

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

august 2005

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Evidence for design



J.P. Moreland • Mortal terror • The God brand

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# AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian

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## SCIENCE

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Mind over matter: J.P. Moreland .....  | 4  |
| No contradiction: Greta Gaut .....     | 9  |
| God's fingerprints: Andrew Moody ..... | 11 |
| Made for life: Joe Mock .....          | 13 |

## BIBLE STUDY

|   |    |
|---|----|
| God knows                                   |    |
| 20 Bible studies in 1 Corinthians 1-7 ..... | 15 |

## NEWS

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Across Australia ..... | 21 |
| Around the World ..... | 22 |
| On the Agenda .....    | 23 |

## CULTURE WATCH

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Movie watch: Million Dollar Baby: Bryson Smith ..... | 25 |
|--|----|

## SOCIETY

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| The God brand: Barney Zwartz ..... | 26 |
|------------------------------------|----|

## LONDON BOMBINGS

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Mortal terror: William Taylor ..... | 27 |
|-------------------------------------|----|

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| LETTERS ..... | 29 |
|---------------|----|

|              |    |
|--------------|----|
| PRAYER ..... | 30 |
|--------------|----|

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| BOOKS ..... | 31 |
|-------------|----|

Westminster Confession of Faith Study Book: Joseph Pipa

Worship: J.C. Ryle

Lady Jane Grey: Faith Cook

Australia's Religious Communities: Philip Hughes

## REFLECTION

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Mueller's secret: John Piper ..... | 32 |
|------------------------------------|----|

## editorial

One of the most striking features of Western thought since 1859 has been the way in which Darwin's ideas about evolutionary biology have assumed a significance that far exceeds the realm of animal physiology. Indeed, some modern Darwinists have become so confident in their views that they cannot conceive of any alternative explanation for the origins of life. Richard Dawkins, Britain's leading evolutionist, has written in *The Blind Watchmaker* that "it is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid, or insane – or wicked...".

This naturalistic way of thinking, which assumes that nature is "all that is or ever was or ever will be", has spilled over into many other areas of life. One of these is the area of theology. In his book, *After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, John Haught says: "Any thoughts we may have of God after ... Charles Darwin (1809-1882) can hardly remain the same as before." It is Haught's claims that make the issue of evolution so urgent for the church.

While many Christians may be weary of the evolution debate, it is essential that it continues. Why? Because the idea of evolution has assumed a present cultural importance that exceeds its scientific credentials. Evolution, by which I mean random natural selection as opposed to mere variation in a species, now serves the purpose of justifying the materialist "creation story" without any need to refer to God as a designer.

For the last century Christians have struggled with the concept of naturalistic evolution. Recently, a group of Christian scientists who subscribe to Intelligent Design have proposed a way forward that begins by demonstrating that the philosophical assumptions of Darwinism are scientifically unproven. Specifically, they claim that no one has yet been able to show how the mechanism of evolution, based on chance and natural selection, can produce complex living organisms.

While Christians may be divided about evolution, one fact that is non-negotiable is that any proposed scientific explanation for the origin of life must be faithful to Scripture and supportive of the idea that God's design can be seen in it. For this reason the Intelligent Design movement represents a good point from which to advance the debate.

Peter Hastie <sup>ap</sup>

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# Mind over matter

*Intelligent design is challenging evolution among scientists.*



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With degrees in philosophy, theology and chemistry, Dr Moreland has taught theology and philosophy at several schools throughout the USA. He is author or co-author of many books, including the prize-winning *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*; *Christianity and the Nature of Science*; *Scaling the Secular City*; *Does God Exist?*; *Immortality: The Other Side of Death*; and *The Life and Death Debate: Moral Issues of Our Times*. He is co-editor of *Christian Perspectives on Being Human* and *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*.

In recent years Dr Moreland has published extensively on the subject of a Christian philosophy of science and has played a leading role in providing philosophical support for the “intelligent design” movement. He is a Fellow of the Discovery Institute ([www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org)) and has written/edited *The Creation*



**J.P. Moreland**  
talks to  
**Peter Hastie**

*Hypothesis and Three Views on Creation and Evolution*. He has published with William Lane Craig a major work on naturalism entitled *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*.

