

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

august 2000



teenagers  
our tender treasure

Exiting to a postcode • The cutting edge • Spiritual defection

plc

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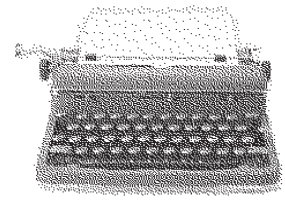
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August 2000  
No. 518

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

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# Tender hearts, but strong

One of the highlights of my week is a meeting that I have with a young teenager in Year 9 at Sydney Boys' High School. I first met him about 10 years ago - lost track of him for several years - and then became reacquainted with him when his family joined the church and he became involved in our youth ministry.

He comes armed with a shopping-bag containing Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, and we spend the hour looking at the Bible and discussing relevant issues raised by theologians such as how do we know God, can we trust the Bible, what's the meaning of the Trinity, do science and religion conflict, and what does it mean to believe in Christ? He has an active mind and really wants to know the Bible so that he can grow in his understanding of God and explain the gospel to his friends.

Perhaps that's why he asked me recently whether the two of us could study Norman Geisler's book on apologetics *When Sceptics Ask*. I am looking forward to some stimulating conversations with him in the coming term. I mention our meeting for an important reason: it serves as a reminder that in a deeply cynical and secular age, a young person - particularly a teenager - can be kept for God. Despite the fact that our culture is unravelling under the pressure of lawlessness, the Lord still works powerfully in the hearts of teens.

I need to be reminded of this constantly. The media presents an image of youth which is hardly complimentary. They are portrayed as bent upon the destruction of all meaning and moral principle. Adults often think of them in terms of promiscu-

ous sex, drug abuse, violence and subversion. Yet teenagers' responses to survey questions fail to reveal the depraved culture that adults typically expect. (See Dr Greta Gaut's findings in this issue.)

The reality is that their viewpoints and values are much closer to their parents' than many of us would imagine, which is why we should be more sympathetic and understanding of them.

The Bible presents the period of our teenage years as ripe with possibilities. In the first book of Samuel, we read how God protected the young prophet at a time when "the word of the Lord was rare" (3:1). He spent his teenage years in a culture where corruption was ubiquitous - even in the temple - and where immorality had spread throughout society like a dense fog.

However, it was in this unpromising period that God revealed himself to Samuel. And his response was prompt and immediate: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (3:10) This was the voice of a youth responding to the call of God's grace. It was the most significant response that Samuel would ever make.

The same is true for the prophet Daniel several hundred years later. He also made a stand for God as a teenager in the Babylonian court. He refused to be melted down into just another compliant idolater. He responded to the promises of God and lived a holy life throughout his adolescence. In fact, he determined in his heart that he would rather die than fail the faith or turn aside from the true worship of his God. All this took place during his teenage years.

The lessons from the lives of Samuel and Daniel are that teenagers can be powerfully touched by the grace of God. The most important decision that they will ever face is a religious one. Of course, if they turn aside from God, the whole world of darkness, destruction and heartache opens up before them. But if a teenager yields his heart to God and trusts in Christ as his Lord and Saviour, then he can begin to overcome every problem that he will ever confront: the problem of guilt, the problem of failure, the problem of self-image, the problem of virtue, the problem of marriage, home, children, judgment, death and eternity. Both Samuel and Daniel resolved in

their teenage years to follow God. They would rather die than deny him.

Since the Bible makes it clear that the teenage years can be a crucial time of life (Eccles. 12: 1), it's important for the church to understand the broad characteristics of youth culture. While it's true that the popular stereotype of teens as addicted to "sex, drugs and rock and roll" is wide-of-the-mark, it's increasingly clear that there is a distinctive youth culture. This culture differs from general culture in discernible ways that parents of teens know only too well.

This is why it's essential to explore and identify those elements of youth culture that are manifestations of the underlying world-view of today's youth. We need to understand these basic elements if we are to have a meaningful ministry to young people. Only when we understand the attitudes and thought-patterns of teens can we help them "to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Cor. 10:5)

This issue of *AP* is dedicated to exploring the issues affecting teens today so that parents, educators and mentors can help youth experience the grace of God in Christ. We want them to lead lives as full and as rich as Samuel and Daniel.

Peter Hastie

## From the Convener

Students leaving theological college to take up their first ministry face a daunting task. How much more if their first parish is merely a postcode. That was the prospect confronting Glenn and Lyn Samuel as part of Queensland's vision 5. Thanks partly to imaginative advertising, the work has flourished. There is much in their example to inspire any minister: read about it on page 20.



Robert Benn,  
Convener

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# The terrific teens

*Warning: tots become teenagers. It's reason to rejoice*



There's nothing like being the father of three cute blonde-haired girls under five to attract attention down the street. The comments range from "you'll have to beat the boys off with a stick" to "you'd better start saving for three weddings now". Perhaps the saddest comment we receive is "enjoy them while they're young, because once they're older they'll be trouble". The message is out. Be afraid, be very afraid. Your children will become "teenagers". Expect the worst!

Sometimes you'll find a similar attitude in the church. The average congregation knows what to do with children, but when it comes to teenagers, help! Which is a little surprising. At times teenagers may seem like they're from a different planet but we've all had to face those "in-between years" ourselves, even if the memory may be fading a bit.

What then should be our attitude toward young people? The Scriptures have much to teach us. But first a word of caution. The Bible does not confine its attention to our modern categories of adolescence or teen years. The same Hebrew word is flexible enough to include Moses at three months, Samuel as a child under the



*Colin Spragg*

care of Eli, to Joseph as a 17-year-old and Joshua as a young adult in the service of Moses. The other references to youth also have a flexibility about them.

A Hebrew boy was recognised as entering manhood at 13 years of age. It's not certain when this practice began but it was widespread by New Testament times. A boy of 13 became a "son of the law". From that age he could qualify to become one of the 10 men who could constitute a synagogue.

Although recognised as an adult, there was still a long period of transition to full adult responsibility. Under the Old Testament law, a young man did not enter military service until 20 years of age (Num. 1:3). Levites began their duties at the taber-

nacle even later, at 25 (Num. 8:23), presumably as assistants until they took up full responsibilities from 30 (Num. 4:30).

The picture of youth in the Old Testament combines the twin themes of youthful exuberance and growing maturity. The playfulness of youth and the call to be wise are not mutually exclusive. The wise teacher in Ecclesiastes commends both. He offers the following advice to the young: "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth" (11:9). Within the same breath he reminds the young to remember their Creator in the days of their youth (12:1). God will call them to account for the wisdom or foolishness of their actions.

In the lead up to the Olympic Games there is incredible pressure on our young athletes. The worlds of tennis, swimming and gymnastics are littered with disillusioned champions who peaked and then crashed while still teenagers. What would a wise coach advise his young charges? A recurring theme from older and wiser athletes is to enjoy the moment. Put in the hard work but don't lose the sense of enjoyment in what you do.

How would we advise this generation of youth, who face incredible pressures? The advice is there in Scripture. Grow in wisdom and maturity. Put the effort into your education, your work and ministry but don't forget to enjoy it. It is a time of transition. As parents, and as a church, we need to avoid the dual dangers of expecting too much from our young people or expecting too little.

The modern emphasis on teenage rebellion and angst has coloured our understanding of youth. All too often adolescence becomes a stage of life to endure or survive. Without denying the sense of alienation and despair many young people experience, we must take seriously the biblical perspective. The time of youth is intended as a gift from God. It is a time of dramatic change, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

While these changes bring their pressures and uncertainties, it is still a time to be embraced and enjoyed. It is a time to celebrate the goodness of our Creator. Even the trials of youth are an opportunity to grow into adulthood with a firm trust in the Lord. This may sound idealistic in the face of the modern world. But the world of Ecclesiastes is not as far removed from our world as we might think.

The time of youth is often a time when God stirs the hearts of young men and women. That was certainly the case at a number of strategic moments in the history of Israel.

Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel and Mary are prime examples. To them we can add Timothy in the early church. They experienced the call of God as young people. Their hearts were open to the work of God in the days of their youth. He used them mightily.

Jesus himself experienced the transition through youth. The one incident that is recorded in the Gospels is his visit to Jerusalem at 12. In Luke chapter 2 you can sense the anxiety of Mary and Joseph desperately searching for Jesus in Jerusalem. They found him sitting among the teachers. His response confused them. Where else did they expect him to be! It was quite obvious to Jesus. He was in his Father's house. Although Jesus exercised his independence on that occasion, Luke records that he returned to Nazareth and was obedient to them. God was at work during those years.

The time of youth is also a time for which we are called to account. Our course is set for the future. The Teacher of Ecclesiastes writes to the young: "follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (Ecc

11:9).

This accountability is a good thing. Without accountability there is no sense to life. If it doesn't matter what you do, why do anything? Life becomes meaningless. When young people cannot see a future with any meaning, what reason is there to live? Isn't that a major cause of despair among youth today!

The biblical concept of accountability is at odds with the predominant world view today. I was leading a discussion on *The Simpsons* with a group of teens. One of the characters was involved in an immoral relationship that broke up. When asked about



the consequences of that relationship the group said on mass: "you just learn from it and move on". That is the spirit of our age. There is little recognition of accountability for our actions or lasting consequences, let alone eternal consequences.

The Old and New Testaments back up their recognition of accountability with many promises and commands specifically directed to the young. There are passages that cover the breadth of a young person's relationship with God (Psalm 103:5, 119:9, Joel 2:28-29), issues of personal character (2 Tim 2:22, Titus 2:6) and relationships with others (Prov 1:8-9, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 Tim 4:12).

The first seven chapters of Proverbs are practical advice from a father to his son. What are the big issues he addresses? Much the same ones that apply to youth today: the need for wisdom for living, purity in relationships, good companions, a heart that is sensitive to God and an attitude to life that takes eternity into account.

The Scriptures reveal God's heart for young people. If God has a heart for youth, it's fairly obvious we should too. But what's a parent to do who is feeling battered and bruised? Eugene Peterson in his book *Like Dew Your Youth*, addresses that situation.

His main point is this. Don't see adolescence as a problem to solve or a stage to get through. See it as a "gift", not just for the adolescent but the parent. That may not be the first thought that enters a parent's mind when confronted by a door-slaming 15-year-old daughter or a defiant 16-year-old son.

Adolescents are in the process of growing up. Their growing up spills out all over the place. Peterson describes adolescence as God's gift to parents who may at that stage in their life be in danger of being arrested in their growth. The adolescent provides a challenge to the parent, testing their love, chastening their hope and pushing their faith to the edge. All the spiritual realities that may have become a little hackneyed and trite suddenly come at them with full force, demanding a response and requiring participation.

Parents are forced to grapple with issues that might otherwise have been purely academic. Their faith and life are put under the scrutiny of someone at very close quarters. It may seem like a trial. But then is that not God's way? Through trials he refines our faith.

Adolescents are also a gift to the church. Young people provide a fresh vision of the church that adults may lack. We distance ourselves from young people and ignore their insights at our peril. Part of the reason young people have a fresh insight is because they don't have the long-range responsibilities and vested interest in things as they are. Once you're caught up in the structures of the church, it's harder to express some feelings and consider some ideas. I know that myself.

Once you're in leadership there is much more at stake. However, when young people challenge what we think or the way we do things, they may just be God's gift to us rather than a problem to solve. There is nothing like young people in a church to shake our complacency.

What of young people themselves? It's crucial they have a heart for each other. Christian young people are the best people to reach their own generation of youth. They understand them. They share their world. We can help them to have a vision to reach their generation for the Lord. We can motivate them through our own example. We can equip them to share their faith. We can pray for them and encourage them, not at a distance but up close. Even if you only have contact with one young person, you can make a difference in his or her life.

Do you have a heart for youth? God does! Let's show that heart.

Colin Spragg is Presbyterian Youth Training Development Director (NSW)

# The real issue

*The best evangelism for teenagers is to see God's reality in our lives.*

**W**e all want to communicate Christianity to today's teens and we want to do it well. To do this, we need to know what they hear when we tell them about Jesus. We need to know what they are hearing from society about God. We need to know what roadblocks stand between them and faith. We need to know how to present Christianity in a relevant way.

I asked 63 students (in year 9 and 10) at Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon, to fill out a brief questionnaire on Christianity. It looked at several issues:

- What appeals to you about Christianity?
- What bugs you about Christianity?
- Is Christianity relevant to teenagers?
- What are the problems you have to deal with as a teenager?

Then I asked 11 girls in the High School Crusaders group, Koinonia, to fill me in on their Christians lives by asking:

- What do you find hard about being a Christian as a teenager?
- How is Christianity relevant and helpful in your life?
- What do you find hard when you try to share your faith with your friends?
- What is stopping your friends from becoming Christians?
- How could your pastor (or I as your Chaplain) help convert your teenage friends?

We will surely be better equipped to communicate Christ to teens if we pay attention to their very interesting answers.

**What appeals to teenagers about Christianity?** The answers to this question show us what aspects of Christianity teens are quick to accept. They also show us where the secular worldview fails to satisfy. These issues are good openers to get teens thinking about God.

Here are some of the most frequent responses. "There is always someone there – God – to talk to, to ask questions of and to ask for help." "The offer of eternal life and heaven removes the fear of death." "Jesus gives forgiveness so we can have a second chance instead of punishment." "God loves us all, no matter what or who we are." "The rules of Christianity bring out the best in people and give them a goal of purity to aim for." (This one is surprising, isn't it? Teens aren't supposed to like rules.) "Christianity gives us something to



*Greta Gaut*

believe — a path to follow." "It provides a sense of belonging, value and purpose."

