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editorial

One of the hardest-hitting billboard signs I've ever seen was at a railway station. It got my rapt attention. "No Excuses...Never, Ever." My curiosity got the better of me, so I read on. "What was the unforgivable sin?" I asked myself. "What sort of conduct leaves us without a shred of excuse?" The answer slammed the message home: child sexual abuse. While this sin touches a raw nerve, it prompts the further question: Is this the only sin without excuse?

Apparently not. According to Paul, the sin that capped them all was the perversity of the individual who denied the existence of God. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen... being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). God has erected his own billboard on the platform of the earth, and it shouts out the same warning: "No Excuses... Never Ever."

This set me thinking. Obviously, in Paul's mind, the question of God's existence is an open and shut case. If God's existence was doubtful in any way, then Paul could never have said that unbelievers are "without excuse". Why should a person worship God when he has no convincing reason to do so? On the other hand, if unbelievers are without excuse, as Paul insists, then the apostle must have thought that there was sufficient evidence to prove conclusively that God exists.

According to the latest Census (2001), 15 per cent of Australians have said that they are atheists. This is a very significant and influential group of the population. Why has such a large number of people so decisively rejected what is so intellectually obvious? It's not enough to put it down to spiritual depravity. That may be an ultimate explanation, but it doesn't address the intellectual climate which enables such unbelief to blossom and flourish.

Modern Australia has been badly infected by naturalism. Many people have blithely assumed that if God cannot be seen, heard or touched, he doesn't exist. However, defining existence by such criteria is hardly exhaustive. Would atoms exist on this basis? The Christian apologist today must remove the intellectual hiding-places for unbelief. This issue of *AP* is a step in that direction.

Peter Hastie 

I am

The evidence is overwhelming: He is there and he is Lord

Why is it so important to prove that God exists?

Well, for the simple reason that all of us have a worldview and at the very heart of it is the question of whether God exists. If God does not exist, then Dostoevsky is right: “All things are permitted and there are no rules.” In fact, people are free to do what they want without any fear of ultimate consequences.

However, if God does exist, then I am accountable for who I am and what I do in this world. Further, it also means that there’s a purpose to human existence. We are not products of chance that have emerged fortuitously from the primordial slime and are destined for annihilation.

Ultimately, the philosophical quest to understand the nature of man is rooted in the prior question of the nature and reality of God. In addition, where the prevailing intellectual culture believes that the existence of God has been proved, there is an enormous amount of moral restraint placed upon those who are hostile to religion in general and Christianity in particular.

During the medieval period, when theologians such as Anselm and Thomas Aquinas helped to establish Christianity as the dominant intellectual force, those who were opposed to Christianity were pretty quiet about it because their arguments carried little weight in the academic world. However in today’s post-enlightenment world, people feel far more confident to express an unbridled paganism because they are not met by a strong case made for the existence of God such as occurred during the Middle Ages.

Some people, including Christians, say it’s a waste of time trying to prove God’s existence. They say it’s self-evident. Or some, like philosopher Anthony Flew, say that talk about God is meaningless. How do you respond to that?

Flew sets out to prove that you cannot prove the existence of God. He offers the now-famous parable where two explorers find this well-kept and symmetrical garden in the midst of a dense jungle. One of them assumes that a gardener has to be somewhere nearby. But they can’t find him. After a while, one of them begins to



**Peter Hastie
talks to
R.C. Sproul**

hypothesize about an invisible, immaterial gardener. And finally, after they cannot think of a test that would conclusively prove that such a gardener exists, the question arises: “What difference, then, is there between an invisible, immaterial gardener and no gardener at all?” And, of course, that’s the question you’ve asked.

Of course, Flew has conveniently sidestepped the issue of the rather obvious problem of the garden. I mean, Flew has never given a sufficient explanation for

If God does not exist, then how can we possibly account for life, for this planet, for reality, or for meaning within human existence?

the garden’s existence; there’s nothing invisible or immaterial about the garden. He dodges the issue by remaining silent. Does he have a better explanation for how the garden came into being if he refuses to accept that an invisible gardener makes a lot more sense than pure chance? He doesn’t offer one.

Again, his assumption — that there’s no difference between an invisible, immaterial God who creates and governs the universe and no God at all — is wrong. There’s all the difference in the world between these two positions. If God does not exist, then how can we possibly account for life, for this planet, for reality, or for meaning within human existence?

Let’s be quite clear here: if God does not exist, if there is no mind behind the cosmos, then everything is reduced to meaninglessness and to nihilism. On the other hand, if God does exist, we have an invisible, immaterial purposive Creator who transcends all forms of nihilism. Really, I can’t imagine a more silly question than the one Flew has asked: “What difference does it make?” It makes an awful lot of difference, especially with respect to the garden.

Why do people believe in some form of higher power? Is the idea of God naturally implanted in our minds, or is it something that we rationally infer from the created order?

I think it’s both. I don’t see it as an either/or proposition. On the one hand, the Apostle Paul tells us in his Letter to the Romans that in addition to “special” or biblical revelation there is also what we call “natural revelation”. What Paul means by natural revelation is that God reveals himself manifestly and clearly to all people through the things that he has made. He says this in Romans 1: 20: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Here Paul makes it clear that God does more than give an objective disclosure of himself in and through the creation. He tells us that this revelation gets through; it penetrates human consciousness. But we “suppress the truth” (1:18).

And the reason why God judges us is not that we refuse to receive this revelation; but that having received it, we refuse to honour him as God and we do not thank him.

Further, in Romans 2:15 Paul reminds us that this natural revelation occurs in human nature itself. Besides the general revelation through the created order, there is the immediate knowledge of God that he plants in our minds — what Calvin called the *sensus divinitatis* — or the sense of the divine within human consciousness. That’s why belief in God comes more easily than atheism.

So, yes, I would say that all people are intellectually aware that there is a God. But they refuse to acknowledge what they know to be true.

Some modern theologians believe devising proofs for God’s existence is a useless exercise — it’s just a matter of faith; we don’t need reasons. Is that consistent with the Bible?

Not at all. I believe, first of all, that we can prove the existence of God. I think we can do more than just give evidence. I think we can argue compellingly for the

existence of God, at least in terms of a self-existent, eternal being.

Further, I think Aquinas was absolutely right when he developed the concept of a “necessary being”. What do we mean by a “necessary being”? We mean that this particular being is one who is both ontologically necessary, that is, that he is a being who cannot not be, as well as being a being who is logically necessary.

When I say that God is logically necessary what I mean is this: it is illogical and inconceivable that you can have something coming out of nothing. It’s impossible. Nothing cannot produce something. Something must have the power of being, within itself, or other things couldn’t come into existence. This is what I mean when I say that God is logically necessary. That’s as potent an argument today as it was in the days of Aquinas. People still try to get around it with fancy arguments, but I think that their efforts fail.

The sad thing is that while the Church historically has had the higher intellectual ground, in more recent times theologians have felt no need to argue for God’s existence. This is so despite the fact Christians have compelling arguments for doing so. My own experience is that when I go around campuses in the United States to argue for God’s existence, I find that lots of people are very open to the presentation. Sometimes they’re quite startled by the arguments because they haven’t heard them before.

However, unfortunately, there are people in the Church today who don’t believe that we should be presenting the arguments for God’s existence. They say: “No, you shouldn’t reason with unbelievers about God.” They argue that reason is something that comes from Aristotle and that it’s a waste of time. According to them, you don’t deal with your audience’s objections; you just preach the gospel and ask people to take it all by faith. That’s supposedly the spiritual way of doing it.

But I think if we mean by faith the absence of evidence, then in my judgment that’s not faith; it’s credulity. The fact is that the apostle Peter calls upon us to use our reason in witnessing to unbelievers (1 Pet. 3:15). Further, Paul says that God has given us “plain” and “clearly perceived” evidence of his existence (Rom. 1:19,20). According to Luke, we also have many “convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3). Surely Christians should need no further arguments to use our God-given reason to defend the existence of God to unbelievers.

Why has the Church retreated from reason?

I believe the main cause for the Church abandoning reason is due to the influence of the watershed work of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

In the 18th century, Kant published a massive critique of pure reason which had, I think, a far greater impact on Western civilisation than the French or American revolutions. The Kantian revolution was a revolution in the realm of theoretical thought. Kant laid his axe at the very root of the tree by arguing against the classical arguments for the existence of God. He claimed that these arguments all fell short of demonstrating God’s existence.

Kant’s basic argument rested on his underlying assumption that there’s an unbridgeable chasm between the world of the human senses such as sight, sound and touch — the phenomenal realm as he referred to it — and the transcendent, metaphysical world, which he called the noumenal realm. Kant said that it was impossible to get from the phenomenal to the noumenal realm because we cannot rely upon our senses when we are talking about transcendent realities. So, in the Kantian scheme of things, knowledge about God through the use of reason becomes a sheer impossibility.

Of course, Kant put himself on a head-

on collision course with what the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 1. Kant says that you can’t know about God from the created order. Paul says you can. They can’t both be right. As a Christian, I’m convinced that Paul is right and Kant is wrong. And Christian theologians have a duty to demonstrate that.

The traditional proofs for the existence of God have been out of fashion in theological circles. How useful are they, and are any especially useful today?

I think they are all useful, although some are perhaps more useful than others.

The first point I want to make is that as a reformed theologian I don’t believe that I, by my own persuasive powers, can argue anyone into the kingdom of God. People often misunderstand the nature of apologetics. The function of apologetics is not simply to convert people; that’s the job of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, the reformers distinguished between the various elements of saving faith, which they called 1) content (notitia) 2) intellectual assent (assensus), and 3) trust (fiducia). The first two elements of saving faith describe intellectual activity in which the mind is fully engaged. This is self-evidently true because I cannot put my trust in something that I don’t know about or which I do not believe is true. The function of the apologist is to take people through the first two steps. After that, only God can change their hearts and cause them to accept the arguments and trust in the Lord.

He is a being who cannot not be, as well as being a being who is logically necessary.

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Calvin also pointed out another reason why apologetics is helpful. He said that it was useful to stop the mouths of the obstreperous and to place restraints upon those who rail against the truth-claims of Christianity. The apostle Peter, when he tells us to give the reason for the hope that is within us, says that we should do it so as to bring shame on those who revile the truth of Christianity (1 Peter 3:16). And this also helps young Christians who are exposed to skepticism at every quarter today.

Which of the classic proofs, do you think, are most helpful today?

Well, we usually distinguish among the arguments for the existence of God by classifying them as follows: the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument and so on. But each of these arguments can be presented in different ways.

People have their favourite arguments. Personally, I believe that the best argument is an argument from being. This is called the ontological argument, but I wouldn't present it in the same way that Anselm did 1000 years ago. I prefer to come from the angle of giving a reason for being itself: "Why is there something, rather than nothing?" And that's an argument from necessary being. So I'd call it "ontological" in that sense, although there are similarities to the cosmological argument there too. However, for me, the ontological argument is the most persuasive.

Interestingly, the philosophers Immanuel Kant and David Hume thought that the teleological argument was the most persuasive. Kant could never get over the manifest appearance of harmony and order in nature. He couldn't imagine having design without a Designer. And so he was, at least from a practical point of view, very much impressed by that.

Some people say their faith brings meaning, offers a goal and a purpose. Is that sufficient reason for religious faith?

Absolutely not! It could just as easily be superstition, or credulity. I've talked to people in our relativistic culture who don't find God meaningful. I've also had a conversation with one college student recently who said to me: "If I believe in God and it is meaningful to me — singing hymns, praying prayers and that sort of thing — then for me God exists." But I've said to them all: "Well, you know, what I'm talking about is not whether you find

something subjectively meaningful or not; I'm talking about whether there's a God outside of us, who, if he doesn't exist, all my praying, singing and worshipping does not have the power to conjure him up. And, at the same time, if he does exist in and of himself, all of your unbelief and lack of interest in him does not have the power to destroy him." We're talking here about reality, not subjectivity.

How do you use logic in establishing the existence of God?

Well, it's foundational to the way I present my arguments. As I've already said, I like to present the ontological argument. It's logically irrefutable. I use logic at each stage of the argument. I start with this proposition: if something exists — if anything exists — then that which exists is either an illusion, self-created, self-existent or ultimately created by something that is self-existent. Those are the only

It seems completely illogical to create a god like the God of the Bible, — a holy God and who holds us accountable.

alternatives. Then I labour to point out that any attempt to find another alternative can be subsumed under one of those categories.

Probably the most popular alternative to Christian theism in the last 200 years has been some sort of self-creation, either the spontaneous generation theory of the French rationalists during the Enlightenment, or the different theories of the universe being created by chance in modern cosmology. Today it's common to hear people talking about the universe exploding into being from non-being which, again, is another form of self-creation.

Now if we take the concept of self-creation and analyse it, we see that it is logically false. It's falsified by logic for this reason: for something to create itself, it would have to exist before it existed. In other words, it would have to be and not be at the same time. You don't have to be very intelligent person to realise that this is a manifest violation of the law of non-contradiction. The idea of self-creation is logically false. And so you can eliminate the option of self-creation.

Now, when you eliminate that option, you're left with only three others: the first of these is that the created order is an illusion. The first step here is to account for the illusion. Now the problem with

this option is that somebody has to have the illusion. And Descartes was right on this score: you end up, at least, with somebody (you) being conscious of an illusion. So something in the created order exists and you know that you're not an illusion. So this option fails.

Now you are left with two options: either the world is created by something that is self-existent and eternal, or is itself self-existent and eternal. Now in either of those two options you have a self-existent, eternal being. All you are faced with at this point is the task of identifying it. But you have it by sheer logical necessity.

How do atheists account for people's belief in God if it's so obvious to them that he doesn't exist?

In the 19th century a number of leading thinkers attempted to explain the existence of religion in the light of the absence of God. They asked the question: If there is no God, why is man incurably religious? Everywhere and in every culture we discover people engaged in some form of religion. Why?