Dr Moreland served with Campus Crusade for 10 years, planted two churches and has spoken on more than 200 college campuses.

**Should modern science bear the blame for so many people doubting the existence of a personal Creator, or are there other reasons?**

Many people today don't realise that the so-called modern doubt about the existence of a personal Creator really goes back to ancient times. For instance, take the ancient Greeks. They didn't believe that the world had a beginning. They were convinced that it had always been there. While both Plato and Aristotle believed in

a supernatural designer, they did not believe in a creation out of nothing. So the Christian idea of an infinite-personal God who creates the world *ex nihilo* was unique in the ancient world.

People often forget that leading thinkers throughout the ages have usually believed in an intelligent designer of some kind. However, the fact that God is a personal being who creates the world out of nothing is a unique Christian idea. Non-Christians have had varying degrees of difficulty coming to terms with it. So it has always been a problem in that sense. However, I admit that the difficulties have become more pronounced in modern times, especially since Darwin's theory of evolution has gained in popularity.

Nevertheless, we should remember that while Darwin's theories have given renewed fervour to those who oppose the doctrine of a personal Creator, people have been hostile to the doctrine since ancient times. Why? Because the notion of the existence of a designer with a special purpose for the universe – even if He didn't bring it into existence out of nothing – is deeply troubling to many. It raises

the possibility that some of us, or indeed all of us, may be out of step with the Creator and thus face a judgment.

### **Why is the issue of whether there is a personal Creator behind the universe so important?**

I think there are two matters that make it important. The first involves worldview struggle. The primary worldview that western culture is fighting today is naturalism. The naturalist has a “creation myth” – the Darwinist theory of evolution – that he believes renders Christian theism superfluous. The Darwinist says: “If you want to believe in a personal Creator, that’s your business. But there’s absolutely no need to because we can explain how life began without one.” The Darwinist claim means that the Christian needs to be concerned about whether there is a personal Creator and how He brought the world into existence. If Christianity is to gain a hearing in our culture, it’s important for the Christian worldview to show the inadequacies of the naturalist creation story.

The second reason why this issue is important is because we have a real interest in affirming the historical credibility of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. It is crucial to Christian theology that there is a literal Adam and Eve and a literal fall. The apostle Paul certainly thought so when he referred to Jesus as the second Adam who came to remedy the consequences of a space-time fall.

It is also important that Christians can affirm the historicity of biblical events such as the flood of Noah. If such events are myth, then we have no rational grounds for believing that God can intervene in our world. If Noah’s flood never happened, can we speak with any confidence of a future judgment? I think it’s vital for Christians to show that Christianity is more than a series of timeless truths; it’s a set of truths rooted in historical events and the great acts of God in history. It is essential to the truthfulness of Christianity that we can affirm the historicity of those events. When modern science raises some alleged problems with the Christian view of origins and the historicity of the Bible, then the Christian community must find effective ways to respond to these claims or face the possibility of being branded “irrational” and no longer taken seriously.

### **Do Christians have a duty to try to integrate science and theology?**

Yes, the Christian has a duty to try to

integrate Christianity with any source of ideas that are accepted by the culture he is seeking to reach. If Christians are trying to reach an animist culture where shamans and witch doctors play a key role in controlling and disseminating the basic ideas for that community, then it’s important that Christians critique and interact with those ideas.

If Christians are trying to reach western culture, then they need to interact with those who have established the dominant mindset in the modern world. In this case it is naturalistic scientists who control the intellectual framework of today’s world. Science has become the authority for people in western culture. The problem is that while there are some aspects of scientific thought that actually support Christian ideas, there are aspects that raise serious problems that need to be answered. The challenge that faces us all, Christians and non-Christians alike, is to live with a holistic worldview that is not riddled and compromised with all sorts of inconsistencies.