Only seven of the 63 girls said nothing appealed to them. Teens are definitely interested in Christianity.

**What bugs teenagers about Christianity?**

Here we get to see what they are balking at. This is where we may need to clarify issues or help teens overcome their preconceptions. (Issues are ranked from most often mentioned to least.)

Christianity claims to be the truth. This is narrow-minded because it excludes other religions, lifestyles (eg practising homosexuality), and opinions. One third of the girls mentioned this.

The nature of the rules. They are restricting, old-fashioned and burdensome.

Christians are always trying to convert you — putting pressure on you.

You can't see God or Jesus and it all happened so long ago — "how do I know it isn't all a scam?"

**M**any of the things I thought might bug them were mentioned only one to three times: guilt, suffering allowed by a loving God, the negative emphasis on sin and judgment, unbelievable miracles, the requirement to attend church, the harshness of the heaven vs hell option, and too many denominations.

**What is really true?** All the main things that bugged teens are related to this question — does Christianity have the right to say what is true and binding or not? "What is really true?" and so "what should I believe?" are major questions. One year 10 girl said, "I just think that nowadays it is so easy for teenagers to think what they like."

When I talk to teens I get the impression that they are very confused about truth — they have a mixture of modern and post-modern thinking. When they are faced with emotional or spiritual ideas,

teens are post-modern thinkers. They are willing to consider these issues, but view them only as relative truths — things that are true for you, but not for them. When I want to talk about absolute truths, teens are still modern thinkers. That is, only scientifically supported ideas have a claim to absolute truth.

We need to be transparent to teens. Too often we present the message of Christianity as principles detached from our personal lives. This leads Christian claims to be interpreted as relative truths — just something we think is true. It is important for teens to see how Christ works out to be true in our lives. Then it will be easier for them to see how he will be true in theirs.

**The science versus religion myth.**

Another related problem is the role of science. So often, scientific truth is pitted against religious truth. Listen to these two comments from year 10 students: "How can you compare the Bible theory to the scientific theory of evolution (which has scientific evidence)?" or "You don't always know the real truth. I am a good Christian, but when I think about it, science contradicts the Bible and the Bible contradicts science. It's a bit confusing sometimes."

I am a scientist, a science teacher *and* a chaplain. I can't tell you how many times students have come up to me and asked me how I could possibly be both a science teacher and a chaplain! Such an attitude is not limited to students, nor to the unchurched. Christian parents and church people make the same comments. "Science and religion — that's a strange combination. How do you manage with that?" Why this expected conflict? The myth that science and religion are necessary enemies needs to be exploded — and fast.

A misunderstanding of the role of science can be a real roadblock to faith for today's youth. Year 10 religious education classes finished a unit called "2 Ways to Live" in Semester 1. I asked the students to write out their response to the Christian message. Many students expressed a keen interest in the gospel message and a renewed desire to learn more about it. However, many believed that the Bible contradicted science. They feared a "blind faith" would be necessary to accept the Bible over science.

David Fergusson in *The Cosmos and the Creator* regrets that many teens “grow out of” their religious beliefs when the science they learn appears to contradict them. There need be no contradiction between the Bible and science. For example, Genesis chapters 1 to 3 are often used to support such “contradictions”. Yet this is a statement of theology, even of history, but not of science.

We need to help teens understand the role of science in examining and explaining the physical world around us. We need to help them see that true science can neither prove nor disprove God. Indeed, the supernatural realm is beyond the jurisdiction of science. We need to combat the strong message of scientific naturalism (a philosophy which excludes the supernatural — only what can be scientifically proven matters). We need to help them see that when science begins to make claims against God *it has ceased to be science and has become another religion*.

There are two potential errors we should avoid. First, we must not attack science, as some radical creationists have done, making anti-intellectual claims and insisting evolution not even be taught. Christians should not ignore evolution, nor be frightened by it, but be able to discuss it.

Philip Johnson’s book *Darwin on Trial* helpfully sets out the logical and practical limits of science. He also lists the evidence for and against Darwinian and other types of evolution. Most schools present evolution as certain and unquestionable fact. It is correct that most scientists assume evolution is true, but in reality they are still debating how it happened. It is far from being an unquestionable fact. Johnson’s book is an excellent teaching aid to help us show teens that science need not threaten Creation theology.

The second error is to support the “God of the Gaps” theory. This theory makes God the answer to all the questions science cannot answer. This inevitably makes science a threat to God’s role. As science progresses to explain more and more things, the role left for God becomes smaller and smaller. A better paradigm is to present science as limited to the exploration of the physical realm. Religion answers questions from the supernatural realm and explains the creation, purpose, meaning and fulfilment of the physical realm.

*Do teenagers think Christianity is relevant to their lives?* Half the girls said yes, one sixth said definitely not, and one third said yes and no. The main reasons for saying yes were because God provided purpose, meaning and someone to help with life and, second, Christianity must be

important because we keep on hearing about it.

However, there was a clear misconception that God was only relevant to the big questions in life (purpose, meaning), while Christianity didn’t help a teenager face daily stresses and problems. One year 10 student said, “These days the majority of teenagers and adults couldn’t care less about God, because God is not involved in our daily lives. Most people don’t turn to God for answers; they turn to family and friends.”

Other students said teenagers had no time to think about God and that they were too consumed with their problems to investigate Christianity. We need to help connect the message of Christianity to the daily lives of teenagers, and show them how God can help and guide them through their every-day problems.

Many students thought Christianity might be true. But they felt Christianity had been discredited through history and hypocrites, and no longer held the answer. Another student said, “Only nerds believe in God. Christianity is not a big thing among teenagers (as far as I can see). Even people who simply believe in God do not follow Christianity.”

The Koinonia girls said that Christianity was relevant to their lives in two main ways: it explains life, provides meaning and a path to follow, and they know they always have the help and love of God. Edith (year 7) said, “I have a forever friend.” What a profound answer to the emotional turmoil surrounding relationships for teenagers today.

*What are the problems teens face?* Asked to suggest the problems they faced as teenagers, four problems emerged: Friendship problems causing emotional turmoil (half the girls listed this one); family problems — general tension and broken families (just under half); busyness and stress — the picture is one of frantic busyness, pressure to perform and succeed, pressure mounting to nervous breakdown proportions (some girls listed up to four sources of stress, and presented stress as their only problem); and boy troubles — relationship stress, pressure to have sex and to be attractive.

The more traditional problems of self-image, being judged by how they look (body shape, styles, being cool), pressure or trouble with alcohol and drugs, and the nasty things teenagers say about each other were also mentioned, but far less frequently than the four main problems.

It is clear that the emotions of our teenagers are threatened by relationships and busyness/stress. We need to show them how Christianity is relevant to these problems in our lives and in theirs. They need to see how God’s love can sustain

them and how his principles for living can help sort out the relationship messes that are all too prevalent. We need to help teenagers learn how to manage their time and how to set biblical priorities. It is sad how many parents have told me over the past three years that their children are far too busy with school to be able to come to church or youth group.

On another section of the survey I asked the girls to rank six problems. First was problems with self-image, followed by not knowing what is really *true* among all the claims people make; family breakdown, or tension in family relationships; spiritual confusion or loss of purpose and meaning; loneliness; and fear of economic disaster or financial breakdown.

This again emphasises the widespread confusion over truth and the need to address the issues of science, religion, modernism and post-modern relativism in our youth groups and classrooms. We also need to show how God’s truth is the only foundation for a healthy self-image. Finally, we need to welcome teens into the family of God to help heal the pain caused by earthly families.

The Koinonia girls said the main problems they faced as Christian teenagers were lack of time to spend with God, due to their busy lives, and standing out as different from other teens. Peace (year 7) said: “Many other teenagers don’t understand you, they tease you, they feel uneasy around you, they think maybe you’re boring.”

*Preconceptions about Christianity.* Teenagers have already formed an opinion on the content, value and relevance of Christianity to their lives even if they don’t understand Christianity. A few years ago, witnessing to youth in a NSW country town, I asked a young woman if she would mind talking to me about Jesus. She said she didn’t want to because she knew Jesus just wasn’t for her. I then asked if she knew what Easter was all about (then only a week away). She thought it might have something to do with the church, but wasn’t sure. This shows that many teenagers have already rejected a Jesus they know very little about.

The Koinonia girls said that one of the hardest things about trying to share their faith was their friends’ preconceptions about Christianity. Vivian (year 10) said: “I don’t think they see any point in becoming Christian, and they think the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. Also, some don’t know what Christianity is about in the first place.”

The best conversations I have had with teenagers about Christ have been when I have shown them where the Bible answers



their questions. They are often amazed! Further, their interpretation of Christianity is challenged and corrected. We need to create a hunger in them for the true Jesus, the biblical Jesus and not just the version of Jesus they have absorbed from society. We need to listen to them and address their misconceptions.

**W**e need to liberate our Christian teenagers to be able to share their faith with confidence. So often they feel inadequate to answer their friends' questions, to explain their beliefs and challenge their friends' preconceptions. Greta (year 9) said the hardest thing for her in sharing her faith was, "answering questions that I don't always understand myself, Explaining what I believe and telling them how important it is".

These same feelings largely silenced me during most of my teenage years too. Apologetics should be a staple element in our curricula to teenagers. They need to know exactly what and why they believe (see the article by Conrad Nixon in this issue of *AP*).

Topics I think we need to treat in these classes include:

- Training teens how to state the gospel clearly and defend it from the Bible, history and sociology.
- The importance of the doctrine of creation, and how to maintain this in the face

of current scientific claims about the earth's formation and history.

- Exploring the concept of truth — are absolutes knowable? How? This leads into a unit on the reliability of the Scriptures as divine revelation.
- The evidence for God.
- At least a rudimentary understanding of the message of the Old Testament. Many teens are very confused about how Jesus could have been a Jew and yet started a new religion. Teens also balk at apparent differences between the God of the Old and New Testaments.

*What do Christian teens want leaders to do to help convert their friends?* Of all the survey information, the answers in this section challenged and excited me the most. Here we have advice from the teenage mind on how to win teens.

Vivian (year 10) said: "Explain clearly what Christianity is — this is often overlooked." We can no longer rely on general knowledge to aid our pre-evangelism. We must make sure we are presenting teenagers with the information they need to accept Christ.

Catriona (year 10) said: "Tell them what benefits the Chaplain gets" — I think she is asking me to tell people how Christianity works out in my life, how the advantages of faith far outweigh the disadvantages. We need to be more personal in our presentation of the gospel.

Rosie (year 12) said: "Be natural, and don't try to make Christianity 'cool'. I don't like it when Christianity is played down. It's fake, and gives wrong messages. It is better for church leaders to just be open and create an environment where people feel comfortable to talk, learn, and ask questions." Since teenagers face such confusion over the truth, we of all people need to be real to them — our lives must ring true.

Also, since so many of their relationships are surrounded by pain and turmoil, we need to open ourselves to be their friends — people to whom they can turn with questions.

Fiona (year 12) said: "I think that the most helpful thing would be spending time to really get to know my friends." She goes on to describe a "successful" youth outing. It was a day at the beach with only one formal talk first thing in the morning. The rest of the day was just spent on building relationships and fostering conversations from the talk. She said this day was easy to get non-Christians along to and gave ample opportunity for real communication. Should we spend less time making great programs and more time just talking about real things with teens? I think so. That is certainly going to be my plan.

*Greta Gaut is chaplain at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, Sydney.* **ap**

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# A question of understanding

*Why I teach apologetics to teenagers*

In the Indian Himalaya, there is a beautiful region known as Nandakini Valley. I visited there two years ago, while on an expedition with a group of high school students. We arrived on a fog-bound afternoon, scarcely able to see across the few metres that separated one tent from the next.

But shortly after we had set up camp the fog lifted. Suddenly we were able to see the stunning mountains that surrounded us: massive peaks, soaring beyond 7000 metres, glistening against the clear blue sky. The mountains had been there all along, but the fog had obscured our view.

I continually come across people who are struggling to see what Christianity really is; people whose views are thoroughly confused; people for whom there seem to be so many barriers to faith. They have many questions and many objections. If we are to help them to understand Christianity rightly, we may have to clear away some obstacles.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we read: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give a *defence* to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have; but do this with gentleness and respect."

The work of *apologetics* is to give a defence of what one believes to be true. Clearly, it is not simply a matter of having the right answers to questions. Christ must be Lord of our hearts. That will mean that he will be the focus of our answers, and our answers will be delivered in a way that reflects his character: "with gentleness and respect."

The apostle Paul was a great apologist. He argued the case for the gospel in a variety of ways against a variety of backgrounds. In his speech before the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34), Paul appealed to reason and common experience in demonstrating certain truths about God and in showing the inadequacy of the prevailing Athenian world view; in Acts 14:17, he refers to the clear evidence in nature of the existence of God; while in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 he appeals to eye-witness testimony in support of the resurrection of Jesus. In Acts 2:22, the apostle Peter makes reference to Jesus' miracles as evidence of his divine nature. Clearly the apostles were not afraid to argue for the



*Conrad Nixon*

truth of Christianity. Equally clear is the fact that they were dependent upon the Holy Spirit to use their arguments in bringing people to God (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 2 Cor. 10:4,5).

In my work among teenagers, I find it important to teach apologetics. Teenagers ask lots of questions about God and the Bible, and most of the questions are good ones. They are not trivial, they are not impertinent, they ought not to be dismissed or treated with little regard. They need to be dealt with carefully.

