medical hostel at Oodnadatta. It had "a ward to accommodate six beds, a dispensary, a nurse's sitting room, bedroom, large kitchen and scullery. It was surrounded, bungalow-style, by an unfloored verandah 10 feet wide. Water was laid on from Oodnadatta's artesian bore, and two 1000-gallon tanks were provided to conserve the precious rain water. The property was fenced, and presented a neat, business-like appearance." Flynn was clear that such a three-pronged approach, providing medical care, spiritual counsel and appropriate literature, was the way the Presbyterian Church could reach the Outback for Christ.

In 1912 the Victoria Home Missions Committee and the Federal Board of Foreign Missions asked Flynn to compile a detailed report on the spiritual condition of the Northern Territory. The scope of Flynn's report quickly evolved to include Central Australia. He made a seven-week trip to Darwin and its hinterland. The report, tabled at the GAA that September, was called *Northern Territory and Central Australia – A Call to the Church*.

It was a masterful document which "described simply and arrestingly vast areas previously ignored or neglected by the Church and government alike, and it outlined a sweeping program of remedial action". It proposed that a special committee be given jurisdiction over five areas based on Port Augusta, Port Hedland, Broome, Darwin and a vast central area. The proposed model of ministry was basically that which had already developed in the Smith of Dunesk Mission, with the funding coming from what Flynn called a "bush brigade" of 5000 members each making an annual subscription of one pound. The GAA appointed Flynn as the organising agent of the whole scheme.

His immediate task was raising and sustaining support for the Australian Inland Mission, as the new work had been named. The end of 1913 saw the first edition of

Flynn's magazine *The Inlander*. An immediate success, it greatly raised the profile of the bush and the AIM.

For the rest of his life Flynn worked to see the AIM progressively establish patrol and medical facilities throughout the outback. While the names and fields changed and fluctuated over the years, the basic aim remained the same, to bring the gospel by word and deed to the people of the inland. What did change was the ratio of word ministry to deed ministry. While it is true that as the years went on the AIM moved more towards the provision of medical facilities and social care over patrol work, this needs to be kept in perspective by a foundational principle that had guided Flynn from even before the AIM had been formally organised.

In his 1912 report Flynn quoted the pioneer missionary of Labrador, Dr William Grenfall, who had united gospel preaching and medical work in the cause of Christ: "When you set out to commend your gospel to men who do not particularly want it, there is only one way to go about it -to do something for them that they will be sure to understand." This gives an important vantage point for the correct understanding of the way the AIM developed over the years and the true motivation behind the herculean labours of Flynn.

While the 1914-1918 war had brought Flynn problems, it was also eventually to provide unexpected but great blessings to the inland. It was the technological advances in aviation and radio caused by the war that led in the 1920s and '30s to the complete fulfillment of his dream of throwing a mantle of safety over outback communities.

Flynn's work with the flying doctor and the pedal radio were to transform him from being simply a church leader to a figure of national and eventually international significance. He also played a central role in the development of a national Australian consciousness. To freshly apply a famous phrase, it was "the tyranny of distance" that led Flynn to dream of using the plane to provide medical assistance from a strategically placed inland base. This would bring a vital service of coastal Australia right into the heartland of the nation.

Such a service would combine two things Flynn loved: efficiency and cost-effectiveness. A suitably equipped plane with a flying doctor could cover vast distances quickly, way beyond even the existing AIM nursing home and hospitals. Flynn had to wait until 1928 for the launching of the first experimental service of the AIM Aerial Medical Service based in Cloncurry.

Running in conjunction with the development of the AMS was the work Flynn sponsored in developing radio communication. In this regard we see one of Flynn's great assets, his ability to involve the experts who could solve the technical problems that lay between his vision and its achievement. It was a long and at times very frustrating story. Flynn abandoned the quest for a voice transmission radio set for the outback as uneconomic, and from 1926 the focus fell on Morse transmission sets.

Eventually voice transmission problems were overcome and people could speak to one another over vast distances. In addition to the direct contact made with the AMS, the contribution radio communication made to outback life was immense. While medical calls always had priority, the air-



John Flynn

waves were opened to a full range of other messages covering a wide range of social, personal, business and current affairs matters.

In 1945 Flynn gave, as it turned out, his last report to the GAA as AIM Superintendent. He said: "The AIM began, really, as a temporary effort - something to inspire, succour, and comfort our lonely people until normal population flowed into Australia's vast, almost-empty spaces, bringing in their thousands adequate amenities of life. All these benefits were assumed in those prophecies of enthusiastic months following 1911, when the Commonwealth Government took over all responsibility for Northern Territory. Similar optimism excited those concerned in vast adjacent areas east, west and south.

"But most of our AIM field has remained lonely, while some is lonelier than ever. A very significant phrase has emerged: "Permanent pioneering." In fact, instead of State Home Mission Committees follow-

ing increasing populations westward and northward while the AIM steadily decreased, the AIM has actually advanced eastward and southward! That is why I have advocated three things:

"1. We must cease to define the AIM by geographical boundaries. It is best defined by its functions. Our national job is to help in caring for people who live beyond "parish life", i.e., where ordinary church, social, and economic establishments cannot yet be provided, or where they have been abandoned as no longer practical.

"2. We must recognise the value of silent witness by institution. Evangel means infinitely more than "preaching". It includes "placarding".

"3. We must recognise that "Christian ministry" is two-fold. There is pastoral care, and there is conduct of public worship. Our aim, not yet attained in full, is to create helpful friendships between experienced Presbyterian ministers and isolated Presbyterian laity, or near-Presbyterians, no matter how far they may have wandered from conventional Kirk services. We are doing our share in conducting public worship as opportunities offer - and we have made our facilities available to ministers of other branches of the Church, who desire to do likewise."

This brief account of Flynn reveals five aspects of his character which are central to any true understanding of him. Together they form a strong argument for accepting John Flynn as perhaps the most winsome witness for Christ that Australia has ever seen.

John Flynn was a biblical and practical Christian. It is impossible really to comprehend Flynn's life and influence without recognising his fundamental commitment to Jesus Christ. The power and glory of Christ the risen Lord was central to him. Preaching on the raising of Lazarus, Flynn said: "Men have tried to explain away the literalness of that resurrection, but it will not be so removed. The whole event may be denied along with the body of Scripture, but the calm claim of Jesus to supreme authority over death is so intricately woven into the very fibre of Scripture that the two must stand or fall together. The Resurrection of Jesus has been recorded at greater length. It has been questioned in its own historic time, but such questionings have never beaten down the power of its constraining truth."

Flynn was a practical believer who embraced the transforming power of Christ as it led him to personal spiritual renewal but also to a life of humble practical service. Such service was invaluable in itself he believed, but was properly to be understood as a pre-evangelistic activity.

Flynn's practical Christian commitment permeated the whole structure and ministry of the AIM.

**John Flynn was a pastor and a preacher.** Recent research has revealed a side of Flynn that has tended to be hidden under the weight of the legend of 'Flynn of the inland' – that he was primarily a pastor and a preacher of God's Word. The development of the AIM should be seen in the light of a number of early pastoral and parochial ministries in South Australia and Western Australia, including Flynn's own ministry at the Smith of Dunesk Mission in 1911 and 1912.

A chief figure in all of this is Robert Mitchell, who had an enormous influence on Flynn and the shape of the AIM, but the work of the Nor' West Mission should not be forgotten. These ministries were inevitable, as some form of innovative pastoral response had to be made to the widening frontiers of Australia. Nevertheless what Flynn and those who preceded him sought to achieve personally as faithful Presbyterian ministers, was later perpetuated through the AIM on the infinitely larger stage of rural, remote and regional Australia.

**John Flynn was a missionary and an ecumenist.** Flynn's work as the superintendent of the AIM represents one of the best examples of the contextualisation of Christian ministry and mission that Australia has seen. It met the needs of many in the outback, captured the imagination of the nation and stimulated other Christian groups to launch their own missions to the inland. The Methodist Inland Mission and the Bush

Church Aid Society of the Church of England were closely patterned on the AIM. This did not worry Flynn in the slightest, as he believed the more workers in the field and the more appropriate cooperation that took place between different Protestant denominations the better.

**John Flynn was a master communicator in person and print.** From the earliest years of his ministry Flynn was a brilliant communicator. Until his last years, he was a compelling speaker who could address a congregation, an audience of outback stockmen or the members of Federal Cabinet with the same ease, while making his point and gaining sympathy and support for the AIM and its ministry.

In print he was equally impressive. *The Bushman Companion*, *The Outback Battler*, and of course *The Inlander* set a standard that was seldom bettered in terms of spiritual and social impact. His reports to the GAA 1912 and 1914 created the momentum that raised and continued the vision and the support for the AIM. At almost every GAA his superintendent's report kept the AIM vision fresh and vital. He was committed to good communication concerning the AIM right up till his death in 1951. This can be seen with Flynn's approval of the production of the one hour documentary film *The Inlanders* in 1948.

**John Flynn was a visionary and a nation builder.** The plan that Flynn had for the AIM was breathtaking, it was for "Christ and the Continent". Through the work of the patrol padres and the deaconess-nurses, the Presbyterian Church reached the most isolated people in Australia with spiritual and practical help. However his vision was not simply limited to assisting Presbyterians as such, but anyone in need.

He also believed that by throwing the mantle of safety over Australia, he would not only assist the existing settlers, but encourage the development of widespread white settlement by providing a comparatively secure environment in which women and children especially could safely live. The establishment of the mantle of safety was only possible because of his visionary use of planes for medical work and the development of the pedal radio which broke the silence of the outback.

*This article is adapted from the chapter 'For Christ and the Continent': The Inland Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the Centenary History of Presbyterian Church of Australia to be published next year.*

**C**ontrary to established wisdom in some circles, the Christian Church has had a long, albeit by no means perfect, tradition of looking after those in need. One shining example is Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia.

Basil was born about 328, and became known finally as Basil the Great. He was essentially an ascetic and a theologian, being a follower of Athanasius, but with a reputation for being more sensitive. His grandparents were martyrs as well as Christians, and his family possessed considerable wealth.

Being the son of a professor of rhetoric meant that as a youth Basil was steeped in Greek culture. His good friend Gregory of Nazianzus was to call him "a ship heavily laden with culture". Basil did well as a student in Caesarea, then Constantinople, and finally Athens. Later he was to comment that at Athens, he had "lavished much time on the vanity of the precepts of that wisdom made foolish by God".

Perhaps through the influence of his sister Macrina, Basil came to seek to follow the ascetic and contemplative ideals of communal monasticism (as opposed to more solitary forms of monasticism). For all that, Basil always opposed the more extremist followers of Eustathius of Sebaste who said that married Christians could not be saved.