People such as Marx, Nietzsche, Feuerbach, and Freud came up with a variety of different answers. But the one thing they almost always had in common was the assumption that men create gods as a crutch to help them cope with a hostile or, even worse, an indifferent universe. In some respects they were correct because people certainly have the ability to make up false religions. In fact, the world is full of false religions. And the reason for this is that we want to have gods and goddesses with whom we can live comfortably.

But while this explanation may account for most forms of religion, it certainly cannot account for Christianity. On their assumptions, it seems completely illogical to create a god like the God of the Bible, who is a holy God and who holds us accountable for everything we ever think or do. That would be going far beyond our psychological needs for comfort and security. Let's face it: it's downright threatening. Christians don't deny that they want God to exist — but certainly not for the reasons that Freud and others think.

I have written a book about this subject called *The Psychology of Atheism*. In it I say that I want God to exist. I freely admit that to any atheist. There's no question about it. It would be dreadful for me to wake up tomorrow and discover that there is no God. But at the same time I want the atheist to come clean and admit

that he desperately wants God not to exist because he knows that if God does exist and he doesn't repent, he's going to spend forever in hell. Sadly, most won't admit that. I don't mind admitting that I have strong psychological impulses that lead me to believe in God. But it cuts both ways. Atheists have got stronger psychological impulses to flee from him.

But the point that I want to make is this: you cannot determine the truth or falseness of an argument on the basis of what you want to be true.

Why do so many brilliant minds disagree about the existence of God?

That's an interesting question! In my book, *The Psychology of Atheism*, I wrote a whole chapter on Why Great Minds Come to Different Conclusions.

One of the reasons has to do with faulty logic. Even the most brilliant minds have been guilty of logical slip-ups. Aristotle himself said that a fool can dwell in just a small corner of the mind of a brilliant man. One of our problems is that we often draw false conclusions and inferences from straightforward data. You're not exempt from this just because you're a brilliant person.

But another problem is the problem of bias. And we know that that's a huge factor. In fact, I would say that the more brilliant a person is, the greater this problem can become. Take Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance. He was a brilliant intellect. But at the beginning of his philosophy he rejects the existence of God. Now if Paul is right when he says that God gets through to people and that they know it in their hearts, then you can expect these brilliant minds to devise all sorts of arguments to silence God.

So if you refuse to acknowledge what you know to be true very early in your intellectual development, as Bertrand Russell did when he was 17 years old, then the more brilliant and logical you are, the further away from the truth of God you will end up. That's why I think the most brilliant philosophers today who don't believe in God end up in radical nihilism, because that's the only logical ending point that they can come to. But, again, I think their real problem is sin and its effect on their minds.

What is it about God that is so threatening to people?

He's holy, and we're not! The god of American culture is a nebulous higher power who is no threat to any one. But the God of the Bible is so awesome that

people come before him in fear. In fact, they are reduced to dread and reverence in his presence.

It has been my experience in the study of theology that the giants of the faith — people like Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Edwards — were overwhelmed by the majesty of God. Sadly, I don't find that in the theologies of our Church today.

How is the Christian doctrine of God under threat in the Church today?

Luther once said: "Let God be God!" I'm convinced that the most important belief of Christian theology is the doctrine of God. When that goes, everything else

collapses. And in our day we are seeing this. I sincerely hope it's a passing fad, but I regard the new teaching of "open theism" as a tremendously subtle danger to our doctrine of God. Essentially, open theists believe that God doesn't know what our decisions will be until we make them. He is limited in his knowledge, especially of the future.

Actually, what astonishes me is that not only is it being propagated from within the so-called evangelical church in America, but it has in certain places already been recognised as something that

The most important belief is the doctrine of God. When that goes, everything else collapses.

is legitimately within the pale of evangelical Christianity. I don't think it's within the pale of any kind of Christianity! I don't think it's just sub-Christian, I think open theism is fundamentally anti-Christian. I think Christians everywhere in the evangelical world need to be warned against it.

How should we truly respond to the revelation of God's sovereignty, power, majesty and incomprehensibility?

The first thing we should experience is a "flight to the cross" type of humility that Isaiah experienced before God. Isaiah only discovered who he was when he saw himself spiritually naked before the holy God. And he cried out in repentance. He needed to experience the forgiveness of God. And then, what immediately followed for him was service to God. He lived the rest of his life coram Deo — before the face of God, under the authority of God, and for the glory of God. That's what I think is the only appropriate response to the holiness of God for the believer.

Dr R.C. Sproul exercises an influential teaching and writing ministry through Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Florida. He is a prolific author of theological and apologetic works.

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Sartre's flight from God brought him — and many — little satisfaction and no joy.

If you're on friendly terms with any nurses, you'll know the career provides an endless supply of vivid memories. When my wife once worked as a transplant nurse at a large, bustling medical center in the south-eastern US, she accumulated many memorable stories.

On one occasion, a bed-ridden patient was transferred to her ward from a neighbouring plastic surgery unit, which was filled to capacity. Sadly, the patient was afflicted with a medical condition that caused severe disfigurement of his face. Although anyone catching a glimpse was immediately struck by his appearance, the patient was as yet unaware of his plight.

To avoid the devastating psychological impact involved, the attending physician and the man's family devised a plan to keep him from discovering the truth. Before his arrival on the ward, the nursing staff were instructed to use tape and brown paper to cover all reflective objects in his room. All mirrors and stainless steel surfaces were covered over. They even substituted plastic cutlery for the shiny, reflective spoons and knives normally used at mealtimes.

This story reminds me of the famous passage in Romans 1:18-22, where the



**Peter
Burcham**

Apostle Paul describes the intellectual conspiracy of those outside of Christ. It tells us that while they don't know God in the manner enjoyed by Christians, unbelievers nevertheless "know" him via general revelation in the created order: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without any excuse" (vs. 20). But, like the medical staff "conspiring" to keep the patient from learning his true condition, unbelievers

Evasive habits are true of the whole human race ... humans have a bad case of Coober Pedy Syndrome.

actively "suppress the truth" concerning God (vs.18). In other words, a deep psychological battle rages continually within the non-Christian mind. On the one hand,

they possess a measure of truth about God and are clearly aware of his holiness. They cannot change the fact that they are made in his image. But on the other, they actively rebel against their Creator. So, when thinking through the important issues of life, they display a distinct "chip on the shoulder" towards God.

Elsewhere in Scripture, we learn that these evasive habits of individuals are also true of the whole human race. Indeed, we might even say that humans have a bad case of Coober Pedy Syndrome! Coober Pedy of course, is a unique town in the hot South Australian desert, famous for its opal mines and the way miners avoid the heat by digging underground to build their homes. In fact, the town's name is taken from an Aboriginal phrase meaning "White Fellow's Burrow."

Although he lived far from outback Australia, the prophet Isaiah used a powerful "Coober Pedy" image to

describe the behaviour of the human race in its mutiny against God's rule. Speaking as God's mouthpiece, Isaiah conveyed his displeasure toward such conduct: "Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, Who sees us? Who will know?" (Is. 29:15).

The image here is of humans figuratively burrowing into the ground, attempting to escape the all-seeing gaze of a holy God. Note that the "burrowing behaviour" involves both intellectual and lifestyle aspects: the conspirators "hide their plans from the Lord" plus they "do their work in darkness". In other words, they develop philosophical systems ("plans") that rationalise excluding God from his creation. Simultaneously, they adopt lifestyles ("work") that reinforce the intellectual rebellion.

This link between theory and practice is especially obvious today. As the American cultural observer E. Michael Jones noted in his book *Degenerate Moderns*, 20th century intellectual life tended to display "a vicious circle, oscillating between sexual and intellectual sins: sexual sin leads to bad science as a form of rationalisation, turning one's back on the truth in the interest of ideology or self-will, which in turn leads to more dissolute behaviour, which in turn leads to ever more ludicrous theories".

Such behaviour closely parallels the "Coober Pedy" imagery of Isaiah. It also illustrates what Old Testament commentator Alec Motyer calls the "impenetrable blindness" of the human race highlighted in Isaiah.

This brings us to another sad story, concerning a highly influential thinker of the 20th century, the Paris-born novelist, playwright and philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80). Sartre came to world attention after his delivery of a lecture entitled *Existentialism is a Humanism* in Paris in 1945. The philosophical system he advanced, atheistic existentialism, quickly became popular on university campuses around the world. In some ways, it accelerated the tumultuous cultural upheavals of the '60s, including the often-violent student revolutions of that decade.

In essence, Sartre's philosophy empha-

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

sised modern man's perceived plight as he struggles for self-understanding and authenticity in a meaningless world emptied of God's presence. In developing this system, Sartre deliberately rejected the Catholic doctrines to which he had been nominally exposed as a child.

Instead, Sartre tried to invent a belief system that was free of Christian ideas that he thought had long contaminated Western philosophy. For example, Sartre wished people would stop thinking of themselves as possessing a "human nature". As he put it in an essay entitled *Existentialism*: "There is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it ... Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism."

Late in life, in conversations with his lifelong mistress, the feminist matriarch Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre summarised this goal: "It seemed to me that a great atheist philosophy was something that philosophy lacked. And it was in this direction that one should now endeavour to work... [I wanted] to make a philosophy of man in a material world." The resulting worldview was presented in his major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*. This book was very influential among philosophy students in Australia, the US and elsewhere.

Sartre's ideology also had a strong influence outside universities, thanks to the popularity of his plays (e.g. *Flies* and *No Exit*) and novels (e.g. *Nausea*). His work's appeal was largely due to its emphasis on the exercise of human freedom — an idea that was tailor-made for the prosperous post-war era. Sartre's intoxicating ideas were inhaled by many baby boomers, who obediently expressed the philosophy by wearing blue jeans, smoking pot, having unconventional sex, playing rock n' roll and protesting against US and Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. Down with the Establishment! Up with freedom and the individual!

Thanks to the passage of time and the faddism of academic life, Sartre's direct influence is much weaker today than it was three or four decades ago. The ongoing seductive appeal of French thought meant Western intellectuals fell in love with a newer generation of thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard. As a result, existentialism faced competition from movements such as poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Of particular interest to us is a striking

admission by Sartre towards the end of his above-mentioned conversations with de Beauvoir. These were published in English in 1984, entitled *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. The book comprises long, rambling discussions of the odd Sartre-de Beauvoir relationship, his literary works, political activism, and sexual conquests of



sartre

Sartre gives us a world populated by hostile, warring self-deities, each trying to exert god-like freedom.

groupie women. However, towards the end of the discussions, Sartre spoke openly of a major road-block to his goal of developing a truly atheistic philosophy.

The problem according to Sartre is that it is very difficult to rid one's thinking of the presence of God. As he put it: "Even if one does not believe in God, there are elements of the idea of God that remain in us and that cause us to see the world with some divine aspects." De Beauvoir interrupted at this point, asking Sartre to explain himself. He continued: "I don't see myself as so much dust that has appeared in the world, but as a being that was expected, prefigured, called forth. In short, as a being that could, it seems, come only from a creator; and this idea of a creating hand that created me refers me back to God. Naturally, this is not a clear, exact idea that I set in motion every time I think of myself. It contradicts many of my other ideas; but it is there, floating vaguely. And when I think of myself I often think rather in this way, for want of being able to think otherwise..."

To those familiar with classic Christian theology, Sartre's comments reveal an eerie awareness of the *cognitio Dei* insita — the internal knowledge of God implanted within every human heart. This is something all people possess as bearers of the image of God, and supplements the knowledge received by seeing God's creative handiwork in the world around them. Sadly, instead of pursuing the implications of such knowledge, Sartre chose to suppress it. Consequently, he spent the rest of his life in a darkened Coober Pedy-style burrow, churning out his literary and philosophical works.

Reading the conversations between Sartre and de Beauvoir, one is struck by the gloomy pettiness of their shared mental outlook in the final stages of their lives. Although "the world was their oyster" in the '50s and '60s, this proud, brilliant couple were vulnerable at the achilles' heel possessed by all secular intellectuals: the tyranny of idolatrous ideas. For as Psalm 115 warns those who manufacture idols, that "those who make them are like them", so Sartre and de Beauvoir came to resemble the ideas they worshipped, becoming barren, lifeless and abstract.

The Christian gospel is good news for modern man because it is perfectly designed for darkness-preferring burrow-dwellers. Lyle Dorsett's choice of title for his biography of the life and conversion of another famous 20th century skeptic, Joy Davidman, beautifully captured the Gospel's essence: *And God Came In*.

Mercifully, God graciously takes the initiative in our salvation, entering the burrows of the impenetrably blind.

Although the gospel is precious to us as believers, how do we go about sharing it with the confused offspring of the baby boomer generation? Anyone who has tried to share their faith with friends or workmates will know that in today's climate, the skeptical legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre and his existentialist colleagues is very strong. Many efforts to discuss religious truths are met by an instinctive, knee-jerk cynicism. This state of affairs illustrates what Yale professor Arthur Leff calls "the Grand 'Sez Who'?" In other words, each person considers himself or herself entitled to believe or behave however they please. They are skeptical when confronted by truth claims that question this approach to life. Jesus died to take away my sins? Sez who?

In this climate, Christians must assail the cosy belief systems with which people insulate their burrows against the knowledge of God. Writing to the Corinthian church, which was surrounded by a moral climate just like our own, Paul reminded his readers that the gospel is for "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). This is a mandate for 21st century believers too. We are called to tackle the powerful ideologies that dominate the thinking and behaviour of people in our confused, pluralistic age.

I think there are at least three ways we must do this.

First, we need to meet the prevailing skepticism head on, demanding that advocates of secular belief systems justify their sweeping truth claims. To borrow a phrase from Os Guinness, Christians need to cultivate skepticism concerning skepticism! God is dead? The Bible is out of date? The Christian faith is irrelevant? Sez who? Jean-Paul Sartre?

But why are his views — and those of many other secular intellectuals — so deserving of belief? After all, the reasons Sartre gave for rejecting God seem amazingly childish. For example, in his autobiography, Sartre tells how as a boy, his unbelief began after submitting an essay on the Easter narrative for a competition at his Catholic school. Dismayed that it only received second prize, Sartre revealed “this disappointment drove me to impiety”. Surely we are entitled to reply to this trivial incident: Big deal, Jean-Paul! Get over it!