***The naturalist has a “creation myth” – the Darwinist theory of evolution.***

### **Have Christians throughout the ages seen a responsibility to try and integrate Christianity with other forms of knowledge, especially the natural sciences?**

Yes, leading Christian thinkers have tried to integrate theology with other aspects of knowledge. For example, Augustine made just this point when he said that it’s important for Christians to show that the Scriptures do not contradict what can be demonstrated about the nature of things from credible sources. Augustine’s point was that we have information about reality from other reliable sources outside of Scripture and we need to interact with that information and show that the Scriptures are not refuted by sound evidence. This is a challenge that Christians have had to face in every age as new knowledge becomes available.

### **Have scientists always been sceptical about the truth claims of Christianity, or is that a more recent development?**

Modern scientific scepticism about Christianity is quite recent. Indeed, science was nurtured in a context where Christian theology actually helped to get it started as a major movement. The idea that the world was created in an orderly fashion by a rational mind provided a key motivation for investigating the natural world. The earliest scientists were Christians who believed that the natural world was discoverable by intellectual enquiry. They reasoned that since the world was contingent and not a necessary being (where you could learn what it was like just by abstract principles), you could engage in experiments to learn about the world. This was a distinctively Christian concept. Science was no accident; it was born within a culture that had embraced a Christian theological framework.

Until about 100 years ago, the vast majority of scientists were Christian theists. I would hazard a guess that the majority of scientists today are theists. I think some fields like biology and anthropology tend to have fewer Christians in them. But this is not true in disciplines like astronomy, physics, chemistry and medicine. I think I would be on safe ground in saying that many of these scientists are theists. Whether they are Christian theists would be a different question altogether. Nevertheless, I think most of them would be believers in God. For example, I think the vast majority of medical scientists and doctors who look at the human body are more likely to believe in God. However, I suspect that biologists who focus on death and struggle in the natural world tend to be preoccupied by the problem of evil and allow that to determine their attitude to theism.

### **Why have theism and the idea of special creation come under such attack in the last century?**

The main issue in the Darwinist revolution in 1859, when Darwin published *Origin of the Species*, was not the scientific evidence. People need to understand that. Darwin did not discover any evidence that creationists of his day did not know about.

As a matter of fact, it was widely acknowledged that creationists explained the data better than evolutionists, at least initially. For example, creationists predicted that there would be massive gaps in the fossil record; Darwin predicted that there would be hundreds or thousands of transition points. We now know that

Darwin was wrong, even as he was in his own lifetime.

Another piece of evidence that creationists emphasised was the fact that the different parts of living systems, like the blood, the heart, the liver, all functioned interdependently so that they all needed the other parts of the body before any of them worked. The recent argument of irreducible complexity advanced by the biologist, Michael Behe, was originally raised in the 1850s and Darwinists were at a loss to explain, then as now, how you could evolve parts of a frog, one part at a time, if they all were interdependent and needed all the other parts to be there before they worked. I think this demonstrates that the success of the Darwinist revolution was not due to its explanatory power of the evidence. Darwinism has never been able to explain the problem of irreducible complexity.

Darwinism won because a shift in the philosophy of science occurred whereby theology was thrown out of the science lab altogether. What natural scientists wanted to do was rid themselves of the need to consult biblical theologians and scholars before they could do their work. They wanted to work entirely independently of any reference to God. Neil Gillespie wrote a book called *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation*, published by the University of Chicago Press. It is the standard book on the Darwinist revolution. Gillespie makes it very clear that the reason why Darwinism won out over Christianity was not because it had better scientific evidence in its favour, but because Darwin advanced the naturalistic methodology that you don't need to consult a divine being or rely upon theology to explain things in science. It was this methodological shift, and not the scientific evidence, that caused Darwinism to gain the upper hand in the battle of the worldviews.

**Who have been the main figures who laid the axe to the root of theistic science, and what did they say that was so persuasive?**

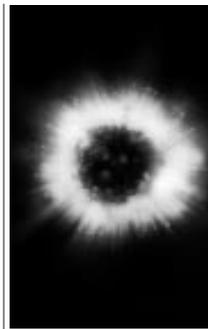
In my judgment as a professional philosopher, I think that the primary culprits have been Freud in psychology and Darwin in biology.

