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Presbyterian

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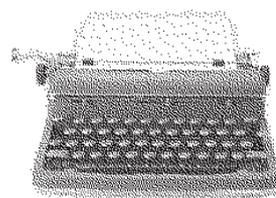
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A U S T R A L I A N
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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"Our people die well," said John Wesley. May it be true of us, prays Peter Barnes.

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A colony of heaven

Just over a decade ago, *Leadership* magazine, an offshoot of *Christianity Today*, commissioned a poll of American church leaders on sexual attitudes and practices. They surveyed 1000 readers who were involved in pastoral work. The results were alarming: One out of eight admitted to adultery, and one in five confessed to having behaved in sexually inappropriate and unprofessional ways.

Understandably, the editors of *Christianity Today* were dismayed. So they commissioned a second poll and surveyed 1000 of their own subscribers who were not ministers. This time the news was even worse. One in four admitted to extra-marital sex and one in two said that they had done something which they believed was sexually improper.

These statistics sent shock-waves through conservative Protestant circles, especially in view of the fact that *Christianity Today* readers tend to be highly educated and often hold positions of church office. If this sort of conduct is the norm for many of the leaders in the church, what is the average church member doing when confronted with sexual temptation?

Lest we shake our heads in disbelief at these statistics, or even worse, self-righteously tut-tut the American church, we should remember that sexual purity has been a challenge for Christians ever since the first century. Numerous churches in the apostolic period were scandalized by sexual promiscuity: Corinth, Thessalonica, Pergamum and Thyatira, to name just a few. The idea that immorality is only a recent problem is a myth. It's just part of the folklore that has developed around the idea that the apostolic church was somehow perfect. We know it wasn't. Nevertheless, the apostles found an antidote to the epidemic of immorality in the first-century world. What was it?

Several years ago, I remember sitting in the Regent College atrium at a coffee morning listening to Professor Gordon Fee, a leading New Testament scholar. Students were invited to put all sorts of questions to him. One question went something like this: "Dr Fee, if you were to return to parish life today, what would be one of your main priorities?" Dr Fee didn't hesitate for a moment: "If I were to lead a local church again," he said, "I would be

passionate in reminding the congregation that we had to think of ourselves as an eschatological community."

What did Dr Fee mean? When he chose the term "eschatological community" he used a piece of jargon that theologians sometimes employ to mean that Christians had to think of themselves as living simultaneously in the New Age of the kingdom as well as in the old world which is passing away.

For Christians, the future has already arrived. It began with Jesus' resurrection. The new world has dawned. But the old world remains too. As believers, we live between the times. The future age is already here, but it hasn't come in its fullness. And this is meant to shape how we live, how we think, and how we understand our place in the present world, which is destined for destruction.

As an "eschatological community", Christians are meant to be the advance-party of the new age. Some years ago, when I was involved in beach missions in northern NSW, I travelled to a couple of campsites as part of an advance-party. Our job was to establish the camp before the full team arrived. Although our activities were limited, nevertheless we had to represent our organisation from the moment we arrived. It would have been unthinkable to have acted as unbelievers until the programme commenced several days later. Similarly, as an "eschatological community" living in the 21st century, we have to live by the standards of heaven. That's where our citizenship belongs (Phil. 3: 20), even though we are still living in a world that is passing away.

In Paul's eyes, if we live by the standards of this age we become enemies of the cross (Phil. 3:18). Then our minds are set on earthly things. Conversely, if we are Christians, our eyes are turned towards heaven and the values of the New Age.

What this meant for the Christians of Philippi was clear. Paul reminded them that although they lived in Roman society and under Roman law, they held a higher citizenship than their Roman one. They were citizens of heaven. As citizens of this heavenly realm, they were to obey its laws, reflect its life and manners, and sing its songs. Their church was a small colony of

the heavenly city. In other words, their life together was a sign of the new order that is destined to replace the old.

Clearly, this eschatological understanding of the Christian life has serious implications for our understanding of sexual conduct, and especially for how we educate the younger generation within the church. From the early 1980s onwards, Christians have capitulated in frightening numbers to the idea that "safe sex" is all right. It's based on the premise that teenagers "are going to do it anyway" and the only thing adults can do is to encourage them to have sex safely (avoiding disease) and responsibly (avoiding pregnancy). School curriculums, especially in NSW, are generally determined by the "safe-sex" philosophy. One searches almost in vain for abstinence-based curriculums, despite the fact that some good ones exist.

The time has come for the church at large to recognise that it is an "eschatological community" – the advance party of the New Age. We are to behave as a "colony of heaven", God's outpost in the midst of this passing age. This calls for a radical Christian mind as far as our own personal sexual ethics are concerned, and a radical heavenly approach to the sex education of our children.

Peter Hastie

From the Convener

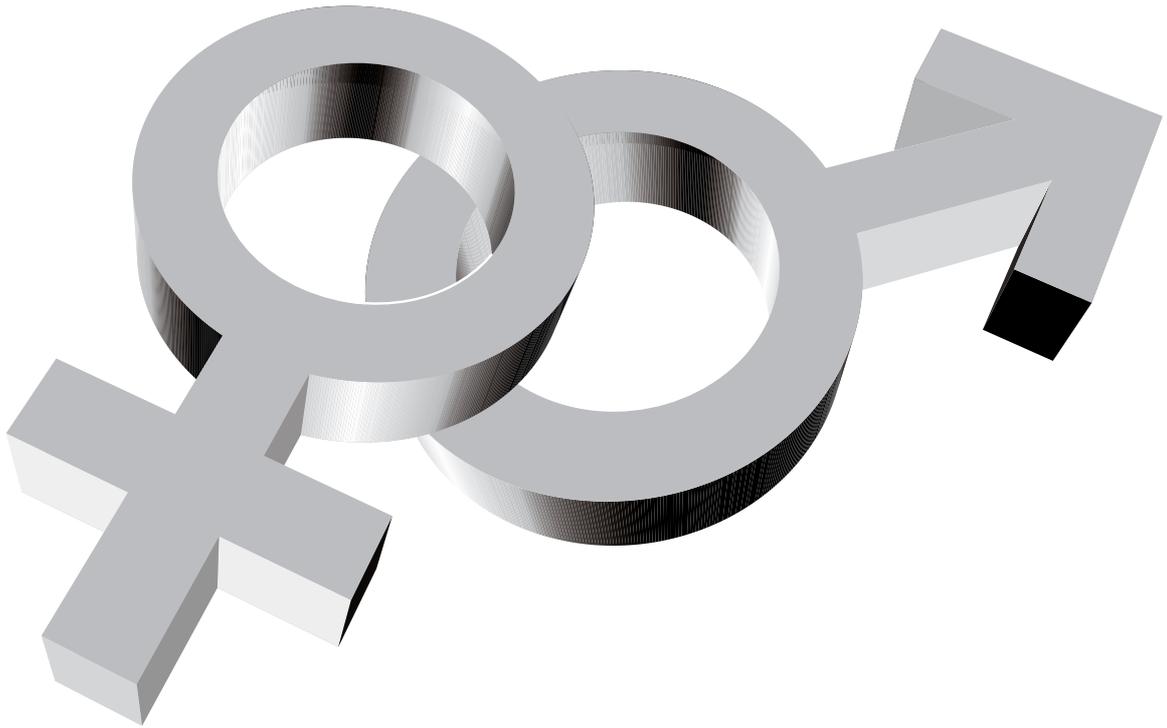
The tragedy of abortion goes far beyond the death of 100,000 children a year in Australia. No one involved is immune: medical staff can suffer marriage problems, drinking, fear and stress, while women report grief, guilt and pain for decades afterwards. This is true even of those who at first regarded the foetus as merely a blob of tissue. On page 20, Peter Barnes looks at an important new book on the forbidden grief.



*Robert Benn,
Convener,
National Journal Committee* 

A brief history of sex

Why did we have a sexual revolution?



Did a bunch of '60s hippies get together one night and decide it was time for a change? Or were the '50s so bad that no-one could stand it anymore? Given that human beings have always found sex alluring and attractive, why was it in the '60s (and the decades following) that Western society threw off the shackles and leapt into bed with each other?

This is a very important question. If we are to understand the current sexual landscape, and how we might navigate our way through it, we need to look back and consider the forces, people and events that gave rise to such a dramatic change in sexual attitudes and behaviour. Our journey begins around a century ago, with our much-maligned ancestors, the Victorians.

The naughtiness of piano legs: Strictly speaking, a Victorian is someone who lived during the long reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901. The term has come to mean, however, far more than this. It now refers to an attitude or stance towards morality and convention, exemplified by the English in the latter half of the 19th century.



Tony Payne

To us, a "Victorian" set of values (or "virtues", as they would have put it) is one that is hopelessly outdated, rigid, formal and hung-up. It refers to a repressed, stiff-upper lip form of moral rectitude, in which one must always behave "properly", morally and with good manners, at least in public.

In particular, people believe that to be Victorian is to have a repressed and hypocritical attitude towards sex – to make covers for the legs of pianos because of the immoral connotations and suggestions that a bare, curvaceous leg might have on the minds of the easily corruptible; and yet at the same time, to keep a mistress to satisfy one's sexual appetites. It denotes a facade of public respectability and sexual strict-

ness, with a cauldron of suppressed sexuality and immorality lurking beneath.

There is a kernel of truth in this depiction. Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb has shown that morality was a big issue for the Victorians, not because of religious faith, but because of the *loss* of religious faith:

"When [George] Eliot was asked how morality could subsist in the absence of religious faith, she replied that God was "inconceivable", immortality "unbelievable" and duty nonetheless "peremptory and absolute". This is the clue to the Victorian obsession with morality. "Feeling guilty about the loss of their religious faith, suspecting that that loss might expose them to the temptations of immorality and the perils of nihilism ... they were determined to make of morality a substitute for religion – to make of it, indeed, a form of religion. And having forfeited the sanctions of religion, they were thrown back all the more on the sanctions of convention and law."