Another key event occurred to the boy Sartre when he set fire to a floor rug after playing with matches: “I was in the process of covering up my crime when God saw me. I felt his gaze inside my head and on my hands. I whirled about in the bathroom, horribly visible, a live target. Indignation saved me... I blasphemed, I muttered like my grandfather: “God damn it, God damn it, God damn it.” He never looked at me again” (*The Words*).

That one of the greatest atheist thinkers of the 20th century could offer such normal boyhood episodes to justify rejecting God is incredible. John-Paul

Sartre developed strong arguments that prove God is irrelevant? Sez who?

Second, we need to convince people that life becomes meaningless and brutish if they fail to see themselves as made in the image of God. We have already seen how Sartre hated to see himself as the handiwork of God. After all, since Darwin we prefer to see ourselves as hairless, tool-making primates who are products of a

Sartre and de Beauvoir came to resemble the ideas they worshipped, becoming barren, lifeless and abstract.



long, unguided evolutionary history.

But, although this view is popular, there are many grounds for challenging it. Indeed, the 20th century is littered with the debris of many failed efforts to explain human behaviour from a Darwinian perspective. In the 1930s, for example, brutal advocates of Nazi genocide and eugenic racial doctrines justified their actions by saying they promote evolution by “weeding out” unwanted members of the human gene pool. In our time, Darwinian justifications for rape and sexual subjugation have aroused the anger of many feminists and other thoughtful people (e.g. see the new collection of essays entitled *Alas Poor Darwin; Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, 2001, Vintage

Books).

Many rightly see that reducing humans to the levels of genetic robots ruled by their ancestral DNA strips them of their humanity, and society of its decency. But history suggests that such reductionist views may be inevitable when people consciously reject the biblical vision of humans made in God’s image.

Third, we need to confront people with the seriousness of the deep moral flaw that afflicts every human heart. Reading Sartre’s reminiscences with De Beauvoir, one is struck not only by his intellectual prowess, but also his extraordinary selfishness. They convey the indelible impression of a man who used people around him with impunity. His strange relationship with de Beauvoir is a case in point, since she clearly competed for sexual favours and affection alongside other women in Sartre’s odd harem of intellectual co-travellers.

Existentialism’s view of freedom boils thus down to this: mine is exercised at the expense of yours. In a famous quote from one of his plays, *No Exit*, Sartre has Garcin declare, “Hell is — other people!” Sartre gives us a world populated by hostile, warring self-deities, each trying to exert god-like freedom in the pursuit of self-authenticity and meaning. This sounds suspiciously like Genesis 3, an ideal starting point for engaging the postmodern mind.

To return to the story with which we began, of the poor disfigured patient trapped in his lonely hospital room. Christians need God’s help and energy in their task of removing the paper coverings and tape used by people today to obscure their knowledge of God and of themselves. We must convince them that skepticism concerning God’s truth is unwarranted and irrational; that life is meaningless unless we see ourselves as made in his likeness; and that the gospel is the only remedy to the deep sinfulness that ensnares every human heart. This three-pronged message is crucial if we are to fulfil our calling as apologists and evangelists to the troubled world that is the legacy of J-P Sartre and his despairing philosophy.

Peter Burcham is a biomedical researcher living in Adelaide. He is an elder at Norwood Presbyterian Church, where he worships with his wife Elizabeth and their daughter.

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God's Funeral

A.N. Wilson's 19th century parade is mired in liberalism's contradictions.

A.N. Wilson gained a well-deserved reputation as a biographer because of his works on Sir Walter Scott, John Milton and Leo Tolstoy. His work on C. S. Lewis, however, was a step backwards, and then he quite unashamedly blotted his copy-book by publishing two dreadful, albeit well-written, efforts — one on Jesus and the other on Paul.

In writing on Jesus, Wilson claimed that he was producing a dispassionate and objective account, but only managed to come up with the lunatic proposition that the disciples saw James and thought that it was the resurrected Jesus. He went on to portray Paul as the great pagan villain who in effect became the founder of Christianity.

Paul, in Wilson's view, had no interest in the historical Jesus, and so interpreted Jesus' death through the filter of the cult of Mithras where devotees stood under a platform as a bull was being sacrificed. As a result, they were drenched in its blood. The book of Leviticus is a rather more likely filter, but it is difficult to convince a man who is determined to come up with what he thinks is a novel idea. For all-round credibility, Wilson's views on Paul and Jesus only just manage to shade the efforts of Barbara Thiering and John Shelby Spong.

In the light of these developments in Wilson's thinking — or lack of it — in the 1990s, one might have expected that his new historical work on the 19th century, *God's Funeral*, would be one which exuded an air of liberal triumphalism. That is certainly present, but the result is rather more significant than just another rehash of the Whig addiction to evolutionary notions of progress.

The title — *God's Funeral* — comes from a poem by Thomas Hardy, written about 1908-10, where Hardy states that "what was mourned for, I, too, long had prized". The 19th century was indeed a period of revolution in Europe. A great many politicians, artists, scientists, novelists, poets, philosophers, social commentators, and clergymen came to doubt the basic verities of the Christian faith, and even the existence of



Peter Barnes

God himself. Indeed, some of these intellectuals were positively hostile, even paranoid, about the issue.

Matthew Arnold, an archetypal Victorian, saw religion as "morality touched by emotion", and portrayed the essence of Jesus' religion as his sweet reasonableness. In *Dover Beach* he wrote of his own religious position:

*The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round
earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle
furled;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy long withdrawing roar.*

Leslie Stephen was an Anglican clergyman, but lost his faith and became a journalist. In 1875 he called Hardy in to witness his renunciation of his clerical orders. Like Arnold, Stephen retained a firm commitment to living and dying like a gentleman — not the first men in history to entertain the hope that a house on sand would survive the storms.

Not unreasonably, Wilson sees a collective aspect to religious experience, and presumably to the decay of it. His thesis is that "Scepticism in the 19th century was, as often as not, allied not with the sunny good cheer of Gibbon or Hume, but with profound depressions, self-hatred and melancholy". There is plenty of evidence for this. Virginia Woolf said that the friends of her father, Leslie Stephen, feared that he would take his own life — a tragically ironic comment in the light of Virginia Woolf's own suicide. Fedor Dostoyevsky in 1876 also commented on

the number of suicides.

Gibbon and Hume might be urbane, detached and humorous, but skeptics from the 19th century were not so endowed. Immanuel Kant looked up and within from the dull routine of his life, and exclaimed: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." However, that was about as much excitement as he could manage, and the worship of the ethical imperative proved unable to rally the masses.

Far from being a triumph for light and sanity, the rejection of God in the 19th century led to some bizarre, twisted, and tragic consequences. Jeremy Bentham wore his hair down to his waist, paid obsessive attention to detail, and propped (the philosophy of Gradgrind, according to Charles Dickens).

John Stuart Mill reacted to this kind of approach to life — whereby he spent a childhood without games or fairy-tales — and came to discover feeling and beauty. But the best he could do with Christ was to write from a great height: "When this pre-eminent genius of Christ is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer and martyr to that mission who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man ..." It was hardly the sort of stuff to inspire martyrs in the Coliseum, but Mill thought of it as religious progress.

Meanwhile, Auguste Comte tried to marry science and sociology to establish a cult to rival Christianity. His pamphlets advocating this new cult of Positivism suffered from a number of defects, notably the fact that Comte himself was mad, and that he spent too much space in vilifying the prostitute whom he had married. Nietzsche announced the death of God, but also lost his mind, but was not committed to an asylum until after he wrote his works.

Marxism was no more convincing, although it was more successful than Positivism for a time — tragically so.

Positivism suffered from a number of defects, notably the fact that Comte himself was mad

Marx himself drank too much, fathered an illegitimate child, denounced the Jews, and quarreled with every socialist who had the temerity not to fawn before him. Indeed, Wilson maintains that Marx deliberately tried to look like the god Zeus. After coming to power in Russia in 1917, Lenin, the mass murderer, was hailed as 'the invisible messenger of peace'.

When Marx died in 1883, Engels compared his work with that of Charles Darwin, and claimed that millions in Siberia, California and elsewhere were mourning. The true mourning came later as Marx's ideas were implemented in the USSR and China, and millions perished of starvation or in labour camps. Not for nothing did Solzhenitsyn see a peasant woman in tears cross herself repeatedly as she saw a trainload of prisoners, including Solzhenitsyn, pass through Torbeyevo station.

Others are more embarrassing than anything else. Herbert Spencer wrote on virtually everything — *First Principles*; *The Principles of Biology* (in two volumes); *The Principles of Psychology*; *The Principles of Sociology*; and *The Principles of Ethics*. He seems to have read not much more than his own works, but he had absolute confidence in the creed of progress.

It was Spencer who coined the term "the survival of the fittest". He was convinced that Papuans proved the theory of evolution as, in Spencer's view, their legs were short and their brains small. When he died, the Italian parliament observed a

minute's silence, so he did not die totally in vain.

Another participant in "God's funeral" was Charles Darwin. He was no obsessed Nietzschean, but he especially objected to the doctrine of everlasting punishment. If evolution is correct, then the meek cannot expect to inherit the earth. More emphatic but not more

An atheist cannot be too careful about what he reads.

influential was the poet A. C. Swinburne. To give his poetry the appearance of depth, he resorted to the constant use of Christian imagery. Perhaps his most infamous lines are:

*Glory to man in the highest!
For Man is the master of things.*

Swinburne's other great obsession was flagellation, and like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dylan Thomas, he wrote better while he was drunk.

George Bernard Shaw abandoned Christianity but extolled the Life Force. He also crusaded for public female lavatories and against the eating of meat. Two of his heroes were Hitler and Stalin.

A recurring pattern is that those who exalt man end out demeaning him. Either wittingly or unwittingly, Wilson has illustrated C. S. Lewis' quip that an atheist cannot be too careful about what he reads. It is the unbelievers who come across as flawed and dangerous.

As Wilson realises: "The human race can easily deprive itself of Christianity,

but finds it rather more difficult to lose its capacity for worship." Strangely enough, he concludes by looking at Roman Catholicism Modernism, exemplified by the likes of George Tyrell and Alfred Loisy. One can only hope that, for Wilson as for others, Simone Weil is right: "Christ likes us to prefer truth to him. If one turns aside from him to go to the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms."

On the evidence presented, God's funeral looks more like man's funeral. There is every reason for the Christian to lament, but not to despair. God's funeral has been proclaimed many times before — by Pilate and Caiaphas in the first century, by Julian the Apostate in the fourth century, by Voltaire in the 18th century, by Nietzsche in the 19th century, and by Khrushchev in the 20th century.

The last word does not belong to their ilk. Even Wilson finishes not with the vagaries of modernism but with the words of Revelation 1:18, "I was dead, and see, I am alive for evermore."

A. N. Wilson's God's Funeral (London: Abacus, 2000) Peter Barnes, minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, is books editor of AP. AP

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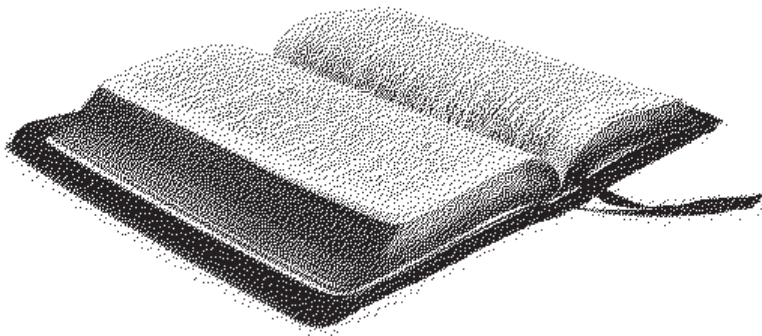


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Word for the wise



*The theme this month:
The God with whom we have to do
(Romans 1-8)*

There are some things about which the Bible is quite specific — it doesn't ask for our opinion or interpretation, it just tells us quite clearly and unambiguously what God wants us to know: 1. This is God's world — he created it and he controls it absolutely; 2. We have a unique place in Creation, we were made in God's image, to run the world as his resident CEO; 3. We rebelled against God's authority (sin), messed up the world (the Fall), and lost our life-giving relationship with God (death); 4. God has intervened in human history, sending his only Son, Jesus, to die in our place and give us the gift of eternal life which we can never earn but must receive by faith (the Gospel). The whole Bible is centred on these important truths but Romans 1-8 is perhaps the place where they are dealt with most succinctly and logically.

Bruce Christian

■ DAY 1

Good News for all!

THE PASSAGE

ROMANS 1 : 1-7

THE POINT God acted decisively in human history through Jesus, his Son. All people are called to respond to the Good News of Jesus & to this end God calls people like Paul to be apostles ('sent' ones).

THE PARTICULARS

- God commissioned Paul to take the Good News to non-Jews.
- The Good News of Jesus was the fulfilment of the OT promises.
- Jesus was both man (proven by his descent from David) & God (proven by the powerful fact of his resurrection from the dead)!
- The fact & force of the Gospel involves the Three-in-One God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit: the Trinity is essential to the Gospel.
- Saving faith leads to obedience; we are called to be saints.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you have a real desire in your heart to understand more and more about God and his Gospel concerning Jesus? Why is it important for us to keep on growing in our understanding? (The error of heretical sects such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc, begins with a wrong understanding of the Tri-une God.)
- What evidence can you see of God's love, grace and peace at work in your life today? Does your faith lead to obedience?2

■ DAY 2

The Gospel is dynamite!

THE PASSAGE

ROMANS 1 : 8-17

THE POINT Paul had a strong pastoral concern for the believers in Rome. He prayed for them continually, longed to see them, and wanted them to grow in their faith. He was confident that the Gospel would bring many to faith because it embraces God's power.