As far as physics and chemistry are concerned, these disciplines have continued by and large to be friendly towards theism. For example, you have one of the greatest scientists of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, a physicist, saying that the order of the world can only be

explained as evidence of some kind of divine mind. Einstein made the famous statement that "God doesn't play dice with the universe". He was a theist of some sort.

But Freud was different. He tried to say that belief in God was a projection of a need for a "father figure" – in other words, God didn't exist. Darwin's story is already well-known. Did they have a point? Yes, to some extent. They were right in saying that psychologists and biologists should be about the task of looking for natural mechanisms and scientific explanations for why certain things happen in the natural world. It is important to be able to explain accurately how

*I would hazard a guess that the majority of scientists today are theists.*



and why certain things take place, especially if there are natural explanations for these phenomena. For instance, I think Christians should be interested in collecting all the data that we can on the question of the age of the universe. This has been a troublesome issue and I think that there are always opportunities to learn something useful from our critics.

However, I do believe that Freud and Darwin went too far in claiming that the only causes that can be scientifically detected are natural causes. In psychology this has led to the banishment of the self. We know that the self is a mental subject that is not the brain. Yet in psychology the focus has been on the brain's role in behaviour to the neglect of the self and free agency. This is a major problem in understanding human personality. It leaves us with a very one-dimensional and inadequate view of personhood.

There is a similar problem with Darwinism. Darwinists cannot discover intelligent causes. So the useful activity of looking for a scientific understanding of the natural order has been used in an extremist fashion so that we are denied a complete understanding of why things are so. The Freuds and Darwins of this world are guilty of overstatement.

**In your opinion, has the Christian**

**community been effective in countering the claims of modern science?**

I think I would have to answer that question with a yes and no. I think the Christian community has been able to marshal some very powerful and persuasive arguments against naturalistic science – arguments which the scientific community has not been able to answer effectively. For instance, the Christian critique of materialist psychology has been overwhelmingly powerful. Again, I think that the Christian answers to naturalistic forms of cosmology that claim that the universe is eternal or that the universe began without a supernatural cause have been devastating.

I also believe that Christians have demonstrated the substantial failure of naturalistic attempts to explain the fine-tuning of the universe without a designer. Christians have also been extremely successful in showing the logical and scientific flaws in the theories of Darwinism. A number of very fine scholars have been involved in this area, like Phillip Johnson, Michael Behe and William Dembski. However, I think we need to continue the good work by developing our own positive models of research. This process has been under way for at least four or five years now, but it still has a way to go. So I believe that we've been successful in advancing powerful arguments against these theories.

However, I think that where the Christian community has been unsuccessful is that we have not managed to get the message that Darwinism is flawed out to the general public. I believe we have a major public relations problem and that's why magazines like *Australian Presbyterian* and others need to get the word out to the general public that naturalistic science has a number of significant shortcomings that are being powerfully exposed by Christian scientists and philosophers who themselves are at the cutting edge.

**Who are some of the major Christian critics of Darwinism who have done a good job in exposing the naturalistic theory of evolution?**

I think we all owe a huge debt to Phillip Johnson, the law professor from Berkeley University, whose book *Darwin on Trial* started a new revolution by challenging the evidentiary assumptions of Darwinism. The molecular biologist, Michael Behe, in his book *Darwin's Black Box* showed conclusively that the whole evolutionary argument has no plausible

explanation for the highly complex and simultaneous operation of thousands of different processes which are taking place in living organisms, the failure of any one of which would be fatal to the organism itself. This is known as the principle of irreducible complexity.

Other scholars who come to mind are Stephen Myer and William Dembski, both of whom have written on different aspects of intelligent design. Their writings have come out through Intervarsity Press. Another very powerful book which I would recommend to all biologists is Jonathan Well's *Icons of Evolution*, which in my view is unanswerable in its criticisms of Darwinism. Another scholar who ranks highly in my judgment is Walter Bradley, who investigates the mystery of the beginning of life.