I recently spoke to a student about his behaviour in Chapel. He seemed restless, inattentive, even disruptive. After we had been talking for quite some time, tears began to well up in his eyes. He explained that because his mother had died when he was very young, he found it difficult to believe in God, and especially in the idea of a loving God. I said that I could not begin to imagine how difficult that must have been for him. I told him that I would try to answer his many questions as best I could. I spoke of how Jesus suffered greatly and can certainly understand our pain.

Many people have good questions; we need to take the time to listen and to answer. Many people have objections concerning the Bible; we need to gently help them to see that their objections are groundless and that Christ is worthy of their attention.

In Isaiah 42:3, we read of the Lord's servant who "will not break off a bent reed nor put out a flickering lamp". It is clearly a reference to Jesus (Mt. 12:15ff), who in his own ministry met people where they were, but did not leave them there. His conversation with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4) shows his patience and gentleness in leading people to a fuller understanding. We need to deal with people's questions in an

honest and sensitive manner, taking care not to "put out a flickering lamp".

I want to provide answers to the questions my students ask, and thus help them to be in a position to answer the questions and the objections of others.

I want them to see that faith in Christ is not a "leap into the unknown", and Christianity is not a philosophy in which people can simply believe whatever they wish.

I want them to recognise that Christianity is grounded in events of history and stands in opposition to the post-modernist view that there is no absolute or objective truth.

I want to help people to see the insufficiency of a worldview which does not have Christ as Lord; to see the utter impotency of materialism and secularism; the logical contradictions within Eastern mysticism and the New Age Movement; the baseless and self-defeating claims of post-modernism; the hopelessness and indefensibility of atheism.

Showing people the poverty of such worldviews will not in itself make them Christians, but within the providence of God it may be a step along the way to them considering a worldview which better matches reality and offers hope like no other.

Whether we are dealing with a person's objections to Christianity or telling them how they can be saved, we are involved in essentially the same work. We are seeking to proclaim Christ as Lord; that is our goal – to declare him and to invite people to turn away from sin and to believe in Christ for salvation.

In doing this, we need to be sensitive to where a person is at in terms of his level of understanding and preparedness to accept certain things that we are saying or certain premises upon which we are operating. We need to have the patience to listen to questions and the wisdom to answer them as best we can. All the while we endeavour to proclaim Christ as Lord, and pray that their heart will be opened to receive him.

Recently I visited a friend who had moved house. I thought I was going for lunch. Somehow I found myself working in the garden. While my friend busied himself planting some shrubs into beautifully prepared soil, I was loading up a wheel barrow

with thorn-infested debris and clearing from a pathway, pickets from an old fence that had been pulled down.

As I glanced at the scratches on my arms from the thorns, I began to think that I had got the raw end of the deal; planting shrubs looked a joy by comparison! But of course, we were both engaged in the same work. We were making a garden. I was clearing away obstacles; he was planting shrubs. In the work of evangelism, there are times when we feel that we are planting seeds into well-prepared soil. There are times when we feel that we must clear away obstacles. The purpose is the same. We want to make disciples who will bear fruit. Ultimately it is all the Lord's work. Whether clearing the weeds or planting the seeds, the goal is the same.

We need always to be mindful of the fact that it is indeed the Lord's work. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces people of the truths of the Christian faith. He is the one who convinces unbelievers of their sin in ignoring Jesus, of the righteousness of God, and of their condemnation under God's judgment (Jn 16:7-11). We read in the book of Acts of the conversion of Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14).

No merely human arguments can take the place of this work of the Spirit; and if it were not for this work, no one would ever become a Christian, for as Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." (John 6:44). This is not to say that there is no place for presenting arguments and evidence, but these must be seen as servants of the gospel; of help perhaps in leading a person along the pathway of understanding, but not themselves the means of conversion or the basis of belief.

Ultimately, the basis of my belief is that I know Jesus. This is sufficient, whether or not I have a grasp on the evidence, the argu-

ments or the answer to every question.

So while seeking to answer questions, I must try to present the gospel clearly. I do not think for one moment that my articulate presentation of evidence will convert anyone – that is the work of God – but God may use my arguments in the process. The Holy Spirit can work through many different means. In teaching teenagers, I seek to appeal to the head as well as the heart; in explaining biblical truth to them, I try to use illustrations from many walks of life; I employ a variety of teaching techniques because I suspect that different people learn in different ways. All the while I pray that God might use such things in carrying out his work of grace.

If in the process a student questions the reliability of the gospel accounts I will give reasons why they can be trusted; if someone protests that the Bible has been altered over the centuries I will give evidence to show that the Bible has been transmitted to us faithfully and translated accurately; if there are doubts about the resurrection of Jesus, I will provide some compelling reasons for believing that it occurred.

Along with such evidence I will stress the urgent importance of coming to know this Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and will pray that God's Spirit will enable it to happen! I must not have as my goal "winning the argument"; my defence must be presented with gentleness and respect; and whether or not a person is convinced by my arguments, I need to try to speak about the wonder of Jesus and his claims upon our lives. To simply ignore a person's question or objection is to fail to treat him or her with gentleness and respect, and failure to give someone a fair hearing is perhaps not the best way to win a fair hearing in return!

It would of course be naïve to think that every question I am asked in the classroom is genuine. Some questions are designed to act as distractions. And some people, hav-


ing asked a question, don't really want to hear an answer. The Bible has very helpful advice at this point. The words of Proverbs 26:4, 5 may seem strange at first: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

There are times when, for whatever reason, a person is not willing to listen to answers. It is important to be sensitive to that person's needs and to the situation, and in particular, to avoid getting into the kind of argument which makes both of you look foolish.

On the other hand, there are times when, with gentleness and respect, you can demonstrate to a person that there is more to the matter than they first thought, and they need, with honesty and humility, to delve deeper. We need to pray for wisdom, so that we might know whether it is verse 4, or verse 5, which best fits the particular situation.

Ultimately, we need to remember that unbelief is essentially a spiritual, not an intellectual, problem. I remember having a conversation with a student who, for some months, had asked question after question in class. I asked him whether, if I could satisfactorily answer all his questions, he would be ready to become a Christian. His response demonstrated that the problem was more to do with not wanting to obey Jesus than not understanding the gospel. There are times when continuing to present arguments can be counterproductive; we may need to say less and pray more.

We need to work hard at presenting the gospel in a way that is clear and compelling. We need to try to deal with people's objections intelligently and sensitively. Most of all, we need to pray earnestly, that God himself will open hearts and change lives.

Conrad Nixon is the chaplain at The Scots College, Sydney 

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# Parents, meet your teenager

*Difficulties may be proverbial. So is the way forward, according to Paul Tripp.*

**D**o you remember what it was like to be a teenager? Do you remember your self-consciousness, your physical self-awareness, and your general confusion? Do you remember feeling great about yourself one day and wanting to die the next? Do you remember trying to be cool, only to make a complete fool of yourself? Do you remember doing immature and irresponsible things just at the time you were trying to win your parents' respect?

Effective parents of teenagers are people who are able to remember what it was like to live in the scary world of the teen years.

I remember the time I finally got my mom and dad to trust me with the car, only to run out of gas and hitchhike home, leaving the keys in the ignition! I was crushed as my mom told me in elaborate detail how dumb a thing that was.

If parents fail to remember moments like this, if we fail to recognise how huge these events are to our teenagers, we will fail to take them seriously. The problem is that teenage crises sneak up on you.

Maybe this is why parents approach adolescence with such apprehension. We don't like the unpredictability, the spontaneity. We get nervous about how quickly things get serious, or how rapidly things can change. So we tend to buy into the survival mentality of the culture and look for another book that will help us cope with teen chaos. I saw a tee-shirt recently that said, "Of course I look tired. I have a teenager!"

**W**e will never be able to predict what each day will bring as we raise our teenagers, but the more we understand about the age the more we will be able to approach this time with a spirit of preparedness rather than a spirit of fear.

We must reject the self-centered survivalism that sees success as making it through our children's adolescence with our sanity and our marriages intact. We must settle for nothing less than being instruments in the hands of God who is doing important things in the lives of our children.

The first seven chapters of Proverbs record a wise father giving practical life advice to his son. As I have studied these chapters, I have found the sorts of things we will encounter with our teenagers. Yet



*Paul Tripp*

none of these themes lead to the hopelessness so prevalent in our culture's view of teens. Rather, they simply and wisely begin to orient you to the kinds of struggles you will encounter as you live with your teenager. Let's look at the tendencies revealed in this section of Proverbs.

**No hunger for correction:** Proverbs emphasizes the value of wisdom and the importance of correction. The father of Proverbs essentially says to his son, "Whatever you get in life, get wisdom! It is more valuable than you will ever know." Most teenagers simply don't have a hunger for wisdom. In fact, most think they are much wiser than they actually are, and they mistakenly believe that their parents have little practical insight to offer. They tend to think that their parents "don't really understand" or are "pretty much out of it." Yet most teenagers sorely lack wisdom and desperately need loving, biblical, and faithfully dispensed correction.

Most teenagers don't walk into the family room and say, "You know, Dad, I was just thinking how wise you are, and what a good thing it is that God put you in my life so that I could gain wisdom too. I just thought I'd come in and talk with you for a while and soak up some of the wisdom that you and I both know I desperately need." No, it doesn't happen that way. Teens don't tend to beg for our wisdom. Yet we cannot give in and let them set the agenda for our relationship with them.

Ask yourself, do I respond to my teenager in ways that make wisdom appealing? Do I make the taste of correction sweet? I watch parents make correction bitter as they beat their children with demeaning words. Make wisdom attractive. Make correction something to be desired.

Win your children for wisdom. Be a salesman for it. You don't do this with nasty, inflammatory confrontations and

ugly verbal power struggles. No wisdom is imparted in these moments. If you hit your kids with a barrage of verbal bullets, they will either run for the bunker or come out firing themselves.

After preparing yourself, talk with your teen in the right place at the right time. Get away into a quiet room in the house, preferably the teen's room where he is comfortable. Don't squeeze these important wisdom or corrective times into busy moments; don't do this on the fly.

Don't conduct them in front of other people, or introduce them as you are running out to the car on the way to school or church. Take time, and in so doing say, "You are important and what God says is important, so I am willing to invest the time necessary to be his instrument of correction." Remember, giving wisdom is not hitting your teenager over the head with words.

**Tendency to legalism:** Proverbs doesn't give us an encyclopedia of dos and don'ts, or rights and wrongs. What Proverbs gives us is two worldviews, wisdom and foolishness. Here we find two ways of living: the way of the wise that gets its direction from the truth of God, and the way of the fool that gets its direction from human perspective and desire. God is looking for more than outward behaviour. He is working so that we would be nothing less than partakers of his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We cannot and we must not reduce godly living to a set of rules.

**T**eenagers, however, tend to be dyed-in-the-wool legalists. They tend to emphasise the letter of the law rather than the spirit. Teenagers tend to push at the fences while telling you that they are still in the yard. They tend to drive you to boundary discussions. They engage you in "how far can I go" conversations, and they tend to respond later with "but I did exactly what you told me to do".

We need to be skilled at talking about the spirit of the law with our teenagers. We need to talk about the heart issues behind the command. We need to show them the difference between an inner purity and a pharisaic performance of duty. We need to see teenage legalism as an opportunity to talk about what it means to have a heart for God and a heart for doing what is right.

My son tended to be rough in his physical play with his brother. He enjoyed his advantage of size and strength. There were many occasions when his younger brother would end up frustrated and in tears. So I went to my son and asked him not to engage in physical play with his brother. In making this request, I was actually summarising a lot of things that were in the category of intimidation, using his size to take advantage of his younger brother.

A few days later I heard his brother crying again in the family room. I said, "I thought I asked you not to do this with your brother?" His response was, "I didn't touch him." Do you see what happened? He technically kept the letter of the law, in that he did not physically touch or hurt his brother. Yet he completely disobeyed the spirit of the request by physically intimidating his brother without touching him.

As we point out this legalism to our teenagers and remind them of the true spirit of God's requirements, they will see their inability and begin to hunger for Christ. Otherwise, they will tend to be like the Pharisees who reduced the law of God to doable human standards. Christ told his followers that unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees they would not enter the kingdom of heaven! As we point our teenagers to the grandeur of the spirit of the law, they will say, "I can't do this. I can't love. I can't give. I am not a servant." They will begin to reach out for the help that only Christ can give.

The stakes here are high. Human legalism leads to human self-righteousness. Human self-righteousness denies the need for the saving, enabling grace of Christ. Human righteousness embraces the cruelest of Satan's lies, that a person can be righteous by keeping the law. If that were true, there would have been no need for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

We must help our teenagers to see their legalism, and we must not get into the endless boundary debates that legalism enjoys. We must help our children to see their rebellion of heart, and take them to Christ, who is their righteousness.

**T**endency to unwise company: There is a great deal of material in Proverbs about friendship and the influence that others have on you and your behavior. Teenagers often are naive and unwise in their choice of friends. Proverbs goes so far as to say that when you see certain people, you should cross the road and walk on the other side! Friendship is very important. A person is known by the company he keeps. It is impossible to be uninfluenced by one's friends. Yet teenagers typically assume that they won't be influenced and will respond to our concern with "I can handle it".

We need to approach these conversations with sensitivity and patient love. Teenagers tend to be prickly and protective when it comes to discussions of their friends. It is as if the operational rule is this: "To reject my friends is to reject me."

As parents we need to be very careful about the way we have these conversations. Never resort to name-calling and character assassination. Your goal should be to get your teenager to step outside the emotion and commitment of the relationship to give it a long, honest, biblical look. They won't do this without your help. But it's also true that they won't do it if, in your own fear, you have emotionally denigrated relationships that are precious to them.