THE PARTICULARS

- Paul expressed his pastoral concern for the Church in Rome by praise, encouragement, prayer, affection, a desire for personal contact & ministry, and a longing to see growth among them.
- Paul had committed his whole life to preaching the Gospel and had seen fruit being borne for his labours among the Gentiles.
- Paul was very aware of his obligation to take the Gospel to all.
- Paul had full confidence in God's power to save all believers through the Gospel of Jesus. The Good News is that everyone, Jew & Gentile, can be made right with God through faith alone.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you conscious of being right with God through faith alone?
- Are you ashamed of talking to others about the Gospel?
- Do you have a prayerful, pastoral concern for others?

DAY 3 *The other side of God*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 1 : 18-23

THE POINT The Good News of Jesus has a reverse side as well. Without the righteousness he provides through faith in Jesus we are still subject to God's anger against sin. At its heart, this sin is to refuse to acknowledge who God is & give him his rightful place.

THE PARTICULARS

- In spite of what people might say, God tells us that he has made himself known quite clearly to everyone through Creation, so that on Judgement Day no one will be able to plead ignorance.
- Man, by nature, shows himself undeniably to be a spiritual being. But he acts foolishly, and, instead of worshipping the God who created him as he should, he takes God's place and creates gods & beliefs to suit himself, leading him into greater darkness.
- This deliberate denial of the truth incurs God's just anger.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Has reading the Bible helped you to change your view of something? When this has happened, have you thought, "Why was I so stupid not to see this before?" Why is reading the Bible regularly so important? What can happen if we don't read it?
- What is especially frightening about vs 20 for Judgement Day?

DAY 4 *When God lets us loose*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 1 : 24-32

THE POINT God only has to withdraw his restraining hand of mercy & we will do the rest. Left to our own devices we will bring about our own downfall, our own Judgement.

THE PARTICULARS

- Any restrictions God places on us are for our own good.
- If God takes away his restraining grace from human society we turn something he intended to be beautiful within marriage into something dirty, degrading, & reduced to its base component of physical activity emptied of its real significance.
- Once we have set out on the downward path of abusing God's gift of sex we are leaving ourselves open to much worse perversions such as homosexuality. God's judgement occurs as a natural outcome (vs.27). (AIDS?)
- Ultimately, unchecked, we drift into every kind of wickedness.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Look carefully through the long list of sins in verses 29-32. Using TV as the indicator, how much does this list describe our own society? What is especially frightening about verse 32?
- What do these verses show us about the need for censorship?

DAY 5 *People in glass houses*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 2 : 1-16

THE POINT There's no point in depending on being better than someone else whose wickedness we can easily expose. We are all in the mess of sin together. Our judgement of others, rather than getting us off the hook, only serves to condemn us because it shows we do know right from wrong but don't live up to the light we have. Our only hope is to embrace God's kindness & mercy — & repent.

THE PARTICULARS

- Jews, by thinking they were better than others because they had God's law, put themselves in grave danger. This attitude kept them from seeing the real nature, extent & consequences of sin.
- Having (knowing) God's law is one thing; keeping it satisfactorily (ie perfectly, since God is perfect) is quite another matter.
- The only hope for eternal life is repentance that leads to godly thinking & doing. This truth applies to Jew & Gentile alike.
- We will all be judged by the light we have. This will be determined by the standard we set for others by making (even mental) judgements about their behaviour. And the pass mark is 100%!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What particular warning is there in this passage for Christians who have been Church members for many years?

DAY 6 *Hypocrites beware!*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 2 : 17-29

THE POINT All our outward credentials — family background, social status, great achievements, humanitarian deeds, even Church membership — count for nothing before God; he is only interested in a humble, contrite, blood-bought (circumcised) heart.

THE PARTICULARS

- Paul, the Pharisee, was only too aware of the danger of being the policeman of others' lives on the basis of the Commandments but failing to apply the principles behind them to one's own life (see his comments about coveting in Romans 7:7-12 — Day 17).
- Professing to belong to God's people while living a life that fails to reflect God's character brings dishonour to God's name. Isaiah had warned the Jews about this in Isaiah 52:5 (vs 24).
- Circumcision was a sacred covenant sign that marked the Jewish people off from everyone else, as God's chosen people. But it can never be of value if it isn't accompanied by godly living.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Whenever you have cause to apply the Bible's teaching to someone else do you first apply it to yourself? (see Matthew 7:1-5)
- What does this passage teach us about our need of Christ?

DAY 7 *The end never justifies the means*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 3 : 1-8

THE POINT All is not lost for the Jews — they have had the honour and responsibility of being the guardians of God's Word.

- God remains faithful even when his people don't.
- The fact that God brings good out of man's disobedience does not excuse us or make us less deserving of God's wrath.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's dealing with the Jews in history, both in action and in verbal revelation, ie the Old Testament, is an important part of his dealing with the whole of mankind. The Jews had a special and important part to play in salvation history.
- God will always remain true to all his promises, even when the people who are the purpose of those promises are unfaithful. (Paul will spell out what this means for the Jews in chps 9-11.)
- God's justice must stand. Our sin must be punished even if God has made use of it positively to demonstrate his glory & grace. (cf Jesus' statement about Judas' betrayal in Matthew 26:24.)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you trust entirely what God reveals of himself & his ways in his Word? Let him be true and every man a liar?

DAY 8 *All guilty...absolutely!*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 3:9-20

THE POINT God's infallible Word pronounces us all guilty on the basis of his just requirements of us. Instead of giving us a way to please him, his law proves we are sinners. None escapes this sentence.

THE PARTICULARS

- Even the very best person stands guilty before God's law.
- God has already declared our universal guilt in many places in the Old Testament — in Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah as examples.
- God's pronouncement of our guilt is absolute and leaves us with no grounds for appeal; we are left silent before him.
- Whether we believe in God or not, whether we accept his Word or not, whether we agree with his verdict or not, makes no difference — every one of us must one day give account to him.
- The more we know of the requirements of God's law the more sinful we realise we are before him.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Most of us try to live good, honest lives. Many of us have some behavioural problems. Some of us are hardened criminals. The Bible treats us all the same before God. Do you have trouble accepting this verdict? Do we fully realise how holy God is?

DAY 9 *The Good News Package*

THE PASSAGE ROMAS 3:21-31

THE POINT Every human being who has ever lived or ever will live stands guilty & condemned before God. God has provided just one way of escape for all these human beings: the blood shed on the cross by Jesus, his Son. The righteousness we need to share eternity with him in heaven is provided free; we receive it by putting our faith in Jesus — we can never earn it by keeping God's law. There is therefore no place for boasting about our pedigree etc.

THE PARTICULARS

- We cannot start to understand the Gospel until we first realise that ALL have sinned and fall short of God's glory.
- Jesus' righteousness & blood are the ONLY way to peace with God & heaven. We receive these ONLY through faith in him.
- Everyone who has been saved, is being saved, or will be saved, is saved because Jesus died on the cross. This applies to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samson, David, Hezekiah, Isaiah, etc, etc, as much as it applies to Peter, Paul & Mary & to you & me!
- This is what the OT Law, Prophets & sacrifices were all about.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you made the 2 most important discoveries anyone can ever make: that you are a sinner, & that Jesus is the only Saviour?

DAY 10 *Take Abraham, for instance*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 4:1-12

THE POINT The fact that men can only ever be put right with God by faith and not by good works is shown clearly in the example of Ab-raham (Genesis 15:6), & in the words of David (Psalm 32:1-2).

THE PARTICULARS

- Genesis 15:6 makes it quite clear that it was his faith ("Abraham believed God") and not his works that made Abraham right with God ("and it was credited to him as righteousness").
- We receive something either by earning it through work done or as a gift by the giver's grace. Salvation can only come as a gift.
- Psalm 32:1-2 makes it clear that David had the same view.
- The Jews' relationship with God was symbolised by the covenant sign of circumcision. But Jews cannot boast of any special salvation deal; because Abraham was saved, then circumcised.
- Abraham's true children are those who have his faith, not those who have his genes or identify with him in circumcision.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What are you depending on to get to heaven — your family background? — your good living? — your baptism or Church membership? — or only on what Jesus has done for you? (be honest)?

DAY 11 *We walk by faith, not sight*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 4:13-24

THE POINT If we take the path of the Law in our journey to heaven we are acknowledging that sin & disobedience deserve God's anger & ultimate rejection and there is no meaning to his promises — any slip means death. If we take the path of grace we can trust all God's promises and are therefore certain of reaching our destination. We demonstrate that our trust is real by taking hold of God's promises and acting on them in spite of how things seem.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's promises can only be depended on on the basis of his free grace. By bringing law-keeping into the equation we condemn ourselves because we are giving him a reason to reject us!
- Abraham's true offspring are all those who share his faith.
- Abraham's faith was severely tested when Sarah could not conceive; but he trusted God and pressed on regardless. (See Hebrews 11:17-19 for a further example of Abraham's faith.)

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Abraham's life shows that saving faith isn't an airy-fairy idea but an active commitment to God's promises. What would you say to someone who claimed to have faith but whose life failed to demonstrate any commitment to God's ways or promises?

DAY 12 *I cannot but rejoice*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 4:25 — 5:11

THE POINT We have been put right with God through faith in Jesus' death & resurrection for us. This gives us peace with God and many grounds for rejoicing. God's love for us is shown most of all in the fact that Christ died for us while we were still his enemies!

THE PARTICULARS

- Because Jesus died & rose again, our faith in him gives us a right standing before God and access to all his gifts of grace.
- Things about which we can really rejoice include the following:
 - the hope of sharing in God's glory;
 - suffering takes on a new meaning because God is now using it to teach us to persevere and to build up a godly character;
 - we have the Holy Spirit filling our hearts with God's love.
- People usually only die for those worthy of it. God's amazing love is shown in that he didn't wait for us to be worthy but sent Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners.
- Since God made friends with us while we were still his enemies he can be sure he will stay friends with us in Christ for ever.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you rejoicing in Christ? Is it obvious? If not, why not?

DAY 13 *Only two family heads*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 5:12-19

THE POINT We are all born into Adam's family, inheriting his sinful nature & destined for eternal death away from God. If we are born again by faith into Jesus' family we take on his nature and inherit the gift of eternal life that his righteousness has earned for us.

THE PARTICULARS

- Adam broke God's rule. Without doing anything we all inherit Adam's sinful nature. Our own sins show our family likeness to Adam & prove our guilt. God's law gives this a legal basis.
- Death in the world is the direct result of Adam's sin. (The fall must have occurred close to the beginning of Creation!)
- (Eternal) life is available as a free gift to all. By faith in Jesus we can inherit his nature, taking on his righteousness as ours.
- In Adam, all (without exception) die; in Christ, all (without distinction — Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, free) receive the gift of eternal life. We are either in Christ, or we are still in Adam.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How does this passage help us understand why infants manage to do wrong things, but not right things, without being taught?
- How does this passage fit in with the theory of evolution?

DAY 14 *Set free...to obey*

THE PASSAGE ROMANS 5:20-6:14

THE POINT Although the grace that saves us must be greater if our sin is greater, it would be irresponsible for us to sin more in order to increase the grace. In Adam we were under the law & couldn't help but sin. In Christ we are under grace & are free to choose not to sin. We should use this freedom to get rid of the sin that is no longer appropriate to the new life we have in Christ.

THE PARTICULARS

- The law leads to greater sin; greater sin leads to greater grace; greater grace brings eternal life & is at its best in righteousness.
- This equation does not imply that we should sin more in order to increase grace; rather that grace is best seen in righteousness.
- Jesus died for our sin & rose to give us life. Baptism is a picture of us dying to sin (and therefore burying our old sinful nature in the process) and rising to new life where sin no longer rules.
- Under law, sin was our master; under grace, God is our master. Our whole bodies, & every part, should be surrendered to him.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What would you say to someone who says that now we are under grace we should forget all about the Ten Commandments? What place do they have in the life of a Christian?

DAY 15 *New master, not no master!*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 6:15-23**

THE POINT Being under grace sets us free; but not to do anything we like, ie be our own master. It sets us free to be slaves to righteousness & slaves to God (which sin would never let us do when it had us in its power under the law's regulations). Master Sin pays wages — death; Master God gives a free gift — eternal life!

THE PARTICULARS

- The Christians at Rome had clearly been set free from their old sinful ways — things that they were now quite ashamed of and that clearly had death at the end of the road.
- Paul was confident that they had understood the doctrines of God's grace, but was concerned that they ran the risk of using the benefits of grace as an excuse for living however they liked.
- True freedom is total submission to the God who made us, who loved us enough to send his own Son to die on a cross for us, & who has our best interests at heart. True freedom is holy living.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Because we depend on grace alone for salvation it's easy to drift into thinking sin doesn't matter so much — God will forgive us, that's what grace is all about. Does this passage expose any habits, attitudes or life-style activities you need to deal with?

DAY 16 *New husband, not no husband!*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 7:1-16**

THE POINT Paul moves from the master-servant illustration to use marriage as a way of explaining the relationship between law & grace. His point is the same — grace doesn't release us from the law into a vacuum, but into a new, fruitful relationship with Christ.

THE PARTICULARS

- The illustration of marriage makes Paul's point about law and grace even clearer. A woman can only be married to one man at a time but she is free to marry again if her first husband dies. In Adam, we are married to the law & must obey it; when we are saved by God's grace the law is no longer in charge of us, it dies, and this sets us free to marry Christ and be subject to him.
- There is a further parallel: when we were married to the law as descendants of Adam, the expression of our passions in that relationship produced fruit consisting of things that led to death; married to the risen, living Christ we bear fruit to God!
- The new way puts legalism aside and serves God in the Spirit.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you been freed from the law by God's grace?
Are you married to Christ as his bride? ... or going it alone?
... or just pretending to live in a de facto relationship with him?

DAY 17 *The struggle within*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 7:7-25**

THE POINT The law can only command — it cannot give strength to perform; it can only point out sin — it cannot enable me to conquer it.