### **Is the ground of the debate about creation and evolution shifting as we enter the 21st century?**

Yes, I believe the ground is shifting in favour of special creation.

In recent years we have seen some interesting developments in cosmology where scientists and philosophers are now conceding that the universe really did have a beginning. Again, there is a growing recognition that the phenomenon of irreducible complexity means that the likelihood of evolution being true is so small as to be impossible. Then the discovery in the late 1970s of the so-called "anthropic principle" (the fine-tuning of the universe to support human life) has added weight to the case for the existence of a personal Creator. All these discoveries have been refined into highly respected propositions that have serious theistic implications. Their combined force has acted as a wedge that is splitting apart the theory of evolution as it was proposed by Darwin.

Another interesting development has come in the area of information-theory. I believe that the identification of information as a unique category of life, which is different from ordered randomness, is an area of research that is yielding some powerful results which, again, point to a personal Creator. I believe that the intelligent design literature has become so powerful that it is now a force with its own momentum. You can tell the strength of its impact by the increasing hostility and shrillness of the opposition.

### **Can you give us some examples?**

Yes, I think an interesting one that happened only recently was the sacking of Dr Rick Sternberg, the editor of the

Smithsonian Museum's journal, *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*. This is an independent and prestigious scientific publication. Dr Sternberg, who holds two PhDs in biology, accepted an article by Dr Stephen Meyer, who has a doctorate from Cambridge, on information-theory in the field of biology. Dr Sternberg had the article checked for publication by several academic referees who said that it was fine. However, when it was published evolutionists went hysterical. Dr Sternberg was sacked. I think the whole episode shows how threatening the intelligent design movement has become. Dr Meyer has said that many scientists are secretly sympathetic to intelligent design but are frightened by the sort of reprisals that took place at the Smithsonian Museum.

*The intelligent design literature has become so powerful that it is now a force with its own momentum.*

### **What are some of the ways that Christians have tried to come to terms with modern science, and how successful are these various approaches?**

There are essentially three attempts by Christians to come to terms with science. The first of these could be called the "complementarian approach". This is the model where we allow the natural sciences to say whatever they want to say and then Christians accommodate themselves to this by saying, "theology doesn't conflict the science; it just gives meaning to it all". This is essentially the view taken by Christians who are theistic evolutionists. It all boils down to this: as a Christian you accept evolution, but you say God did it so that He could have beings with whom He could have fellowship. Christians who follow this model look to the Bible for theological meaning and ethics, but they do not regard it as a reliable source of historical facts. Personally, I think this is an inadequate approach, but many Christians have adopted it.

The second approach among Christians is what I describe as the "young-earth creation approach". I have a deep respect for this position because those who hold it take the Bible very seriously, but I believe that they that have failed to distinguish between the

really core issues and the secondary ones in the debate. Young-earth creationists have a rather open-and-shut view. If you don't hold to their position, if for example you are a progressive creationist, they tend to treat you as though you are on the other side. I sense that the young-earth people believe that if you compromise on any one of the points of their model you are as good as a theistic evolutionist.

Personally, I think the best way to approach the topic is to opt for the middle ground. I would call this a progressive creationist, intelligent design model. I prefer not to get hung up on the age question. It is a second-order issue. The most important thing for now is to concentrate on the big issue by driving a wedge into naturalism through establishing the existence of an intelligent designer. Once we have done that, we can then move on to the more detailed biblical questions.

### **What is it about modern naturalistic science that makes it so hostile to Christianity?**

The hostility of naturalistic scientists to Christian truth-claims is completely unjustified, and here's why.

Ask the average scientist if he knows anything at all about Christian truth-claims in the area of science and he will be forced to admit that he does not. I have been doing this now in public debates for 35 years. I ask these scientists: "Would you please tell us what you consider are the four or five best arguments on the side of the intelligent design/creationist movement? Would you also list for us the top scholars who have advocated this argument, and some of the best books that you have read that promote these positions?" You know what? They are never able to answer any of those questions.