This subject must be put on the table. Teenagers need to learn the skill of wisely choosing friends. They need to understand the powerful influence of friendship upon them.

Susceptibility to sexual temptation: The father in Proverbs has much to say about sexual temptation. We need to take this theme seriously, particularly in a culture that has such a distorted view of human sexuality. There is almost nowhere outside the Christian community that a teenager will get anything close to an accurate perspective of this significant area of human life. The teenage years are a time of physical awakening. For the first time, children become desirous of relationships with the opposite sex. Lust and fantasy often become the private sins of teenagers. We cannot avoid this area or respond to it with embarrassment and ambivalence. We must put this subject on the table early with our children and keep it there as a topic for open discussion.

Many parents seem to dread having that first sex talk. They spend weeks working themselves up to it. They breathe a sigh of relief that they made it through it alive, and they never discuss the subject again.

How about you? Do you know how your child is doing in this area? Do you know if he struggles with lust, fantasy, or masturbation? Do you know if he has a biblical view of relationships with the opposite sex? Do you know how many of the sexual lies of the world he has accepted? Do you understand the situations, locations, and relationships where he is experiencing temptation? Have you brainstormed with him about ways of fleeing the "lust of youth"? You cannot parent here if you have allowed the doors to be closed.

If we are going to help our teenagers with their struggle to be sexually pure, the key is to start early so that by the time the child is a teenager, parent and child alike have moved beyond any embarrassment or reticence in talking about sex.

Learning how to recognise and flee temptation is not a skill that is mastered after one introductory talk about sexuality. Parents need to be committed to a process that begins in the pre-teen years and continues, with consistency, until our children are ready to leave our homes.

There is an explosion of sexual awareness and sexual temptation in the teen years. Teenagers are beginning to form a sexual lifestyle that will be with them for years. It is a time when many teens fall into sexual sin that alters the course of their lives, secret patterns of sexual sin that leave them in bondage for years. We must be committed to open, positive, and consistent parenting in this area.

**N**o eschatological perspective: eschatology – a focus on eternity – is not the strong point of most teenagers' functional theology. They don't tend to live with eternity in view. They don't think in terms of delayed gratification.

Teenagers are shockingly present-focused. They live as if the present moment is the only moment of life. They don't think in terms of investment. They don't have a harvest mentality. Galatians 6:7 says, "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." This is a significant spiritual principle that is seldom in the typical teenager's view.

Teenagers need to be taught to think in terms of long-term investment. This is not the typical way they think about their lives. Teenagers tend to live for whatever they want at the moment and they tend to put off their responsibilities until the very last minute.

We need to teach them to examine the kinds of seeds they are now planting and the kind of harvest those seeds will bring.

Open doors all around: Issues of wisdom and foolishness, legalism and true godliness, friendship, sexuality, eternity, and a personal awareness of the heart all are on the table during the teen years, providing wide open doors of opportunity.

God uses discussions like these to help your teenagers come to know him, and love him, and to internalize his truth in a way that gives practical direction to their lives.

These are also the things that make this a scary time of parenting. These are issues that can cause parental panic and dread and become the occasion of parental anger. These are the issues around which parents say things they live to regret. These issues can be used of God to form a deeper bond between parent and teen, or be the thing the enemy uses to drive a deeper wedge in the relationship.

*Reprinted with permission from Age of Opportunity: A Biblical guide to Parenting Teens, by Paul David Tripp, P&R 1998. <sup>ap</sup>*

# A happy end

*Joy starts and finishes with God, says Jay E. Adams.*

I have asked diverse groups of pastors – from a large variety of backgrounds – “What is the chief end of man?” Without hesitation, the answer is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever”.

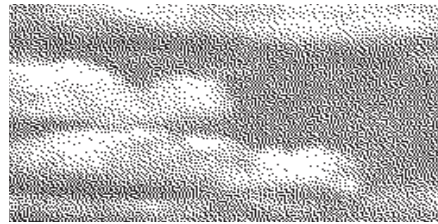
There is something significant about that. People with Calvinistic, Arminian, as well as nondescript theologies unite in that great affirmation in the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. That fact says something for its powerful influence upon the church of Jesus Christ.

Today in many ways, while affirming the truth taught in the Catechism, the church is departing from it in practice. Christians – perhaps more than ever before – need to understand what those words mean in everyday actions. Listen to any discussion about the problems of believers, or read the average book from the shelf of a Christian bookstore and you will discover that – far from glorifying God – advice is given about the chief end of man that flatly contradicts the Catechism.

While writers usually do not begin with the statement “Man’s chief end is . . .” nevertheless, their statements assert that man’s purpose in life is “to find happiness”, or “to feel good about himself, or “to obtain security and significance.” Clearly, there is something quite different about the orientation of those answers. Nowhere does the Bible or the Westminster Standards teach any such thing.

What is the problem? You can see what has gone wrong by comparing the Catechism’s response with the answers

## IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



listed above. In the one case, the response is God-directed, in the other man-directed. In the one case, God is the object of life; in the other, man.

Today is a time of unparalleled self-centeredness. Humanistic philosophy has permeated the church, so that the dominant concern no longer is to glorify God but to become self-actualised. It is therefore time to re-emphasise the truth taught in Question One: Man’s chief end – not his only end, but his chief end – is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Note well, the Catechism answer does not say “Glorify God, and enjoy the world – or yourself – forever.” It does not say that man’s purpose is enjoyment. What it says is that man should enjoy God. We are to have an enjoyment of his being, his works, his word – the kind of enjoyment found in the hymns of the psalmists.

Man is not capable of finding true, lasting joy in perishable things, or in associations with other sinful creatures. It is only in fellowship with God, who made us, that we experience such joy. Even that, as the Catechism seems to say, is derivative – a by-product – of glorifying God.

What does it mean to glorify God? The Old Testament Hebrew word for glory is “weight, heaviness”. The New Testament term is “fame”. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:17, brings them both together when he speaks of the heavenly “weight of glory” that awaits those who, like him, glorify God.

When the Old Testament idea of glory-as-weight is examined, the idea of giving God his proper weight in all things is uppermost. God is to be honored for all his works and for all he is. He is to be acknowledged – as the one who sustains the world and all that is in it.

That note is missing in today’s society, a society in which people are caught up in themselves. It is a rare thing for anyone on television, in a newspaper account or anywhere else, to give God the glory for his accomplishments. Today man is willing to take the credit for everything. God, if considered at all, is considered a light-weight. He has all but been driven from public life. Even privately, the average person lives his life from year to year without ever thinking of God. God has become irrelevant.

The New Testament concept of glory-as-fame accords with the idea of glory-as-weight. When God is given his rightful place (weight), his fame is spread abroad among men. It is this emphasis, so strongly taught in years past when children were reared on the Shorter Catechism, that is so greatly needed.

Many problems now prevalent in the church would evaporate if believers would once more take this matter to heart. As Presbyterians who love our Standards, let us heed the answer to the first question of the Catechism, and learn afresh to enjoy God as we glorify him in all that we do! Perhaps, then, not only the works, but the joyful Christian life implied in the answer, will begin to spread to people of all theological persuasions.

*The Chief End of Man, an excerpt from To Glorify and Enjoy God (Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), is reprinted with permission. <sup>ap</sup>*

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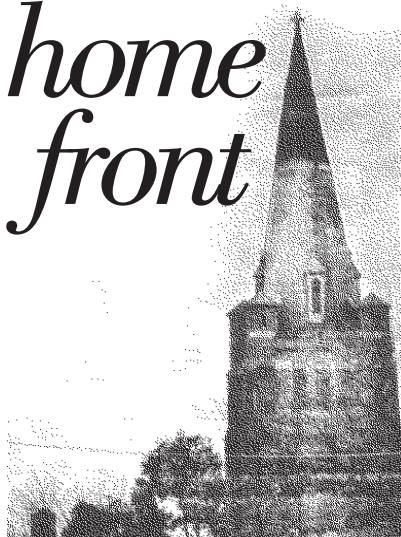
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# home front



## Home from India

**Rev. John and Lynette Ellis** have recently returned from 16 weeks teaching at Presbyterian Theological College at Dehra Dun, northern India. John had been invited by the seminary to spend his long service leave from Clarinda, Melbourne, as a guest lecturer. Lynette assisted students with class presentations. The seminary has 70 students – 20 women – and six teaching staff. Two of the staff were on study leave while the Ellises visited. The students come from throughout India and nearby nations. John reports that the spiritual quality of the students is pleasing. Some are the children of believers; others are first generation converts. Conversations with students indicated that a person's conversion to Christian faith normally results in rejection by their family. This has happened to a number of students at the seminary. He found that the residential nature of the school seems to contribute positively to spiritual as well as academic progress, and that Presbyterian work in India is in good heart, and appears to be steadily growing.



John and Lynette Ellis

## Tasmanian assembly

The Tasmanian general assembly opened on Tuesday 16 May with the induction of **Rev. John Britton**, minister emeritus, as moderator. Tasmania is a small assembly (there are 25 persons on the roll, of whom two are serving overseas and four are unavailable for committee work) but it has all the usual committees. Business began on Wednesday. Among other things, the assembly commissioned two of its members to attend the 2001 GAA and appointed members to other GAA committees and commissions; approved proposed recommendations concerning celebration of the sacraments by ministers other than those of the PCA, and approved amendments to the regulations of the GAA



Bruce Christian

Reception of Ministers Committee; expressed its appreciation of work being carried out on behalf of the assembly in the fields of aged care and hospital chaplaincy; and expressed concern over the PCT's inability to take advantage of vacancies in Defence Forces Chaplaincy work with the Army Reserve in Tasmania. We also, with regret, received the resignation of **Rev. Dr David Mitchell** as Procurator, a post he relinquished after serving for well over a decade.

The normal business routine was punctuated by addresses from four visiting speakers. The **Rt Rev. Bruce Christian**, the Moderator General, brought greetings from the GAA and offered some encouraging comments on Psalm 80. He was also the guest speaker at the moderator's dinner on Wednesday evening. **Rev. Robert Meischke**, minister of the Margate congregation of the Reformed Churches of Australia, brought greetings from their Synod which was meeting in Launceston, saying they had resolved to seek closer links with the Presbyterian Church of Australia. **Walter Bruining**, business manager of *AP*, brought greetings from the National Journal Committee and a report on the journal. **Rev. Les Percy**, a member of the Queensland Assembly, spoke on behalf of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship.

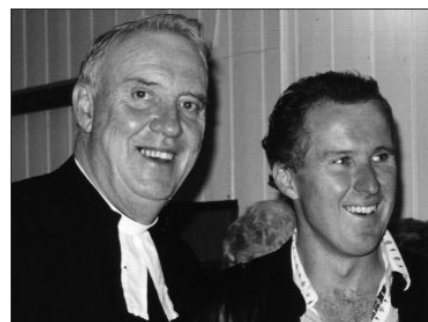
# Raised to higher service

Rev. James Bruce 1931 – 2000

The funeral and thanksgiving service for the life of Rev. James Bruce, who died on 4 June, was held at St. Peter's Church, North Sydney.

Jim Bruce was born and raised at Epping in Sydney, of Scottish parents. Leaving school at the age of 15 years he joined the railways, one of his great interests.

In his mid teens his commitment to Christ deepened through the PFA, and he became a candidate in 1950, aged 19. While studying for matriculation and the preparatory studies for entering the Theological Hall, he held several student pastorates, including Paterson, a church planting ministry at West Tamworth (now St. Stephen's), and a term as acting chaplain on the early days of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. He pursued his theological studies at St. Andrew's College within the University of Sydney.



James Bruce with eldest son Hamish

Ordained at Dungog in 1958, he was translated to Parkes in 1962; St Peter's, North Sydney, in 1968; Lismore in 1978; Annandale in 1982; Darwin in 1989; and finally Cowra in 1990 from where he retired in 1996. With his wife Diedre, he moved to the Saratoga in 1998. Our prayers of love and support go out to his wife Diedre, the children, Hamish, Margaret and Iain and their families.

## Appointments

**Rev. Richard Greig Keith** was inducted into the Charge of Leeton/Yanco (NSW) as of 13 May.

Some 150 people gathered in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Naracoorte, SA, to induct **Rev. Rudi Schwartz** on 23 June. The induction service was led by **Rev. Rod Waterhouse**, and **Rev Alan Clarkson** preached.

At Forster/Tuncurry, a newly sanctioned charge, on 26 March **Rev. J.S. Thompson** inducted **Mr James A Thompson** and **Mr David C Waugh** as elders.

At the Upper Manning charge, Wingham, on 4 June, **Mr Douglas J Rae** was inducted and **Mr Robert J Archinal** and **Mr Raymond D Johnston** were inducted and ordained elders.

**Mr Douglas J. Rae** is the new session clerk at Upper Manning.

## Moderator-General 2001

Following the second round of voting for Moderator-General **Rev. Jack James Knapp**, minister of Ann Street Church, Brisbane, and convener/superintendent of the Presbyterian Inland Mission is Moderator General nominee of the 2001 General Assembly of Australia.

## Queensland assembly

From the opening on Monday 22 May, with the induction of the new moderator, **Rev. Peter Barson**, to the conclusion on Thursday 25 May, the Queensland assembly afforded a time of spiritual blessings and fellowship as well as the usual business sessions.

The death of elders **Lynn Nelson** (Peninsula Charge) and **Bert Biggs** (Gordonvale) were recorded and thanks given to God for their faithful service to the Church. Two new ministers, **Rev. Walter Jones** (St Andrew's Townsville) and **Rev. Greg Watt** (Caboolture Charge), were welcomed.