THE PARTICULARS

- The law isn't all bad, it serves some good purposes. Taking the 10th Commandment ('Do not covet') as an example:-
 1. It shows me what sin really is (7);
 2. It proves to me how powerful sin is (8);
 3. It makes clear to me my true position before God (9-11).
- Thus, I must admit the law is: 1. holy, 2. righteous, 3. good (12).
- The law can't be blamed for my spiritual death, sin is the culprit. The law is only the means by which sin is exposed (13).
- The law points out to me how powerless I am to deal with my sinful nature; I do what I don't want to do & vice versa. Thus again the law serves a good purpose; sin is the problem (14-25).
- The Good News is: Jesus can rescue me from all this (24-25)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Can you identify with Paul's struggle here?
- What other commandment(s) could you use as an example in your present experience? Is Jesus rescuing you (be honest)?

DAY 18 *Only 2 kinds of people*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 8:1-17**

THE POINT Jesus has set the believer free from the condemnation which the law showed he was under, & has given him the Spirit as proof. This is the only way this can happen, so mankind divides into only 2 groups — A: those under the Spirit's control; B: those still under sin's control. Group A have a duty to live in line with the Spirit's leading. Group B have no option but to be sinners!

THE PARTICULARS

- Those who have put their faith in Jesus can never be subject to any condemnation — they've been freed from the law's demands.
- Jesus made a double exchange with us — he took on our sin and died; he gave us his righteousness to fit us for eternal life.
- Everyone has a mind-set: the believer, a mind set on what the Spirit desires leading to life & peace; the natural man, a mind set against God leading to death.
- The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead gives us life and confirms that we are God's children & co-heirs with Christ.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What are all the benefits this passage says the Christian has?
- What are all the obligations this passage reminds us we have?

DAY 19 *Our groaning 'Plan A' world*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 8:18-27**

THE POINT Although we have been freed from sin & received the gift of eternal life we still have to live out our days in a world damaged by sin. Paul gives us some important facts to encourage us.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's Plan for Creation has the following features:-
- the original Creation was perfect, without death & decay;
- Man introduced death & decay into Creation by his sin;
- Jesus came to deal with sin, and redeem & renew Creation;
- the final renewal will not happen until Jesus comes again;
- in the meantime, God's redeemed people are to wait in hope.
- God encourages us in our struggle with the following facts:-
- suffering here, bad as it is, is nothing compared with heaven;
- it is all part of God's original Plan which includes renewal;
- the concepts of suffering & hope are part of the original Plan;
- God has given us his Spirit to help us pray and stay on track.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What have you learnt from this passage that encourages you?
- How do this passage (especially vss 20-21), & Revelation 13:8, help us to see that this world is God's Plan A and not Plan B?

DAY 20 *Wow!*

THE PASSAGE **ROMANS 8:28-39**

THE POINT This is God's world, he alone controls it, we are his chosen people whom he loves, he sent Jesus his Son into the world to do everything necessary to put it right, we have nothing to fear.

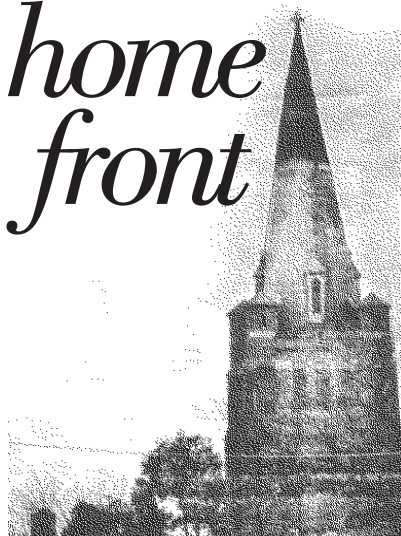
THE PARTICULARS

- God encourages me further with the following extra facts:-
- I am his — he chose, called & justified me, & will glorify me;
- he is sovereignly working everything for my ultimate good;
- his purpose is to keep working on me until I am like Jesus;
- if he didn't spare his own Son in the process of redeeming me, I can rest assured that he will do everything else necessary to ensure my spiritual health and final salvation;
- with God for me, no one can succeed against me;
- Jesus rose again & is now at God's right hand as my friend;
- no trial that might come to me, not even death itself, takes him by surprise, or can ever separate me from his love in Christ;
- with his help, and through his love, I can conquer everything.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- With these facts before us, why do we ever doubt or complain?
- Today's passage is the culmination of Romans 1-8. What is the most significant thing you have learnt this month? Why?

home front



Powerless in Ipswich

Expect the unexpected was an apt motto for the open day held at **St Stephen's Ipswich**, on 18 May, reports *Scott Muir*. The day, celebrating the opening of the church's new auditorium, was "transformed", when a crow blew up a power transformer, cutting power to the church block. The lights went out, the music stopped, and the jumping castle sagged — but spirits did not.

Church members rose to the occasion to ensure the afternoon's program continued, and by 3 pm power was restored.

Those who came enjoyed musical performances by the **West Side Christian College** band and choir and songs by St Stephen's own children's band and choir which included a song by our toddlers. There were also many displays including a fine art display of works by church members, vintage cars and a craft table. People enjoyed tours of the heritage building, the gardening workshops, organ recitals, multi-media presentations and information about Christian Television Australia.

The auditorium was opened by the Moderator of the PCQ, Rt Rev. **John Nicol**. The mayor of Ipswich, **John Nugent**, also attended.

Enriched and rejoicing

Rev. Ian Smith, lecturer at the PTC Sydney, his wife, **Jenni**, and their family are rejoicing that after six months of treatment for lymphoma, Ian is now in remission. Ian wrote: "The past six months have been both very difficult and strangely rewarding. Although I do not choose to go through them again, and I will be happy to live the rest of my life without feeling the effects of chemother-

apy again, I have also been enriched. I have known the closeness of God in a way that I have seldom experienced. Fear of death and sickness really do fade in the light of the hope of glory held out in the Gospel. The need to appropriate that knowledge has deepened my faith — both at times when I have received bad news and now as I receive good news."

Doctor in the house

The new lecturer in Biblical Studies at the PTC Melbourne, the **Rev. Greg Goswell**, has been awarded the Ph. D. of the University of Sydney for a thesis on Kingship, human and divine in Is. 36-39.

A proverbial scholar

One of the world's most outstanding Old Testament theologians, **Dr Tremper Longman III**, is due to visit the PTC Sydney from 19 to 23 August to present a series of lectures around the theme 'Proverbs and Pastoral Praxis'. These lectures will involve a close reading of the book of Proverbs (in English) in its ancient Near Eastern and canonical contexts. Special attention will be given to the proper use of the book in the context of pastoral care and counselling. The cost of attending all the lectures is \$50.

Dr. Longman has written many books and commentaries including the latest volume in the highly acclaimed NICOT series on *Song of Songs*. Hence while in Sydney he will also present the Eliza Ferrie public lecture, *Reading the Song of Songs as Ancient Love Lyrics and as the*

Word of God, on 21 August at the PTC, 77 Shaftsbury Rd, Burwood. For more details about Dr Longman's visit contact the PTC Sydney (02) 9744 1977 or adminptc@ptcsyd.wow.aust.com.

David Maher ordained

On Saturday 25 May 2002 the Presbytery of Sydney met at Meridan School, Strathfield to ordain **Mr David Maher** to the ministry of Word and sacraments.

The Public Worship was led by the Moderator, the **Rev. Bruce Christian** and the Holy Scriptures were expounded by **Rev. John Davies**.

Outreach in Augusta

For a number of years now members of **Bicton** and **New Life Church** in Rockingham, WA, have been involved in running a monthly Bible group in Augusta. The study group has also formed part of the ministry of the **Presbyterian Country Ministries** and began when a local Christian woman responded to a basic Bible study correspondence course as part of her desire for further teaching and fellowship.

A small group of enthusiastic people subsequently gathered in the local CWA hall for prayer, learning, fellowship and supper. In late April under the leadership of the **Rev. Paul Bloomfield**, the home missionary at Rockingham a group of 10 people from Bicton and Rockingham joined with local believers in the Augusta

Eliza Ferrie Public Lecture

Professor Tremper Longman III

at the **Presbyterian Theological Centre**
77 Shaftsbury Road, Burwood, NSW

Wednesday 21st August 2002 at 7.30pm

"Reading the Song of Songs as Ancient Love Lyrics and as the Word of God"

Supper provided

Civic Centre to run an outreach night with **John Button**, who was falsely convicted of murder in the 1960s and who, as has been widely reported in the media nationally, had the conviction quashed by the WA Supreme Court. Despite bleak weather, some 65 came, many of whom had no previous church contact.

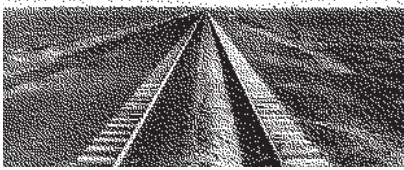
PCA Yearbook Corrections

Page 14: APWM Director Fax number should read: (02) 9792 1374

Page 78: Church Records Management and Archives Committee. Convener Rev. Andrew Clarke

Please note: Due to lack of space we can publish only corrections in this column. For all PCA Yearbook Updates please go to: www.presbyterian.org.au

across australia



Crick questions

Nancy Crick's death from euthanasia last May has revealed the Pandora's box awaiting us if we cross the line and legalise voluntary euthanasia, according to the **Australian Christian Lobby**.

"While opposing euthanasia, we join in compassion with other Australians in mourning the death of Nancy Crick and in empathising with the pain and suffering experienced by Nancy, her family, friends and others like her," said ACL's executive chairman, **Mr Jim Wallace**.

However, as tragic and traumatic as the circumstances of her situation, reports that she may have been free of cancer raise some serious questions, according to Mr Wallace.

"If it is the case that those championing euthanasia, either intentionally or unintentionally, made her a role model out of which she felt compelled to act, then the full force of the law should be brought to bear," Mr Wallace said. "The case seems to justify our concerns that the availability of euthanasia would enable manipulation

of society's vulnerable and introduce an expectation that there is a 'use-by-date' for people as there is for milk."

Encouragement for disabled

David Longworth is a Salvation Army soldier who publishes a monthly newsletter for the mentally ill and disabled Christian, called *The Encourager*. If you would like to know more drop David a line at 61a Ivanhoe St, Morley, WA 6062, or you can ring him on (08) 9379 1029

Evangelism congress planned

Plans are under way for a National Congress on Evangelism in September 2003, under the banner *Recreating Australia*, initially funded by the **Billy Graham Evangelistic Association of Australia**. The aim of the congress is to draw together Christians from every walk of life to stimulate strategies that will equip and mobilise local churches.

Islamic persecution in Australia

A deeply disturbing scandal has emerged in Australia's immigration detention centres at Woomera, Port Hedland and Curtin, where Christians and other non-Muslim asylum-seekers have been "stoned, assaulted, sexually harassed and abused by Islamic fanatics," according to the **Barnabus Fund**. The allegations were also reported in Melbourne's *Age* newspaper.

Reza, an Iranian Christian, was blinded in one eye last August when a group of Afghan Muslim men stoned Christians leaving the dining hall in Woomera detention centre, the Barnabus Fund said in a press release. In another incident a Christian man was kicked to the floor and his cross was ripped from his neck, according to the release. In December, an 18-year-old Mandaean girl (a small religious group which follows the teachings of John the Baptist) was shouted at by Muslim men in a dining hall who called her a "dirty, filthy infidel" who shouldn't be allowed to serve food to Muslims. When she attempted to argue back she was "pushed to the ground and kicked and abused".

The Barnabus Fund release said that in a similarly shocking incident a blind Mandaean man was seized by Muslim men, held down and defecated on before being left in a locked toilet. In other incidents non-Muslim girls have faced sexual harassment and verbal abuse because they

do not wear Islamic veils, the doorways of Mandaean asylum seekers have been defecated in, and a local Islamic mullah has even called for a jihad (holy war) against Mandeans at the Port Hedland detention centre.

The organisation said that non-Muslim men, women, and even children, many of whom fled Muslim-majority countries like Iran in the first place because they were being persecuted for their faith, are now facing abuse of a horrific nature from Muslim conservatives in Australia's detention centres.

"The majority of asylum seekers in Australia are Muslims," the release said. "Witnesses say that extremist Shia Muslims, particularly Iranians, Afghans and Iraqis, are often those behind the violence." The Barnabus Fund reports that chaplains, pastoral workers and staff at the Woomera, Curtin and Port Hedland detention centres in Australia have spoken up about an atmosphere of Islamic intimidation and terror in which the authorities seem powerless to protect the non-Muslims.

The widespread suffering and "constant discrimination" is leading to deep emotional distress and psychological trauma. **Jim Monaghan**, a Christian chaplain at Woomera, says that "at present the families there are very vulnerable. There have been attempted suicides and other forms of self-harm ... they are desperate."

Workers head for Afghanistan

Milton and **Merrilyn Bailey** of the Blackburn North Baptist church, Melbourne, are TEAR Australia's latest field workers to head for Afghanistan.

Milton is a qualified electrician turned fire-fighter who fights remote Victorian bushfires from a helicopter. Merrilyn is a busy midwife who juggles the diverse needs of a hospital in Mansfield.

This year their willingness to go where God will send them will lead them to one of the poorest and most devastated regions on earth — the Kandahar province in southern Afghanistan. The Baileys will work with a team to build up the community's ability to provide health care and education.

They have done this before. Merrilyn spent a year working as a nurse in Zambia and time in a rural Indian hospital. Together, they helped fix up an orphanage in Thailand, provided logistical assistance for a disaster relief team in Hong Kong, and there's even been time for SES work around Mansfield.

For information on TEAR Australia's work in Afghanistan, phone 1800 244 986 or see www.tear.org.au

Church: why we don't

Some 70 per cent of Australians identify with a Christian denomination, yet fewer than 20 per cent claim to attend church monthly or more often. New findings have been released on why people don't go to church from the **National Church Life Survey** and **Edith Cowan University** in Perth.

The most common explanations people give have to do with finding worship services boring or unfulfilling (42 per cent), the beliefs and moral views of the churches (35 per cent) and not seeing any need to go to church (31 per cent).