The causes of this loss of faith are complex, but its reality was undeniable. What the Victorians did not come to terms with was that, without God, morality could not be sustained for long by the forces of con-



Virginia Woolf

vention and law alone. They clung resolutely to the *content* of Christian morality, for they feared the consequences of abandoning it. In the generation that followed, however, there was no such fear.

The Bloomsbury set: As the new century dawned, the children of the Victorians had no qualms about throwing off what they saw as a set of stifling moral conventions. The name most immediately associated with the new era of freedom was Bloomsbury, taken from the London district where Virginia Stephen (later Woolf) took up residence with her brother and sister. They became the heart of a close-knit group of artists and intellectuals who sought moral and spiritual liberation from the strictures of Victorianism.

Their basic philosophy of life, which they drew from the philosopher G. E. Moore, was to pursue higher “states of consciousness”, through human relationships and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. It was a philosophy that deliberately rejected conventional morality, and lived for the good of present experience, repudiating duty, convention, law and programs of moral improvement or social action.

The Bloomsbury group were seen as radicals, but a more influential group of radicals could scarcely be found. Members and associates of Bloomsbury were prominent in the fields of art, literature and intellectual endeavour – people such as the biographer Lytton Strachey, the artists Duncan Grant, Roger Fry and Clive Bell, the novelists Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

It was following the trail blazed by Bloomsbury that the promiscuous “Bohemian” culture flourished in the 1920s, and likewise the Sydney Push of the

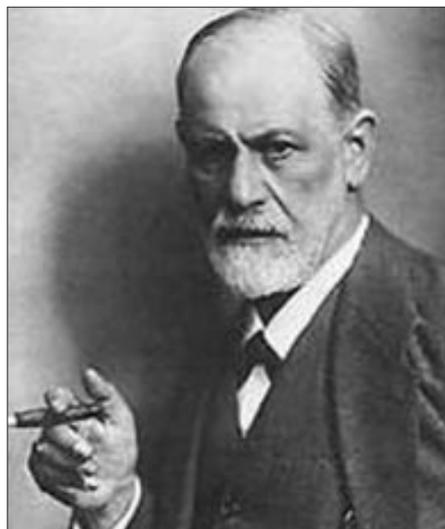
1950s and ’60s. As Himmelfarb points out, these movements were still at the radical margins of the society rather than at its everyday core, yet they were no less visible, and influential, for being so.

In the words of Leonard Woolf (Virginia’s husband), the Bloomsbury group saw themselves as “the builders of a new society which should be free, rational, civilised”, and many since have praised their wit and fidelity, their pursuit of truth and good sense, their closeknit and affectionate relationships, free of the constraints of Victorian guilt and shame.

The logic of their position was certainly hard to shake. If God was dead, as Nietzsche had said, and as a growing number of turn-of-the-century intellectuals believed, then what hold could morals and convention have over the liberated mind? What else should one pursue except the pleasures of love and sex and sensual beauty that the Victorians had so needlessly repressed?

Freud: The word “repressed” leads us naturally to another major player in the recent history of sex, the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. In basic terms, Freud sought an explanation for human behaviour, and in particular neurotic illnesses and problems, in the functions of the human unconscious. Freud believed that the human mind was like a mechanical system into which energy flowed. This energy was largely sexual, and how the system dealt with this energy – whether it diverted it, blocked it, expressed it, repressed it, or whatever – determined to a large degree the mental health of the individual.

Freud saw sex as the basic determinant of who we are, and what we become. More than any intellectual before him, Freud talked openly and frankly about sex, in a way which startled his contemporaries. It



Sigmund Freud



Margaret Mead

was not so much that Freud advocated free love, or any vast social change in sexual mores. But in the matter of expression and speech his attitude was completely revolutionary. Thus he shocked both those who viewed sex as very sacred and those who viewed it as indecent.

After Freud, sex became not only a topic for discussion; it was now a potentially dangerous force in the human psyche, if it was not dealt with properly. In popular terms, Freud taught that if sexual instincts were somehow repressed they would lead to some form of neurotic illness. After Freud, the family was no longer seen as the place of protection, nurture and the teaching of good morals; it was a constricting, unhealthy place, in which crippling attitudes to sexuality led to various damaging psychological complexes.

Sex comes of age: Freud was not the only one to suggest that conventional morality may be unhealthy, or unnecessary. The idea that sexual values and morals were merely expressions of a particular culture, and were not innate or universal, was championed by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead. Her best-selling book *Coming of age in Samoa*, published in 1928, was claimed to be based on extensive field research, and demonstrated that sexual conventions and experiences in Samoa were vastly different than in, for example, America.

In particular, Mead argued that the adolescents of Samoa engaged in free sexual experimentation and promiscuity, without guilt or other harmful effects, and that their society was a model of contentment and happiness. Samoans, Mead argued, “laugh at stories of romantic love, scoff at fidelity to a long-absent wife or mistress, believe explicitly that one love will cure another ...

Adultery does not necessarily mean a broken marriage ... Divorce is a simple informal matter ... It is a very brittle monogamy often trespassed and more often broken entirely, but many adulteries occur ... which hardly threaten the continuity of established relationships ... and so there are no marriages of any duration in which either person is actively unhappy.”

In short, Mead portrayed Samoa as a paradise of uninhibited sexual free love. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Mead’s ideas met an enthusiastic reception. She became a media and academic superstar, roles Mead herself did not resist. She was vigorous in popularising her research, and the lessons that it contained for Western culture. Her basic contention – that nurture not nature accounts for taboos and restrictions on sexuality – has been enormously influential throughout the latter half of our century.

The pursuit of tolerance and kindness: If Margaret Mead argued for sexual liberation from the viewpoint of anthropology, another leading intellectual argued for it on the basis of philosophy. Bertrand Russell was one of our century’s most famous philosophers and atheists, and argued that the superstition of religion did great harm when it came to sex. In fact, Russell regarded Christianity’s “morbid and unnatural” attitude towards sex as its worst feature.

He argued that monogamy as an institution was on its last legs in the Western world. The forces that held it together were all on the wane – the social narrowness of village life, the superstitions of religion, sin and eternal punishment, and the sanction of public opinion. For Russell, there was no higher or divine law of good and bad, only actions which do or do not promote human happiness.



Bertrand Russell

It was upon this basis (which philosophically is called “utilitarianism”) that a sexual ethic should be worked out, although as to what this would mean in practice Russell was a little less clear. He certainly wished there to be a greater degree of sexual freedom to individuals, especially for young people, before the advent of children complicated the termination of the relationship. But Russell also acknowledged that the contradictory impulses of jealousy and polygamy – which he regarded as basic to human experience – made the formulation of a satisfactory modern code of sexual behaviour far from simple.

Everybody’s doing it: Our final stop on this brief historical journey is in America in the late 1940s. It was there that a respectable 53-year-old former entomologist (his specialty was the gall wasp) published a fat scientific study that *Life* magazine declared to be the most sensational and popular scientific work published since Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. The work was entitled *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, and its author was Dr Alfred Kinsey.

The Kinsey Report lifted the lid on sexual taboos and behaviour that Americans had previously been reluctant to discuss. Kinsey surveyed a massive sample of Americans and reported that 90 per cent of males masturbated, 85 per cent had engaged in premarital intercourse, 30 to 45 per cent had conducted extra-marital sexual relationships, and around 70 per cent had visited prostitutes.

Furthermore, Kinsey contended that 37 per cent of males had experienced homosexual orgasm post-puberty, that 10 per cent of the population were predominantly homosexual and 4 per cent exclusively so.

The implications of Kin’s research were not lost on the American public. If, for example, 10 per cent of the population were homosexual (which was how the figures were popularly represented), then homosexuality was no longer a deviant criminal act only practised by a very small number of social outcasts. It ought now to be recognized as the fairly common behaviour of a large minority. Many homosexual activists cite Kinsey as the man who made the modern gay movement possible.

After Kinsey, the conversation about sex was on a new level. As a step towards the overthrowing of conventional moral norms, it was a defining moment.

A slow burning fuse: As this brief history has tried to demonstrate, the sexual revolution of the last 30 years has been a long time in the making. The abandonment of conventional or “Victorian” sexual morality that occurred among the Bloomsbury group prefigured what was to



Alfred Kinsey

happen on a mass scale later in the century. It was there, perhaps, that the fuse was lit. Freud, Mead, Russell and Kinsey all played their part (and, of course, they were not the only ones). They kept it burning, as it were, and laid the explosive. It was in the mid-’60s, when the conditions were right, that the bomb went off.

What must be remembered, however, is that lying behind the whole process was a *previous generation’s rejection of God*. The late-Victorians lived on the moral capital of their forefathers. Their loss of faith may have rendered their morals formal, sterile and ultimately hypocritical, but the sense of duty and morality remained, such was the residual power of the religion of the parents’ generation. But by the next generation, there was no such constraining force. When Bloomsbury looked at the late Victorians, all they could see was morality and good manners being kept for the sake of convention. They could see no logical barrier to the moral and sexual liberation they eagerly sought.

It took much of the rest of the century for this logic to filter down through society as a whole. Society’s “gatekeepers” – the intellectuals, university teachers, commentators, journalists, film-makers – played an important role in this percolation process

Nevertheless, the sexual attitudes and behaviour that are now common and accepted in our society can only be understood in light of the historical background we have been outlining in this chapter – or, should we say, the theological background. The sexual revolution was not simply a rebellion against traditional morality; it was the consequence of a rebellion against God, who defined the terms of that morality.

Tony Payne is director of Matthias Media. 

A divine relationship

Love isn't half-hearted, but sex can be.

Several years ago a group of 18 skydivers in the United States jumped from 20,000 feet. It was a cloudy day in Ohio, so cloudy that when they jumped the divers couldn't even see the ground from the plane. But they decided to jump anyway. They'd been looking forward to this jump for weeks. Anyway, according to the pilot's calculations, they were flying over flat, open farmland. Perfect terrain.

So they trusted the pilot's advice and jumped. When the skydivers eventually broke through the cloud, all they could see was water. They had actually jumped right over the middle of Lake Erie! Sixteen of the eighteen divers drowned. There can be serious consequences when you go with the wrong advice.