Basil journeyed through the east, to Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia to visit monks, and sought to retire to a hermitage near a waterfall on estates on the river Iris at Annesi in Pontus, where his sister and mother were living. But the contemplative life was always somewhat elusive for Basil, and in 364 he was ordained as presbyter (his friend Gregory of Nazianzus was forcibly ordained by his father, who was a bishop).

**S**ix years later Basil became Archbishop of Caesarea, ruling over a mountainous and barren region, which in the fourth century was populated by an uneducated and unsophisticated people. It was the age of the great Trinitarian disputes in the Church in the aftermath of the Council of Nicaea in 325, which declared that the Son of God is of the one essence with the Father. A succession of emperors were not fond of the view that Christ is truly God, and this led, for example, to the exile of the great Athanasius from Alexandria on five occasions. Basil always stood firm for Nicene orthodoxy, although as he himself commented: "Hunting truth is no easy task; we must look everywhere for its tracks."

Basil died in 379, aged about 50, just before the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Basil, however, deserves to be known for his example of caring as well as his capacity for leadership, his championing of communal monasticism, and his refusal to compromise



**The pedal radio was an enormous breakthrough.**

# Acts of an apostle

*Basil the Great stands tall in a long line of Christian caring.*



*Peter Barnes*

the full deity of Christ and the Spirit. In 368 Basil had helped to organise famine relief in difficult times when there were a thousand theological distractions. He also established charitable institutions, hospitals and schools.

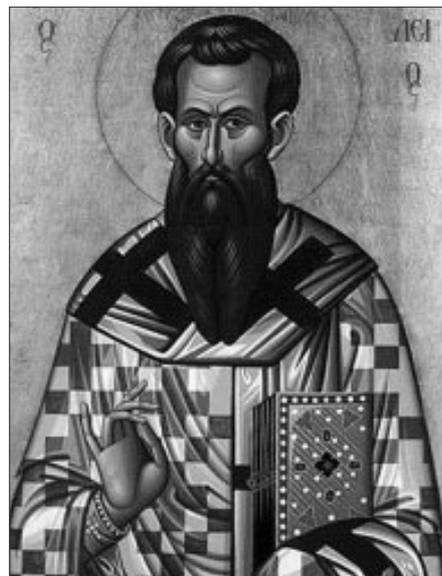
It has been said that the reputed founder of monasticism, Antony, was stirred by Matthew 19:21 ("If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me"), whereas Basil's text was Acts 2:44 ("All the believers were together and had everything in common"). Basil emphasised the importance of manual labour, the need to obey the superior, and the centrality of fraternal charity. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, these qualities were imbibed from Basil's family. Gregory praised them for "their care of the poor, their hospitality toward strangers, their purity of soul achieved through austerity, the dedication of a portion of their goods to God".

Gregory especially praised Basil for what he did to improve the lot of lepers in Cappadocia. The situation before Basil began his work was grim indeed – Gregory described "that terrible and piteous spectacle of men who are living corpses, the greater part of whose limbs have mortified, driven away from their cities and homes and public places and fountains, aye, and from their own dearest ones, recognizable by their names rather than by their features".

Basil took the lead in pressing upon men that they ought not to despise their fellow-men nor to dishonour Christ by their inhuman treatment of lepers. Rather, they needed to "lend to God that mercy of which they stand in need at his hands". The text behind this thought seems to be Proverbs 19:17, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done".

Such was the impact of Basil's preaching and example that even the leaders of society came to vie with one another in their philanthropy and magnanimity towards the lepers. It is here that Basil's true greatness is to be located. Gregory noted: "Others have had their cooks, and splendid tables, and devices and dainties of confectioners, and exquisite carriages, and soft, flowing robes; Basil's care was for the sick, and the relief of their wounds, and the imitation of Christ, by cleansing leprosy, not by a word, but in deed." Basil's example continues those found in the New Testament. The church took up a collection for famine relief in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Even in the midst of his tense theological battle with the Galatians over justification by faith in Christ alone, Paul recalls that he was asked to remember the poor, and adds that this was the very thing that he was eager to do (Gal.2:10). Religion which is approved by God is many things, but one of them is to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27).

And so the story has continued. In the period of the early Church, homes were given to babies who had been left to die. Prisoners were visited, especially those suffering for the faith. In fact, it was not altogether unusual for this to cost the visitor his or her life. There are a number of records of Christian visitors being arrested and then beheaded, thrown to the beasts or sent to mines to be worked to death. It was a monk,



Telemachus, who ran into the arena in Rome in 391 to try to stop the cruel gladiatorial games which saw crowds gather to watch gladiators kill one another or kill prisoners. Telemachus' brave intervention led to his death.

In the Middle Ages, Francis of Assisi sought to identify with the lepers. In the 18th century revival, George Whitfield laboured mainly to bring the gospel to those without it, but he also supported his orphanage Bethesda ('House of Mercy') in Georgia. In our own day, James Montgomery Boice is known, rightly enough, for his expository preaching at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, USA, yet his church manages to combine evangelism with welfare work, and there is a group which provides alternatives for girls seeking abortions, as well as a ministry to homosexuals and the administration of a Christian High School.

At her best the Church has managed to preach the gospel truly and live out some of its implications. These two are not contrary to one another. Salvation by grace is the message of Galatians, but this is also the book which tells us to do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of faith (Gal.6:10). One might conclude by citing Gregory again: "A noble thing is philanthropy, and the support of the poor, and the assistance of human weakness."

*Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.*

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SERVICING ALL SUBURBS

# A confession

*Most of us neglect a vital aspect of spiritual health, suggests Michael Boyd.*

I have a confession to make. There is an aspect of my life I have not paid much attention to for many years. While I knew I should be doing it, I never put too much emphasis on it in practice. You know the sort of thing I mean: I knew it in my head, but that's as far as it went. Yet Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German martyr from World War II said that the church's "greatest task at the moment" is to make this aspect of church life "once again a living source of strength".

That intrigued me. Then when I found that Martin Luther in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) called it "a cure without an equal for distressed consciences" it made me think very hard. Why was I ignoring it? Why haven't I heard much about it if it is so important? So what is it? Confessing our sins to each other.

Confession is essentially agreement with God. It is not saying "I'm sorry", but "I have sinned, please forgive me". It recognises that what I have done is an offence to God's holy nature. Confession is not self-focused, but God-centred. Its aim is reconciliation between the offender and the one offended. So if that is the case, why bother confessing to a person when God is the one offended?

For one thing, God's word commands it. James writes: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). God doesn't command things just for the sake of it; he does it for our ultimate good.

In Psalm 32:1-7, David speaks of the debilitating effect of unconfessed sin and the release confession brings. The reformers and puritans spoke much of "the cure of souls" and the positive role of confession for easing distressed consciences. The puri-

## IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



tan Christopher Love, in *The Dejected Soul's Cure* (1657), instructs the reader to "disclose and reveal that sin, the guilt of which so disquiets the soul, to some judicious, compassionate and experienced Christian. Giving vent to your own sorrows by complaints is a great way to ease the mind". It is the testimony of both the Bible and Church history that confessing our sins to one another is both appropriate and beneficial.

But how hard that is! I don't want to tell someone my darkest secrets, and maybe I don't want to hear theirs! Why can't we just leave one another alone?

Well, apart from going against the teaching of the Bible, lack of confession within a church means that we cannot dare to be sinners. People are forced to become secret carriers of sin. Bonhoeffer describes this type of church as "pious community" where being a sinner is not acknowledged. Sin must be concealed from one another so our true natures are not known. However, "he who is alone with his sin is utterly alone". This situation shatters the

community we are meant to experience in Christ. We pretend to be something we are not.

How can we break this silence and find healing? The first step is to acknowledge the seriousness of sin and the power of forgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews makes this very clear. Hebrews 3:12-13 and 10:26-27 show that our encouraging of one another must include warning away from and dealing with sin.

If we do not mention sin we give the impression that it is either unimportant or not to be discussed. Or, honestly, I'm not going to ask you about your sin because that gives you opportunity to ask me about mine! We need to remember that forgiveness is powerful and essential and that facilitating confession may help you or I overcome bondage to a particular sin.

Who should hear our confession? James says we are to confess to one another. It is not the responsibility of one member of the fellowship; we each have a role to play. Yet the Bible certainly does not advocate reckless confession; discretion must be used in both what we confess and to whom. Is there a brother or sister you trust, who has the maturity to hear what you must say, and with whom you can be mutually accountable?

It may be a fearful first step to take, but finally being able to be honest may break the hold of habitual sin. The forgiveness we have in Christ may break in with fresh power to your situation. May God work so that our love and care may extend even to this sensitive area!

*Michael Boyd is associate pastor of Revesby and Panania Congregational Churches, NSW.*

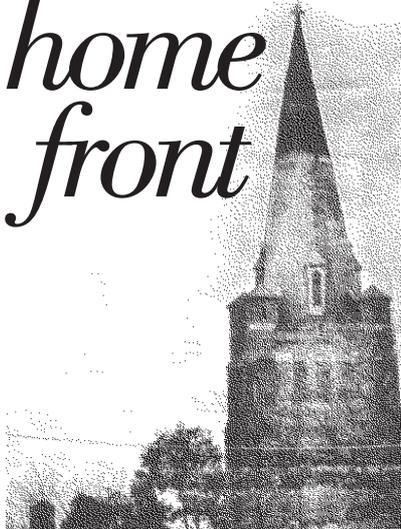
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# home front



## A wing and a prayer

**B**almattum church, 9 kilometres north of Euroa, was packed for the dedication of its new wing on 5 March. This rare occasion – how many country congregations undertake an extension? – was a tribute to the hard work of the congregation itself, assisted by local tradesmen.

More than 100 visitors came from Wagga Wagga, Melbourne, Geelong,

Bendigo, Wangaratta and nearby parishes. These included **Stewart Chant** (Geelong) and **Ken Martin** (Cranbourne), both past ministers. Many visitors recalled early associations with the Balmattum church, going back several decades.

**Rev. Dr Dallas Clarnette**, Benalla conducted the service and **Rev. J. Woodward**, (immediate past moderator) supplied in the absence of the present moderator, and conducted the dedication and preached.



Some of the Balmattum congregation at the dedication of the new wing

## The chain that liberates

**T**he committee of pastoral care in the **Chatswood/Lane Cove** parish, Sydney, has prepared a “chain of prayer”. The idea is that those on the chain can be contacted if there is a need to support anyone by prayer. The person contacted will then pass the request on to the next link.

## Beginnings at Westlakes

**M**arch 12, 2000 was D-day for the new congregation at Westlakes in NSW. Nine families had heard the call to plant a church in the Warnervale region (north central coast). **Rev. Esa Hukinnen** reports that the service went well. The sermon was based around the Great Command and the Great Commission (Matt 22:34-40 and Matt 28:16-20).