It is more than a matter of Christian beliefs, according to Dr John Bellamy of NCLS Research. There are other widely held beliefs that are negatively related to a church involvement. These include the idea that there can never be absolutely clear guidelines on what is good or evil, that different religions and philosophies have different versions of the truth, and that life is made sense of largely in terms of the here and now.

Shifts in community values have had an effect: There have been marked cultural changes since the 1960s that have created gaps between churches and the wider community. Some moral issues where there are wide gaps include attitudes on abortion, euthanasia, and sexual issues.

Dr Philip Hughes of Edith Cowan University notes that "The under-representation of young adults in churches can be largely explained by cultural changes."

Relationships are key: relationships are strongly linked to patterns of church involvement. Most non-attenders (60 per cent) and a quarter of infrequent attenders (26 per cent) say that they have no close friends who are church attenders. This compares with 8 per cent of frequent church attenders. The church attendance pattern of one's spouse or partner is even more strongly linked; very few non-attenders say that their spouse is a church attender.

Whether a person went to church as a child is less influential than current relationships. Despite the perception that people are just too busy to go to church, the research shows that lack of time is also less important.

NCLS Research is a joint project of the Uniting Church NSW Board of Mission, ANGLICARE (NSW) and the Australian Catholics Bishops Conference.

Young women's tough love

Nicole Thornburrow and **Carmelina Read** of Chatswood Presbyterian were part of the organising committee of the fourth Young Evangelical Women's Conference, which attracted 560 young women at Rydalmere, NSW, on 18 May.

They came from nearly 100 churches, different ethnic groups and diverse locations.

The conference is aimed at women between the ages of 18 and 35, but women of all ages came to hear **Di Warren**, **Isobel Lin** and **Cath Young** explain 2 Corinthians 6-7, looking at the theme "tough love". After lunch, the afternoon started with insights into 'mission to Japan' from missionary **Cathy Smith**, followed by various electives.

Tapes are available from Matthias Media. Next year, YEWC is scheduled for May 17 — check the website for confirmation: www.yewc.org or email: enquiries@yewc.org

Great debate

The Evangelical Union at Sydney University plans a high-powered series of public debates and talks from 26 August to September 5 this year, headed by renowned American theologian **William Lane Craig**. Evangelical leaders such as **Dr Peter Jensen** and **Rev. Ian Powell** will also take part, under the theme of "absolute God".

These debates (with outspoken anti-Christian broadcaster and author **Phillip Adams**) and talks will cover many of the major relevant issues that people face — justice, truth, science, sex, reality, and forgiveness, and how they relate to the truth of our absolute and sovereign creator. For more info, visit www.mission.sueu.org.au or email the team on mission@sueu.org.au.

absoluteGod

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER

The rhetoric is that our universities are places of honest intellectual inquiry and open debate and discussion; the truth is often very different. However, the Sydney University Evangelical Union is working hard to bring the two a little closer together!

From August 26 to September 5 this year, the EU will be holding a series of public debates and talks, under the theme of 'absolute God'. Keynote speaker, world renowned American theologian **Dr William Lane Craig**, together with well known evangelical leaders such as **Dr Peter Jensen** and **Rev. Ian Powell**, will seek to engage Sydney University in a battle for mind and heart. These debates (with outspoken anti-Christian broadcaster and author **Phillip Adams**) and talks will cover many of the major relevant issues that people face — justice, truth, science, sex, reality, and forgiveness, and how they relate to the truth of our absolute and sovereign creator, who has come to us in the person of his Son.

For more info, visit www.mission.sueu.org.au or email the team on mission@sueu.org.au.

teachers

Technology and Applied Science (TAS) and/or BIBLE and German (Block — 4th term 2002)



Applications are invited from enthusiastic and committed Christian teachers of reformed persuasion, for the above full time position(s) available from the beginning of first term 2003 (except for German). The Teaching of TAS involves both wood and metal Technics. Both TAS and Bible subjects are taught throughout the junior and senior secondary sections of the school.

There is three other full time teachers in the TAS area and one other full timeteacher in the Bible area and the curriculum is well developed. Preference would be for one applicant to combine both subjects but combinations with other subjects may be considered.

Sutherland is a Christian parent

controlled, Kindergarten to HSC, Protestant, co-educational school with enrolment in 2002 of 750 students and a staff of over 70. Buildings and facilities are all modern and well equipped. In 2001 we celebrated our 25th year of operation. The school is located at Barden Ridge in a delightful bush-land setting 25km south of Sydney.

Interested teachers should write (with full details of teacher training and teaching experience) to:

The Business Manager
Sutherland Shire Christian School
P.O. Box 390, Sutherland NSW 1499
Enquiries are welcome by phone on: 02 9543 2133 or by e-mail: sscs@sscs.nsw.edu.au or web site: www.sscs.nsw.edu.au.

world news



Clone by 2003

Infertility researcher **Panos Zavos** has predicted that his Kentucky-based human cloning team will produce a pregnancy this year, with the delivery of a cloned human being coming in 2003.

Only logistical problems, not scientific or medical ones, now stand in the way of the team's attempts to clone a person, he said after testifying before a US congressional subcommittee debating whether any form of cloning should be made illegal in the States.

Saying he would not clone a human in the US because of popular opposition, he told the panel, however, that the cloning "genie is out of the bottle and it keeps getting bigger every day. There is no way that this genie is going back into the bottle". Zavos said his team is one of five in the world planning to clone human beings.

The Washington Post

Plea to Georgia

Fifteen members of the US Congress have sent a letter to Republic of Georgia **President Eduard Shevardnadze** urging him to ensure an end to the increasing violence against minority religious groups in the former Soviet Republic. Over the past two years, violent mobs have attacked members of various non-Orthodox religious communities, while police allegedly refuse to intervene or even join in the attacks.

The letter, spearheaded by Members of the United States Helsinki Commission, urges Shevardnadze to "take concrete steps to provide for the security of all Georgians without distinction as to religion".

"President Shevardnadze and Georgian authorities appear to have turned a blind eye to the ongoing violence against certain

church groups," said commission chairman **Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell**. "Hopefully, this letter will send a clear message that the United States is greatly alarmed by these attacks and expects Georgian authorities to do everything possible to protect individuals, regardless of their religious faith."

Voice of the Martyrs

Preparing for persecution

Christians across the former Soviet Union have started preparing for a new period of persecution, according to reports monitored by *ASSIST News Service*.

In Belarus, proposed legislation will ban unregistered religious activity, and stop foreigners leading religious organisations, while religious literature is subjected to prior compulsory censorship. Religious groups with fewer than 20 adult citizen members in any one location will be denied registration, if Belarus parliament adopts the proposals. "All religious groups are watching and waiting for this law," said **Aleksandr Velichko** of the **Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith**.

In Islamic Uzbekistan "actions have recently been resumed which could soon lead to a significant restriction on religious freedom in our country," said an open letter from Protestant Christians. It cites a number of events in recent weeks, including a senior religious affairs official's demand that churches stop preaching in the country's official language, Uzbek, as well as the detention of 18 Christians following an investigation into the sources of Christian literature in Central Asian languages. The chairman of the **Bible Society of Uzbekistan** told *KNS* it was "impossible to rule out the possibility that the authorities are beginning a campaign against Protestant communities in the republic." Similar reports came from the former Soviet republic of Moldova.

Catacombs revisited

A decade after communism collapsed, a Christian community in the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan is forced to live like the first "catacomb" Christians in the Roman Empire. The *Keston News Service* (*KNS*) said that about 50 members of a Protestant congregation in the town of Muinak are forced to hold secret meetings in the nearby desert as their pastor, **Salavat Seregabaev**, is under surveillance.

Grand slam

For the first time in more than 150 years, copies of the first four printed editions of the Bible have come under the ownership of a single person — a little-known, wealthy 88-year-old collector named **William Hurd Scheide**, who keeps them in his private jewel-box of a library at Princeton University.

Mr Scheide completed the rare-book grand slam late last year with his quiet, seven-figure purchase of a Mentelin Bible, printed by **Johann Mentelin** in 1460 in Strasbourg.

"It's phenomenal," said **Peter E. Hanff**, deputy director of the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley. "To bring together those four monumental records of Western culture in a single place, and in the New World, is of international significance."

Only two other individuals, King George III of England and the second Earl Spencer, great-great-great-grandfather of Diana, Princess of Wales, have ever owned copies of all four of the Bibles, which, because they were printed in roughly the same period in Germany, constitute a distinct group for scholars. All the books in the Scheide Library are available for study by scholars.

The Mentelin Bible, even rarer than the **Gutenberg**, joins a Gutenberg, the first major Western book printed from movable type, in 1455 in Mainz; a copy of what is known as the **36-Line Bible**, printed in Bamberg in 1461, possibly by **Albrecht Pfister**; and, most beautiful, **The 1462 Bible**, also printed in Mainz, by **Johann Fust** and **Peter Schoeffer**.

New York Times

Same-sex unions

The Canadian Anglican **Diocese of New Westminster** has moved independently toward the blessing of same-sex unions, to strident opposition by 13 bishops. In a statement issued by the opposing bishops, they write: "We believe the decision of the Diocese of New Westminster to be in conflict with the moral teaching of Holy Scripture and the tradition of the universal Church ... Matters of moral teaching and Church order and discipline are beyond the jurisdiction of a single diocese acting alone." Against the New Westminster decision, the discipline and teaching of the rest of the Anglican Church nationally and globally remain unchanged.

The Idiot Box

Irresponsible parents are producing lazy, stupid children.

Many adults feel that since they freely watched television when they were young and don't think that they were too negatively affected, TV doesn't have a significant impact either on their children, or themselves as adults.

The difference, though, lies in the nature of the programs that were prevalent in the '50s, '60s and '70s, as compared to now. By and large, today's parents were brought up on wholesome or family oriented programs that emphasised traditional, Judeo-Christian values. The most worrisome of the shows incorporated hard-to-explain "situation ethics", or just simple (but fun) frivolity.

Many of today's most popular youth and "family" programs, however, include varying degrees of sexual promiscuity, profanity, coarse joking, and anti-family/anti-Christian plots and sub-plots. Occultism, violence, and self-indulgent materialism are also found in a huge percentage of Hollywood's offerings. Now more than ever, discretion is essential.

Although Hollywood has a lot to answer for, it's important to remember that not everything that comes through TV is bad. It's not our intent to alienate you from your TV. In fact, in our book *How To Get the Best Out of TV*, we present many refreshing, creative ideas of how you and your family can gain lasting control of, and benefit from, this valuable communication tool. A carefully programmed TV can be a beneficial ally!

However, because the average child between 2 and 11 years old watches more than 27 hours of poorly supervised television a week, because the only thing that kids do more than watch television is sleep, and because we are convinced that most parents are unaware of the indecent liberties that modern media take with our children, we implore ... "Your attention please!"

Aggression: Dr Jay Martin of the University of Southern California found that "in a multi-year study of 732 children, conflicts with parents, fighting with peers, and delinquency were correlated with the total number of hours of television viewing."

It is troubling to note, especially for

child care operators and parents who let their children watch moderate to large amounts of "only the good stuff", that the "fundamental correlation is not between aggressive behaviour and the viewing of violence on TV. Increases in aggression correlate with viewing television, not with viewing violent scenes."

The process of viewing – the number of hours actually viewed – is the main factor correlated with negative behavior.

It appears that the best way to guard against over-aggressiveness and interpersonal conflicts is a two-pronged approach. First and most importantly, cut down on the total number of hours viewed. Second, eliminate all violent programs from your TV-viewing

**Dale and
Karen Mason**

The process of viewing — the number of hours actually viewed — is the main factor correlated with negative behavior.

diet so that a callousness to pain and suffering is not unnecessarily fostered in the hearts of your own children.

Education: While attention grabbing headlines demand excellence in our nation's classrooms, the evidence that too much television has an adverse effect on scholastic performance is overwhelming. The bottom line is, the more television a child watches, the greater the negative impact on his learning and development. Our cries for educational reforms must be matched by reform on the home front -- in our TV viewing habits.

Distorting sex: In an effort to broaden and obtain a better selection of programs, the majority of American households now subscribe to cable TV services. Better control is not a benefit of the monthly service fee, though. In fact, in a study of 450 sixth-graders who watch cable, Oklahoma State University professor Godfrey Ellis found that a staggering 66 per cent of the children watched at least one program a month that contained nudity or heavy sexual content.

Where do Christian children develop their weakened moral ideas? A substantial part of the blame can be laid to poorly managed television. A child may attend Sunday School for one hour a week, church for two more hours and never

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really hear about God's prohibitions regarding premarital sex. But when a child has unlimited access to the world's perspective at the rate of 25 to 30 hours a week, which ideas can we expect to have the most influence?

Weight problems: Dr. Robert Klesges, a researcher at Memphis State University, found that "children watching TV tend to burn fewer calories a minute -- not only fewer than those engaged in active play, but also fewer than those who are reading or "doing nothing" — in fact, almost as few as children who are sleeping".

And the heavier a child is, the more grave the effect. For children of normal weight, "TV-watching triggered a 12 per cent (metabolic) drop ... The metabolic rates of obese children fell an average 16 per cent." Dr Klesges suggested the obvious. "It seems prudent for people of all ages who have weight problems to curb their time in front of the tube and do something more demanding instead."

Advertisements: It is estimated that the average child sees 20,000 advertisements a year. Unlike adults, who often mute out commercials, or who get up and make a mad dash for the bathroom during the 60 to 180 seconds that they are allotted, children like TV ads. They like to be told what to lobby for ... and lobby they do.

Imaginative play: Few adults are aware of it, but television has completely altered the way that children spend their time. Yesterday's children spent much of their days playing games and exploring the outdoor world around them. But today's children spend their time with their eyes glued to the television screen and their bottoms firmly planted on the living-room rug.