When you're so eager to chase the thrill that you listen to the wrong person, the results can be disastrous. Wrong advice can be especially tragic when it comes to our sexuality. That's the thing about sex. It promises so much.

Our sexuality creates powerful desires. It tantalises us with the idea that physical intimacy will deliver us incredible joy. And it can. But it's like anything else: if you follow the wrong advice, then what can deliver so much joy will actually deliver terrible heartache. That's why, when it comes to thinking about sex, the thing we really have to get sorted out first is: whose directions are we going to trust? Whose word are we going to follow? When it comes to sex, we need to trust and obey what God has to say. It sounds so simple, but it really is the heart of everything.

In life we've basically got two options to choose with respect to sex. There's what God says, and there's what the world says. The world's view of sex is all about doing whatever you want, with whoever you want, wherever you want, and doing it as many times as you want. The world's view of sex is all about having no boundaries.



Bryson Smith

Let's be honest, there's a level of attraction to no-boundary sex. As you move from person to person, hunting for the best love-making techniques, as you roam from one sex-shop to the next, as you search for the ultimate orgasm, you titillate your passions and fantasies. No-boundary sex does have an appeal to it. But it's an appeal born out of rebellion against God. As God reminds us in Romans 1:21, "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

God, for his part, totally disagrees with the world's view on sex. In his word, God stresses that there are important boundaries. Our sexuality is such a precious part of who we are that it needs to be preserved for the security of a life-long, male-female relationship. Anything other than that and we'll be short-changing ourselves on sex. We'll be going for something other than the best. So will we trust the world or God?

Even a moment's thinking will bear out that we ought to believe God. To start with, Genesis tells us that it's God who created us. He knows what's best for us. Indeed, God never stops being committed to our best interests. The message of the gospel is that God is so committed to us that he didn't even withhold his Son from death on a cross. The apostle John puts it like this, "This is love: not that we loved God but

that he loved us and he sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1Jn 4:10).

Further, God doesn't lay down boundaries for our sexuality because he's a killjoy. God lays down boundaries because no-boundary sex is unbelievably destructive to us. The problem is that we keep falling for the lie that no-boundary sex will be fulfilling and liberating. We need to forget the *Cleo* survey and the advice from *Ralph* magazine. God is the one with the invaluable combination of limitless wisdom and limitless love. God's word is all about faithfulness and confining our sexual intimacy to the one life-long relationship.

If we really believe that God gives us boundaries because he has our best interests at heart, then we'll be wanting to go to extremes to keep them. When he says "but among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality" (Eph 5:3), we'll deliberately not watch movies that will lead us to daydream about immorality. We'll refuse to flirt with others, no matter how supposedly harmless it is. We'll resist touching members of the opposite sex! We'll be striving not just to avoid sexual intercourse with someone else outside of marriage, we'll be actively avoiding anything that might cause us to go even near the limits that God has laid down.

In other words we are to be so focused on keeping God's boundaries that no one could even mistakenly get the wrong impression that we weren't keeping them. If you're going out with someone on a date, you'll be thinking very carefully about what you're going to wear and what you'll be going to see and do. You'll think through whether you're going to be alone at your date's home, and how long you'll be alone. What exact situations will you be put in? What temptations might develop?

Ephesians 5:4 provides us with another powerful thought. "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking

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which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving". Obscenity is a way of life in this country. There is incredible peer pressure to join in swapping dirty jokes and to make suggestive comments about different people. We mustn't do it. It's inappropriate for a child of God to say things that could even be accidentally misconstrued as being vulgar. It's pushing God's boundaries, and we don't want to do that.

A few verses later, there's another challenge in Ephesians. In 5:8-14 Paul uses the images of light and darkness to illustrate the extent to which we should be going to keep God's loving boundaries. A lifestyle of darkness is one which is shameful and needs to be hidden. But a lifestyle of light abounds in goodness and is happy to be seen by all. There ought to be no actions, no motives, no secret fantasies that we'd prefer others not to know about.

This is actually a good criterion for testing your actions in the whole area of Christian freedom and sex. Would you rent that video for yourself if you knew the whole Bible study group was going to watch it with you? Would you flick through that magazine if you knew that your wife or your girlfriend was looking over your shoulder? Living within God's boundaries means living such a righteous life that you're happy to be seen in the light. If you're single and dating, you should be using your sexual freedom in such a way that if the entire night were videotaped you'd be happy for others in your church to watch the tape. You should be happy for your youth group to see how much you kissed and fondled each other on the tape.

This is something you may need to seriously think through in practical terms. Especially if you are already drifting into some trends that are putting you on a slippery slide. If you're single, you may need to



rethink the movies that you've been watching lately, the magazines you've been reading, maybe even the sorts of people that you've been going out with. Certainly going out with a non-Christian is not a smart move if you're serious about keeping within God's boundaries.

Maybe you need to lift your game with your personal prayer and Bible-reading so that the way you're thinking about things is a bit more like God and a little less like the world. Maybe you're married and you need to rethink the amount of time that you're spending with someone of the opposite sex who isn't your marriage partner. Maybe it's all still innocent. You might even be helping them through a difficult patch in their lives, but perhaps you need to wake up to the dangers. Maybe you need to find at least one friend who's prepared to routinely ask you the hard things and help you recognise

the thin edge of wedge when it appears.

Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission. During one of his last sermons, he kept repeating the same line, over and over again. Some people thought that he'd gone crazy with old age. Other people thought he was simply saying the most important thing he had to say. Taylor kept repeating, "You can trust the Lord too little, but you cannot trust him too much." That's a good saying! And in this article on how we use our sexuality, it's a great line to close on. "You can trust the Lord too little, but you cannot trust Him too much." Our God is not a killjoy. He is wholeheartedly generous, wholeheartedly wise and wholeheartedly loving. That's why we mustn't be half-hearted at obeying him!

Bryson Smith is minister of Dubbo Presbyterian Church 

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- management experience in health or welfare services
- knowledge of current aged care policies and practices

Naked without shame

A guided tour of modern mores – and God's.

I've just moved from Ballina to Randwick, and it's been a bit of a shock. In Ballina, from my study I could see the whales swimming by. Now I get up and look out the windows and I see the buses rushing towards the city. But watching the buses is very educational.

At the moment, plastered all over the sides of some buses are the latest ads for adult sex shops on the net. One of them says: "Moan, moan, moan, it's all we ever hear from our customers, moans." It's not much fun being the father of an eight-year-old who's a good reader. "What's that mean, dad?"

It's a good question. What does it mean? In order to think around that question for a while, I thought I might take you on an imaginary bus trip. We'll catch the 380 from the City to Bondi.

We get on at Hyde Park. It's not long before we hit Oxford Street. Oxford Street is the bottom-end of the sex market. The streets are lined with brothels, strip joints, and places that put on live sex shows. News vendors don't just sell the *Sydney Morning Herald*, they also sell a wide array of porn magazines, including homosexual ones.

Our society tolerates what goes on at Oxford Street, but I think that most people feel a little uneasy about it.

As we make our way down Oxford Street we come to Paddington – rows upon rows of terraces, owned by upwardly mobile couples. If you quizzed them about their views on sex, you'd find that many of them believed in serial monogamy: one sexual partner at a time. If things start to go sour, you move on to the next person.

As we make our way down Oxford Street towards Bondi, we come to Centennial Park. There on the corner you can see St Matthias. On the notice board, there's a sign for the next sermon series: "Pure sex – sex as God intended it", whatever that means.



Grant Thorp

Finally, we make it to Bondi Beach. It's covered with young bodies drinking in the sun. A hundred years ago everyone would have been in their neck-to-knees, but you nearly need a magnifying glass to spot the swimming costumes they're wearing today! Bondi is where the sex as leisure lifestyle is best seen.

What does it all mean? One thing that's obvious is there are lots of different views about what's OK in sex and marriage. At one end you have the conservative view, sex within marriage, but from there it's an ever-broadening road, from serial monogamy, to sex as fun, to the perversions of Oxford Street. People aren't all that interested in getting off at the church. They don't want pure sex, but more sex.

About eighteen months ago *Ally McBeal* hit our TV screens. When the show started, it caused a real splash because they had a unisex toilet. That toilet is a symbol of the show in more ways than one. It's all about doing away with the barriers. Ally has sex with her professor. She used to go out with her best friend's husband. She still has a thing for him. She had sex with another friend's fiancée in the car wash. She has kissed other women. All the barriers are down. And the last thing on anyone's mind is marriage.

It's easy for us to become rather smug as we see how people are crashing through the barriers, extending the boundaries. But we

need to be careful to analyse our own boundaries as well. What boundaries have we set up? How do we deal with the issue of sexuality as Christian people?

Is it OK to kiss your girlfriend when you drop her off at home after a good night out? If so, what sort of kiss? One on the cheek, or one on the lips? If you hug, what sort of hug is OK? Is it OK to flirt with members of the opposite sex? If so, when is it too much? What boundaries do we have? More importantly, what are God's?

In Genesis 2 God tells us clearly the boundaries he has established for sexual relationships.

The first two and a half chapters of Genesis are the account of creation. God keeps saying: "It's good, it's good, it's very good." But in Gen 2:18 God says for the first time "it's not good". "It's not good for the man to be alone." And so the Lord sets out to provide a suitable helper or companion for him. The word 'suitable' there means corresponding to him, appropriate, right. God is going to find a companion who complements him.

First, the Lord brings all the animals before him in v19, and Adam names them. But we read in v20 that no suitable helper was found for him. So in v21 God causes a deep sleep to come over Adam. He takes out one of his ribs, and makes a woman from it. Then in v22 he brings the woman to the man. Notice how he responds in v23

"This is now bone of my bone,
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman
for she was taken out of man."

It's love at first sight. It works!

As we read on we see God's pattern for the way our sexuality is to be expressed:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh."

God's pattern for sexual relationships is marriage. This verse highlights four steps involved in the marriage relationship.

First, it involves a man and woman. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife." When Adam needed a suitable helper God didn't make another man; he made a woman. God's pattern is a man and a woman, not a man and a man, not a woman and a woman.