**Rev. Robert Benn** spoke on behalf of the Australian Presbyterian World Mission concerning East Timor and the National Journal Committee. **Mr Keith Booker's** appointment as general secretary was confirmed, to commence on 1 June 2000. Appreciation was expressed to **Mr Gordon Dunkley** for his nine years of service and to **Mrs Daphne Dunkley** for her support. The **Rev. John Nicol**, director of Home Ministry and Christian Education was nominated as moderator elect. A presentation was made to **Deaconess Dianne Yates** for her years of service as a chaplain at St. Andrew's War Memorial Hospital

During the report from the Emmanuel

College Council gratitude was expressed for more than 18 years of service rendered by the **Rev. Prof. Norm Barker**, 10 as vice-chairman and four as chairman

## Watch this space

Chatswood Presbyterian Church has a new internet site. You can check it out on: [www.presbyterian.org.au/nsw/chatswood](http://www.presbyterian.org.au/nsw/chatswood)

## Easter Camp

**Brad Fletcher** reports that Easter Camp 2000 proved to be one of the most successful Easter Camps yet for Presbyterian youth in South-East Queensland. More than 100 campers gathered at Luther Heights Youth Camp at Coolum to study the Bible on the topic of evangelism and to have a heap of fun.

The camp was the culmination of nine months of hard work by the organising team. It focused on studying the Bible through talks from the speaker, study groups and fellowship, providing activities and a comfortable atmosphere that encouraged campers to meet new people and step outside their usual social boundaries

A great number of people gave their talents, including the study group leaders, team members, musicians, cooks, elective speakers **Ken** and **Julie Moser**, and our chaplain/parents, **Graham** and **Lorraine Eastwell**.

## PWA update

The Queensland PWA met during the Queensland assembly, with more than 150 women attending. The president, **Mrs Perry**, presented moderator **Rev. Peter Barson** with \$2000 – proceeds of the 1999/2000 Burning Bush Appeal – to pass on to the director of Christian Education to be used for children's work. The guest speaker was **Dr Grace Warren**, of the Leprosy Mission, who has worked for many years in China. The convenor of the Christian Education standing committee, **Mrs Lillian Kennedy**, launched the committee's latest publication *Hear it Again* (a book of devotions by **Mrs Joan Napper**).

The afternoon speakers were the moderator elect, **Rev. John Nicol**, Queensland's director of Home Ministry and of Christian Education; **Bill** and **Bronwen Gray** from the Presbyterian Inland Mission, North Queensland Patrol; and **Mrs Jan Langbridge**, who recently visited Nepal and India.

## Cundletown closes

A significant era of Cundletown history came to an end with the last service held at

St Andrews Presbyterian Church – in the Hastings Presbytery, near Taree, Northern NSW – on 27 February. It was led by **Rev. John Thompson**, who spoke on Ecclesiastes ch 3 and stressed the impact the Cundletown church had had on the community in the past 114 years, not just as a place of worship, but as a focus of community activity. The first Presbyterian Church was opened in Cundletown in March 1886 by the **Rev. John Ballantyne**. The land was purchased for the grand sum of 5 shillings (50 cents) for half an acre.

## Gambier camp

About 22 children and 10 adults attended the Mt Gambier Sunday School camp from 19 to 21 May. The camp, celebrating the theme 'God's people are' was held at Karnkendi in Nelson (Vic). Activities included a hike into Nelson to view the river, the town and God's handiwork, and worship with the congregation at Nelson.



At Mt Gambier Sunday School camp

## Lectures in Latvia

Presbyterian Theological Centre lecturer **Chris Balzer** recently gave two guest lectures at the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Christian College (Kristīga Akadēmija) near Riga, Latvia. His interpreter for one of the lecturers was **Dr. Professor Janis Vejs**, previously professor of philosophy at the University of Latvia and now teaching full-time at the college. Under the Soviet regime in Latvia there was no Theology Faculty at the University; one was re-established soon after Latvia gained its independence from the USSR in 1991. A small Lutheran seminary had operated before that. The academy has grown from two full-time teachers in 1993 to 32 this year, and from 25 to 780 students, many of these being part-time evening students. The primary aim of the academy is the integration of the gospel into society after the deep atheistic depression in Latvia since 1940. Besides special programmes in both practical and academic theology, there is a one for



creative artists, painters, designers and graphic artists. Prison chaplains and Christian social workers are also trained there.

A number of members of parliament have graduated from the Academy and others are currently enrolled in the evening classes. Chris Balzer reports that at this historic moment there is a window of opportunity in which the Christian church may influence the course of the newly independent nation of Latvia, and the academy needs support to enlarge its programme before such opportunities are lost, as they have been in Australia. For information on how to help, contact Chris Balzer at the PTC Sydney (Ph. (02). 9744-1977).



Chris Balzer and Janis Vejs

### PIM update

The Presbyterian Inland Mission met in mid-May at Mt. Tamborine in Queensland, reports **Stuart Bonnington**. Under the able leadership of **Rev. Jack Knapp**, the PIM superintendent and Moderator-General elect, the full committee is made up of representatives of all six state assemblies and the GAA. They discussed two main areas: PIM's present state, and a proposed vision to be presented to the Centenary GAA in July 2001 for extending PIM throughout the Commonwealth. The patrol Padres and their wives at Mt. Tamborine gave reports on their work. Those there were **Ron and Jean Lyons** (Far North Queensland Patrol); **Bill and Bronwyn Gray** (North West Queensland); **Rudi and Heila Schwartz** (late of Orana Corner, now of Narracoorte, SA); **Alan and Laleen Clarkson** (late of Condoblin Patrol, called to Penola, SA); **Ross and Lyn Brinkman** (South West New South Wales) and **Laurie and Gwen Peake** (Flynn Patrol). Absent were **Ray and Trudy Rutland** (David Shearer Patrol, on holiday) and **Terry and Judy Sadler** (South West Queensland, serious illness).

With the resignations of Rudi Schartz and Alan Clarkson and the illness of Terry Sadler, the PIM was suddenly confronted with the need for a fresh injection of workers and the re-organisation of patrol

boundaries. The committee appointed **David and Doreen Hart** from Tasmania to patrol work. The Committee decided to present the 2001 General Assembly of Australia with a fresh vision including not only for the consolidation of present PIM work but the establishment of three new patrols: a Pilbara Patrol in the north-west of Western Australia, a Central Australian Patrol (named after Robert Mitchell, the SA pioneer of Inland mission work) and a Kimberley Patrol in far-north Western Australia. Each patrol will require around \$150,000 to establish and about \$60,000 a year to run.

As May 2001 will see the 50th anniversary of the death of **Rev. Dr. John Flynn**, the founder of the Australian Inland Mission, the work of which the Presbyterian Inland Mission continues, the committee resolved to publish a small booklet entitled *For Christ and the Continent: The Inland Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*.

The committee thanked **Gordon Dunkley**, who has resigned as PIM secretary after many years' service. **Keith Booker**, the new general secretary of the PCQ, will take the post.

### Toukley tabernacle

At 2pm on 24 June, NSW moderator **Rt. Rev John Webster**, accompanied by a piper, led the Presbytery of the Central Coast from the vestry of Toukley's new building around to the front door of the church, solemnly knocking for admittance. **Elder Ian Douglas** responded, opening the door, as the congregation of 230 sang Psalm 100. Mr Webster, accompanied by the parish minister, **Rev. Peter Dunstan**, led the Presbytery into the Church and conducted the traditional service of opening and dedication.

Mr Webster conducted the service, suggesting in the sermon that the new building should be to the Toukley community what the Tabernacle had been to the Israelites in their desert wanderings: the reminder of God's presence among the people.

The service was followed by afternoon tea in the church hall. A history of the original building, destroyed by fire last year just before its relocation to Bethshan mission at Wyee, is available. The new building seats 120.

### Bundaberg's new manse

On 24 June, the new manse of Scots, Bundaberg, was opened. **Mrs May Lynch**, 93 and a member of almost 70 years' standing, turned the key, ably assisted by **Brianna Harte**, aged three. All who walked through the door following the service of

thanksgiving rejoiced in the lovely spaciousness of the new manse and its welcoming feel. It is the prayer of the congregation that God who provided so richly for the building of the manse debt-free will bring the family of his choice to live in it and that the work of his kingdom will continue to grow.



Rev. D. Newman, Brianna Harte and May Lynch opening Scots Bundaberg manse.

world  
news



### Indonesia violence flairs

At least six people, including two police officers, have been killed in fresh Muslim-Christian fighting in Maluku Province, eastern Indonesia. Muslim militant Jihad force came ashore in speed boats and fired on villagers on Ambon's eastern shore.

### Clashes in Ambon kill 114

Christians and Muslims fought a battle on Halmahera, in the a remote eastern Indonesian Island, killing 114 people. The clash lasted about an hour and 292 homes and one church were burnt. Many people are afraid to leave their houses for fear of sniper fire.

## Moluccas emergency.

President Abdurrahman Wahid has declared a civil emergency in Indonesia's Moluccas. A civil state of emergency allows security forces to search houses, detain suspects, and impose curfew. It falls short of martial law, however, with responsibility for law and order with the provincial governor rather than the security forces. **Samuel Weileruni**, an official of the Maranatha Church in Ambon, says: "If the military say that peace and order has been restored to Ambon because of civil emergency status that is a lie."

## Christians victims of ferry

Christians refugees fleeing Halmahera were among the hundreds of people missing and feared dead when an overcrowded ferry sank in high seas. The ship carried 290 Christian refugees, and 186 regular passengers. A fishing boat rescued only 10 survivors. The ship had left Halmahera and was on its way to Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi. More than 3000 people have been killed and thousands have been forced to flee to neighbouring Northern Sulawesi.

## Church bombings deplored

In Jakarta, Muslim leaders and politicians have condemned bombing of a Protestant church in northern Sumatra, urging authorities to investigate the incident. **Al Habib Husin**, a Muslim leader, said the church bombings were politically motivated and an attempt to spread hatred between Muslims and Christians. He appealed for both groups to remain calm and maintain unity.

## Pope condemns violence

In Rome, **Pope John Paul II** has condemned Indonesia's Muslims for attacking the Christians, and called for peace and urged Jakarta to do more to end violence.

The Pope said: "You cannot kill and destroy in the name of religion."

## Hague riot

Moluccans in The Hague protested against the bloodshed in the Moluccas. The protest turned violent, and water canons were used to disperse the 1000 protesters.

## Muslim stays

**Comacho** is the last Muslim left in Tentena, which is the second main seat of Central Sulawesi's 136,000-strong Christian community. He saw Muslims forced from their homes after the burning

of Christian houses and several churches. He feels safe living with his Christian family who own a guest house in Tentena, as long as he does not wander from the area. He says... "I try to tell them (Christians) the same thing I would tell Muslims, that war and killing have no place in religion."

## Bombings in India

In India a bombing that injured three Christians has been blamed on militant Hindu organisations. Church leaders said the violence suggested the government was unable or unwilling to curb violence by militant Hindu organisations.

## Tension in Pakistan

**Sami ul-Haq**, through his Islamic academy has taught many graduates who have become leaders in the military or taken up Islamic religious posts throughout Pakistan. He now has millions of supporters. His vision is for a stricter religious state. His group exercises huge power over Muslim law, culture and policy that not even the country's military ruler, **General Pervez Musharraf**, has felt strong enough to challenge.

## Mahathir embraces technology

Malaysian Prime Minister **Mahathir Mohammad** has told Muslim leaders to embrace the "information age" to guard against it making them "banana republics". Mr Mahathir said that the biggest obstacle to acquiring new technology and skills was the fears of Muslim religious and political leaders of losing authority.

## Jesus Day celebrated

More than 450 cities across the US took part in a global event on 10 June called **Jesus Day**. **Tom Pelton**, Jesus Day organiser, said the celebration was "based on the idea that in heaven, no one goes hungry, no child is fatherless, no one suffers alone". Jesus Day activities included feeding the hungry, serving the homeless, touching AIDS patients and befriending the fatherless.

## Nashville crusade sets record.

The **Billy Graham Crusades** youth concert "Concert for the Next Generation" broke the attendance record of Tennessee Titans last home game at 67,400, with 72,000 young people attending. Billy Graham's third crusade to Nashville had crowds averaging 52,500 each night. Hearts were changed,

with organisers saying an average of 2100 individuals making a commitment to Christ.

## Death loses sting?

Experts are predicting technologies that will reverse the aging process and replace body parts. The forth Alcor Conference on Life Extension Technologies was addressed by **K. Eric Drexler** who said medicine was about to be revolutionised by machines so small 1000 could fit on a pin, although the technology may not be developed for another four decades.

## Gays arrested

In Long Beach, Los Angeles, police arrested 80 gay and lesbian activists for blocking access to the week long General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Those arrested were protesting the church's refusal to ordain homosexuals and lesbians.

## Call for prayer in Fiji

Fijian Christians seek prayer for Fiji, still in turmoil since the coup which began in May. Pray for a spirit of peace, justice and reconciliation to prevail within the hearts of those involved in the political crisis and throughout the nation of Fiji. Pray for wisdom, strength and courage for the leaders of churches in Fiji in responding to the national crisis and guiding their members.

## Coptic Christian jailed

In Egypt, Coptic Christian **William Shaiboub** has been sentenced to 15 years jail with hard labour for the murder of two men. Shaiboub was tried by evidence of two prosecution witnesses, both army conscripts who confessed that he only admitted guilt under duress. His arrest followed the indiscriminate round up of 1000 local Coptic Christians, many whom were then tortured by local police officers while being held in detention.