## New head at St Andrews

**S**t Andrews Christian College, Melbourne, last month inducted **Bob Speck** as its new principal. In introducing Bob to the school community, St. Andrews council chairman **Professor Allan Harman** paid tribute to the firm foundations laid by **Mrs Meryl McEwen**, the college’s first principal, who has now joined her husband in Cairo.

The induction was part of the College’s annual commencement service, during which college staff and council members stood before an audience of more than 300 students and parents to re-affirm God’s call. **Rev. Brian Bayston**, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria conducted the ceremony.



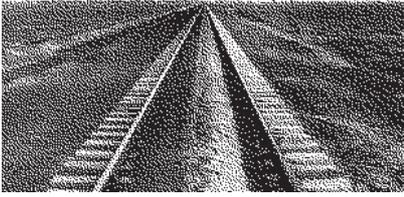
St Andrews Christian College commencement service

## PLC celebrates 125th anniversary



A momentous march: Presbyterian Ladies College (Melbourne) students are led by a piper as they celebrate the school’s 125th anniversary. The 1300 staff and students filled a convoy of trams on the trip from the school’s present Burwood home to its original site, now the Dallas Brookes Hall. This was followed by a thanksgiving ceremony in Scots Church.

# across australia



## Stand against sentencing

The president of the NSW Council of Churches, **Ray Hoekzema**, has appealed to the Federal Government to heed the concerns of its own backbench and bring pressure on the Northern Territory and Western Australian Governments to repeal their mandatory sentencing laws, especially in view of their impact on juveniles and indigenous people. The council believes it is essential for the maintaining of "righteous law" that, while it recognises the rights of victims and the need for punishment and deterrence, it must always be tempered by compassion and a concern for the rehabilitation of the offender. The judiciary must be free to act independently and to apply "mercy and grace".

## Life rally in Sydney

Several hundred passers-by, onlookers and supporters attended a 'Celebrate Life' rally in Sydney's Hyde Park on Saturday 25 March to remember the Day of the Unborn Child. Information stalls, guest speakers, musical entertainment and helpful literature were provided and it was hoped that next year other capital cities would also join.

## A faithful readership

**RBC Ministries** would like to meet the person who has been receiving *Our Daily Bread* for the longest time in Australia. They are also seeking their oldest reader. RBC Ministries provides devotional and study material.

## OzFamily day

Once a year every family in Australia gets reminded that our families are precious", according to **Dr Rex Campbell**, national coordinator of OzFamily Ministry. All of us long to be part of a family, that divine institution which God

made for us to experience real intimacy, yet 43 per cent of marriages end in divorce. OzFamily has now launched its 'Year 2000 Family Life Marriage Conferences for NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. For more details, contact 02 9746 1099 or email: OzFamily@lifemin.org.au

## African opportunity

Australian entrepreneur **David Bussau**, co-founder of aid agency *Opportunity International*, has played a pivotal role in brokering a world-first agreement between the World Bank and African Christian Churches to cooperate on poverty alleviation in Africa. It is the first time the bank had agreed to partner on a regional level with the Church. Mr Bussau said that "it shows that the World Bank is recognising the crucial role the spirituality of people plays in ensuring that donations do lead to sustainable development and transformed lives. While governments, the usual vehicles for aid distribution, come and go, the Christian churches remained committed to serving the poor, no matter their ethnic or tribal background."

## Children at risk

You are invited to join prayers in more than 50 countries who will take part in the fifth annual **Worldwide Day of Prayer for Children at Risk** on 3 June. For further information contact Day of Prayer, Kingdom Living Ministries, Locked Bag 10, West Ryde, NSW 2114 or check the VIVA Network website.

## Christian TV

Senior ABC Radio journalist **Russell Powell** joined the *World View* team when it resumed on Channel 9 in March. Powell is a member of St Matthias' Anglican Church in Sydney. The program aims to bring a Christian perspective on issues currently being debated in the public arena. It features issues affecting teenagers.

## Trans-World Radio

**Trans-World Radio**, well-known for Christian broadcasting in many parts of the world, has set up in Australia to establish *Next Generation Network*, which aims to produce youth orientated radio productions targeting 13 to 23-year-olds. TWR hopes to raise awareness in Christian broadcasting for the need to produce such programmes to address the needs and pressures of today's youth.

## New home for RTC

The **Reformed Theological College** in Geelong recently combined with **Christian College Geelong** to buy the Geelong Grammar School's junior campus, set on 60 acres, complete with classroom buildings and a dormitory block. Both colleges opened their doors to students in February. The RTC's opening ceremony was attended by almost 500 supporters, many of whom had come from interstate and some from New Zealand. **Professor Alexander Barkley**, the college's first principal (1955-78) delivered the inaugural address. The RTC continues to maintain close links with PTC in Melbourne. **Dr Bill Berends** is serving PTC as the visiting lecturer in systematic theology.



**Classrooms at the new Reformed Theological College site**

## Timor update

National director **Robert Benn** reports on developments in the Australian Presbyterian World Mission ministry to East Timor. A Christian school is considering making available to the senior minister of Hosana Church a computer and printer. He and his family lost everything, and in March had received no salary since August.

Timorese moderator **Arlindo Marcal** is likely to pass through Sydney soon, and may meet some Australian Presbyterians. A Timorese theological/politics student would dearly love to come to Australia to study English within a good evangelical environment next year. He already has a BTh from the Kupang Theological College. We seek \$12,000 a year for a scholarship for him.

A Portuguese minister and his wife are considering a short-term ministry to teach English, Bible and minister to leaders. Several people, and a congregation or two have contributed money which has helped with my expenses and the on-flow from that. Thank you.

There have been offers of some goods, but so far I have not worked out systems of

getting them in. In the light of so much 'goods' and finance being shipped into East Timor, I am increasingly convinced that if we handle goods, it should first flow from well established relationships, and that means people on the ground in East Timor.

Do you know of people who would commit to learning the language and culture as potential career missionaries; or Portuguese or Indonesian speakers who would teach English, Bible and be good helpers in East Timor? Wouldn't it be wonderful if some of our people would move out of their comfort zone and allow us to see East Timor as a special new mission opportunity for our church, thus faithfully playing out the Great Commission of our Lord in a new area?

### African partnership

Does Africa need missionaries? Rev. Joseph Kahiga, a well-known African leader working with Africa Inland Church who is visiting Australia from March to May, says: "We prefer partnership in training for ministry. We are all members of Christ's body, serving the same church of Christ. We have also seen that there is expertise that missionaries bring." Contact AIM International office in Sydney for details about where Joseph will be speaking on (02) 9686 9325 or PO Box 744, Castle Hill, NSW 1765.

### Joni visits Australia

The Interchurch Commission on Religious Education in Schools is bringing Joni Eareckson Tada as keynote speaker to a conference for NSW Scripture teachers in October. There will also be internationally acclaimed plenary speakers and workshops. For more details, phone (02) 4268-3806, or email [juddsmit@oze-mail.com.au](mailto:juddsmit@oze-mail.com.au).



Joni Eareckson Tada

### Indonesian challenge

Januar Sugianto, director of the Bible League in Indonesia, visited Australia in March and April to bring Australian Christians up-to-date on the spiritual climate in Indonesia. Januar spoke on the general situation in Indonesia, the challenges faced by the Church, and in particular the ministry of the Bible League in all 26 provinces of this vast nation. Based on current growth rates, Januar estimates that the church will grow by 1.2 million people in the next 12 months. In Indonesia last year the Bible League placed 785,000 Bibles, New Testaments, and Scripture portions, and 64,920 people graduated from 'Project Philip' the Bible League's evangelistic Bible study program.

# world news



### Scottish denomination splits

The Free Church of Scotland, a denomination within the Reformed tradition, has split, resulting in a breakaway church that has the support of up to one-fifth of its serving ministers. The split is partly the result of a long running feud over the adjustment of beliefs with that of the modern secular world. It may also lead to a long legal fight regarding the use of titles and the ownership of buildings and churches.

The breakaway church, which has also adopted the name the Free Church of Scotland, says it has received support from elsewhere in Britain and from the United States, the Far East, Africa and Australasia since it made the break. The breakaway church has expressed sorrow about the break and has stressed it will remain a part of the worldwide Reformed tradition.

Part of the reason for this split is centered on, Professor Donald Macleod, principal of the Free Church College in

Edinburgh. In 1996, he was acquitted in open court of indecent assault on four women. Some ministers and lay people wanted Macleod to answer to the claims in a church tribunal. Church authorities ruled that they were forbidden to proceed on charges "incapable of proof".

### Pakistan violence

Sister Christine, a 78-year-old nun, was beaten to death at the Lourdes Convent in Karachi, Pakistan. On 12 March a group of 12 men forcibly entered the convent premises where 10 nuns of the Franciscan Missionary of Mary lived and worked. Sister Christine was beaten with clubs and as a result died several days later. The attackers are believed to have been fanatic Islamists.

### Church growth in London

Between 1989 and 1998 the number of churches in London grew by five per cent at a time when the national average fell by two per cent. There were 3549 churches in London in 1989, of which 344 had closed by 1998. In the same time 555 new churches were started, of which 27 had closed by 1998. More than half of London's churches hold midweek services.

### Bishop's view

The Bishop of Rochester (London), has declared that married couples who chose to remain childless are "self-indulgent and incomplete".

### German faith diminishes

According to the Alliance for Spiritual Liberty in Augsburg, the '90s have brought about the biggest secularisation push in German history. Since 1990 around 4 million members of the Catholic and Protestant churches cancelled their membership, while only half a million joined. In addition the church membership was reduced by 1.5 million, because deaths outnumbered the christenings. The percentage of church members in German population dropped from 72.4 per cent in 1990 to 65.2 in 1999.

### Sudan bombs hospital

A hospital in southern Sudan sponsored by Voice of the Martyrs was bombed by Sudan's radical Islamic Government. Two people were killed, including a Christian worker, and several others were injured. In March three hospitals were bombed.

## Ukrainian leader killed

The Superintendent of Baptist Churches of Poltava Oblast, Leonid Solovyov, was stabbed to death on 12 March. A gunman sneaked into his house and attacked the bishop and his wife. The bishop died at the scene, and his wife was taken to hospital with multiple injuries.

## Support for gays

A statement affirming "sexuality as God's gift" calling for the "full participation of women and gays and lesbians" in the life of religious institutions was released in New York in January. Almost 1000 scholars and clergy from the United States signed the document known as the **Declaration on Sexual Morality**. It supports the full inclusion of sexual minorities in congregational life including their ordination and the blessing of sexual unions.