Second, it involves leaving – "a man will

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leave his father and mother” – that sounds self-evident. How can you get married if you don’t leave home? But when these words were written, most men didn’t physically leave home when they were married. Often the man would take his bride to live in his father’s house. What this means is not so much physically leaving home as mentally leaving it. It’s talking about establishing a new primary relationship in life, a new commitment.

This thought is carried through to the third statement – “he will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife”. The word cling there literally means “glue”. And when you glue things together, they’re meant to stay together. I’m always telling my five-year-old daughter not to put stickers on the end of the bed because when you tear them off, they inevitably tear away the paint. Things that are glued together are meant to stay together.

That leads us to the final step. Once a couple have left and become glued together, they become one flesh. Then sex is OK. Let’s be clear, we’re not talking about sex as an animal attraction here. It’s not just lust. This is love. Two people delighting in one another, enjoying one another, and expressing their deep love and lasting commitment to one another. Sex is a physical way of saying “I love you, I am committed to you”. It’s only appropriate in a committed and lasting relationship. If you read through the Bible, then you’ll see that it says yes to sex in the context of marriage, and no in every other one! Marriage and sex are always tied together in the Bible.

It’s easy to see how much this cuts across the culture of our day. It cuts across just about everything we saw on our bus trip from the city to Bondi: the Oxford Street scene, the serial monogamy of Paddington, and the sex as leisure at Bondi.

The Bible’s view of sex within marriage is all but gone. One of the things that I get to do as a minister is marry people. I’ve been in the ministry for 10 years now, and I reckon that at least 80 per cent of the couples who come to me asking to be married are living together. The couple believe that if they’re compatible, then they’ll commit. It’s the exact reverse of what it says in the Bible.

Why do we see all the sexual confusion we see in our society? Why don’t we see more people being married if God’s pattern is so good? Because we are in rebellion against God! We want to make our own rules. There’s only one problem: it doesn’t work. It doesn’t work because it’s based upon lies. The devil says “There aren’t any boundaries, there aren’t any consequences. You can be like God.”

But God has set boundaries, boundaries

that work. There are clearly consequences for going outside those boundaries, as we can see all around us. And we don’t make very good gods.

We know this in our hearts. We don’t always want to acknowledge it, but deep down we know it. Perhaps we’ve gone too far sexually in a relationship, but the thing that made it seem right was that we thought we were in love and we thought it was good. But it wasn’t. We were used. And now we feel exposed and guilty.

However sex is one of God’s greatest gifts to us. But when we take it and use it outside of the boundaries he has set, then it becomes something that does untold damage in our lives. We are left feeling guilty, broken, exposed, ashamed.

If we want to get back to the quality of relationship that we see pictured at the end of Genesis 2 (“the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame”), there’s only one way. We need to confess our rebellion towards God and repent of it.

If you’re going out with a girl or a boy, then you’ll need to talk about how you’re going to relate to one another in a way that honours the Lord. And if you’ve already gone beyond the boundaries that God has set, then you’ll need to ask forgiveness from God and one another.

If you’re engaged, then you may need to do the same thing. Certainly, all of us, single, engaged or married need to repent of the wrong thoughts and intentions we’ve had. We need to ask God to strengthen our

hearts to obey him.

Second, we need to determine that we are going to obey God in this area of our lives. I was challenged recently by a statement from one of the old Puritans, William Law. He said: “If you will stop and ask yourself why you are not as godly as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you that it’s neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because you never thoroughly intended it.”

That cuts to the heart, doesn’t it? We don’t obey God because we have never really intended to! Do you fully intend to obey God in the matter of your sexuality and how you use it?

In the back seat of the car with the windows steamed up is no time to begin to think about what you’re going to do with your sexuality. Give your sexuality to God.

Repent of using it your own way. Ask God to give you a new heart and a new mind. You don’t need to be overcome with guilt over your past failures. Jesus died on the cross to forgive your rebellion, including your sexual sins. Confess them and repent.

Determine with God’s help to obey him and trust him in this matter. If you do, then you’ll be able to experience the quality of relationship pictured there at the end of Genesis 2, “the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame”.

Grant Thorp is minister of Randwick Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 



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The high life

Ministry is more important than life itself, suggests John Piper.

According to the New Testament, “ministry” is what all Christians do. Pastors have the job of equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). But ordinary Christians do the ministry. What ministry looks like is as varied as Christians are varied. It’s not an office; it’s a lifestyle devoted to advancing other people’s faith and holiness. In this sense the only life that counts for anything is a life of ministry – whether you’re a banker or a bricklayer. Fulfilling your ministry is more important than staying alive.

This conviction is what makes the lives of radically devoted people so inspiring to watch. Most of them speak the way Paul did about his ministry: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24). Doing the ministry that God gives us to do is more important than life.

You may think you need to save your life in order to do your ministry. On the contrary, how you lose your life may be the capstone of your ministry. It certainly was for Jesus, at age 33. We need not fret about keeping ourselves alive in order to finish our ministry. God alone knows the appointed time of our service. Henry Martyn was right when he said, “If [God] has work for me to do, I cannot die.” In other words, I am immortal until my work is done. Therefore, ministry is more important than life.

How many examples could be multiplied from the glorious history of God’s faithful saints! William Carey sailed to India from England in 1793. He lost his five-year-old son, his wife became mentally ill, he labored

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



seven years for his first convert, and he lost years’ worth of precious translation work in a fire. But still he pressed on – for 40 years without a furlough. Because ministry is more important than life.

Adoniram Judson, “America’s first foreign missionary”, went to Burma in 1814. He lost a six-month-old baby boy, spent a year and a half in a “death prison”, lost his wife from fever, suffered a mental breakdown, and waited five years for his first convert. But he kept on, because ministry is more important than life.

Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to go to China (in 1807), lost his young wife and worked seven years for his first convert. But he kept on, because ministry is more important than life.

Evelyn Harris Brand, the mother of Paul Brand, the world-renowned hand surgeon and leprosy specialist, grew up in a well-to-do English family. She had studied at the London Conservatory of Art and dressed in the finest silks. But she went with her husband to minister as missionaries in the Kolli Malai range of India. After about 10 years her husband died at 44 and she came home “a broken woman, beaten down by pain and grief”. But after a year’s recuperation, and against all advice, she returned to India. Her soul was restored and she poured her life into the hill people, nursing the sick, teaching farming, lecturing, rearing orphans, clearing jungle land, pulling teeth, establishing schools, preaching the gospel. She lived in a portable hut, eight feet square, that could be taken down, moved and erected again.

At 67 she fell and broke her hip. Her son, Paul, had just come to India as a sur-

geon. He encouraged her to retire. She had already suffered a broken arm, several cracked vertebrae and recurrent malaria. Paul mounted as many arguments as he could think of to persuade her that 67 years was a good investment in ministry, and now it was time to retire. Her response? “Paul, you know these mountains. If I leave, who will help the village people? Who will treat their wounds and pull their teeth and teach them about Jesus? When someone comes to take my place, then and only then will I retire. In any case, why preserve this old body if it’s not going to be used where God needs me?” That was her final answer. So she worked on.

At 95 she died. Following her instructions, villagers buried her in a simple cotton sheet so that her body would return to the soil and nourish new life. Her spirit, too, lives on, in a church, a clinic, several schools, and in the faces of thousands of villagers across five mountain ranges of South India. Her son commented that “with wrinkles as deep and extensive as any I have ever seen on a human face ... she was a beautiful woman.” But it was not the beauty of the silk and heirlooms of London high society. For the last 20 years of her life she refused to have a mirror in her house! She was consumed with ministry, not mirrors. A co-worker once remarked that Granny Brand was more alive than any person he had ever met. “By giving away life, she found it.” This is what happens, paradoxically, when ministry is more important than life.

This is an extract from Future Grace (Moltnomah, 1998), reprinted with permission.

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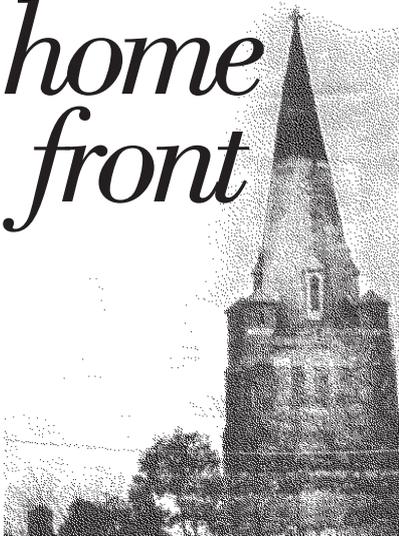
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A joyful gathering

During 1999, 56 composers, singers and musicians from 15 different Presbyterian churches of South-East Queensland contributed to the CD *We are Gathered*. The CD consists of 10 original songs by different composers. Producer **Robert G. Herrgott** reports that he was excited to see many local people express their faith through their own music. "I found that the quality was superb, considering they were amateurs, and the message uplifting for Christian living."

The idea stemmed from a music camp on which several musicians aired some of their material. The CD comes with a songbook produced by **Joel Ledema**, designed to encourage congregations to use the

songs. The music styles are Afro-American, ballad, rock, and Celtic. There are songs of praise and songs that are prayerful.

Robert Herrgott also made a second CD of Christmas songs. Both CDs are available for a total of \$25 plus postage from Presbyterian Christian Education, 35 Amelia St, Fortitude Valley, Qld 4006 (07 3252 1114).

The songbook is also available for \$8.

Eveson visit

Rev. Philip Eveson, principal of London Theological Seminary, is to visit New Zealand and Australia from July to September with his wife Jennifer.

Mr Eveson is the author of *The Great Exchange: Justification by faith alone in the light of recent thought*. This book has been well received and is now in its second printing.

Appointments

Rev. Mark Crabb was inducted into the parish of Mt Evelyn, Vic, 14 April.

Rev. Mike Wharton has been appointed interim moderator to the South Yarra parish.

Centenary in Geelong

St George's Geelong celebrated **Gwiadys McNaughton's** 100th birthday with her on 19 March.