Youngsters who should be outdoors getting bruised, dirty, and exhausted, exer-

cise only their blinking eyelids as they sit entranced, hour after hour, in front of the tube. Evidence indicates that television interferes with the capacity to entertain oneself and stifles the ability to express ideas logically and sensitively. Television viewing replaces essential play activities with passivity rather than activity.

Family time and communications: A Michigan State University study revealed that "when four and five-year-olds were offered the choice between giving up television or their fathers, a third opted to give up daddy". According to another study, "the average five-year-old spends [only] 25 minutes a week in close interaction with his father [but] 25 hours a week in close interaction with the TV set".

Parents often regret not spending more time with their children. However, "two-thirds ... say they would probably

Parents have abused their children in order to benefit themselves, turning the TV set into a constant and convenient baby-sitter.

accept a job that required more time away from home if it offered higher income or greater prestige".

Caught in time-binds that limit the number of hours available for family interaction, equally problematic is the

average family's misuse of the TV set.

Poorly managed television wastes opportunities for kids to learn how to relate to other people, including their parents and siblings, and relating with their families is a desire of today's youth. In a nationwide, ethnically balanced survey of 750 10 to 16-year-olds, "three-quarters said that if they had a choice between watching TV or spending time with their families, they'd opt for family time".

Instead, in the strong words of one author, "parents have abused their children in order to benefit themselves, turning the TV set into a constant and convenient baby-sitter".

I'm convinced, however, that the family's loss of control of its time is one of the most perplexing of the problems faced by parents today. We recognise the fact that values completely contrary to those that we want our children to absorb are being shot — rapid fire — through the TV set into the living room. We realise that, as the family supper table succumbs to the chatter of TV noise, hope for a daily period of sharing, caring, and interaction is almost zero. Yet we stay "tuned in" anyway.

When one considers that the average

household now spends almost 50 hours a week with the TV, yet mom and dad allot only 27.5 minutes during the same week to focus on and talk to each other, it's little wonder that relationships suffer. And when families suffer, society itself feels the results.

Children of all ages need adult contact. While a teenager's vehement verbal attacks may suggest otherwise, they need adult/child relationships for reassurance that they are loved, and for instruction in the ways of adult society.

Author/lecturer Josh McDowell has repeatedly stated that he often has teenagers come to him, convinced that their parents don't love them. When asked why they feel this way, many respond that they just don't feel important. Their parents don't try to spend time with them any more. In fact, poorly managed TV has become one of the primary impediments to relational richness in millions of American homes.

After a lively meeting where we had been invited to challenge a large group of Christian teens about their TV habits, a teen-aged girl shyly came to my wife, Karen. The girl was heartbroken by the way that television stood between her and her parents, and between them and God. She was convinced that she was not as important to her mom and dad as were their TV sets. This teen actually wanted to get closer to her parents. But the way that TV was used in her home made true closeness an all-but-impossible dream. Most disturbing of all, her parents would be surprised, even angry if anyone were to suggest that maybe TV rated too high a priority in their average Christian family.

If someone in your home wants some uninterrupted time to share some problems or feelings, do you sometimes respond with, "Shhh, I'm watching TV"? That phrase is a strong indication that television is the basic presence and all others are considered interruptive. When we put TV ahead of people, it reveals a lot about the value we place on others.

Remember, children learn from parental example -- whether that example is lethargy or loving involvement, harsh words or gentle speech.

Will you give prime time to your family, friends, church? Make a commitment for just one or two weeks to improve your viewing habits. It's really true, you can get the best out of TV, without letting TV get the best out of you!

Reprinted from Christianity Today magazine

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Genuine original

Only one being is utterly self-existent, and it's not us.

'God has no origin," said Novatian, and it is precisely this concept of no-origin which distinguishes That-which-is-God from whatever is not God.

Origin is a word that can apply only to things created. When we think of anything that has origin we are not thinking of God. God is self-existent, while all created things necessarily originated somewhere at some time. Aside from God, nothing is self-caused.

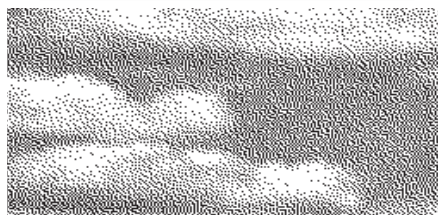
By our effort to discover the origin of things we confess our belief that everything was made by Someone who was made of none. By familiar experience we are taught that everything "came from" something else. Any person or thing may be at once both caused and the cause of someone or something else; and so, back to the One who is the cause of all but is himself caused by none.

The child by his question, "Where did God come from?", is unwittingly acknowledging his creaturehood. Already the concept of cause and source and origin is firmly fixed in his mind. He knows that everything around him came from something other than itself, and he simply extends that concept upward to God. The little philosopher is thinking in true creature-idiom and, allowing for his lack of basic information, he is reasoning correctly. He must be told that God has no origin, and he will find this hard to grasp since it introduces a category with which he is wholly unfamiliar and contradicts the bent toward origin-seeking so deeply ingrained in all intelligent beings.

To think steadily of that to which the idea of origin cannot apply is not easy, if indeed it is possible at all. The human mind, being created, has an understandable uneasiness about the Uncreated. We do not find it comfortable to allow for the presence of One who is wholly outside of the circle of our familiar knowledge. We tend to be disquieted by the thought of One who does not account to us for his being, who is responsible to no one, who is self-existent, self-dependent and self-sufficient.

To admit that there is One who lies beyond us, who will not appear before the bar of our reason: this requires a great deal

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD



of humility, more than most of us possess, so we save face by thinking God down to our level, or at least down to where we can manage him.

It is not a cheerful thought that millions of us who live in a land of Bibles may yet pass our whole life on this earth without once having tried to think seriously about the being of God. Few of us have let our hearts gaze in wonder at the I AM, the self-existent Self, back of which no creature can think. Such thoughts are too painful for us. We prefer to think where it will do more good — about how to build a better mousetrap, for instance. And for this we are now paying a too heavy price in the secularisation of our religion and the decay of our inner lives.

Perhaps some puzzled Christian may at this juncture wish to inquire about the practicality of such concepts. "What possible meaning can the self existence of God have for me and others like me in a world such as this and in times such as these?" he may ask.

To this I reply that, because we are the handiwork of God, it follows that all our problems and their solutions are theological. Some knowledge of what kind of God it is who operates the universe is

indispensable to a sound philosophy of life and a sane outlook on the world scene. The much-quoted advice of Alexander Pope,

*Know then thyself,
presume not God to scan:*

The proper study of mankind is man, if followed literally, would destroy any possibility of man's ever knowing himself in any but the most superficial way. We can never know who or what we are till we know at least something of what God is. For this reason the self-existence of God is not a wisp of dry doctrine, academic and remote; it is in fact as near as our breath and as practical as the latest surgical technique.

For reasons known only to himself, God honoured man above all other beings by creating him in his own image. It is a solid theological fact, taught plainly throughout the sacred scriptures as a truth necessary to a right understanding of the Christian faith.

Man is a created being, a derived and contingent self, who of himself possesses nothing but is dependent each moment for his existence upon the One who created him after his own likeness. The fact of God is necessary to the fact of man.

Think God away and man has no ground of existence. That God is everything and man nothing is a basic tenet of Christian faith and devotion. Man is an echo of the original Voice, a reflection of the untreated Light. As a sunbeam perishes when cut off from the sun, so man apart from God would pass back into the void of nothingness from which he first leaped at the creative call.

This extract is taken from A.W. Tozer: The Idea of the Holy (James Clarke, 1965).

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Cinema Watch

I am Sam

Reviewed by Phil Campbell

Sam Dawson is retarded. He's also a single parent. So what happens when his bubbling daughter turns seven — and matches Sam's mental age? That's the dilemma posed in the new movie *I Am Sam*, starring Sean Penn, Michelle Pfeiffer and Dakota Fanning.

Penn's performance is reminiscent of Dustin Hoffman's earlier *Rain Man*.

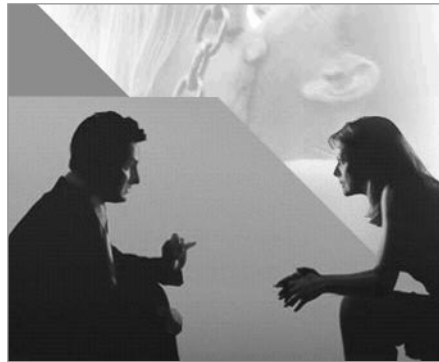
Sometimes vacant, sometimes poignant, and at times funny, Penn is always entirely believable. Seven year-old Dakota Fanning is simply outstanding as little Lucy Diamond, and Pfeiffer turns in a sharp performance as Sam's driven lawyer Rita Harrison. The moral subtext of the movie is clear — just who is the "normal" parent? High-performance lawyer Rita, bulldozing everyone around her and ignoring her son Willie ... or Sam?

There are plenty of moving moments — take plenty of tissues — but they're not always where you'd expect. As the story unfolds, Sam is declared an unsuitable parent and Lucy is removed from his care by force. At that point, you'll probably be feeling angry. For me, the lump-in-the-throat moments come with unexpected neighbourly kindness — neighbour Annie reminding Sam that "two hourly feeds"

will mean giving baby Lucy the bottle "at the start of Hogan's Heroes, I Dream of Genie and I Love Lucy"; or Sam's equally disabled friends scraping together cash for Lucy's first school shoes. Then there's Lucy, reassuring Sam that she doesn't mind that he's different to other school dads. "Don't worry — I'm lucky. No-one else's daddy comes to the park."

When the crunch comes, the timing couldn't be worse. The stern Department of Family Services social worker arrives during Lucy's surprise seventh birthday party; after a brief and confusing family court hearing, Lucy is taken into foster care.

Cleverly, the script avoids stereotypes. The bad guys aren't malicious. They're just trying to do what's best for a seven-year-old girl who's outgrown her dad — at



Sean Penn with Michelle Pfeiffer

times, they even show compassion. And the problems are real. Lucy refuses to read anything that Sam can't read with her, and her school paintings show she's casting herself as the primary "carer" in the family.

But how can someone like Sam get a fair hearing in court? "The normal confidentiality agreements will be waived," bustles his assessing psychologist. "Do you understand?" Or course he doesn't understand. Here's a guy whose ambition is to be promoted to actually making the coffee in Starbucks, rather than cleaning the tables — "always set your dreams high."

And where do you find a suitable character witness when your best friends are equally handicapped? Where do you find a lawyer?

Enter, at this point, Michelle Pfeiffer's Rita. She talks fast, she eats fast, and she drives fast. The only reason she'll take Sam's case is to prove to her colleagues that she takes her regulation load of pro-bono cases.

It's the contrast with Rita that makes the ultimate point of the movie. As she softens and learns some key life-lessons from Sam, we're confronted with some stark questions. Sam refuses to eat yellow vegetables alongside green ones, while Rita orders a double-decaf skinny-latte. Who's fussy? Sam can't multiply two simple numbers, while Rita simply has no time to spend with her own seven-year old son. Who's the ineffective parent? And Rita ultimately sees the truth. "You don't understand. You're perfect," cries Sam. "No, it's you who doesn't understand," says Rita. "People like me feel lost and stupid and ugly. People like me have husbands who sleep around and sons who hate them."

Overall, it's top marks all round for a movie that will make you laugh and make you cry, while raising some key questions about what it means to be a truly valuable human being. The movie is liberally sprinkled with Beatles songs, and sums itself up in one famous line... "All you need is love." It's also a great illustration of an earlier famous line, this one from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8: "Knowledge puffs up ... but love builds up."

Phil Campbell is Culture Watch editor
For more information see the website
www.iamsammovie.com

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Pilgrim's progress

An Australian in Singapore sees the gospel advancing.

What should I do when my new mother in law serves food and tells me that it has been offered to idols?

How far can I participate in ancestor worship?"

Welcome to life at Orchard Road Presbyterian Church (ORPC) Singapore!

Singapore is a country that is all hustle and bustle. Constant construction announces a city-state that has been on the go since independence in 1965. Economic progress, social stability, cleanliness, and personal safety are remarkable. Life here is pleasant, stimulating and a fascinating mixture of east meets west.

ORPC started as a Kirk of the Scots in 1856 and is now a thoroughly Asian church. About 3000 people gather weekly in buildings amid the national retail, government, legal and financial hubs. A pastoral and support staff of 30 serves English, Mandarin, Indonesian and German language congregations, with a constant battle to find rooms for all the activities. A branch church was recently planted and it now is overcrowded.

Christianity continues to grow in Singapore, especially among the young and well educated. Much disciple making happens on campus and among men in National Service. We take advantage of our location to offer weeknight evangelistic Bible.

Most of our congregation are first generation Christians. This tends to mean high levels of zeal, but creates a need for solid Bible teaching. It also gives rise to questions about food offered to idols, ancestor worship, polygamy and the like. For me, this meant a steep learning curve as the issues of first-century Corinth come to life.

Singapore serves as a regional hub for many Christian bodies and there are constant movements of Christian workers for training, missionary work and such like. Consider the case of Christopher who came to Singapore for a leadership course. He is a Bangladeshi "untouchable", whose Hindu family pulls dead cows from the river, eats the meat and sells the hides to make a tiny income.

Christopher is now a pastor with 70



**David
Burke**

churches of untouchables under his care. A colleague and I took Christopher to eat. Mid-way through the meal he started crying. On inquiry, he said that he never imagined he would sit at table with people like us and be accepted as an equal. It was a wonderful opportunity to speak about equality in Christ. We made sure we took him out often.

Some things remain Presbyterian anywhere. Committees meet, minutes are taken and motions are passed! There are, however, some differences. The annual synod meets for a total of 12 hours over three nights. Presbytery elects an executive committee that attends to all business. A monthly meeting of presbytery co-workers allows for times of encouragement and learning. Elders and deacons are elected for three-year terms with a compulsory sabbatical after two terms. All this tends to refresh church leadership.