But it's a completely different story with the intelligent design people. They know the naturalistic literature like the back of their hand. They know exactly what their opponents are saying. But the naturalists are always stuck for answers. I believe that if you can't give a simple answer to the questions that I have asked them, then that is proof that they are rejecting a theory without knowing what it says.

### **Can modern science satisfactorily account for the existence of the universe and life?**

No, it can't. In fact modern science has to presuppose time and the existence of

the universe before it can even begin to explain anything. In other words, science can only begin to explain its understanding of reality *after* science has already assumed a range of fundamental beliefs about the universe.

For instance, scientists assume that the senses are reliable and give accurate information about a world that exists independently of the mind. Science also assumes that the mind is rational and that the universe is rational in such a way that the mind can know it. It also assumes that the laws of logic are true, that numbers exist, that language has meaning and that truth exists and involves some sort of correspondence between theories and the world. Further, modern science assumes certain moral values before it can begin to operate. For instance, science assumes that experiments should be reported honestly and that truth-telling is a virtue. Since science must accept all these assumptions before it can do its work, we need to look elsewhere for a satisfactory explanation for the existence of the universe. And that explanation is necessarily philosophical and points in the direction of theism. What this means is that science cannot give a satisfactory explanation of the very thing that it must presuppose before it can explain anything.

The other point I want to make is that science cannot give an adequate explanation for the origin of life for two reasons. First, it cannot explain how “information” (which implies organisation) arises in a purely random universe. Second, it is unable to explain how “consciousness” is derived from brute matter. Those are two things science cannot explain and that is why it has failed to explain the origin of life.

**How persuasive is the argument for God’s existence based on the apparent design of the universe?**

I believe the argument of intelligent design is powerful and persuasive on two grounds. First, I think it appeals to common sense. You don’t really have to convince the average person in our culture that there is a designer; it is obvious to them. My own father is a blue-collar worker and never went to college and studied science. Yet it is obvious to him from natural observation and from the incredible discoveries scientists have made about nature.

The second level at which the argument for intelligent design is compelling is the level of scholarship. A growing number of scholars are identifying them-

selves as theists because of the powerful new information that has been discovered about intelligent design in the last 25 years. I’m talking about the fine-tuning of the universe for the existence of human life, or what we call the anthropic principle. I’m talking about the big-bang theory, which indicates that the world had a beginning; I’m talking about the extraordinarily complex structure of even the simplest living cell. Until the recent discoveries of microbiology, people used to think that the cell was like a blob of jelly; but now we know that it is like an entire city with all types of factories in it. This means that the gap has widened significantly between living and non-living

***Far too many Christians have surrendered biblical/philosophical real estate too early.***

things. I could also talk about the complete absence of intermediate or transitional species in the fossil record. Then there’s the problem of how we account for the phenomenon of consciousness and moral responsibility from the point of view of psychology. Science can’t explain any of these occurrences from a purely naturalistic point of view. These latest discoveries of science provide powerful evidence that the Christian story of God as an intelligent designer is true.

**Why do Christians take such strong but differing positions on creation and evolution?**

The reason Christians take such a strong stance on the creation/evolution issue is that the early chapters of Genesis are crucial to redemption and the whole of Christian theology. Having a real Adam and Eve is essential to the plan of salvation. Both Jesus and Paul believed that Adam and Eve were historical people (Mt 19:3-6; Acts 17:26; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). So did the Gospel writers (Luke 3:38).

There are different views about how to harmonise Genesis 1-3 with scientific claims, especially when it comes to the age of the earth. For example, embracing the “young earth” creationist model would be a point of tension for me in my present understanding of the text of Genesis 1-3. There are differences of opinion on that issue and it has caused a lot of controversy within the church. At the moment I am inclined to the view that Adam and Eve were created miraculously by God in rela-

tively recent times, but that the universe itself is old. So, at the moment, I think we have an old earth with a literal Adam and Eve created recently, perhaps 10,000-20,000 years ago. I certainly don’t think that the Bible is teaching that humankind has been around for millions of years, it’s just that the jury’s still out for me on the age of the earth.