Relatives and friends attended the morning service, followed by a morning tea to enable members of the congregation to

offer congratulations and best wishes to a remarkable lady who, at 100, continues to live alone, manage a large house, tend her garden and attend church.

Mrs McNaughton's niece, **Mrs Jessie Osborne**, presented a Bible which had been given in 1865 by the first minister of St. George's, the Rev. A.J. Campbell, to Hugh Mackay, an elder in the first kirk session in St. George's and a forebear of the McNaughtons. The inscription reads "in memory of six years of faithful service", as St. George's was established in 1860. The Bible was accepted by **Rev. Graeme Weber** and has been added to St. George's large historical collection.

across australia



Gospel music festival

Australia's largest gospel musical event was held during Easter in Toowoomba, Queensland. Festival coordinator **Isaac Moody** said that Festival 2000 included some of the best gospel music available. Some 25,000 people listened to artists including Aria hall of fame inductee **Jimmy Little**, US rock band **All Star United** and DJ **Dr Onionskin**.

Queen plants reconciliation tree

On 27 March, **Queen Elizabeth II** visited several sites in Canberra, including the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, near St Mark's National Theological Centre and Anglican Memorial Library, Barton.

She planted the first of "seven trees of reconciliation", a black cypress pine. Her Majesty was accompanied by the Governor General of Australia and patron of the centre, **Sir William Deane**, **Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue** and the Anglican Bishop of Canberra, the **Rt. Rev. George Browning**.

One of the many projects planned for the site is the Pilgrim Walk, which will connect

Alister Read Murray

1917 - 2000

Alister Murray was born in the school house at Mittagong on 16 April 1917. He was raised there until his family moved to Forster, Canley Vale and Manly, then back to Mittagong. Alister completed his schooling at Bowral High School, then joined the Mittagong Municipal Shire Council, where he worked continuously except for active service from 1940 to 1945 with the 9th Division, when he was of the "Rats of Tobruk".

In 1947 Alister married Elizabeth Mary Griffiths, and they were blessed with two children, Elizabeth and Phillip.

In April 1953 he was ordained an elder. He served on many committees, both in the parish and presbytery. The annual congregational meeting in 1975 carries a resolution thanking the pair for their efforts.

The parish will miss Alister, as will the wider community who saw in Alister a man of Christian beliefs who throughout his long life practised his faith for the betterment of his community and the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

Greg Taylor, session clerk, Bowral-Mittagong Presbyterian Church.

with new walking paths to be introduced into the Parliamentary Triangle over the next 20 years. The Pilgrim Walk will "guide people through a series of experiences, such as a biblical garden, a place of reconciliation and peace", as well as "a place for healing".

Martyrs conference

Voice of the Martyrs held its annual mission conferences in Sydney and Brisbane recently, focusing on the theme "serving the persecuted – forgiving our enemies".

Held in the Calvary Chapel, Georges Hall, in Sydney and the Ashgrove Baptist Church, in Brisbane, the meetings enabled supporters and those concerned for the persecuted Church to find out from those personally involved the situation in Sudan, Egypt, Vietnam and Indonesia.

For further information contact the Voice of the Martyrs, PO Box 598, Penrith NSW 2751; phone: (02) 4721 8221; fax: (02) 4721 8035; web: www.vom.com.au, e-mail: thevoice@vom.com.au

Cover to cover

A reported 445,000 people worldwide are reading the Bible this year with the aid of **Cover to Cover**, including 12,000 in Australia and New Zealand. **CMC Australasia**, the distributors for CWR Publishers, planned to introduce 8000 people to this program and were overwhelmed with the enthusiasm of people. **Cover to Cover** inspires readers to read right through God's Word chronologically, that is, in the order in which the events happened.

For more information on the program call 1800 634 507

New structure for MERF

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship's new structure for ministry in the Middle East and the Arabic speaking world is now operating, reports MERF Australia chairman **Rev. Graham Nicholson**. This involved building a new and more active relationship between the original holding company MERF Ltd., set up in Cyprus in 1984, and representatives from all other partner countries or regions. It replaces the previous link with the Cairo-based board chaired by **Dr Istafanous**. Five members of that board along with some of the Cairo office staff are serving with the new structure.

Sadly some of the issues relating to the restructuring, and MERF-Australia's alignment with the new structure prompted some members of the board of MERF-Australia Inc. to discontinue their involvement, Mr Nicholson said. Seven out of the eight international MERF support groups (US, Canada, England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Netherlands and Australia) have aligned themselves with the new structure (New Zealand has yet to decide).

MERF resignations

The five members of the MERF Australia council who resigned over the new structure are **Douglas Milne** (chairman), **Peter Bloomfield** (vice-chairman), **Timothy Biggs** (treasurer), **John Tucker** and **Lesleigh Hall**. The resigning councillors said: "This was as a result of the reconstitu-

tion of MERF International at the Larnaca consultation in January, and the decision of the MERF Australia Council to support the body called MERF Ltd. in its new and enlarged form.

"We believe that the administration and ethos of MERF has been changed significantly.

"We question the legality of the actions of the Larnaca consultation in separating from the original Board of MERF, and we believe that serious allegations brought against one of the leaders of MERF have not been properly investigated. We disapprove of the haste with which the changes have been brought about.

In resigning after several years of service to MERF Australia Inc., we continue our desire to see the gospel Kingdom of God prosper in the Middle East."



Kids helping kids

British composer and producer **Chris Williams** is on a mission to empower kids to help less fortunate kids around the world. He has written and produced musicals that schools performed to raise money for charities. Williams says ... "Christians should be involved in (almost) every walk of life. Popular music is absolutely no exception. Salt and light should be everywhere."

Chinese house church warned

Ten officers of the Public Security Bureau interrupted the **Hua Du Church**, calling the gathering "illegal and unregistered". Their leader, **Pastor Li**, was arrested two weeks ago and sentenced to 15 days' detention, and is being treated harshly. Please pray for his release and return to his family and friends.

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Help for Kosovo refugees

United Methodists Church in Macedonia is working in cooperation with Austrians to build a new centre for medical and social care in Strumica, Macedonia. Macedonia still hosts 20,000 refugees who fled Kosovo in the 1999 war. The centre will distribute food and medicines, offer free medical check-ups, dispense social, legal and medical advice, and offer one hot meal daily.

Christian victory in India

In India, the Gujarat state government has withdrawn the controversial 1999 Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill after Christian and other groups protested. Those against the bill said it would be used to persecute minorities.

Mudslides in Taiwan

Mudslides are causing chaos in Taiwan as heavy rains soften ground made unstable by the earthquake last September. The slides have cut off road access between towns, and many people have no water or

electricity. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan is planning to set up a centre for those affected.

Indonesian jihad continues

Radical Muslims in Indonesia's Molucca Islands have vowed to stick to plans of a holy jihad (war) against Christians despite being disarmed and disbanded by police. Christians fear the Indonesian Government cannot prevent what they believe is a Muslim attempt to purge the Moluccas of Christianity.

US leaders in jail

Chuck Colson and Franklin Graham went to jail at Easter. They launched a nationwide outreach to inmates called **Operation Starting Line**, a joint effort of more than a dozen Christian ministries. The program includes bible studies, carer and family support, matching of prisoners with mentors in local churches upon release. Colson said: "Without a moral and spiritual change of heart, released inmates will likely return to temptations, associations and activities that lead to more crime."

Surfing for sex is dangerous

More evidence that pornography is psychologically dangerous: The American journal *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* has reported a study which shows that too much time surfing internet sex sites can damage your mental health.

The study was based on the results of an MSNBC Website questionnaire that received 13,529 responses. It showed that individuals who spend 11 hours or more a week visiting such sites – as 5 per cent of respondents did – were more prone to psychological abnormalities such as sexual compulsivity. These people show signs of psychological distress and admit their behaviour interferes with other areas of their lives. It can create serious family and work difficulties.

Other findings included that women prefer chat rooms where men prefer visual erotica; 61 per cent said they lied about their age on the Internet; 50 per cent lied about age, looks, weight and marital status; and "experiencing intimacy" is the major reason people go online.



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Appointment of Lecturer in Biblical Studies

Applications are invited from ordained ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (or from persons eligible to become so) for appointment as Lecturer in Biblical Studies. This position will involve teaching Hebrew and lecturing in Old Testament subjects, including to students preparing for the diplomas and degrees of the Australian College of Theology. In addition the applicant may be required to teach some New Testament or other subject. Preference will be given to a candidate with at least a master's degree in Old Testament, and who has had pastoral experience. With the agreement of the TEC the position can be taken up either on 1 July 2001 or 1 January 2002. Prospective applicants should also note that the Theological Education Committee, after consultation with the Faculty, will be recommending to the General Assembly the name of the one of the College lecturing staff as the next Principal. Applicants may wish to indicate that they are interested in the Principalship position.

The Presbyterian Theological College is committed to Reformed and evangelical theological study, and it has developed a reputation for holding to a confessional position while at the same time fostering warm devotional life among students.

All applications must be received by 30 September, 2000.

For further details write to Mr Reg Butcher, Secretary TEC, at the above address.

The forbidden grief

A new Australian book reveals the terrible hidden cost of abortion.

In 1989 the American Psychological Association reported that abortion “appears to be a relatively benign procedure both medically and psychologically”. Planned Parenthood in Los Angeles in 1988 claimed that only about 100 women each year, out of one and a half million who abort, experience significant emotional distress.

Yet only a little later, in 1992, Anne Speckhard and Vincent Rue wrote of post-abortion syndrome (PAS) as an emerging public health concern. David Reardon has also found in his survey of 252 post-abortion women that many suffer from flashbacks (61 per cent), anniversary reactions (54 per cent), temptations to suicide (33 per cent), feelings of having less control over their lives (78 per cent), difficulties in maintaining and developing relationships (52 per cent), a turning to drugs (49 per cent), and stress (62 per cent).