Someone asked how ministry in ORPC is different from Australia. The basics are the same: love the Lord, his word and his people. As always, it is the

privilege of working at the intersection of grace and life that makes ministry worthwhile. Consider these stories:

An American executive in town was wandering up Orchard Road on a Sunday night. The lights, bell and pipe organ attracted him to church. Sometime later he wrote saying how he had left his wife and abandoned the Lord before coming to Singapore. Something happened that Sunday night and he had gone home, reconnected with the Lord and returned to his family.

An elder's wife started an outreach Bible study for the maids from regional countries. As a result a particular maid converted to Christianity. Our last question in the final baptismal interview was this: Are you ready to die for Jesus when you return home? With just a slight pause, the answer came: Yes.

Such noble courage from a little one of the kingdom is a sobering reminder of just how far we are from Australia and how close to Asia.

David & Glenda Burke have been in Singapore since June 1999. David is Senior Minister at ORPC and was formerly NSW Director of Christian Education. Glenda is head of English at the Australian International School.

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prayer

JULY

- 21 Historic St Johns church, Hobart (1840); about 260 communicants and adherents, 100 younger folk and 7 elders; Robert and Susan White.
- 22 North West N.S.W. Bingara home mission station including Dellungra; about 45 communicants and adherents, 7 younger folk and 2 elders; Henry and Penelope Pennings.
- 23 A quarter century has passed since the formation of the Uniting Church and the continuation of the Presbyterian Church of Australia as a much smaller denomination than before. Pray for faithful biblical teaching and spiritual revival in both.
- 24 The Arabic Evangelical home mission station at Toongabbie in Western Sydney; about 55 communicants and adherents, 60 younger folk and 2 elders; vacant.
- 25 Presbytery of Moree, N.S.W.; 5 parishes and 3 home mission stations totalling 20 congregations with 880 communicants and adherents, 1 overseas missionary, 1 P.I.M. patrol padre, 1 retired minister; Elizabeth Styles, Clerk.
- 26 Peter and Anna Gobbo and the 7 elders of Griffith parish in the N.S.W. Riverina with about 95 communicants and adherents and 6 younger folk.
- 27 Dalby parish on Queensland's Darling Downs, including Cecil Plains and Tara; Roland and Joanne Lowther, about 250 communicants and adherents, 230 younger folk and 13 elders.
- 28 The local and wider contribution to church life by women's organizations (P.W.A., P.W.M.U etc) and men's organizations.
- 29 Bruce and Jill Murray of Hurstville, Sydney workers for over 20 years with Campus Crusade (previously L.I.F.E.). They are involved in training church people in evangelism, discipleship and leadership.
- 30 Mark Adams exit appointee at "New Life" (Gunghalin- North Belconnen) parish. A.C.T and Kathryn, with congregations in Melba and Ngunnawal; the communicants and

adherents , younger folk and elders.

- 31 The severe drought in eastern Australia — pray for a turning to the Lord (2 Chronicles 7:13-14), relief and the ministry of local pastors and P.I.M. patrol padres to all those affected.

AUGUST

- 1 Mt Gambier parish, southern S.A. including Glenburnie, Allendale, O.B.Flat and Nelson (Vic.); about 200 communicants and adherents, 60 younger folk and 13 elders; Rod and Sandra Waterhouse.
- 2 The vacant N.S.W. Illawarra parish of Unanderra; about 60 communicants and adherents, 10 younger folk and 3 elders; uphold the moderator and all who preach.
- 3 Pray for Les Percy of Zillmere, Brisbane, national coordinator of Middle East Reformed Fellowship, for Victor Attalah and the Cyprus-based training, radio evangelism and diaconal (relief) work of MERF.
- 4 Presbytery of Penola, S.A.; 4 parishes totalling 11 congregations with 508 communicants and adherents, 1 under jurisdiction ; Brian Johnson, Clerk.
- 5 Talua Ministry Training Centre, Santo, Vanuatu. The Williamsons have had to return early for family reasons, but Andy Williamson, Bill Lutton and others will be conducting short intensive courses; pray for these and a 2003 appointment.
- 6 Temora parish south western N.S.W.; about 70 communicants and adherents, 6 younger folk and 7 elders; Fred and Hilary Monckton.
- 7 Veteran W.E.C. missionaries (35 years) Robert and Beverley Harvey from Annerley, Brisbane responsible for all W.E.C. work in Latin America.
- 8 All our folk involved in prison ministries including Keith King (Goulburn N.S.W), Barry Porter, Ruth Owen and George and Min Lee (Vic.)
- 9 Gisborne home mission station, western Melbourne; about 25 communicants and adherents, 25 younger folk and 3 elders; vacant.
- 10 Albury parish with congregations at Lavington, N.S.W. and Cookinburra, Vic.;

Bruce and Jan Gorton, about 175 communicants and adherents, 45 younger folk and 10 elders.

- 11 The translation and literacy work of Robyn Davies fom Strathfield N.S.W. and her Swedish partner Elizabeth Fritzell in the Ramoainna language of the Duke of York Islands, P.N.G..
- 12 Como parish southern Sydney; about 30 communicants and adherents, 3 younger folk and 3 elders; Richard and Dianne Lee.
- 13 The 8 parishes and 10 home mission stations of the Presbytery of Darling Downs, Qld totalling some 43 congregations with 1485 communicants and adherents, 1 assembly clerk, 1 school chaplain, 3 retired ministers, 3 under jurisdiction; David Knott Clerk
- 14 Western Newcastle (Wallsend) home mission station; about 70 communicants and adherents, 25 younger folk and 8 elders; Ross and Sue Tucker.
- 15 Pray for the infant church in Mongolia. There were only 4 Christians in 1989, but are now some 9000 in 160 congregations or groups. They are still only 0.7% of the 2.6 million population, while 42 % are non religious, 31 % shamanist and 23 % Buddhist.
- 16 Castle Hill parish north western Sydney; about 155 communicants and adherents , 12 younger folk and 11 elders; Ron and Jackie Keith.
- 17 St Georges, Geelong parish; about 95 communicants and adherents , 10 younger folk and 9 elders; Graeme and Marilyn Weber.
- 18 Pray for the 20 million people (similar to Australia) of Mozambique, East Africa, desperately poor after 470 years of colonialism and 30 of civil war. 58 % profess Christianity (numbers doubled between 1988 and 2000), 22 % traditional religions and 18% Islam.
- 19 Gregory and Helen Ward and the 3 elders of the Caboolture parish north of Brisbane with about 70 communicants and adherents and 20 younger folk.
- 20 Kingsford — Maroubra parish eastern Sydney, including a Chinese congregation; about 50 communicants and adherents , 40 younger folk and 4 elders; Johnnie and Ellen Li.

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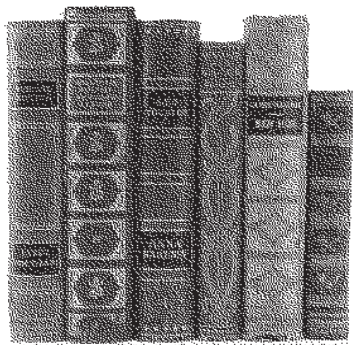
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books



On Eagles' Wings

Beryl Boyce

Sydney: Southwood Press, 2002

Reviewed by Jenni Smith

On Eagles' Wings is a sensitively written account by a mother of her family's journey in the days and months following the death of her son Matt.

Matt Boyce, 21, was in Canada on a family holiday when he was injured in a traffic accident. I remember praying for his family when the news came through to us at a conference for Christian teachers that, after two weeks in intensive care in a coma, Matt had died. His father, Ted Boyce, is the principal of Pacific Hills Christian School, and Matt, who had a strong personal faith in Christ, was one of five children.

Like the apostle John, Beryl Boyce tells us her purpose in writing: "This book was not written to tell you about the boy Matthew, although you will have gained an understanding of him through reading it. It was not written to aid me in working through my grief although, as a by-product, it has been helpful. It was written to tell of *God's sovereignty, faithfulness and love*" (italics mine).

She shares with openness and honesty, not only the events of Matt's illness and death but how she and her family coped with their grief. Beryl displays a strong faith in her Saviour and Redeemer who called her son Matthew "home". Throughout this record of grieving, we are reminded again and again of a Sovereign Lord who is in control of his world and his people. Beryl shares how the Lord comforted and strengthened her, and encouraged her through his Word. Her family stood firm in the knowledge that their son and brother was in a better place, with his Lord Jesus.

Beryl's testimony is powerful, reminding us again of the great truths of God's love and care for his people, expressed in verses like Psalm 139:16, Romans 8:28 and Isaiah 40:30-31. This book is soaked in Scripture and is thus of great encouragement to each of us, as it reminds us to rest in God's love and to look forward to eternal life in heaven with him.

In Beryl's words, "the pain of separation is huge, but it is controlled by the peace that God gives, and the glimpses of pure joy awaiting all who love him".

Jenni Smith worships at Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

God The Evidence: The reconciliation of faith and reason in a postsecular world

Patrick Glynn

Prima Publishing, 1999, California

Reviewed by Tracy Gordon

A generation or more ago, secular thinkers were filled with faith in reason and convinced that the scientific worldview was destined to replace the religious one. What our century has experienced instead is a disenchantment with reason, the collapse of the Enlightenment's secular and rational faith ... God is re-emerging in Western intellectual life at the very moment when reason appears to have hit the end of the road," writes Patrick Glynn.

Glynn, associate director and scholar at the George Washington University Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies in Washington D.C., unpacks recent discoveries in the fields of physics, medicine and psychology, which point away from a general theory of chaos and randomness, and towards a purposeful Creator. The process mirrors his personal journey from atheism and nihilism to faith in God.

Glynn examines some of the challenges to religious belief in the 20th century, in the form of the theories and writings of Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Benjamin Spock, among others. He shows how radically the intellectual landscape has changed — starting with the ramifications of the anthropic principle (the anthropic principle basically refers to evidence that the universe has been fine-tuned to support life).

"Modern thinkers assumed that science would reveal the universe to be ever more random and mechanical; instead it has dis-

covered unexpected new layers of intricate order that bespeak an almost unimaginably vast master design," writes Glynn.

Glynn does not claim that anyone can reason their way to faith in God, but rather he seeks to show how reason no longer stands in the way to belief in God, which it once did.

I found the book to be a perceptive and fascinating read. Glynn does not assume readers are scientifically or medically trained, so the book is ideal for those who have an interest in broadening their understanding of the changing scientific and intellectual landscape, and how significant current research is supporting the idea of God as the Creator and Sustainer.

One would only hope and pray that, as the book has already reached national bestseller status in the United States, it would cause many seekers with a restless heart, to find their resting place in God.

Tracy Gordon is a Sydney journalist. She worships at Ashfield Presbyterian Church.

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A nice distinction

Saviour, Lord — but possibly a difficult dinner guest.

Contrary to all the canons of common sense, I still play competition squash. In such a capacity (or incapacity), I am often faced with the problem of how to respond to the frequent outbursts of foul language which abound in sport — and the general community — today. One night I was umpiring a match in which a woman in my team must have broken the record for the number of expletives to be uttered in one match.

That week I drew up a list of words that she could use whenever she lost a point, and presented it to her the following week. She took it all in good humour, and made a genuine effort to curb her tongue. However, worse followed when another woman bellowed out Christ's name when she lost a point.

She quickly looked up at me, and saw that I had winced. She then tried to make light of the incident: "I meant to say 'Jesus Christ was a nice man'." She smiled, but I winced again, and responded: "Stop it, you're making it worse."

At the end of the match we talked for a while. I suppose I was a little provocative, but I tried to make the point that Jesus never claimed to be a nice man. In fact, to see him as a nice man is to miss entirely what he was saying and doing. By the end of the conversation, alas, she was more bewildered than she was at the beginning. She seemed certain that, as a clergyman, my task in life was to convince people that Jesus was nice.

In modern parlance, "nice" is a common enough compliment, but it hardly seems the right word to apply to Christ. A nice person is tolerant and friendly, and does not offend people. But Christ says startling things. He tells that if we call our brother a fool, we shall be liable to the hell



Peter Barnes

of fire (Mt. 5:22). Also, it is better for us to pluck out our right eye or cut off our right hand than to sin and be thrown into hell (Mt. 5:29-30). If we are to be like our Father in heaven, we must be perfect (Mt. 5:48). If we do not forgive others, we will not be forgiven (Mt. 6:14-15).

We are to love our enemies (Mt. 5:44), but we are not to cast our pearls before swine (Mt. 7:6). Jesus spoke in parables, not to make difficult theology more digestible for Palestinian peasants, but to keep the non-elect from understanding the things of the kingdom (Mk 4:11-12). On one occasion, Jesus implied that a Syrophenician woman was a Gentile dog (Mk 7:27). On another occasion, he told his followers that unless they hated father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even their own lives, they could not be his true disciples (Lk 14:26). Strangely enough, the Prince of Peace says that he came not to bring peace on earth but a sword (Mt. 10:34).

Just after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, he, with the best of intentions, declared that Jesus would never go to the cross. Jesus' response is hardly nice: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt. 16:21-23). We are told not to

fear men, but to fear him who has power to cast us into hell (Lk 12:4-5).

And so it goes on: the first shall be last, and the last first (Mk 10:31), many are called, but few are chosen (Mt. 22:14), the Pharisees are addressed as "you brood of vipers" (Mt. 23:33), and at the Last Judgment some shall be received into the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world while others shall be cast into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:31-46).

Not only does Jesus say strange things, but he does some strange things. Once, he cursed a fig tree and it withered (Mk 11:14, 20-21). When he heard that Lazarus, the one he loved, was dying, he waited two days before going to see him (John 11:1-36). He refused to answer those who asked him by what authority he cleansed the temple (Mk 11:33). None of this seems altogether *nice*. A man who was simply nice would not say and do those sorts of things.

In C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy hear from Mr and Mrs Beaver about the great Lion, Aslan, who is the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. At first they are rather fearful about the prospect of meeting the King of Beasts, and they ask whether he is safe. Mr Beaver gives the superb answer: "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

So it is with Christ — he is good, perfectly good, holy, and without sin. To praise him as a nice man is condescending drivel. The only appropriate response is to bow the knee and confess him as Lord.

Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.

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