## Violence in Coptic villages

A wave of violence swept through five predominantly Coptic Christian villages in Egypt's Sohag Province leaving at least 21 Christians killed and another 34 in hospital. More than 50 homes were either looted or razed.

## Denomination of the day

It is estimated that there are 33,800 denominations around the world, and people form a new one nearly every day. This is the conclusion of **David Barrett**, who conducts world wide statistical surveys of global Christianity. He estimates that the total world Christian population is just short of two billion, 33 per cent of the world's population and the largest single religious group.

## From the KGB with love

**Boris Bachtayarov** was a KGB major in the Soviet army. In 1985 he was posted to a prison camp in Russia's Far East where he suffered serious injuries in a crash. In hospital, he began to consider God and, contrary to his 21 years of atheistic teaching, became a Christian. He now travels from prison to prison preaching the gospel.

## Mozambique drowning in debt

Flood-devastated Mozambique needs to be released from the burden of debt that sees it paying an average of \$US1.4 million each week. Mozambique will be paying more on its debt to the West than it will be spending on health care and education combined.

## Land for families

Three hundred families have been offered land in Matola, Mozambique, so they can rebuild their homes destroyed by the flooding. The relocation is the joint work of the **Ecumenical Committee for Social Development** and **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**, which hope to aid 598 families victimised by the floods.

## Shelter in Mexico

**Kathy and Greg Saracoff**, of **Latin American Mission**, have started a children's shelter to in Tijuana, Mexico. Abram is one of the 16 boys in the shelter; his father is an alcoholic, his mother abandoned the family. Kathy comments: "He has just blossomed with love and discipline. He was at the top of his class this past month."

## Sudan hospital bombed

The **Samaritan Purse Hospital** in Lui, Southern Sudan was bombed for the second time in a week by the militant Islamic government of Northern Sudan. The bombing was part of Sudan's program for total genocide of the largely Christian south.

## Fruitful sentence

Uzbek pastor **Kim Stanislav** was falsely imprisoned in Istanbul for tax fraud a year ago, he is now being beaten for witnessing to his cell mates. He led 25 of his cell mates to Christ during the first month of imprisonment. When offered the comfort of a private cell he declined so he could share his faith and disciple other prisoners.

## Attacks in Nigeria

**Bishop Ben Kwashi** reports that as Christians delivered a letter against Shamia (the banning of other religions) to the Kaduna government they were attacked by Muslims. The Muslims were declaring jihad. Several churches were destroyed and quite a number of lives lost, official figures state 200 to 300. To avert more bloodshed northern leaders have dropped the call for a ban.

## Fastest growing religion

Evangelical Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world according to **Missions Frontiers** magazine. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have an annual growth rate of 7.3 per cent, followed closely by other evangelicals with a rate of 5.6 per cent. This is

almost twice the growth rate of Islam at 2.7 per cent.

## Turkmenistan persecution

In Turkmenistan all religious minorities are facing harassment, police raids and fines. In February at least four Baptists were arrested for their activities with unregistered churches. A Protestant house church was raided, where literature was confiscated and worshippers were interrogated and warned not to meet again or face criminal charges.

## China: abuses worsening

According to United Nations human rights chief **Mary Robinson**, China's abuse of human rights is worsening. She says: "China's violation of key civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, religion and association have worsened in the past year."

## Police raid Copts

The State Security Intelligence (SSI) in Egypt raided another Coptic Church as they met in their building. They attacked the doors and brutally forced everyone out, even women and children. Some parishioners went to the post office to send telegrams of complaint to the President and government in Cairo but the SSI ordered them not to be sent.

## ProChrist Rally: Europe's biggest

**ProChrist** the biggest Christian event in Europe, has kicked off in Bremen, Germany.

The Conference slogan is "God is here – find out if it is true". It aims to make the gospel relevant to as many Europeans as possible. The campaign reaches out via TV satellite to 1200 locations and hopes to reach 1 million people with the gospel over the week.

## Important Announcement

*All Presbytery & Session Clerks,  
Parish Secretaries and Church  
Workers please note that all news  
for the national journal should be  
sent to the journal's office at*

**PO Box 375,  
Kilsyth VIC. 3137.**

# Broken lives

*Four decades on, an appalling injustice is to be righted.*

This is a true story of events in Perth, Western Australia, in 1963. It begins and ends on the gallows, as Eric Edgar Cooke, a short, slight, polite 32-year-old father of seven is led to the hangman for the murder of six people. With him is the Reverend George Jenkins, a Methodist minister who has given spiritual guidance to the man since his first imprisonment for arson at 18. Within just a few minutes of the trapdoor being sprung, the condemned man voluntarily takes the Bible out of the minister's hand and swears before God that he murdered two more women – a beautiful young Melbourne heiress named Jillian Brewer and a pretty 17-year-old suburban girl, Rosemary Anderson.

Rosemary Anderson had a boyfriend, John Button, a 19-year-old apprentice bricklayer. John, part of a migrant family from Britain, had fallen in love with Rosemary and the two were talking of engagement. John was a quiet, nervous type, with a bad stutter and twitch that earned him the nickname Button and his 40 Blinks at school.

On 9 February 1963, the couple spent a happy summer Saturday, blissfully unaware of the amazing manhunt underway for a youth who had shot a policeman. The police were stretched to the limit. Only two weekends before, someone had suddenly broken the peace of Perth by stealing out in the dead of night, shooting five strangers at random. Two died that night, one was in a coma with half his brain blasted away.

At the time, Perth was emerging from its colonial capital era into a mining and financial centre, its Edwardian city buildings starting to be replaced by skyscrapers. Its citizens still lived by trust. They slept on verandahs to escape the summer heat. They left their back doors open all night for the breeze. They parked their cars with the keys in the ignition. But the wave of random shootings after midnight that hot summer changed this easygoing attitude forever.

John Button and Rosemary Anderson were playing cards after dinner at John's parents' house in Subiaco, not far from where the previous fortnight's killer had struck. Watching the manhunt for the cop-



**Estelle Blackburn, author of *Broken Lives*, with John Button.**

killer live on TV, they had a lover's tiff over a trivial matter, some fish and chips. Rosemary flounced out to walk the three miles home in the dark. She had done this before, and relented after walking a way and cooling down.

John followed in his car. Rosemary wouldn't get in, despite his pleadings. He stopped short of a railway subway and waited for her to walk through, thinking the deserted dark street on the other side would be daunting enough to make her change her mind. But when he drove through to get her, she was gone. Then he saw her lying unconscious and bleeding in a heap on the sandy verge of the road. John picked her up and drove her to her doctor. The doctor called the police. Rosemary died in hospital while John was being interrogated at CIB headquarters, while the manhunt raged outside.

John had damaged the front left of his car a month earlier, in a minor rear-end collision which he had reported to the police but had not had fixed. His car was damaged, there were a couple of tiny flecks of blood on the headlight – probably flicked off John or Rosemary as he carried her to and from the car. The police decided John did it and interrogated him for hours, with

no explanation that he was free to leave, that he could have his parents with him or legal advice.

John, tired and traumatised, gave in when at 2.30am he was told that Rosemary has died. He didn't care anymore, he just wanted the repetitive questioning to stop. He signed a confession typed by the detective. He was charged with the wilful murder of Rosemary, sat on death row facing the noose for three months, until he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years with hard labour.

One week later there was another murder in Perth – a social worker from the Northern Territory was strangled and her body defiled. Six months later a young student was shot dead while babysitting the eight-month old baby of a Melbourne businessman and his wife.

Finally Eric Edgar Cooke was caught. He confessed not only to the shootings and strangling, along with at least 250 burglaries and car thefts but also to the 1958 stabbing murder of a Melbourne divorcee and 12 attempted murders – seven of them in hit-runs with stolen cars, exactly the way Rosemary Anderson had been run down. He also confessed to the murder of Rosemary Anderson and Jillian Brewer.

Like John Button, another man had already confessed, under similar circumstances, to Jillian Brewer's murder. He was Darryl Beamish, a 19-year-old deaf-mute, who was condemned to death but whose sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

The serial killer was charged with all the murders and other crimes – but not the two for which other men were convicted. Those men's new appeals on the basis of the fresh evidence of Cooke's confessions failed, even though the killer's confessions were very detailed. Both men appealed to the High Court of Australia, and Beamish to the Privy Council. All appeals failed, the judges deciding that Cooke was lying in insisting he murdered the girls and Button and Beamish were lying in insisting they did not.

In the case of Rosemary Anderson, Cooke said he had stolen a Holden and, after running down Rosemary, had crashed it into a tree in nearby Kings Park to hide the damage. It was not examined by the



The cell in which John Button's solicitor told him he could "swing for murder".

police, who told the owners that joyriders had taken it. It had been repaired before Cooke was caught.

Cooke's execution in October 1964, the last in Western Australia and second last in Australia, ended Button's hopes of anyone believing him. He patiently sat out his days in prison, and was paroled after five years.

The year after he was paroled, he married Helen Featherstone, a police sergeant's daughter and devout member of the Presbyterian Church. After a lot of anguish and difficulty adjusting to life out of prison, the last years and the injustice, John accepted Helen's guidance and joined her at church. They had two children.

John is now an elder of the Westminister Presbyterian Church and a bricklayer. Helen is a bookkeeper. Their son is a veterinary surgeon studying to become a doctor and their daughter is a social worker. John has got on with his life but

continued to try to have his name cleared, writing to every Premier asking for his case to be reopened, and trying to get access to his police and legal files, and trial transcripts. He kept coming up against a brick wall, but never stopped praying for help to gain justice.

That help came in November 1991 through a chance meeting at a dance between his younger brother, Jim Button, and journalist Estelle Blackburn.

Estelle is the grand-daughter of a Methodist deaconess, and daughter of a Presbyterian Ladies College commercial teacher. She took up journalism after her schooling at Presbyterian Ladies College (primary) and Methodist Ladies College (secondary). She had worked in print, radio and television before joining Government service and becoming press secretary to two Police Ministers. When she met Jim, she was press secretary to the Premier of



Living with anguish: John Button and widow Sally Cooke were both victims of serial killer Eric Edgar Cooke.

*"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand."*

Psalm 37:23, 24 (NKJV)

**John, in 1963 you were charged with the willful murder of your girlfriend of the time, Rosemary Anderson. How close did you come to being sentenced to death?**

Very close indeed! I have found out recently that 11 of the jurors believed that I should hang for the offence. One member of the jury, however spoke up for me and argued strongly that the evidence against me was purely circumstantial. He saved my neck – literally! I was eventually convicted of manslaughter. I look back now and I see that God's providence was at work in those events in the Perth jury room nearly 40 years ago. God can sometimes allow us to reach the very bottom, before he comes to the rescue of his people. This is how I see things now.