## Chinese Bibles confiscated

Chinese pastor **Li-Dexian** is under heavy surveillance by police, who follow him and often stop him going to meetings, and confiscated 300 new Bibles from his church. Li said: "My heart was pained and the believers were in tears." He has been encouraged by the arrival of some new Bibles via courier, and by two young Christian girls who ride their bicycles two hours to their meeting, rejoicing all the way.

# Change and decay

*What a vain triumph to cast off God, suggests William Lane Craig.*

Man, writes Loren Eiseley, is the Cosmic Orphan. He is the only creature in the universe who asks "Why?" Other animals have instincts to guide them, but man has learned to ask questions.

"Who am I?" man asks. "Why am I here? Where am I going?" Since the Enlightenment, when he threw off the shackles of religion, man has tried to answer these questions without reference to God. But the answers that came back were not exhilarating, but dark and terrible. "You are the accidental by-product of nature, a result of matter plus time plus chance. There is no reason for your existence. All you face is death."

Modern man thought that when he got rid of God, he had freed himself from all that repressed and stifled him. Instead, he discovered that in killing God, he had also killed himself. For if there is no God, then man's life becomes absurd.

If God does not exist, then both man and the universe are inevitably doomed to death. Man, like all biological organisms, must die. With no hope of immortality, man's life leads only to the grave. His life is but a spark in the infinite blackness, a spark that appears, flickers, and dies forever.

Compared to the infinite stretch of time, the span of man's life is but an infinitesimal moment; and yet this is all the life he will ever know. Therefore, everyone must come face to face with what theologian Paul Tillich has called "the threat of non-being".

For though I know now that I exist, that I am alive, I also know that someday I will no longer exist, that I will no longer be, that I will die. This thought is staggering and threatening: to think that the person I call "myself" will cease to exist, that I will be no more!

I remember vividly the first time my father told me that someday I would die. Somehow as a child the thought had just never occurred to me. When he told me, I was filled with fear and unbearable sadness. And though he tried repeatedly to reassure me that this was a long way off, that did not seem to matter. Whether sooner or later, the undeniable fact was that I would die and be no more, and the thought overwhelmed me.

Eventually, like all of us, I grew to simply accept the fact. We all learn to live with the inevitable. But the child's insight remains true. As the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre observed, several hours or several years make no difference once you have lost eternity.

Whether it comes sooner or later, the prospect of death and the threat of non-being is a terrible horror. But I met a student once who did not feel this threat. He said he had been raised on the farm and was used to seeing the animals being born and dying. Death was for him simply natural – a part of life, so to speak.

I was puzzled by how different our two perspectives on death were and found it difficult to understand why he did not feel the threat of non-being. Years later, I think I found my answer in reading Sartre. Sartre observed that death is not threatening so long as we view it as the death of the other, from a third-person standpoint, so to speak. It is only when we internalise it and look at it from the first-person perspective – "my death: I am going to die" – that the threat of non-being becomes real.

As Sartre points out, many people never assume this first-person perspective in the midst of life; one can even look at one's own death from the third-person standpoint, as if it were the death of another or even of an animal, as did my friend. But the true existential significance of my death can only be appreciated from the first-person perspective, as I realize that I am going to die and forever cease to exist. My life is just

a momentary transition out of oblivion into oblivion.

And the universe, too, faces death. Scientists tell us that the universe is expanding, and everything in it is growing farther and farther apart. As it does so, it grows colder and colder, and its energy is used up. Eventually all the stars will burn out and all matter will collapse into dead stars and black holes. There will be no light at all; there will be no heat; there will be no life; only the corpses of dead stars and galaxies, ever expanding into the endless darkness and the cold recesses of space – a universe in ruins.

The entire universe marches irreversibly toward its grave. So not only is the life of each individual person doomed; the entire human race is doomed. The universe is plunging toward inevitable extinction – death is written throughout its structure. There is no escape. There is no hope.

If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. There is no God, and there is no immortality. And what is the consequence of this? It means that life itself is absurd. It means that the life we have is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose.

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# A spiritual defection

*The tragedy of a faith surrendered after 44 years of service.*

A minister who serves the Lord for 44 years has surely run a good course. If that same minister has spent his life in five different parishes, and has also been moderator of the assembly, it is indeed noteworthy.

For such a man, who at the end repudiates the faith he once professed and the church he once served, what then? Will not public opinion regard this as a tragedy?

This is what has happened to Doug Morey. His own pamphlets, *Commonsense Christianity*, tell the story. There we learn of his repudiation of his church; there he sets out his current views.

When a public figure begins well but ends on a dismal note, it is always tragic. We see this all too often in politics. The history of the church tells of ministers and professors of theology whose teachings have damaged many. For that reason, our confessional church has not been afraid to lay charges of heresy against a man if he is found teaching contrary to the Scriptures understood in the light of our Westminster standards. Of course, once a minister resigns from the Presbyterian ministry, no charges can be laid. He is no longer under the church's jurisdiction. Such is the case with Mr Morey.

Thankfully, spiritual defection is usually known only to a small circle. When it becomes more widely known the damage is greater. But when one who has defected goes into print and broadcasts his changed views, it is serious enough to warrant some response.

Doug Morey is in this category. While I respect his right to hold his views, and even to publish them, I regard his publishing them under the name of *Commonsense Christianity* as misleading for they neither make sense nor are Christian in the biblical sense. Mr Morey has spent 44 years in the ministry of the Presbyterian church. He has also been moderator of the Victorian Assembly. From his studies at university (philosophy and history) and Ormond College, he went on to serve five different parishes. At church union he decided to stay Presbyterian. Presumably, he believed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He says, "For much of my ministry I would have been considered quite conservative in my theology."

But now, through *Commonsense*



*Dallas Clarnette*

*Christianity*, he is broadcasting a different belief system. He says he is no longer a minister or member of the Presbyterian Church, nor "any Christian denomination". But he believes he must correct what he believes are the erroneous views of other Christians. He laments that "since the disruption in our church in 1977, things have turned out very differently from what we expected." He is horrified at the revival of historic Reformed and Calvinistic theology within Presbyterianism. Through the Burning Bush Society he sought to oppose this and found it a useless exercise. He is annoyed at recent decisions which now deny ordination to women and the legitimacy of Freemasonry. He sees this "as a return to barbaric hyper-Calvinism which flourished at the end of the 17th century".

Mr Morey has acted in good conscience by severing his connection with the Presbyterian Church, and his honesty should be commended. But for him to complain about the church's return to its historic theology is odd. Mr Morey must have realised at the time of church union that the "continuing" Presbyterian church did continue because it wanted to go back to authentic biblical Presbyterianism. For him to say *things have turned out very differently from what we expected* shows a lack of understanding on his part.

He denies the historic, reformed view of the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture as "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). Instead he sees the Bible as a mere human book, and the gospel as propaganda. "The church was good at propagandising Paul's view," he writes. "It is not surprising that the gospels are written up in such a way as to support and teach what Paul had been teaching—Paul, not Jesus." It is not hard therefore for him to allege that the early church was "steeped in both Jewish

mythology, which is so much a part of the Old Testament (!) ... and Greek mythology". Luke, was in cahoots with Paul: "he claimed that Jesus had ascended into heaven." But Luke was mistaken, according to our revisionist, for "there is no heaven 'up there', and Jesus did not – because he could not – ascend 'up there'. And therefore he will not 'return' from there." So not only was Luke wrong; all who believe in the return of Christ are also wrong.

So he speaks in issue No. 1. He returns to criticisms of the Bible and its authority in later issues. In No. 3 he resurrects the ancient debate between natural and Biblical theology. Natural theology is healthier than Biblical theology, he says, so everything is up for grabs. Jesus is no Messiah; he won't return to earth as he promised; "the Bible contains fiction which is claimed to be fact."

Further, Mr Morey denies truth and revelation when he avers that "science, medicine, music, sculpture ... all points to the greatness and love of God." Here he makes a completely unsustainable assertion, for none of these disciplines pretend to speak for God or in fact do so.

It is quite plain that Mr Morey is not only rejecting the revelation of Scripture, but also Christianity itself. For Christianity is nothing if it is not consistent with what the Scriptures teach. We know nothing sure and certain about God and his Son Jesus Christ, except according to the Scriptures. So anyone who rejects the witness and truth of Holy Scripture is rejecting the very foundation on which the Christian faith stands. This is why we speak of Christianity as a religion of revelation. It doesn't help his cause for Mr Morey to speak approvingly of people like Bishop Spong or Lloyd Geering.

It is sad to read what Mr Morey is now writing. Basically he is recycling the then-fashionable views of the liberal theologians of the first half of the 20th century. It is sad to contemplate the end of this man, for if the Scriptures be the rule of faith and practice for the Christian then those who deny their authority can hardly lay claim to being a Christian any more. Is this the point to which Mr Morey has come?

*Dr Dallas Clarnette is minister of Benalla Presbyterian Church, Vic.*

# The cutting edge

*Michael Charles tells how God is using an axeman from Gilgandra.*

Steve Greentree makes a definite impression when he walks into a room. Well over six feet and nearly an axehandle across the shoulders, Steve ran his own timber contracting business for 20 years and became a world-class wood chopper ... before the Lord redirected his life.

Converted under the ministry of Rev. David Tickle at Gilgandra Presbyterian Church in October 1988, he could not have imagined then what God had in store for him, and his family.

Steve's spiritual journey began quietly enough in childhood, when he attended school Scripture classes. "I don't remember much, but I do recall being told about the New Testament." After leaving school at 16, he gave little thought to the Bible, concentrating instead on his work in the timber industry in northern NSW ... and wood chopping. He travelled to New Zealand, the US and Spain, as well as various parts of Australia, to take part in wood chopping competitions. At the world championship in Brisbane one year he came second, and in Sydney another year he came third.

Along the way Steve got married, to Jenny. Then three children arrived – Heidi, James and Anna. It was through the family that God again touched Steve's life.

A Christian influence was present through Jenny and her parents, active members of the Gilgandra PC, where Jenny's father was an elder. "Some missionary neighbours were also praying for us, and I had met a leading axeman from New Zealand who was a Christian."

Coincidentally, Steve had also been facing major problems in running his timber business which had led him to think about wider issues. "When Jenny decided in favour, we both knew it was the right thing to do to join Cornerstone."

Steve trained at the group's leadership school and now teaches New Testament and ethics at the Gidgee Lake community, a half hour's drive north of Bourke, one of two such centres in that district. He says he cannot imagine doing anything else. He has found nothing that comes close to the lifestyle he and his family now experiences, especially the richness of friendships. At the same time, the community life is not the least restrictive. (Living at Gidgee Lake



Steve Greentree

would in itself be an incentive to stay, with its tranquil atmosphere next to a huge lake with abundant birdlife and stunning views of sunrise and sunset across the water.)

Steve says the greatest strength of the Cornerstone discipleship program is its emphasis on producing depth of character among those who complete the two-year course, designed primarily for people aged from around 17 to 27 who are interested in learning to live more consistently as Christians.

The Australian-style, down-to-earth, scheme is the product of the shared vision of a small group of men who saw the need for something more effective than the sort of brief evangelistic missions to youth they had been involved with previously.

When it came to asking about having a child baptised, Steve and Jenny were introduced to the minister, David Tickle, who challenged them about their relationship with God. "David explained the Gospel to us and gave us a book called *Seeking God* to read and think about. When we got home I opened the Bible and looked for the New Testament, which I remembered being told about. I read Matthew's Gospel."

Steve began attending the Gilgandra church regularly, but imagine what God had in store for an axeman armed with the gospel. Today, Steve is one of the teachers on the staff of a Cornerstone community at the back o' Bourke, which runs a radically different kind of evangelical Christian discipleship program for young adults, one of five such centres run by Cornerstone in various parts of NSW.

As so often happens, God's influence seemed like a series of random happenings ... all leading in one direction. Another Christian axeman known to Steve, who had been involved in a Cornerstone centre at

Canowindra, moved to Gilgandra. Not long after, he arranged for a representative of the organisation to speak to the church, and a Cornerstone team from Coonamble took some services. Subsequently, Steve stayed at a community near Bourke when he went there for wood chopping competitions.

He found there was something about "their down-to-earth, get on with the job approach" that appealed to him. Then, by chance, he and Jenny visited the Cornerstone centre at Burrabadine (Dubbo) "just when they were looking for older people to get involved".


In its 20-odd year history, Cornerstone has attracted more than 1000 students from various parts of Australia, and from overseas. Those at Gidgee Lake presently include a student from Fiji and two from Irian Jaya.

The first Cornerstone community was established at Bourke in 1978 on the Darling Farms cotton farm owned by Jack and Harriet Buster and their family, members of the (Baptist) Bourke Christian Church. Since then a second centre has been started on the same farm, and others at Canowindra and Broken Hill. A Christian leadership school has also been established at Dubbo in NSW.

The radically different approach to discipleship training consists of a two-year program to help young people develop an understanding of their faith and to live it out at home and at work.

In the first year, at one of the communities, students attend lectures during weekday mornings and work in secular jobs in the afternoons (varying from farm work to serving in a pizza shop or laundromat). The second year includes further study but focuses more on mission. The students are sent out in teams to live together in different towns and cities with the aim of being a consistent witness to the surrounding community.