There has been a reluctance to make public any negative consequences of abortion for fear of discouraging the pro-abortion establishment. Even Dr C. Everett Koop, the pro-life former Surgeon-General of the United States, examined 250 studies in 1989 and concluded that “the data do not support the premise that abortion does, or does not, cause or contribute to psychological problems”. Part of the reason for Koop’s hesitancy was that so much evidence was presented by pro-abortion groups.

PAS, however, is real enough. The former abortionist Bernard Nathanson has reported the effects of abortion on medical staff, including nightmares, marriage problems, drinking to excess, stress and fear. The effects on women who abort their babies are even more pronounced. Hence Pam Koerbel wrote of *Abortion’s Second Victim*.

This has become so well documented that there really is no excuse for not knowing about it, and now Melinda Tankard Reist has added to the mountain of PAS evidence the results of her research into the Australian experience.

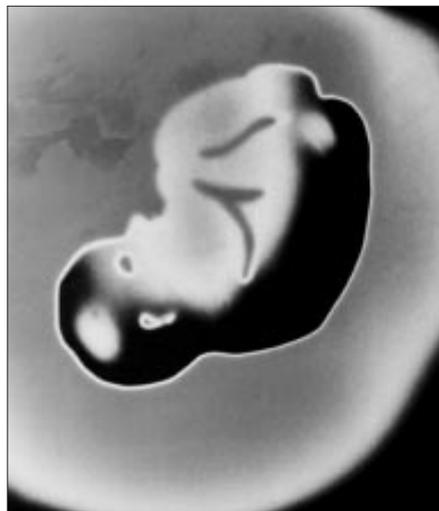
Melinda Reist had 250 women write to her to tell of their experiences of abortion, and she used 18 of these in some detail in her moving book, *Giving Sorrow Words* (the title is taken from Macbeth, IV,3). One



Peter Barnes

respondent was 13 when she had her abortion, one had undergone 12 abortions, while another wrote of an abortion 45 years ago. Yet for all their differences in age, social status, intelligence, and religious conviction, there is a common thread running through every story – each one tells of grief, heartbreak, guilt and pain.

It is not an easy book to wade through because it is such a catalogue of human misery. In so many cases, abortion was meant to save relationships but instead it destroyed them. One woman wrote in despair: “I have paid the ultimate price ... I hate my husband ... I will never be forgiven for what I did.” Another wrote: “I contemplated killing my husband and the doctors, but most of all I wanted my baby.” She was not a Christian, but she found it easier to recover from the death of her 20-year-old son in a car accident than from her abortion. Yet another woman took to lesbian relationships as she could not bear to think of sex with a man. One woman who remained heterosexual still cried after having sex, so painful was the reminder that a



previous act of procreation had led to what she called “the worst experience of my life” More chilling is the bitter statement of one woman who said that she laughed when she heard that the daughter of her abortionist had been murdered.

Women who have abortions often take to drink, indulge in promiscuous behaviour, and have thoughts of suicide. One spoke of her “relentless pain”, and wanted to throw herself in front of a train. Nightmares are common, as well as fantasising about the baby. One woman wrote: “Sometimes I open my arms and embrace the air.” Six years after her abortion, she was writing “in my mind, I have a son I cannot touch and cannot feed and who follows me about like a ghost”.

In order to cope with misery, remedies varied – all of them understandable, but some of them somewhat strange. To atone – or at least compensate – for the aborted baby, many women want to fall pregnant again. One woman adopted a baby’s gravesite, and visited it regularly, including on her birthday, when the baby was due to be born. She observed her birthday as “a day of grieving”. Many name the aborted child. One held a ceremony on the day on which her baby was to have been born, and said to her dead child: “I feel you must hate me, with a fiery anger, but can you let it lie in peace, because I am so sorry.”

One woman describes the shame as “all-consuming”, yet she adds that she is not a religious person. Another says: “The taking of a defenceless life is the worst sin I can think of, and I am guilty of it.” Yet another cries out: “I need penance, healing – to respect, to grieve.” She even has dreams of hell.

Many expressed a hope, however vague, that in death, they would be reunited with their aborted babies. A feminist thought she would have no troubles, but found “my head said one thing; my heart said another”. She went on: “Feminist trail-blazer by day, emotional cripple by night, I often cried myself to sleep curled up in the corner of my lounge room.” Even after she became a Christian, she still faced eight lonely and sorrowful years.

One of the most perceptive comments comes from Catherine: “Abortion is such a secret loss and there is nothing tangible to

grieve for. There are no mementoes, photos, memories to share, no grave to visit, nothing recognisable to anyone else. It all takes place in your imagination.”

It is a grief which one is not supposed to feel – indeed, one is meant to experience some kind of relief. It is also the grief which is perhaps the loneliest grief of all. In the words of one woman, “I have terminated myself”.

The propaganda of the so-called pro-choice lobby has proved to be dreadfully misleading and empty. Consent may be given, but it is hardly informed. Hence abortion counselling is dismissed by one woman as “bulldozing”. There is only the appearance of choice, not the reality. One doctor told Asphyxia: “It’s not a baby! It’s a piece of foetus!” Yet one woman spent the night before her abortion apologising to

her baby. Another writes: “Afterwards I knew with absolute clarity that I had killed a child. My child.” Most poignant is one woman’s confession: “I was a murderer.”

Husbands and partners often issued ultimatums, demanding a choice between the baby or the father. At a vulnerable time of their lives, women can be railroaded into a decision which they may bitterly regret. The pro-abortion feminists have been shown to have acted against the best interests of women. As Germaine Greer, of all people, came to realise, “abortion is the last in a long line of non-choices”.

This book has been used to revive the whole abortion debate, even in the secular media. It has a compelling and disturbing message. If the blood of Abel cried out for retribution, then the blood of the 90,000 to

100,000 thousand little Australians put to death each year by abortion must send a similar message to the Judge of all the earth. In gathering all this evidence, Melinda Tankard Reist has put us all in her debt. The law of God is indeed written upon the human heart, and when we break that law, the result can only be dislocation, anguish and agony.

Should this book be widely read, the hollow slogans of the pro-choice lobby will surely wither before its kind and terrible message.

Melinda Tankard Reist, Giving Sorrow Words, Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and books editor of AP.

And he healed them

Anne tells Peter Barnes of God’s grace – and her continuing pain.

Tell me about your upbringing, Anne, and how you came to have the abortion.

I was raised in a non-Christian household, but I was sent to Sunday School so I knew about God although my parents were not Christians. But at 16, when I was very popular, I wanted to live life my way. I took to partying, and fell pregnant at 17. Before this, I had argued against abortion, but when I found myself in the situation I was in, abortion seemed the only option. I was in a panic. My parents did not know, and I just wanted to save face and be approved.

What was your boyfriend’s response?

I told him after about eight to 11 weeks that I was going to have an abortion. He just said “good luck”, and disappeared off the scene.

How did you come to have the abortion?

I saw my local GP, and she referred me on to a private hospital on the North Shore. It was like being on a treadmill. I was asked questions, but I was in no condition to resist what was happening.

What happened at the hospital?

I drove myself there. At the hospital itself I cried and cried.

Before the abortion? And nobody said anything?

They kept reassuring me that everything would be all right.

Was it?

For a short while I felt on a bit of a high; it was almost like an adventure. I even drove myself home.

Then what happened?

I crashed as a person. I felt worthless. I knew that what I had done was wrong. I would sob and sob and sob. Every day for a year I cried. I had been sold the big lie that abortion would relieve my situation. It was supposed to solve my problem but it was a greater problem.

Did you suffer any of the classic symptoms of so-called post-abortion syndrome? Did you have dreams of the baby?

No, but I had terrible feelings of guilt as my sister fell pregnant, and I became very aware of babies. It was hard to look at mothers with babies.

I tried to forget and not fantasise about the baby, but I was not coping. I had the abortion because I thought a baby would interfere with my HSC, but I failed the HSC anyway. I became extremely promiscuous. I had lost anything of any value which I had. I also adopted a World Vision child.

A replacement child – or even an atonement child?

Yes.

How were you led to faith in Christ?

The problem was that my turning away from God in my mid-teens had led to a lifestyle which led to the abortion. The abortion was the manifestation of a deeper

problem. Anyway, I began to go out with a Catholic boyfriend, and we went to mass, but I heard many sermons which condemned abortion. They upset me, of course. My boyfriend tried to reassure me, “don’t worry, the Church will change on this”. But I knew that I was guilty; it was no use pretending I wasn’t.

After we were married, we went through troubled times, and I went along to another church, and heard of God’s grace and forgiveness. I responded, and my husband saw the change. I was a new creation; I felt set free. I burnt all the records of the abortion which I had kept. Everything was new. God used something very ugly to create something very beautiful. My husband also became a Christian, and we have children now. I am so grateful to God; I know I don’t deserve what I have today.

How are things now?

I shouldn’t leave you with the impression that coming to Christ meant I was completely healed. I still live with the consequences of what I did. I lost two babies through miscarriage, and I wonder if the abortion contributed to those losses. Till I enter glory, I will live with what I’ve done. It is still painful, even today.

But God is the God of all grace, isn’t He?

Yes, God’s grace wonderfully covered my sin. But it still hurts. That’s why I hope my story is helpful to others.

East meets west

Moses and Hannah Hahn tell Peter Hastie about crossing cultures.

Moses, how long have you lived in Australia?

We arrived here about 10 years ago. I met Hannah at a Korean church in Greenacre, Sydney. Actually, my mother also came here. She came as a missionary from Paul Yonggi Cho's church in Seoul. She had finished a diploma course at his seminary and was sent to be the pastoral assistant to the minister at Greenacre.

Many Koreans travel to Australia. Why?

Korea is only a tiny country, but it has a huge population – something like 50 million people. When there is so much competition in such a small place, it's hard for people to find lots of opportunities. That's why Koreans emigrate to America. But American immigration is very strict, and Koreans find it harder to live there and get a good education than in countries like Australia.

Australia is different from the USA. It's not far from Korea, and it's on the edge of Asia. It's an English-speaking country with good education and living standards. That's why many Koreans like this country.

Hannah, what do Korean women like about Australia?