**What do you think about the calls for the reinstatement of the death penalty?**

I have to say that I have mixed feelings. On the one hand as a Christian believer I do think Scripture teaches that, under God, the State has the right to administer the death penalty for certain crimes. On the other hand the way the present system works is flawed, sometimes fatally. For example, I think a jury should not simply be able to hand down a verdict, but should give reasons for it, to show the judge their reasoning and to make it clear they have understood the evidence submitted to them.

**How do you understand the teaching of Deuteronomy 17:6,7 ("On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.")**

Well, to me these verses state that an offence attracting the death penalty must be proven beyond, not just reasonable doubt, but absolute doubt. And this must be established from a number of independent sources of evidence. Also that the witnesses responsible for gaining a conviction which leads to the death penalty, must be held accountable for their testimony and actions so that they clearly understand the seriousness of their evidence. If it's discovered that they have borne false witness, after their motivation for doing so has been clarified, they should be received at the discretion of the Court a punishment that reflects the seriousness of the suffering inflicted on the innocent party. In such a circumstance I would also like to see the person who has

# Up out of

*John Button tells Stuart Bonnington*

been falsely convicted present the court with a 'victim impact statement', which would be taken into account by the judge before he handed down the verdict.

**Your story has many intriguing twists and turns. One of them surrounds Sir Ronald Wilson, whom you faced as Ron Wilson QC, the brilliant Crown Prosecutor, and then an active member of the Presbyterian Church and now of the Uniting Church.**

Yes, Mr Wilson was like the proverbial terrier during my trial. We're very friendly now. He has visited my family at home and keeps in contact with me from time to time. Of course, the first time I saw him was at my trial, the second was in 1988 when I turned up at a Bible Society AGM. He was the speaker although I only really became aware of the link with my past as the meeting went on.

Afterwards I approached him and said "There are two things I would like to say to you, sir. The first is not so important but the second is. I am innocent, but because of what I have been through, my life now since I found Christ is far more blessed than it would every have been without Him." I love Mr Wilson as a brother in Christ and I respect the work he has done in society and for his church.

**In the last minutes before he was**

Western Australia.

When Jim eventually told her about John's case and his efforts with successive Premiers, Estelle offered to see if she could speak to the Premier about it. She wanted to meet John first and read up on his case. Jim took her to meet John on 17 February 1992. After discovering the case had gone to the High Court, Estelle explained to John that the separation of powers prevented the Government re-opening the case without fresh evidence. She suggested John go to the people's jury and write a book. John then produced a manuscript he had taken five years to write and which had been rejected by a publisher just a week before. Estelle offered to work on it for him, thinking it may take up some of the three-month long service leave she was due. Instead it took six and a half years. Certain of John's innocence and determined to find something to prove it, Estelle left her job

and took up work two days a week to leave her free to reinvestigate a 30-year-old murder.

She believes she had a lot of help from God in finding the information she needed. But she also used her Government networks to get access to police, prison and legal files, and followed every lead with terrier-like determination. She found all seven girls who had been run down by Cooke but survived, and gained their confidence so that they agreed to reopen old wounds and tell her their stories. She sought the five other attempted murder victims who had been attacked while asleep, finding all but one who died of cancer a couple of years after the attack.

She found that talking to these girls – now women in their 40s, 50s and 60s – helped them resolve the trauma of their attacks and heal. Though the police at the time had told the girls that it was Cooke



**John Button shows where he found Rosemary Anderson.**

who had attacked them, they never publicised these 12 attempted murders, so the girls had received no sympathy or under-

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*of his long battle to clear his name.*

**hung, Cooke confessed that it was he who murdered Rosemary Anderson and not you. Why do you think he confessed? Why didn't the police believe him?**

I see his confession as a vital piece of God's providence towards me. Eric Cooke was guilty of many dreadful crimes, but at least he tried to set the record straight before he left this life. He had been brought up in the Methodist Church and his final present to his son was a signed copy of the Bible. I believe Cooke was making his peace with God by confessing in the way he did. I expect to meet him in heaven. Nevertheless, at the time, the police and courts viewed him a liar and they had me already, tried, convicted and in prison as Rosemary's killer.

**What was prison like? Did you have any spiritually help inside?**

Fremantle was very grim, but if you minded your own business and watched your back you were OK. I got 10 years with hard labour, which got me some respect in jail. After three years there I was transferred to a prison farm because of good behaviour. The Christian church was basically invisible to me.

The only people who took any spiritual interest in me were a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who wrote to me and wanted to visit me. One of the things my experience

inside taught me was that Prison Fellowship's ministry is a vital way Christians can help prisoners and their families. It's a very good organisation, which is well worth supporting.

**What happened when you were released from prison?**

I tried to pick up the pieces of my life, but I had been shattered by the experience. Everything had changed so much between February 1963 when I went into prison and Christmas 1967 when I was released. I slipped into a depression that seemed to deepen as time went on. I found it very difficult to hold down a job. However even though at the time I did not know it, God had a plan for me, and when I met Helen (who later became my wife,) the Lord really began to work in my life.

Helen came from a Presbyterian family and went regularly to her local congregation. In 1977 I hit rock bottom. That was when I became a believer. I saw clearly that my only hope lay with Christ. When I became a believer my life began to completely change. I became involved in the church and we began to attend Bassendean Presbyterian. I was welcomed very warmly there, with a number of people praying for and befriending me. Since 1992 we have been attending the Beechboro Westminster Presbyterian Church, where I have subsequently become an elder.

**I think Estelle Blackburn's *Broken Lives* is going to turn into a modern Australian classic. How did it come to be written?**

Under God, ministers and their wives have played an important role in it all! At Bassendean Michael and Maureen Charles

encouraged me to make every effort to clear my name, so that people would accept the truth of my Christian profession. That started a whole chain of events that eventually led to Estelle's book. As she was researching it, we prayed and prayed for important people linked to Cooke's crimes to be found and come forward! Then when we moved to Beechboro Paul and Dawn Bloomfield, led us to the first important contact after we had prayed about it together! God has answered so many of our prayers in this regard!

We cannot thank Estelle enough for all her work. She has become like a sister to us! I've also written a short book about my life called *Why Me, Lord?* which complements the material found in *Broken Lives*.

**What now?**

Well, the new evidence in my favour uncovered by *Broken Lives* has led the West Australian Government to grant me leave for a fresh Supreme Court appeal. I have always believed that there are a lot of people in Perth who knew I was innocent, who knew that the circumstantial evidence that convicted me did not reveal the truth about Rosemary's death. Now we have the opportunity to prove this once and for all in the Supreme Court. We are going to try and obtain an acquittal. I'm not looking for revenge or anything like that, but we need to put what was done wrongly in the past right in the present, if possible.

I also want to be open to God's leading concerning future ministry for me. Over the years I've learned to trust him and I have complete confidence that at the right time he will make what he wants me to do plain.

*Stuart Bonnington is minister of Bicton Presbyterian Church, Perth.*

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standing – in one case, the woman’s husband of three decades had not even believed the strangulation to within one twist of death and attempted rape.

Estelle gleaned vital information from a witness who had not been questioned well enough by the police and she found a person who could corroborate part of Cooke’s confession, a person never sought or questioned by the police.

Finally *Broken Lives* was published in November 1998, with funds generously provided by a local newspaper editor who stepped in when a publisher withdrew last minute. Bret Christian has since continued with editorial and financial support for Button’s cause.

It was launched with a special hour’s edition of the ABC program *Australian Story*, followed later by a *60 Minutes* item. It prompted an urgency motion in State Parliament which resulted in the Attorney General asking for the advice of the Solicitor General. Estelle wrote a submission to the Solicitor General and provided source material. In August 1999 the Attorney General granted a new appeal, dependent on the grounds of appeal, which were accepted in March this year.

Estelle gained the pro bono services of Tom Percy QC and solicitor Jon Davies to prepare the appeal, which is expected later this year or early next year. Estelle is still devoting a large part of her time to the case, still exploring further evidence and giving talks to groups such as Probus, Rotary, Wider Vision and schools.

**B**ret Christian has also worked on providing evidence for the appeal. He searched the Internet for an expert who could re-create the Button and Cooke confessions, and searched the state for Simcas and Holdens similar to Button’s car and the one Cooke stole. Bret paid for an American expert to come to Perth to do crash reconstructions in February this year. The expert said the reconstructions proved conclusively that Button’s car had not hit a pedestrian and they substantiated Cooke’s confession. His tests brought startling banner headlines to *The West Australian* newspaper: ‘Cooke Was the Killer’.

Darryl Beamish, whose family did not want to be involved in the book, have now asked Estelle and Bret for their help, and Estelle believes that Button’s exoneration will help achieve Beamish’s. *Broken Lives* has sold 9000 copies and has won Estelle the 1999 Premier’s Literary Award for non-fiction, the 1999 Perth Press Club Award for sustained excellence in journalism, and the prestigious 1999 Clarion Award for the journalist who made the greatest contribution to the profession in the year. The

ABC’s *Australian Story* on the case was highly recommended in the Walkley Awards and the producer, Wendy Page, jointly won the NSW Law Association’s 1999 Media Award.

Estelle is now seeking a publisher to take over publication of *Broken Lives* and she and a scriptwriter are raising development funds for a film *Into the Light* about John’s case.

Estelle says John’s injustice was due to pressured police wanting to close a murder



**A re-enactment of John Button’s horrific discovery.**

case quickly and, with blinkered vision and determination, being able to pressure a naive, powerless youth.

“Having decided John did it, they did not investigate the case at all,” she said. “Had they had the Holden stolen by Cooke examined next morning, they would have found some traces of flesh, skin, hair or fibres or marks that would have shown a pedestrian collision. They did not examine this car, found near the scene

of the crime, despite John’s car having absolutely no skin, hair or fibres on or under it and damage that was not consistent with a pedestrian hit.

“When the detectives went to the scene next morning, they found the facts at the scene did not fit the confession – but instead of asking questions and investigating further, the detective sergeant made up a lie to cover the discrepancy.

“The appeal judges were similarly blinkered. They refused to give any consideration to Cooke’s modus operandi of hit-runs, saying it was similar fact evidence. But similar fact evidence can only not be considered against an accused. Had they granted John another trial, he would have been the accused, not Cooke.”

**E**stelle says she was inspired by other journalists who have succeeded in correcting injustices – such as Ludovic Kennedy with *10 Rillington Place* and David Yallop *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, who exonerated UK’s Timothy Evans (posthumously) and New Zealand’s Arthur Thomas.