One of the strengths of the Cornerstone program is the principal of teaching by example. The staff at each centre are committed to being models for the students who come to live with them. This is what Steve now tries to do at the back o' Bourke, living each day as a servant of Christ who still swings a mean axe at different shows.

*Michael Charles is a former minister of Bassendean Presbyterian Church WA.* 

# Planted – up to my neck

*'We're exiting you to a postcode.' Here beginneth the lesson.*

For those who haven't heard and aren't aware, the Presbyterian Church in Australia is alive and well. This can be seen no more clearly than in sunny Queensland where the Presbyterian Church had the vision some years ago to plant five new churches in 10 years. This vision was called Vision 5.

Rev. Graham Eastwell was the first "volunteer" and was located on the Gold Coast near Movieworld. Rev. Norm Bartlett was "volunteer" number two, sent to Springfield, near Ipswich.

And then came Glenn and Lyn Samuel. Where do you exit him? Let's not give him a congregation and he can do less damage!

"Glenn," the committee nods, "we're exiting you to postcode 4213."

Oh, great. Where's that? "Mudgeeraba." Mudgee – what? Isn't that in NSW? "No, Gold Coast hinterland."

Is there a building? Oh, there isn't eh? What is the congregation like? What do you mean there isn't one ... there has to be something.

But I don't know anyone in Mudgeeraba.

The above one-sided conversation, though bearing no accuracy to the love and care and prayerful support put in place by both the Home Missions Committee and the entire Presbyterian Church family in Queensland, makes for a representation of some of the feeling of helplessness that we felt in being exited to a postcode area with



*Glenn Samuel*

the task of planting a new Presbyterian Church.

## Lesson one: dependence

The first thing that happens to anyone in such a situation is that it doesn't matter how proud or self-sufficient you thought you may have been previously ... you reach new heights of dependence on God.

You begin to realise in very practical ways that if this planting is going to work, then it is because God's will and purpose is accomplished rather than the whim of some exit student or directing committee.

That was back in February 1997. Our prayers were often as simple as "Dear God, send us people". By late March we had started a regular worship service in the local school. They didn't have an assembly hall – only an undercover area. We were grateful for the use of the area, which, though not keeping the wind out, kept the rain off.

God was faithful to our prayers and by

June our numbers had risen to around 40 people.

## Lesson two: support

At this same time (perfect timing) the Anglican ministry centre in Mudgeeraba had to be sold. It had worship-approval and, after some sensitive negotiations, Home Missions found the money to buy this three-bedroom kit home.

It was wonderful to have a permanent place in which to worship – one which could be used mid-week for Bible studies and even a playgroup.

By September 1997 our numbers were often around 70 which meant the small ministry centre was "full-house". Obviously extensions were needed.

By November, 1997 it was a delight to have the moderator, Rev David Secomb, open a marvellous air-conditioned auditorium to house 130 people with a concertina wall behind which another 30 could fit.

The cost was estimated to be \$150,000, but with volunteer labour and some generous donations we needed to borrow only \$30,000. Again the support of the Church meant that we could borrow this amount too.

The Christmas service in December coped with more than 150 people.

## Lesson three: advertising

Now I know that the Church doesn't have an advertising budget, but we do need to proclaim the gospel of Christ into the world.

Your treasurer may call it "outreach". We show it in our books as advertising and it includes banners out the front of the church, the occasional newspaper ad and letter box drops.

Let me share a few of the marketing campaigns we have used. They don't have to be expensive, but they do have to be professional.

Our first was in Easter 1997. It was simply an A5 brochure that asked the question "Why is Good Friday Good? – Come and find out" – and 24 people did.

Next, we dropped an "invitation" into letter boxes inviting people to come to Church. It simply said "You're invited", and included a brief section informing them about our Church together with a Scripture passage. Over the next two weeks, 37 people

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Come as Strangers,

responded.

By then we had purchased the old Anglican ministry centre. Since it was located at the most prominent entrance into Mudgeeraba, we simply “borrowed” a FOR SALE sign and erected it out front. Two weeks later we placed a fluorescent sign over it which read “soul agent”.

Two weeks on we exchanged that for “sold”, then “open Sunday – 9am”.

This attracted much attention in ways with which the local community could identify.

The next letter box drop was most memorable. It simply asked “R. U. overdue for a service?”

We matched this letterbox drop up with a banner out the front of the church which asked the same question. People began to attend services because they knew they were overdue.

After the extension was completed we dropped one that said “Can’t come to Church because the roof will fall in? – We’ve reinforced ours ... you’re welcome to test it sometime.” More people did come along to test the roof.

By our third birthday we were averaging between 120 and 130 people a week. We were very aware that we needed to invite people to church, hence there was a response required from each of the drops.

Our information is that the number one reason why people haven’t gone to church is because nobody has invited them. You can overcome that problem without a letter box drop.

Now at this point you should not be thinking “oh we need this fellow to plant churches for us” because ... I am just like you.

I am someone who has professed faith in Christ and imperfectly tries to get on with the job.

You don’t need me ... you need to depend upon God and ask him to use you. Don’t feel inadequate or scared. God reminds us to “Fear not”, and “I am with you”.

The general advertising through letter box leaflets has worked, though we still needed a personal invitation. These were designed and printed to give personally to friends and relatives.

They are given away to those we have a relationship with simply as a “free pass” to come along anytime.

Some of the ideas you have read in this article may make you squirm, knowing that they would not work in your area. I agree. You need to identify your demographics and work with what God has supplied. If your local area is made up of older citizens then use a theme and even language with which they will identify. Likewise for migrants, interstate travellers, young people, university students and so on.

Be God-dependent. Call for support. Get out and advertise and invite and proclaim the gospel.

Glenn Samuel trained at Emmanuel College in Qld. He is married to Lym [nee Logan], and they have three children – Ben, Beck and Tim. ap

## Movie Watch The Straight Story

Reviewed by Kate Harris

Take this simple scenario: A 78-year-old man with failing eyesight and flagging health sets out across three US heartland states to mend a 10-year rift with his sick brother. Now put him on a 1966 John Deere ride-on-mower hitched to a sleeping trailer and you’ve got a road movie with a difference. Walt Disney’s sweet and heartfelt new release, *The Straight Story*, has been highly acclaimed by some of the tougher critics, earning laurels from the New York Critics Circle and Golden Globe nominations.

Even up against this year’s big epic-like releases (*The Patriot*, *The Perfect Storm*), it’s expected to figure at the Academy Awards. Why? Because this film flags a growing niche for simple fables that espouse some of the values long lost from American art culture. After a decade of ’80s egocentrism and the existential ’90s, there’s still a place for films that deal with relationships, forgiveness and the process of personal redemption.

No doubt the most extraordinary thing about this movie is the fact that David Lynch directed it. (Think quirky *Twin Peaks*, masochistic *Blue Velvet*, and paranoiac *Lost Highway*.) Lynch is the progenitor of the enigma, the riddle, the crooked line. He’s a joker who’ll poke as many highly symbolic skewers into a film as possible. So when a notoriously curly director releases a film that’s as straight as a die – more, one based on a true story – you’ve got to be a little suspicious. Has Lynch buried some devious meaning in this charming tale? Rest assured, this is one inspirational and gently amusing watch suited to the whole family.

*The Straight Story* is based on the true story of pensioner Alvin Straight (played beautifully by a Lear-like Richard Farnsworth) who in 1994 set off from Laurens, Iowa, for Mt Zion, Wisconsin, to see his estranged brother, who has suffered a stroke. Unable to drive because of failing eyesight, Alvin takes to the road on his John Deere ride-on lawnmower for several weeks.

On this heroic personal odyssey, he encounters a cadre of charming and curious characters – a teenage runaway, a fellow WWII veteran, a young cyclist, a preacher. Each of these are pilgrims on a quest of their own. Alvin shares his brand

of laconic wisdom and stoic approach to suffering and surviving with each, and is often the catalyst for their life changes. Of course, when his own journey reaches its end, he must face his metaphoric Calvary and prepare to meet and reconcile with his brother (Harry Dean Stanton).

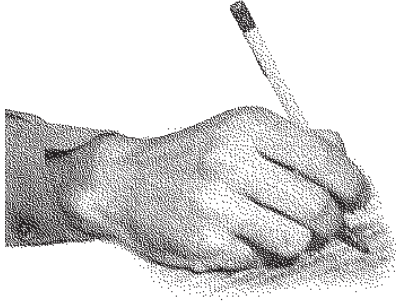
The weave of the plot is loose enough to allow for fine acting from Farnsworth and Sissy Spacek, who plays a tough role as Alvin’s disabled daughter Rose. The stoicism of the Straight family is such that, not until we hear a tragic story of Rose’s past can we appreciate the deep pain characters have managed to live through. Some wiseful and haunting imagery is used beautifully at points, but for the most these characters simply plod on, walking a straight line, carving a path towards honour and truth. If you want to see personal valour and patience in action, *The Straight Story* will delight.

On the other hand, those with high adrenalin levels or attention deficit disorders should think twice. If Alvin’s 1966 John Deere crawls along at around 8kmh, the film travels at roughly the same pace. Lynch couldn’t resist playing a few customary games with time: he stretches vital minutes on screen the way kids stretch their chewing gum. The good news is that he cuts out typical syrupy music and lays the purity of silence bare (although the folkish fiddle music he does use is stirring and evocative). The camera sits as a patient observer while characters work through their emotions in intimate close-up shots. Touchingly, the camera respects each character’s privacy; after momentary disclosure, it will then soar off on rich panoramic shots or aerials. Paradoxically, this room within the film leaves little space for fabrication, so we emerge with a generous portion of realism with intriguing splices of magic thrown in for good measure.

This reviewer has seen more than a few cornball, so-called feel-good movies destined to end up in video \$2 dumpbins. Not *The Straight Story*. Expect it to win awards for the earthy beauty of its cinematography, the resonant and underplayed acting, or even the poignant screenplay that captures the banality of these small lives and their big hearts. However, the true strength of this film lies in its demonstration of determined love in action and its ability to mend broken relationships.

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

# Letters



## Servitude to mammon

Jesus said, "You can't serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and mammon." We might, individually, think that we do not worship mammon, but as a nation it is obvious that we do.

What is the state of your credit card? Is it constantly in debit? Do you regularly have credit charges deducted? If so, you are in the company of millions of Australians. The total credit card debt in this country passed \$14.5 billion in April – an increase of \$3 billion in 12 months. The total averages out at about \$700 for every man, woman and child. So if you are not in debt to mammon then there are plenty whose debt is above average.

This \$14 billion has been part of the lubricant that has kept the wheels of the economy turning. What happens to the economy when mammon turns nasty and says, "You must repay this debt." How many families of four could find the \$3000 to make that payment, since the original debt was regarded as an essential element of a normal standard of living?

Nevertheless, our communal debt is only a microcosm of world debt. Jubilee 2000, supported by the churches, claims that the forgiveness of billions of debts owed by heavily indebted poor countries will save 21 million lives. Maybe! But the money lenders have not taken on the mantle of the Christian concept of "forgive us our debts".

Instead, mammon has simply wiped a few zeroes from the end of the debts. It is most unlikely they would ever be repaid anyway. Now the nations whose debts have been forgiven can go and borrow some more – a revolving door situation.

Ron Fischer,  
Talbot, Victoria

## It's not ordained ...

Considering the role played by the ministry throughout the history of the church, references to ordination are surprisingly few in the New Testament. Indeed, the word "ordination" does not occur and the verb "to ordain" in the technical sense does occur either. A number of verbs are translated "ordain" in AV but these all have meanings like appoint (New Bible Dictionary, second edition).

The important thing for ministering are the spiritual gifts. For example, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits and others. The gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit according to his sovereign will (1 Cor. 12: 11) and an individual believer may receive one or more of them. The essential thing for ministry is the divine gift – not some man-made ceremony of "ordination".

Also "the efficacy of a sacrament does not depend on the piety or intention of him that doth administer it". There are "two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel ... neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained". (The Westminster Confession of Faith 1646, Chapter XXVII) There appears to be inconsistency here. On the one hand the efficacy does not depend on the person and on the other, the person must be an ordained minister. Or perhaps impious and wrong-intentioned ordained ministers may still administer the sacraments!

Hence the need for a ceremony of ordination for ministering is at least doubtful and the Westminster Confession of Faith (the Subordinate Standard) is suspect on the grounds of inconsistent statements.

Garry Hill,  
Ipswich Qld

## Active service

Congratulations on the overall quality of *AP*. To a retired professional soldier however, it seems that 'Call to Arms' (April) waved a white flag.

The penultimate paragraph states: "Certainly there are still battles for Christians to fight, battles against dishonest teaching and behaviour in the church, battles against injustice, as well as corruption and scandals in our community like the (so-called) gay mardi gras. God will deal with these. But the war is won ..."

If any leader of my acquaintance had ever told his troops on active Service, "Listen in. This is going to be pretty unpleasant, but the chief of the General Staff has it all in hand. Carry on", their

retort would have been unprintable in your genteel magazine.

His massive prayer-power notwithstanding, Jesus chose to take positive physical action. Making a scourge of small cords, he drove commercial operators out of the temple, poured out the changers' money, overthrew the tables, and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

Jesus did not encourage his men to avoid responsibility or ignore evil. *He sent them out on fighting patrols with clear, specific orders.*

Many readers may currently be employing prayer against evil with great success. Some are doubtless operating effectively 'in his service' in ways that would motivate other true servants. Let's *all* make and activate effective action plans for the one who died that we might live.