I think that most Korean women like Australia because of the freedom they can have here. My feeling is that there is a greater sense of equality for them, especially in marriage. There are better opportunities for work. Also, husbands become much more family-minded in Australia than in Korea. They spend more time with their wives. But, most of all, Korean women like Australia because of the education that their children are able to get here.

Moses, what did you do before you trained for the ministry?

I studied international commerce at university in Korea. But when I graduated, I worked as a portrait painter. It had been my hobby, then it became my job. But I haven't done it for 10 years. It's just too time-consuming; it cuts into my time for family and ministry. As soon as I decided to study for the ministry, I stopped painting.

Why did you feel called to the ministry?

When I was a university student, some of my student friends and a number of ministers urged me to go to theological college. They said I had gifts for this work. But it wasn't until I was the leader of the youth group in the Korean church in Greenacre that I realised that I needed to be trained for ministry. God moved my heart to serve people as a minister. They had very special needs as second-generation immigrants. Many of them had lost a sense of their identity – they didn't feel Korean or Australian. I wanted to help them, and I knew that I could do this if I had good training at theological college.

Hannah and I met around this time, and we shared our vision together. She's been very supportive of me in prayer and really encourages me. When I went to theological college, God gave me a wider vision of my life's work. I just want to be a teacher and preacher of God's word.

What was the most helpful part of your theological training?

I've been to two colleges, Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood and Sydney Missionary and Bible College (SMBC). PTC taught me so much about the Bible through a careful study of the text, which we call exegesis. SMBC helped me to shape my vision for ministry in multi-cultural work. It was very helpful in meeting people from other parts of the world and from different denominations.

Hannah, what's it like being the wife of a theological student?

The last few years have been very hard. I decided to do some study myself so that I could talk to Moses about his work. I completed a Certificate of Christian Studies at PTC and now I am completing a Diploma at SMBC. I would have liked to have done more, but financial pressures and my health made it too difficult. I found that reading a book by Ruth Bell Graham, Billy Graham's wife, was very helpful to me.

Moses, what are the biggest pressures that Koreans face in Australia?

Australia is part of the western world and so Asians experience a big culture shock when they come here. Asians like community activities; Australians are more individualistic. That's why many Asian immigrants feel very lonely. They find it hard to break into Australian culture. So naturally, they tend to mix in their own cir-



Hannah and Moses Hahn

cles. Then they get caught in a cycle where their English can never improve. So the situation only gets worse.

The biggest difficulty?

It's harder to make contact with people in Australia. In Korea, you don't need to make appointments to see your friends. You can drop in at any time, and friends are glad to see you. Then there is the language barrier. Even if you are quite educated, if you can't speak good English, it's very easy to feel socially inferior. It's very threatening when you can't express your thoughts and feelings and people correct your grammar and pronunciation. Then we feel foolish in the eyes of others and we lose confidence. I think this prevents most migrants from having deeper fellowship with native-speakers.

How can Australians help new settlers in the country?

The best thing to do is to welcome newcomers and treat them as friends. Asians love to be accepted into the community life. We love it when people introduce themselves to us and warmly receive us. We like to be respected and treated equally.

Programs like language schools are very good, but they can't work if there is no loving relationship there. So if Australian churches want to reach Asians, they need to be welcoming and treat migrants without any form of prejudice. We like to visit other people's homes and share in hospital-

ity. Having programs like "introducing Australian culture" would be very helpful. At the same time, Asian migrants, since they've decided to live in Australia and become naturalised citizens, also need to take the responsibility of learning and respecting Australian culture.

What has been your most difficult trial in Australia?

I had a very serious accident at work several years ago. I was working with a tiler on a building site during college holidays, when I stepped backwards and fell three stories off the building. I was knocked unconscious. I broke my legs, ankles and shoulder in the fall. I had a lot of deep bruising all over my body. It happened outside the SBS television station near Royal North Shore hospital at St Leonards in Sydney. I got on the evening news, which is not the best way to get on TV.

I was very sick. I had to stay in bed for three months because the pain was so bad. It took me a long time to start walking again and to make a recovery. I got bouts of nausea and vertigo for a long time after the accident. It took me 18 months to get back to my studies.

What did God teach you in this crisis?

He taught me that he is sovereign in everything. Everyone who saw it said it was a miracle I survived. Through the accident, I saw that life is a special gift and that I am in God's hands.

I also learned what it means to be sick and weak. Up till then, I had been very healthy. It was hard to realise what it was like to be ill. But through this, I can understand what it's like to be weak, frail and sick. I have a new compassion for people like this.

It was also a time when I was able to read the Bible afresh as well as some Christian classics. Lying in bed, I had a lot of time for prayer and meditation. All this was for my profit.

What do you want to do now?

I have been licensed to preach the gospel by the Presbytery of Sydney, so I am waiting for an invitation to become a minister to a church. My vision is to work with all sorts of people in an English-speaking congregation. I call it International Church, in which unity in Christ is coupled with the acceptance and celebration of human diversity. Hugh McKay has said "multiculturalism is something which Australians understand and accept as a demographic reality of the Australian way of life", but I think we Presbyterians have been relatively slow at recognising the fact and applying it to ministry. I want to work, even if it's only part-time, in a genuinely Australian context with people from all cultures. That's my vision.

Moses Ham completed his studies at the PTC Burwood in 1997 and further studies at SMBC in 1999. He and Hannah have a daughter, Nuri, 7. ap

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Movie Watch Gladiator

Reviewed by Charles Colson



Success in Hollywood, these days, usually involves films that promote situation ethics and moral uncertainty. But this first blockbuster of the American summer extols virtue and devotion to a higher cause. Appropriately, perhaps, it is set not in the American suburbs but in second-century Rome. I'm talking about the box-office hit *Gladiator*.

The time in 180AD, and the legions of Emperor Marcus Aurelius are arrayed against the German barbarians – the last remaining obstacle to peace throughout the Empire.

With the cry of “Strength and Honor”, General Maximus leads the Roman army to victory. A man of war who longs for peace, Maximus prepares to return to his life as a farmer, with his wife and his son. But the Emperor, in failing health, has other plans. Maximus is like the son he always wanted – not because of his military prowess, but because of his great personal virtue. By contrast, the emperor's true son, Commodus, is cowardly, cruel, and ambitious.

Aurelius has misgivings about passing the crown to Commodus. In fact, he no longer believes Rome should be ruled by an emperor. Instead, he wants Maximus to return the elected Senate to power.

But before Marcus Aurelius is able to announce his plans publicly, he is murdered by Commodus, who proclaims himself emperor. Maximus refuses to pledge loyalty to this usurper, and he narrowly escapes being killed himself.

Then, finding his own family slaughtered, Maximus is sold into slavery as a gladiator. Eventually, his success in the arena leads to a final showdown – of course, with Commodus.

Like most Hollywood historical fiction, *Gladiator* does require some suspension of disbelief. But it has merits. Although most discussion of the film emphasises the spectacle and bold imagery, *Gladiator* unmistakably celebrates virtue over vice, selflessness over selfishness, and loyalty over ambition.

Yes, it is also very violent – be warned – but the film provides its own critique of the violence it portrays.

Commodus reinstates the gladiatorial games abolished by his father. Instead of ruling for the good of Rome, he uses the spectacle of the games, and he appeals to the basest impulses of the people to distract them from his own tyranny.

Maximus, on the other hand, yearns for peace, but fights in the arena because he hopes to win his freedom and serve the ideal of Marcus Aurelius. He believes that how he lives has significance, not only for this life, but for the life hereafter. And, *because* he lives with a view to eternity, he will not betray his principles.

This noble warrior does not exhibit strength and honor only on the battlefield. When he refuses to kill a defeated oppo-

nent, his mercy makes a mockery of the cruelty of the emperor. Even as a slave, Maximus displays the virtue that makes him not just a great soldier but a good man.

Now, you may find this film too violent for your tastes or for family viewing. But I'm thrilled that crowds are flocking to it. It's not often that people in the west are given such a clear contrast between moral goodness and evil, and given such a high view of virtue.

In the process, they're foretelling, in a sense, “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” because they are reminding all of us that the way we live *does* have eternal consequences.

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Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*

Conflict with Calvin

Robert Burford writes (letters, *AP, March*) “I do not believe that God both loves and hates the elect at different times as Barnes claims”. Burford claims to be consistent with Calvin, but this is not the case.

Calvin's conviction that God both loves and hates the elect at different times is evident in his *Institutes*. Calvin, quoting Augustine, says: “In a marvelous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us even what he had made, and to

love what he had made” (*Institutes* 2.16.4).

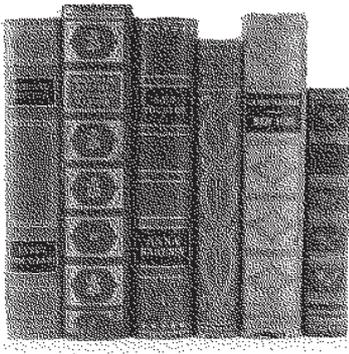
Burford says there is no well-meant offer and no desire of Jesus for the salvation of the non-elect in Mathew 23:37. Calvin's commentary indicates that Christ is expressing indignation towards Jerusalem (on account of their sin), but that they continue to be objects of his compassion. Calvin says “God attempted to draw the Jews to himself by mild and gentle methods”. God loved Israel and wished to gather them time and time again (even though they refused to be gathered and rejected his love). Commenting on 2 Peter 3:9, Calvin writes, “So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved.”

Additionally, if Burford endorses Engelsma's book *Hyper-Calvinism and the*

letters



books



Hostage on the Nighthawk

Dave & Neta Jackson
(Minneapolis: Bethany, 2000).
Reviewed by Lyn Barnes

Dave and Neta Jackson have spent much of their working lives trying to interest younger people in Christian history by means of short biographies and historical novels. *Hostage on the Nighthawk* revolves around the rule of William Penn as Governor of Philadelphia. We also get to meet the pirates of Captain Kidd (the real William Penn apparently did put Kidd's doctor in prison). Much is said about the relationship between Penn and the Indians, whom he recognised as the rightful owners of the land. Hence he sought permission from them to settle and to purchase land.