“But there are just so many. You only have to look at the famous ones in UK now – the Guildford Four, Birmingham Six, Bridgewater Four, Derek Bentley and now, posthumously granted a new appeal, James Hanratty. Then there’s the five innocent men freed from Death Row in Illinois as a result of the work of journalism students at North-Western University. But those cases hardly scratch the surface of the agony suffered by people wrongfully executed and imprisoned.

“I was inspired, too, by a quote from the 1988-91 President of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sir Ronald Wilson. Sir Ronald was the Crown Prosecutor at Button’s trial. In delivering The Bible Society in Australia’s 1988 Oliver Beguin Memorial Lecture titled *Searching for a Just Society*, he said: “The search for justice is as old as humanity. It is not an activity confined to any particular group of human beings. Indeed, the longing for justice is characteristic of all that is best in human nature’.”

Estelle said that she felt morally bound to do something to correct the injustice perpetrated on John Button.

“John had tried everything he could. There was a man crying for help and I had the writing and researching skills that could help him. How could I turn my back?

“While I have lost all my financial resources to this, I have gained much – not least an enduring friendship with John, Helen and their family. But, single and childless and now 50, it has given me the opportunity to give something back in gratitude for the blessings I have received throughout my life.”

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# The fifth gospel

*Charles Colson reflects on the enduring power of artistic excellence.*

Christianity has never had a very strong presence in Japan. In fact, with industrialisation, Japan has become one of the most secular nations on earth. But right now, thousands of Japanese are hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new, or should I say old, way – and they're embracing it.

The evangelist responsible for leading this spiritual awakening might surprise you. He's none other than Johann Sebastian Bach.

That's right. The German composer who died 250 years ago is bringing Christianity to Japan through the beauty of his music. Now there are reports of thousands of Japanese, inspired by his cantatas, converting to Christianity. It's a testament to the power of art steeped in a biblical worldview.

Christianity has never been widely embraced by Japanese culture. When European traders and missionaries came to the island nation in the 17th century they met with mixed success: commerce thrived, but the gospel languished. But Japan eagerly embraced the music of Western culture.

Shinichi Suzuki even developed a method to learn to play classical instruments that became famous worldwide. Now, through a resurgence in Bach's popularity, that music is providing a foothold for evangelism that trade and traditional approaches never have.

Bach's popularity is so great that the classes at the Felix Mendelssohn Academy in Bach's hometown of Leipzig, Germany, are filled with Japanese students. These students are learning about more than the music of the great composer – they learn about the spirit that moved him to write: that is, Bach's love of God.

Writing on this resurgence of Bach's music for *Civilization*, the magazine of the Library of Congress, Uwe Siemon-Netto reports that his Japanese interpreter asked to start the day with one of Bach's cantatas. She selected one whose lyrics declare that God's name is Love. "This has taught me what these two words mean to Christians ... and I like it very much," she said.

As Siemon-Netto points out, Bach's music was once celebrated as the "fifth gospel" — praise that has never been more



aptly said of Bach's work than it is in Japan today.

What began as an interest in the brilliance of the music has led to an understanding of the richness of God's grace. Masaaki Suzuki, founder of a school for Bach's music in Japan, says that "Bach is teaching us the Christian concept of hope."

And Yoshikazu Tokuzen, of Japan's National Christian Council, calls Bach nothing less than "a vehicle of the Holy Spirit". And the revival his music is causing indeed confirms that.

At the end of every one of his works, Bach inscribed the initials "SDG" – shorthand for Soli Deo Gloria, "to God alone be the glory". Little could he have imagined what purposes God would have for his work, even hundreds of years after his death.

And Bach could hardly have imagined that his music would contribute to the evangelisation of Japan.

Bach's legacy is a sterling illustration of C.S. Lewis' maxim that the world does not need more Christian writers – it needs more good writers, and composers, who are Christians. And when we produce art that is really good, art that reflects a biblical worldview, its richness will endure through the ages — Soli Deo Gloria.

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# Out of Africa

*Peter Burke recounts how long service leave turned into an unforgettable adventure.*

**I**t is April 1999; it is 5.30pm and you have just stepped out of a plane into 40-degree heat. You join a 90-minute queue to go through customs and you ask yourself “Why am I here?”

The answer goes back to about one year earlier when two events happened. The first was the principal of the school where I worked suggesting it was time to take some of my long service leave. About the same time SIM (formerly Sudan Interior Mission and now Society for International Ministries) sent out an urgent call for accountants, long or short-term.

My wife Anne and I have been involved with SIM via a prayer group and supporting missionaries for many years. After praying, we applied for short-term service.

The “here” was at Niamey International airport on Good Friday.

The why comes back to a desire to learn a little about what it is like to work with missionaries in another country – in this case Niger – how they cope with living in another culture. We wanted to disturb the comfort zones of our values, including our walk with God.

Anne was asked to assist with secretarial and library duties in Sahel Academy, a

school mainly for missionaries’ children. The college had 57 students from many countries.

A typical day started with Anne leaving home about 7am and returning about 4.30pm. Alongside clerical duties were the little unusual things, such as fixing computers, as it is a little difficult to secure technical help, or supervising classes during SIM team prayer times or exams.

My role was in the school’s treasury office, where the workers included the treasurer, who is a Canadian, and national staff.

Niger’s financial system is different from Australia. Credit cards might be accepted in a couple of locations in the capital city, cheques might be used between businesses, but most people only use cash. Transferring funds via a banking system within the country is not possible.

This means the country operates something like an overgrown national petty cash box. This was a bit of a challenge to someone who complains if anyone at his school needs petty cash reimbursement much more than \$50.

Other challenges included documents from suppliers in written in French to be read by a non-French-speaker; software

programmes often in French and belonging to pre-mouse era; the treasurer taking well-deserved leave four weeks after I arrived; power failures; the time and effort of attending to domestic needs; coping with a the heat, ranging to more than 45 degrees; and poverty, including untreated illness such as leprosy used as an aid to begging.

The privileges of being there far outweighed the challenges. It is hard to describe the joy missionaries expressed when people became Christians. As the focus of the mission is to encourage people to accept Jesus Christ, there was great encouragement when this happened, even in small numbers.

Working for a brief time with people who see the availability of physical resources as a means of serving God and having no other value is refreshing. It certainly challenges the emphasis many of us can have in accumulating resources as a means of obtaining physical security at the risk of our spiritual security. We learned far more from the missionaries and national workers than they could have benefited from us.

The missionaries were very welcoming, even though our roles were very much support. When we asked why the warm welcome, their reply was that, for many of them, their skills did not include financial administration. Such tasks in a foreign culture are daunting at the best of times, but if you have no background it is so much harder. Backrooms skills are in short supply in many areas, such as clerical, medical technicians, trade skills, etc.

The missionary in the front line work needs other people doing the behind-the-scenes work. A support role in a missionary organisation is vital. The people at the cutting edge will welcome you.

We have been asked, “What difference can you make?” However, the better question seems to be “How can I use the gifts God has given me in His service?”

By God’s grace we certainly have had our comfort zones challenged in a wonderful way. We have no regrets about using long service leave in this way.

*Peter and Anne Burke are members of the Wabroonga Presbyterian Church.*

ap

## NIGER

**Location:** West Africa, north of Nigeria

**Area:** 1267 million square kilometres

**Climate:** Desert, mostly hot, dry, dusty

**Population:** 19.5 million (estimated)

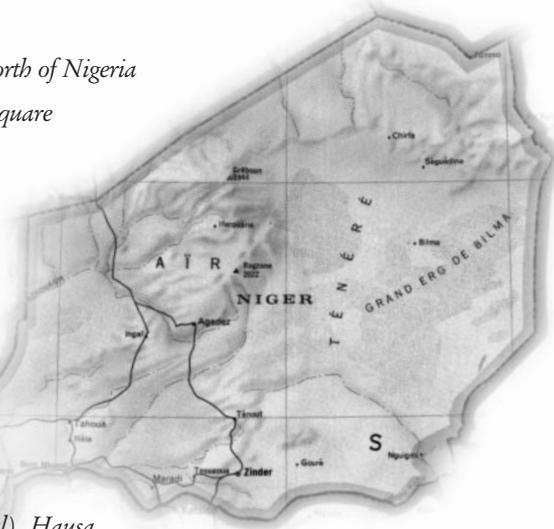
**Life expectancy:** 41.09 years

**Faiths:** Muslim 80%; Christian 1%

**Literacy:** 13.6%

**Languages:** French (official), Hausa and 19 other language groups.

**Economy:** Niger is a poor, landlocked sub-Saharan nation. The economy is centred on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry and ‘re-exports’.



## Movie Watch Erin Brockovich

Reviewed by Phil Campbell

*Starring Julia Roberts as Erin Brockovich, Albert Finney as Ed Masrey; Directed by Danny DeVito. Summary: A heartwarming true story, packaged with uncomfortable levels of gritty language and sexual innuendo.*



Julia Roberts and Albert Finney in *Erin Brockovich*

Everyone loves a good “David and whatsisname” story – the little guy takes on the insurmountable forces of evil, and wins against all the odds. *Erin Brockovich* fits the mould perfectly, with even a passing nod to the biblical prototypes in the opening and closing moments of the movie.

David, in this case, is Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts), a struggling single mum

with mountains of determination, and a figure to match. Tired of being ignored by potential employers, she browbeats lawyer Ed Masrey into hiring her as a filing clerk – “I’m smart, I’ll do anything, and I’m not leaving here without a job.” Erin’s determination carries over into the way she works. Curious as to why routine property settlement case files include medical records, she starts to uncover some disturbing facts.

Enter Goliath, the huge Pacific Gas and Electric plant in the township of Hinkley. Donna Jensen has cancer, and Erin wants to know why PG&E are picking up the tab for the medical bills. And that’s just the start. Donna hasn’t made the connection, but she mentions the neighbours are ill too. And the little girl down the road. That’s enough to launch Erin’s full-scale investigation – under the cynical eye of Ed and rest of the Masry and Vititoe staff. The fact is, PG&E have been allowing Hexavalent Chromium to seep into the ground-water for years, and the townspeople are suffering the consequences. Erin’s research techniques are unorthodox. “How did you do it?” asks a sharp-tongued female lawyer. “Well, seing I’ve got no brains and no legal expertise, I guess I just performed 634 sexual favours,” says Erin. It’s okay – she’s kidding.

While there’s no doubt her low-cut outfits open plenty of doors, the real secret in arranging the biggest class-action lawsuit in American history is that Erin actually cares – in contrast to the legal professionals around her. “Are you a lawyer?” “No – I hate lawyers. I just work for one.”