Geoff Pickering,  
Gympie, Qld

## The price tag of sex

Congratulations to *AP* (June) and to Bryson Smith and to Grant Thorp on sex as God intended it to be in their straight down the line articles. Tony Payne's background article was helpful, as was Peter Barnes' contribution on one of the spin-offs when sex is not how God intended it to be, namely, abortion.

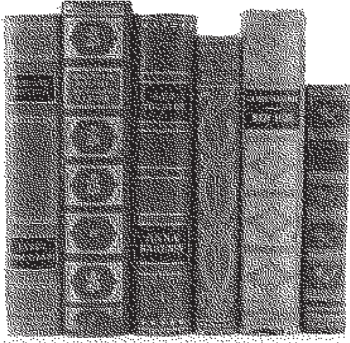
But how is this excellent message going to get across to our young teens? Our teens are the people who need this message most and desperately (see Peter Hastie's concerns in the editorial). It is very unlikely that many or any teens are going to read *AP*! And then there is the wider teen community outside the church.

To meet this need I would like to strongly recommend the video presentation of Pam Stenzel of Straight Talk Inc. entitled *The Price Tag of Sex*. This is a strong presentation which shows biblical boundaries (see Smith and Thorp), as well as those that derive from the many adverse health, social and emotional effects that often result from teenage sexual activity. Pam also makes clear God's promise of restoration and forgiveness for those who have already transgressed. The video is available from Straight Talk Australia, Jim & Faye Lyons, PO Box 7343, Toowoomba MC, Qld, 4352. Suggested donation: \$35 for private use in the home, screening to groups by arrangement. I believe the Lyons are members of Toowoomba West Presbyterian Church. I heartily recommend it both as a doctor and a minister.

Rev Dr John Woods,  
Sutherland Presbyterian Church, NSW



# books



## Burnt Alive

Vishal Mangalwadi et al  
Bombay: GLS Publishing, 2000  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

On 23 January 1999 Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons, Philip and Timothy, were asleep in their station wagon at Manoharpur, India, when a frenzied mob of extremist Hindus set upon them and burnt them to death. This book tells their inspiring story.

It is a deeply moving account of faith, compassion, courage and forgiveness. As is well-known, the widow, Gladys Staines, prayed "Father forgive them" for the murderers of her husband and her two sons, and decided to remain in India with her daughter Esther. She considered that the Lord wanted her to continue her work among the lepers at Mayurbhanj, which had been first set up in 1895. Indeed, its driving force in those early years was another woman, Kate Allanby (1871-1931).

One of the disturbing things to emerge from this work is the well-substantiated claim that recent violence against Christians in India has been planned and is not spontaneous. But there is not a hint of bitterness or self-pity in the book. What emerges is an account of what God can achieve with those who look to him with steadfast faith. This is a book to be read and passed on.

## Evangelical Eloquence

A Course of Lectures on Preaching  
Robert L. Dabney  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth,  
first published 1870, republished 1999)  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

We live in a day which abounds in "how to" books on every conceivable subject, including preaching. Robert Lewis Dabney,

who taught at Union Theological Seminary at a time when it did more good than harm, was steeped in the Scriptures and in the classics on the art of rhetoric. The result is a powerful course of lectures on preaching, with rather more depth than we are used to in the 20th century.

Dabney never loses sight of the fact that "Eloquence may dazzle and please; holiness of life convinces". But he has plenty of useful things to say about true eloquence. Preachers would do well to read this work; it informs and inspires in the best way.

There is only one small objection: the ignoramuses among us would have been even more grateful had the Latin quotations been translated.

## Whatever Happened to the Ten Commandments?

Ernest C. Reisinger  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

These days, any pastor who preaches on the Ten Commandments is likely to be accused of being a legalist. Yet in the 17th century, as John Eliot sought to reach the American Indians with the gospel, he began his translation work with the Ten Commandments and preached on them before he preached on John 3:16.

This was done on the presupposition that people need to know that they are law-breakers before they will be moved to trust in Christ alone as Saviour.

Ernest Reisinger is concerned at modern trends, and has written accordingly to present something of the depth of the Ten Commandments to the modern Church. He draws extensively from the Larger Catechism, and so provides plenty of useful material for pastors and teachers who might want to open up the Commandments to God's people. This will prove to be a useful and timely work, much needed in our antinomian days.

## The Bruised Reed

Richard Sibbes  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1630,  
reprinted 1998.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

One of the tenderest of biblical promises concerns the Servant Messiah who will not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax (Isa.42:1-4; Matt.12:18-20). "The heavenly Doctor Sibbes", of whom Izaak Walton said that "heaven was in him, before he was in heaven", deals with this passage in *The Bruised Reed*. Sibbes is reassuring without being glib: "A weak hand may receive a rich jewel."

Mariners cast anchor in the dark, and Christians are urged to do likewise: "We are only poor for this reason, that we do not know our riches in Christ."

Sibbes' work is easily read and full of such helpful insights. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones once found that this work ministered to him at a time when he was overworked and subject to onslaughts of the devil. One can see why – this is Puritanism at its pastoral best.

A bruised and weak Christian conquers even when he is conquered. "Weakness, with acknowledgement of it, is the fittest seat and subject for God to perfect his strength in; for consciousness of our infirmities drives us out of ourselves to him in whom our strength lies."

Many Christians will be grateful that the Banner of Truth has reproduced this work.

## Saved in the Icy Waters

and 50 other stories  
Ray Cameron-Smith  
Tasmania: Southern Presbyterian Church,  
1999.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

This is a collection of 51 stories taken from various sources, all brief and all designed to illustrate a biblical message. Some of them are taken straight from the Bible while others are from Church history. They are mostly well done – Ray Cameron-Smith is an accomplished story teller.

I must confess that I found numbers 39 and 47 a little banal, but they are the exceptions. The Barnes family read these after breakfast, and each of us found them helpful and thought-provoking. We are glad to recommend them to others.

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# Proper self-esteem

*Over-praising children can be as destructive as too much criticism.*

**Y**ou will never get percentages or places out of me. What do you think it does to a child's self-esteem when you tell him he's bottom of the class?" said Principal Sellers.

Tim and Jenny Crichton were moving interstate. They thought it would be a good idea to take their children's academic records with them. The school principal's reaction surprised them.

Somehow it didn't all add up. What about sport? Only a week before Tim and Jenny had attended the school athletics carnival. Their little Poppy was a bright child but not athletic. She came last in her race in front of the whole school. They mentioned this to Mr Sellers but he did not seem to see the inconsistency.

Self-esteem has started to look like a disease, and praise like a drug, writes Paul Kropp in *I'll be the Parent, You be the Kid*. "Praise-junkie kids" have become a real problem. Children are seen to be verging on emotional anaemia unless they get daily doses of praise from parents and teachers.

He tells the story of Mike, whose parents had high expectations for him but rarely praised his efforts. Mike developed a nervous tic and struggled at school. When his parents started praising him his tic disappeared and his marks rose to B level. However, over time, all the heaping praise went to his head and he never achieved what his parents hoped. He developed a completely unrealistic notion of his own capacity.

Preparation for adult life can be hampered by too much self-esteem polishing, says Kropp. When children are given much praise for little achievement they can come to expect the same from the rest of the world. This is not going to happen. On report cards the old-style F indicating fail-



*Marion Andrews*

ure has been replaced by NI – Needs Improvement, or a dozen other similes that can be found on computer software for teachers.

Contrast the experience of crime writer Agatha Christie. She wrote, "the Victorians looked dispassionately at their offspring and made up their minds about their capacities. A was obviously going to be 'the pretty one'. B was the clever one. C was going to be plain ... Good works would be C's best chance ... There is an enormous relief in not being expected to produce something that you haven't got ... I myself was always recognised, though quite kindly, as 'the slow one' of the family."

The self-esteem movement has inadvertently defined self-worth as a quality determined by praise or criticism from others. What our kids think of themselves should never depend on whether they are praised by us. Each child needs to know what my elders told me: "God has a wonderful plan for your life! Find out what it is, and go for it!" Parents can be of most use to their children by helping them get to know Christ, the author and finisher of their life.

Children benefit by both encouragement and criticism. Speechcraft courses run by Toastmasters have a fair and balanced evaluation system – CRC – Commend,

Recommend, Commend. Each speech is assessed with two positives for every negative. Praise does not, by itself, lead children to grow and seek new challenges. Nor does a word or two of criticism defeat a child who has his eyes on a goal and can take delight in his own achievements. If self-esteem depends on what others think of him, he will come to behave in ways that generate approval rather than build character.

Parents have a duty to consider how much of their own prestige and self-esteem is at stake in their children's achievements. A good test for doting mothers is to ask themselves: "How much conversation do I fill with the success of my offspring? Do I advertise 'the clever one' and forget the others?"

Parents do well to focus on activities that help children achieve something and build character. Let them help you put the dog-kennel together. Not every nail has to be straight. It doesn't hurt a child to feel honest frustration with a project. Give your child a chance to work through solutions before you rescue them. However, it is important to set the hurdles at a realistic height. A kid needs to make a drum stick before a grand piano, to sew a pot-holder before a formal gown.

The Bible does not use the term "self-esteem". Rather, it talks about cultivating patience and perseverance for character-building. It warns us that the deeds of the sinful flesh include selfish ambition. God's focus is active and looks outward, ours tends to be passive and self-centered. "Let us not become conceited ... If any one thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself ... Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else..." (Gal. 5&6). ap

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# Victim mentality

*A primate's evolution takes a downward path.*

It may seem somewhat discourteous for a Presbyterian to comment on the recent election and consecration of Dr Peter Carnley as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. After all, the Irish evangelist W. P. Nicholson (who was himself a Presbyterian) once commented that the road to hell was paved with the skulls of Presbyterian ministers – a delicate way of saying that many heretics have paraded in Presbyterian dress. Nevertheless, Carnley's beliefs are public property, for the primate has made no secret of them.

*The Australian* on 27 April 2000 deplored the controversy over Carnley's theology, and accused his "fundamentalist" critics of a lack of charity. Then it added: "Easter week, when the churches celebrate the resurrection of Christ, seems a strange time to wash the soiled altar linen of doctrinal difference." One would think that the Sydney Anglicans were arguing over the colour of their hymn-books.

Obviously we should ask what does the new primate believe? It is probably easier to say what he does not believe.

First, Carnley does not believe in the physical and literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. Carnley has been writing on this in his own learned and muddle-headed way for some years now. He is willing to affirm that Christ is risen, but is very cagey about saying what exactly happened on the Sunday morning after Jesus was crucified. In Carnley's view, "salvation comes only via one's own living victim". By this, he means that only the victim can forgive, i.e. only Jesus could forgive the Jerusalem crowd which had crucified him. This makes Jesus' resurrection theologically necessary for Jesus' relations with the Jerusalem crowd, but Carnley refuses to say that it was historical and literal.

The Christian, on the other hand, will recall the words of Scripture: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Second, Carnley does not believe that Christ is the only way to the Father. Our Lord declares that he is the way, the truth and the life, the only way to the Father (John 14:6). The apostle Paul says



*Peter Barnes*

that Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The assertion in Acts 4:12, that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved", is interpreted by Carnley to mean that only through the one they had wronged, in this case Jesus, could the Jerusalem crowd find forgiveness.

Carnley even suggests that Luke (the author of Acts) had only a vague idea of the existence of other religions. One could validly assume that the author of Acts had a fair idea of the existence of other religions. After all, he mentions them often enough – Jews in Acts 2-7; the Samaritans in Acts 8; Gentiles attracted to Judaism in Acts 8, 10-11; Judaism outside Israel in Acts 13; pagans who believed in Zeus and Hermes in Acts 14; sorcerers and the demon-possessed in Acts 13, 16; Stoics and Epicureans in Acts 17; worshippers of the goddess Artemis in Acts 19; and the pagans on Malta in Acts 28. Yet Carnley writes: "The modern question of 'other religions' was for Luke miles away, centuries off." Perhaps the good bishop has not read the book of Acts.

Carnley's view of Acts 4:12 is hardly an interpretation of it, but – to go no further – an assault on common sense and the meaning of language. In the view of *The Australian*, "the Primate's greatest offence seems to have been in recognising other ways to God than an exclusive Christian path. It is a view that multicultural Australia applauds". So did Israel in the ninth century B.C. as it worshipped the Lord and Baal, until Elijah confronted the nation with the challenge that it is one or the other but not both (1 Kings 18:21).

Third, Carnley does not believe in salvation through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Carnley considers that Australians should ask forgiveness from those who are the victims of society such as homosexuals, immigrants and Aborigines. We will then know that we are judged. "But not at the same time condemned. Rather, when we are instantaneously forgiven, accepted, welcomed and received, we know the salvation of God, through the medium of our victim."

Carnley writes: "There is salvation in no one else; only via the victim can we be saved. Is it any wonder that this truth has been celebrated and proclaimed for 2000 years?" Whatever Carnley is celebrating at Easter, it is not the Christian message.

In Carnley's scheme of things, I am saved if I ask forgiveness of the person whom I have mistreated. In the Christian view, that is an outworking of the salvation which is found only in Christ (Eph.4:32). In Carnley's view, any victim can in effect become the saviour; in the Christian view, only Christ the Lord is our Saviour.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Anglican bishop of Natal, J. W. Colenso, wrote an attack on the historical accuracy of the first six books of the Old Testament. It was in this context in 1866 that Rev. Samuel John Stone penned the hymn *The Church's one foundation*, with its lines:

*Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
Their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.*

Carnley is one more in the long line of heretics who sought to be relevant and ended being unfaithful. The Spiritual man and the Carnley man are contrary to one another. But the night of weeping must usher in the morn of song.

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