The theme of the novel is the typically Quaker one that we are our brother's keeper. It is easily read, enjoyable, full of intrigue and suspense and adventure, and will help introduce younger readers to life in Philadelphia in the late 17th century.

Unlike many other "Christian" novels, the Christian message does not consist of a few words of moralism tacked on at the end, but is carefully woven into the fabric of the story. It can be warmly recommended.

Creation and Change

Douglas Kelly
(Fearn: Mentor, 1997).
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

There will surely come a day when scholars will be embarrassed that they ever believed theories as ludicrous as the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution and the documentary hypothesis for the Pentateuch.

Yet to question these in some circles is to invite ridicule about one's intellectual capacity.

Douglas Kelly has ventured to state the obvious – that Genesis 1:1-2:4 is meant to be read as straightforward prose rather than exotic poetry. The reasons why it is usually not done so have nothing much to do with the biblical text and quite a lot to do with a desire not to offend the tenets of naturalistic science.

It was the 19th century liberal, Marcus Dods, who declared that if the days of Genesis 1 are not 24 hours, then the interpretation of Scripture is "hopeless". Sometimes it is said that the great Augustine of Hippo did not believe in six literal 24 hour days of creation, but in so far as I can follow Augustine, he seems to have believed that the creation took one day or even less. I cannot for the life of me follow why he believed this. Sir Francis Bacon wrote of God's two "books" – science and Scripture.

These two agree, and Douglas Kelly has done a sensitive, intelligent and convincing

job of showing how they do. This is a work which deserves a wide readership, and much thoughtful study.

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999)
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Dr Lloyd-Jones' ministry was based squarely on 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified". The doctor began his ministry at Sandfields, Aberavon on 28 November 1926 preaching on that text, and over 50 years later, in 1977, preached on the same text (but without repeating the same sermon). For that matter, this was the text which was carved into Lloyd-Jones' gravestone.

The Banner of Truth Trust has reproduced the 1977 sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:2, and it is a fitting summary statement regarding Lloyd-Jones' ministry. He shows the bankruptcy of alternatives to the gospel. The historian Arnold Toynbee commented that "technology is the only field of human activity in which there has been progression." In later life, as he embraced a kind of Buddhist mysticism, the novelist Aldous Huxley confessed: "It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and that at the end one has no more to offer by way of advice than 'Try to be a little kinder'."

Building on such a platform, Lloyd-Jones is able to demonstrate clearly the superiority of the Christian gospel of redemption. It is a powerful and relevant sermon, which should be greatly used.

Call of the Gospel (AP, Nov.) then he must deny that God has a general/common love for all men. Yet, Calvin writes, "But I will content myself with dwelling on one point only, and let that suffice. *Proofs of the love of God towards the whole human race exist innumerable*".

*John Evans,
Woodend, Qld*

How God hates

Peter Bloomfield is entirely correct when he points out that God's hatred of Esau cannot be interpreted as meaning that God loved him less than his brother Jacob (AP, May). But Bloomfield's own definition of "hate" is equally unacceptable: the biblical doctrine of God's hatred cannot be simply

reduced to "the complete absence of intimate complacent love" – i.e., mere privation – as your correspondent goes on to suggest.

God's hatred of an individual is his eternal contemplation of that person with the utmost loathing, disgust, and abhorrence. It is emphatically *not* an attitude of indifference or neutrality as Bloomfield suggests (cf. his illustration of a man's special love for his wife compared with his attitude towards all other women), but rather a disposition in God characterised by abomination, repulsion, and detestation.

It has both subjective (passive) and objective (active) elements. In himself, God's hatred is expressed in his holy recoil against all that the person is and does: it displays itself as an unmitigated and unre-

lenting antagonism towards the individual; an extreme dislike; an antipathy and revulsion of the highest order that never fluctuates and that is not tempered with the least degree of tolerance or benignity.

Objectively, God's hatred is demonstrated both in his open hostility towards, and in his utter rejection of, the person concerned – an enmity revealed both in this life (Malachi 1:3) and in the life to come (Psalm 11:6). It was with precisely this hatred that God hated Esau, and that he hates all the non-elect.

*Harry M. Klomp,
Boronia, Vic*

Editor's note: this concludes correspondence on the Calvin debate for a while.

Please come in

The good mail on young people and the church.

Dear “em”, I’m finally on the net. I can just hear you saying, it’s about time! Glad to hear you’re settling into uni OK. Sounds like church is going well too. That’s good, because the transition isn’t always that easy. I suppose it helped already knowing a few people there.

You asked me if there was any future in the church for people your age? I guess you’re thinking about the problems last year. Not all churches are the same, as you’re discovering. It helps if you understand where they’re coming from. It’s not that churches don’t want young people around, they just baulk at the prospect.

Have a think about your grandparents. They grew up during the Great Depression. It was a different world. They knew what it was to do it tough. They were lucky to have a decent pair of shoes. Despite all that, they look back on their childhood as the good old days. The hardships forged their character. For many of them things turned out much better than they would ever have dreamt. But they do find all the changes today a bit overwhelming.

Now consider your parents. They hit their teens in the ‘60s, the era of the Beatles, flower power and all that. Everything was laid on for them. They were called the “me” generation, but they weren’t completely selfish. They had the confidence to take on the world and challenge what they saw as unjust. Life has turned out far more com-



Colin Spragg

plex than they first thought. They’ve become the “stress” generation!

You know your own generation well enough. Sometimes it’s hard to tie you down to one thing. You want to keep your options open. You seem to thrive on change. You want to be regarded as an individual but you like being in a group. Many of your friends know the pain and insecurity of a fractured family. You want to trust and be trusted, but you’re not sure who you can trust.

I know you hate generalisations. You might not agree with what I’ve said but can you see the point? A church is made up of different generations, just like a family. You’ll find some people who’ve had a lifetime of change and they don’t want any more. They long to recapture the church of their youth. Others are just so stressed out coping with life, they see the needs of young people, and wish someone else would do something. That’s no excuse but

it helps to know the issues people are struggling with.

Is there a future for people your age in the church? I suppose it depends not just on the future but the present. God certainly has something in mind, something glorious. Ephesians 3:20-21 says: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Paul’s desire was to see God glorified in the church throughout all generations: past, present and future. God is glorified when Christ is proclaimed and people repent and believe in him. If that’s our desire for your generation and the next and the next then nothing will stop us proclaiming Christ. We won’t let the differences get in the way. We will bridge them for the sake of the gospel. If we’re tempted to think it’s just too hard, then consider the promise attached. God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. He has the power to do it. His power can work through us as indeed it is already at work in us. So there is a future and a present for people your age in the church. End of sermon!

Regards, tdd.

Colin Spragg is Presbyterian Youth training and development officer, NSW.

Murree Christian School

This boarding school for MKs is in the north of Pakistan, at 7000 feet in the foothills of the Himalayas.

A total of about 150 students are present, in Primary and High School. Job Descriptions are available. Presently, 5 Australians are on staff.

Immediate needs:

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H.S. Teacher of Art
Kitchen Supervisor
Piano Teacher

The final enemy

Christians may mourn, but we do not see death as others do.

One of the most obvious tests of our faith is how we face death. It was during a storm at sea, while on the way to Georgia, that John Wesley noted the courage of his fellow missionaries, the Moravian Brethren, and came to ponder more deeply his own spiritual state. He lamented: "I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near. But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled."

There is an innate fear of death within us all. We can all relate to Woody Allen's comment: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying."

Some are desperate to delay the inevitable. Eugene Christian wrote a book *How to Live to be a Hundred*, but, alas, he died at 69. Some fall apart at the thought of death. In 1998 a Sydney psychologist, Jean Griffin, seriously suggested that employees be given compassionate leave from their places of work should their pet die. Buy some goldfish, and you will never work!

Others try to make light of death. Dylan Thomas' last words, before he collapsed into an alcoholic coma for the last four days of his life, were supposed to have been 'I've had 18 straight whiskies. I think that's a record.' The American novelist, Harold Brodkey, who died recently of AIDS, told his wife: "Look, it's only death. It's not like losing your hair or all your money."

The Bible, however, never takes death lightly. It is real enough. When Jacob



Peter Barnes

thought that Joseph was dead, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned many days for his son (Gen. 37:34). Mourning is treated as something normal and natural when a loved one dies (Ps. 36:14).

When godly king Josiah died in battle in 609 BC, all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him, as did the prophet Jeremiah (2 Chron. 35:24-25). When his wife died, the prophet Ezekiel had to be specifically told not to mourn to illustrate God's attitude to apostate Judah (Ezek. 24:15-18). God himself laments for Moab (Jer. 48:16), and in the New Testament Jesus weeps before the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Sorrow is a perfectly Christian response to death.

Yet Christians are not to sorrow as others who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Pagan mourning rites, such as cutting the flesh or shaving the head, are forbidden (Lev. 19:28; 21:1-5). This is not to say that the Hebrews did not sometimes engage in these practices (cf. Jer. 16:6; 41:5), but God had told his people not to mourn as the pagans mourned.

Christian mourning is real indeed, but it is kept within boundaries by what the apostle Peter calls "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). In Plato's view, death is a liberation from the body which is a prison. The real part of the person is the soul, not the body. The body is simply something which the soul inhabits for a time. Not so for the Christian; his identity as a person consists of body and soul. God created the body, Christ became flesh, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes the body of the Christian to be a temple. In short, the body is not discarded but redeemed.

This makes death harder in one sense, but ultimately all the more glorious. It is harder in that death is taken more seriously. We do not escape from our bodies; we die and face the Judge of all the earth. But the glory is that Christ's rising from the dead in his body means that Christians too shall rise from the dead in their bodies.

It is not just a case of the salvation of the soul but also the redemption of the body. It is the hard history of Christ's own resurrection which gives the Christian the right perspective. Sure, there is sadness and mourning, but also joy inexpressible and hope of glory. As a result, John Wesley could claim of the evangelical Methodists: "Our people die well! The world may find fault with our opinions, but the world cannot deny that our people die well."

God grant us all to live well and die well, in Christ.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney. 

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