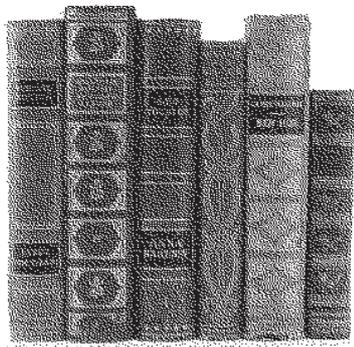
It’s a long movie, slow moving in places, with a few good laughs, an uncomfortable dose of profanity, and a heartwarming finish. In fact, when the outcome of the case is announced, you may get a little misty-eyed. There’s a subtext here that warns against judging by appearances, and that pricks the bubble of professional detachment. Lawyers, beware. But mostly, it’s just a great yarn; a David overcoming giant opposition, good overcoming evil against all the odds.

It’s ironic, really – people love stories like that. And we know a far better one. So why are we so tentative – and even apologetic – when the opportunity comes to tell the story of the one who took on even bigger odds, suffered to the point of death on a cross... and won a bigger victory than Erin Brockovich could even imagine?

*Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor.*



## books



### Serving as Deacons Report to GAA, 1997

Reviewed by Greg Goswell

This is the report presented to and accepted by the General Assembly of Australia in 1997. Don’t let that stop you reading it! To describe it as a “report”

hardly does it justice – it’s a good read! It comes from the pen of the convenor of the Committee on the Diaconate, Peter Barnes, who does a splendid job surveying the role of deacons as presented in the Bible.

Dr Barnes goes on to give an entertaining ‘potted history’ of deacons in the church. The report is scupulously fair in its presentation and weighing of the biblical evidence – as Barnes says, “dogmatism is out of place” – though a clear picture of the biblical role emerges as the office of Christian love.

The convenor has a happy knack of discovering the oddest events in church history, and is good enough to share his discoveries with us. To illustrate the point of how in the early centuries the deacon became a minor liturgical official, we have the example of when Photius became patriarch of Constantinople in 858: he was made a monk one day, a reader the second day, a subdeacon the third, a deacon the fourth, a presbyter the fifth, and a patriarch on the sixth.

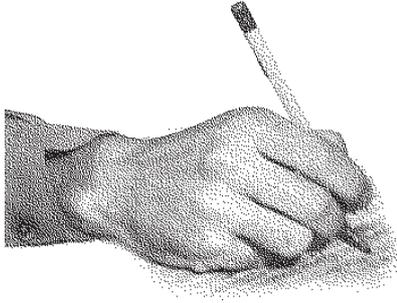
The decay of the diaconate and the deviant theology of the medieval church meant that begging was rife. Jacques de Vitry (c. 1160-1240) told of two beggars – one blind, the other lame – who were healed against their wills when they could not get out of the way of a procession bearing the miracle-working body of Saint Martin. Who said church history was dull or uninteresting?

There is the rediscovery and reactivation of the biblical role at the time of the Reformation, and one of the most impressive attempts in Scotland to revive the diaconate as a ministry of mercy is found at St John’s Glasgow in the 1820s as Thomas Chalmers sought to tackle the problem of urban poverty.

The renewal of the diaconate in the Presbyterian Church of Australia is the final topic, with practical suggestions of how it might be implemented in the church.

*Greg Goswell is minister of Campbelltown Presbyterian Church.*

# letters



## Shattered union

March *AP* with its emphasis on union with Christ seemed to miss the most important point of union. Just before Jesus went to the cross to redeem us, he not only laid down the basis of union but also the constitution by which the church is to operate.

John 17 is the most important chapter in the Bible in relation to union in the Church, and we have ignored it to our peril and disaster within the Church for 2000 years. In John 17 Jesus set the standard that was to last until he comes to judge the world, as is emphasised in many a parable.

For the Church to be the true Church of Christ it must show within its life the oneness in relationship that existed between the Father and the Son. This is the criterion laid down in the final prayer of Christ before he went to the cross. Instead we have shed each other's blood throughout our history, including the Jews'.

Isn't it time we heeded the call to union as clearly expressed in John 17 or face the consequences of rejecting Christ's dying prayer for his Church, a Church with her hands bloody with guilt, instead of a pure bride prepared for the bridegroom?

March *AP* also had articles on Jews. The Bible makes it quite clear the Jews are God's people by eternal choice as well as by redemption.

His promise to lead them back with the help of gentiles to the holy land is happening right now before our eyes. Who are we to judge them or suggest that they are not being saved according to his Word as clearly prophesied? Their place in God's history supersedes that of gentiles. The best we can say is that we can regard ourselves as adopted Jews grafted into their vine (Rom. 11:16-18).

Notice in the coming Kingdom of Christ it is the Jews who are to rule, (Rev. 7:1-7). In fact there is no mention of gen-

tiles at all in the book of Revelation although we can imagine some to be present in 7:9. Let's be honest and admit the Bible, our Bible, is a Jewish book from beginning to end.

*Rev. Lou Ollett,  
member of Scots Church, Kiama*

## God's two loves

Implied in much of the criticism of Peter Barnes (*AP*, December) is the idea that God's love is exclusively defined in giving Jesus for a person, and if he didn't do that (if a person is non-elect) then God does not love that person in any sense. But there are two kinds of love.

First, there is God's love of benevolence, which is received by all his creatures. It arises from God's nature, the fact that "God is love", "Good unto all men is the Lord". God is not ill-disposed to his creatures. God cannot be positively unloving (malicious) without denying his own nature.

Second, there is God's covenantal (complacent) love. This is sheer mercy, so it is not for all God's creatures: "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated." The "I hated" is not "loved less". It means the complete absence of intimate complacent love. That is a special love reserved only for those in covenant relationship with God. It is analogous to the love within marriage. A husband should love all his neighbours (thus all women) in the benevolent sense, desiring only good for them, but he shows special covenant love only for his wife. In that sense, he "hates" all others, not meaning he is unkind or malicious to them, but that he refuses to give them the covenantal intimacy reserved only for his chosen one. Esau was greatly loved in God's daily benevolence, but he was not elected in God's covenant, nor did he want it. He even held the title deed (birth-right) to the covenant, but considered it worth less than a hamburger. Wretched man!

*Peter Bloomfield,  
Bald Hills, Qld.*

## For the dead

Don Carson, writing on baptism of the dead (*AP*, April), does not comment on the context of 1 Corinthians 15:29. It is linked to 1 Corinthians 15:12-16, which concludes "if the dead do not rise then Christ is not risen". The intervening verses talk of the consummation and all things being put under God, then 1 Cor 15:29 is an emphatic conclusion repeating the sentiment of 1 Cor 15:14, "If Christ is not risen ... your faith is in vain".

However I suggest that the punctuation is incorrect. There is none in the original, so I propose the following: "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized? For the dead!!! (to be amongst the dead).

There are no theological problems with this rendering and the whole passage makes more sense with greater artistry.

*Neil Cadman,  
Norman Park, Qld.*

## Resurrection a reality

It is encouraging to read *A body of truth* (*AP*, April) on Bishop Paul Barnett's account of our Lord Jesus' bodily resurrection. His response is straightforward, affirmative and admirable. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand others who claim to be Christian leaders but at the same time do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. As surely as Jesus did die as the substitute for the penalty of our sins, he – our eternal saviour in his entirety – did also rise from death. Evidently, Jesus' physical resurrection is a factual reality.

*Paul Chang,  
Sandringham, NSW*

## Staking all on a day

Are the "days" of creation literal solar days? "Yes!" say the Westminster Confession, a significant number of contemporary scientists and theologians, and a rapidly growing number of Christians. "No" say most scientists, atheists, and Christians who have been swayed by their biased interpretation of some evidence.

The "solar day" model is far better supported by science than the "explain it away" model, say 50 Ph.D scientists in *In Six Days* (edited by John Ashton, published by New Holland in Australia in 1999.) So why should Christians support the philosophical faith position of the anti-biblical scientists? Rowland Ward pleads that this a side issue. No. God's honour is at stake. God is being charged with giving a false story of creation. Respect for the authority of the Bible is at stake. Explain away Genesis 1-11, and you have introduced a hermeneutical principle which undermines anything supernatural in any part of the Bible. So Christianity has lost its impact on law, politics, and culture. (See the interview with Dr Douglas Kelly of the Reformed Seminary in Charlotte, Carolina in *Creation*, 22(2), March-May 2000, pages 24-27.)

The gospel is at stake. If creation were already ancient before Adam, with fossils in

strata revealing disease, death, and catastrophes, how could it be pronounced "very good"? If death and the curse came before Adam's sin, then Christ's obedience can't redeem us from it. And will the restoration of creation only be to that mess?

The reformers fought for justification by faith. Our fight is for God the Creator, as a basis for understanding justification by faith.

*Frank Savage,  
Scots Church, Clayfield.*

### Put science second

David Palmer (*AP*, March) gives equal authority to "Scripture and the testimony of God's revelation found in creation" and again emphasises that "the same reality lies behind God's twin revelations". Placing fallible fallen man's interpretation of God's indirect natural revelation on a par with God's direct Scriptural revelation is completely against Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 1 & 2. See also *The Sufficiency of Scripture* by Noel Weeks.

As a university researcher, I can assure you that the academic scientific community is governed by paradigms and establishments. The supposed great age of the earth is mainly based on dating methods which are governed by assumptions deriving from the dogma of uniformitarianism.

When Velikovsky suggested his catastrophic theories in the 1950s, with many valid criticisms of the established uniformitarianism, he was incredibly abused and his publisher was boycotted by academics.

Similarly, the initial opposition to Galileo came not from the Church but from the Aristotelean/Ptolemaic establishment, which was the "scientific wisdom" of the time.

Young earth creationism is not based on the writings of anti-Darwinists like Behe and Denton, nor even on the scientific evidence itself (which does support it), but it is based on the humble acceptance of God's Word. That is, when he plainly says that he created the universe in six days (Gen. 1, Ex. 20:11), divided the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21), sent a fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17), or will raise the dead (1 Cor. 15), he means what he says.

*Allan Steel,  
University of Sydney, NSW*

*Editor's note: This concludes correspondence on the creation debate for a while.*

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PARK-LINN HAVEN in Bowral, a non-profit retirement initiative

by Presbyterian Social Services could be the

# prayer

## MAY

- 21 Cecily Moar of Toowoomba, Qld, in her new role as O.M.F. Prayer Facilitator, following a visit back to Korea where she worked since 1974.
- 22 Residents and staff at the 16 Presbyterian retirement facilities and nursing homes in NSW, including those at Drummoyne, Croydon, Lakemba, Paddington and Ashfield (Sydney).
- 23 John and Frances Ting of the Chinese Presbyterian Church, Sydney, as they return to Singapore where he is to be the principal of the Discipleship Training Centre.
- 24 Members and leaders of Presbyterian Youth, NSW, especially training director Colin Spragg, president Karen Astles and secretary Gavin Boyd.
- 25 Wendy Eyles from Camp Hill, Brisbane, teaching English in Macassar, Indonesia, and seeking opportunities for deeper conversations with girls she has befriended.
- 26 PLC, Sydney (at Croydon) – pupils and staff; Mr W.T. McKeith principal and Dr Greta Gaut new chaplain.
- 27 Gwen Gibson from Canterbury, Melbourne, Bible translator in PNG. Since 1958 (Kanite and its Inoke dialect) involved in literacy work.
- 28 Leeton-Yanco parish, NSW; about 95 communicants and 8 elders; vacant – the interim moderator and all preachers.
- 29 Warwick and Kathy Vincent from Hurstville, Sydney, training youth workers in Victoria under Campus Crusade for Christ Australia.
- 30 Presbytery of New England, NSW; 4 parishes and 2 home mission stations totalling 18 congregations with 635

communicants, 235 adherents, 350 children and youth and 60 elders; 1 minister under jurisdiction.

- 31 Mt Gambier parish, South Australia, 5 congregations including Allendale, Glenburnie, O.B. Flat and Nelson; about 130 communicants and 11 elders; Rod and Sandra Waterhouse. Geoff Keen, new assistant, and Helen.

## JUNE

- 1 Ascension Day: praise God for the heavenly intercession and reign of Christ and pray for Presbyterians to be more a people of prayer.
- 2 Language Recordings workers (since 1969) Alex Shaw as he recovers from injuries suffered in Thailand, and Sybil, recording in PNG.
- 3 Cairns South parish, Qld; about 45 communicants and 4 elders; Russell and Laurel van Delden.
- 4 David Cook and Neil Chambers (Sydney), Ian Stewart (Tahlee, Karuah) and all Bible College staff and students.
- 5 Browns Plains, southern Brisbane; about 75 communicants and 7 elders; Danny and Desley Mihailovic.
- 6 Peter and Anne Davies from Launceston, SIM medical workers at Galmi hospital, Niger – coping with industrial troubles and court cases, but rejoicing in a group of new believers. Returning to Australia next month.
- 7 Koroit-Port Fairy parish, western Vic. Also including Hawkesdale and Woolsthorpe; about 117 communicants and 13 elders; Alan and Virginia Every.
- 8 Presbytery of Melbourne West, Vic; 5 parishes, 2 appointment parishes and 3 home mission stations with 695 communicants, 70 adherents, 125 children and youth and 75 elders; 1 tertiary chaplain and 1 missionary; Peter Phillips clerk.
- 9 Gisborne home mission station, west-

ern Melbourne; about 20 communicants and 4 elders; George and Bea Smith, Keith Allen moderator.

- 10 Tumarumba home mission station, NSW, 3 congregations; about 28 communicants and 4 elders; vacant, Peter Gordon moderator.
- 11 On the Day of Pentecost pray that our own and all churches will “walk in step with the Spirit” and be renewed by Him.
- 12 There are some 2800 non-ministerial elders (“ruling elders”) in our denomination. Pray that they will all develop and fully exercise their gifts.
- 13 Len and Wendy Pearce of Reservoir, Melbourne, as they return to the Middle East with Red Sea Team International.
- 14 Newcastle Samoan parish, Mayfield; the members and elders; Setu and Faasinoala Amosa.
- 15 Ringwood-Heathmont parish, Melbourne; about 80 communicants and 4 elders; Ken and Gianna Brown.
- 16 Presbyterian Inland Mission as it carried through discussions recently at Mt Tamborine and seeks to fill staff vacancies; Jack Knapp convener-superintendent.
- 17 Sandra Wade-Ferrell from Epping, Sydney, teaching English in East Asia under OMF
- 18 Presbytery of Sydney North; 20 parishes totalling 24 congregations including 3 Korean ones; with 2660 communicants, 450 adherents, 560 children and youth and 240 elders; 12 retired ministers, 6 ministers without charge, 1 deaconess, 1 defence and 1 hospital chaplain; Peter Boase clerk.
- 19 North Pine parish, northern Brisbane; about 43 communicants and 5 elders; Neil and Dorothy McKinlay.
- 20 Botany-Mascot home mission station, eastern Sydney; about 18 communicants and 1 elder; Noah and Sarah Nam. Johnnie Li, moderator.

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# The riddle of Cain's wife

A common question that opponents of the Bible use to challenge its reliability, especially in the account of Creation, is "where did Cain get his wife?" The logic of the Genesis account, of course, requires that Cain married one of his sisters, one of the "other (sons and) daughters" born to Adam (Gen. 5:4).

This raises a double question about the propriety of Cain marrying his sister, both from a genetic point of view and from an ethical point of view (see Lev. 18:11).

Before answering these two difficulties, an important point needs to be made about the opponents of the Biblical account. They usually assume that the logic of science is on their side and, therefore, that the onus of proof rests with the Bible's supporters. They often overlook the fact that the evolutionary model leaves us with a much greater problem: not only to find a wife for Cain, but to find one for Adam as well.

Evolutionary theory assumes that homo sapiens is the result of genetic mutations from a "lower" form, and that after the mutations the new species can no longer mate with the previous form to produce offspring.

Thus, for homo sapiens to get started requires the relatively simultaneous appearance of a male and a female mutant that can mate with each other. If the mutations are random events, the likelihood of this happening in close proximity, in space as well as in time, is very, very remote. The biblical account is much more reasonable, the only difficulty being that it requires belief in a sovereign, omnipotent Creator who can produce something out of nothing.

Regarding the rightness of Cain marrying his sister, a couple of points should be



*Bruce Christian*

made. The evidence available to us today of the adverse effects of inbreeding make the Mosaic laws (eg Lev. 18:11) and the laws of our society concerning prohibited relationships most appropriate. However, the account in Genesis gives us some extra information that is important to our understanding of what happened.

The Bible makes it clear that, first, the world God made was perfect (Gen. 1:31) and, second, the degenerative process was a direct result of man's rebellion against his Creator (Gen. 3). Inbreeding today is so harmful because of the cumulative adverse genetic effects over a long period, but the effects at the beginning would have been minimal. This view is supported by the fact that the early human beings lived much longer and continued to bear children at a much older age than we do.

Some have seen an objection in Genesis 4:25, which says Adam again had relations with his wife who bore him Seth, for "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel". They suggest this verse means no other children were born between Abel and Seth. If this were so, Genesis 4:17, which refers to Cain having relations with his wife, would be a problem. In fact, the reference to Seth concerns his special place in covenant history – through his line the Saviour was born. It

does not imply that there were no other children in between, for several are mentioned in the intervening verses.

It seems to me, even from a scientific point of view, that the Genesis account of the beginning of the human race – God creating Adam and Eve and the line continuing by brothers marrying sisters in the first instance, then first cousins marrying each other, then second cousins, etc. – is much more believable and acceptable than any alternative explanation involving the simultaneous appearance of compatible mutants.

Finally, there is also the Gospel issue of Romans 5:12, which requires all humans to be related to Adam and therefore for Cain to have married his sister.

*Bruce Christian is minister of St Andrew's, Rose Bay, and moderator general of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.* 

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# The missing ingredient

*What the world needs now is grace, sweet grace.*

Christianity to many people, inside and outside the church, is something you don't: don't smoke, don't drink, don't swear, gamble, steal, sleep around – the list is long.

American writer Philip Yancey encapsulates the problem perfectly with a story of a prostitute in Chicago who, drug-addicted and desperate, began renting out her two-year-old daughter to paedophiles. Asked if she had considered asking a church for help, she was shocked.

"Church!" she cried. "Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

Yancey observes that in the New Testament account, women like this prostitute fled towards Jesus, not away from him.

That she – and many – could not do so today illustrates how the church has become identified with morality at the expense of grace. It seems to spend too much time telling people how to live their lives. Church is where you go after your life is sorted out – but who needs church then? Or, at any rate, who thinks they do?

Grace is the heart of the gospel. It is generosity and favor to those who fail to deserve it (that is, all of us). It is God himself on the Cross, reconciling the contradictory demands of justice, which requires the guilty to pay, and love, which cannot bear to see it. The gospel says there are none so depraved that they are beyond the reach of God's mercy.

And grace is free; there is no charge. All God asks of us who have received grace is that we should also impart it.

Morality is important, too. But it's not a qualification for entry to the church. And morality by itself, detached from grace, becomes singularly unattractive. It means well, but it becomes shrill, shrewish, hectoring. It seems quick to judge, slow to love. As James warned, "the anger of man



*Barney Zwartz*

does not achieve the righteousness of God".

What that prostitute did to her toddler was disgusting, vile. But this is a judgment anyone would make. What should distinguish the church is that the story must not end there. She needs not condemnation but compassion – literally, suffering alongside with. The church offers forgiveness and acceptance (plus help to change her life); in short, grace. After all, there but for the grace of God go we.

Recent newspaper articles have suggested different reasons for the slow decline of the church: too little or too much feminism, too many or too few liberals, too old-fashioned. These are peripheral: if the church truly offered grace to a thirsty world, these handicaps would dissolve.

In its infancy, when the church was often despised and persecuted, the testimony was repeated "look how these Christians love each other". When plague ravaged Alexandria in the third century during a violent persecution by the Emperor Valerian and masses fled the city, Christians won admiration by staying and ministering to the sick and terrified, often at the cost of their own lives. And this example was widely repeated, across the Roman world and across history.

Even today, many Christians are responsible for much generosity in the

community. Their contribution to wider society vastly outweighs their numbers. But it is the dedicated few, and mainstream middle-class Christianity often seems marked by a complacency and self-righteousness that we can't blame people for reacting against.

One of the big problems for the church is that we have imbibed too freely of the wider culture. We too – or too many of us – want the perfect body draped in the coolest clothes, conveyed stylishly from pleasant home to fulfilling job, with lots of little luxuries along the way.

We want financial security, the esteem of our peers and the personal autonomy which – conveyed in the raucous language of our "rights" – is modernity's most dangerous delusion. At worst – exemplified by American televangelists – God becomes a huge vending machine, money in here, blessing out there, for a self-absorbed audience indistinguishable from secular me-first society. Too often, the church reflects society's secular values.

Another problem for the church's witness to the world is the constant division, often about comparatively minor matters.

And yet, in grace the church still offers something unique. As Yancey said: "I rejected the church because I found so little grace there. I returned because I found grace nowhere else."

It is easy to say that the church needs to be a community again, that it needs to recapture its vision and mission, its undivided soul. Achieving it is much harder, because it has to begin with ordinary people like me.

*Barney Zwartz is an Age journalist and production editor of AP. This article was first published in The Age.*

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