**What questions do we need to ask ourselves in order to come to a sensible understanding about how God created the world?**

I think the first thing we need to do is to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, we have to avoid the notion that just because a scientist made a certain claim, that that somehow attains gospel truth. I think there have been far too many Christians who have surrendered biblical/philosophical real estate too early. I think that’s a major problem with theistic evolutionists – they concede far too much territory unnecessarily. That’s a great danger.

On the other hand, I think we have to be careful about the way we read the early chapters of Genesis and that we don’t read into them more than is actually there. That means we have to be guided by what we understand is the purpose of these chapters. This isn’t as easy as it looks and explains why Christians take a variety of different positions on what Genesis 1-3 actually teaches. A good way to deal with this is to come up with an approach that shows how the scientific information affects the different interpretations of Genesis. I also believe that whatever interpretation of Genesis we embrace it must be justifiable on exegetical grounds alone. It has to be a plausible interpretation that treats the text fairly.

It is at this point that the scientific data can help us choose among plausible options. However, I do not believe that scientific data can allow us to read things into the text that cannot be plausibly understood. The Word always has priority over science. How do I decide what is plausible? I think the best way to do it would be to take the evangelical Old Testament scholarly community from faithful, credible theological institutions and ask them: “What do you think are our best options based on the exegetical grounds alone?” On this basis, I think we can live with Christians who have an “old-earth” position and those with a “young-earth” view. What I do not believe is a legitimate option is the view of theistic evolutionists. I cannot square that with the biblical text. aP

# No contradiction

*Avoid the four traps that put science and Christianity at odds.*

I am a Christian *and* I am a scientist. I am not a Christian first and a scientist second. My ability to do scientific work is not hampered by my Christian beliefs. Nor am I a scientist first and a Christian second. So my scientific discoveries don't compromise my ability to read and understand God's word. I am both a Christian and a scientist – the two are complementary and not in competition. Yet Christianity and science haven't always complemented each other in my life, and I know many people who feel that the two cannot function well together. Maybe you feel this way. Let me explain how I came to be a Christian scientist.

Maths and science were always my favourite subjects, and I earned my PhD in the branch of physiology known as neuroscience, the study of how nerves work. My work has been published in several scientific journals.

I studied the bowels of rats, looking at the nerves. As I made discoveries I grew more amazed at how complex rats are, not to mention humans. My wonder at the mind of God who designed all this grew. I saw the tiny nerve endings of spinal nerves connecting to the cells that tell the bowels what to do. I followed a nerve's axon through the different tissues in the large intestine to see where it would end. I watched a segment of bowel contracting and relaxing when the nerves were stimulated with electrical pulses. And, using different chemicals, I worked out which molecules the nerves activated to get the muscles of the bowel to work. To see God's handiwork in action at such a level of detail stimulated awe and worship.

I read widely to see if my work could help explain how human bowels work. I was startled at how similar many species are but also how unique they are. Seeing the diversity helped me see just how creative God is. His mind must be immense to come up with so much detail across so many animals. God lets us understand Him better through our scientific research. He also lets us understand ourselves better. My research challenged the understanding of the sympathetic nervous system and began to explain why



**Greta  
Gaut**

people suffering from irritable bowel syndrome get a hyperactive cramping bowel.

At that stage in my life I felt I had to fight to fit my science into my Christianity. I had to do mental gymnastics to fit my understanding of science into my understanding of the Bible. I was a Christian first and a scientist second.

At the end of my doctoral studies I decided to go to theological college. My research peers thought I had lost my mind! They feared I'd throw away my brain. But I had always wanted to study the Bible more deeply. When I got to college my fellow students thought it odd – science to theology? After completing a

Bachelor of Theology and Diploma of Divinity and Missions, I started work at Presbyterian Ladies' College in Croydon, Sydney, as school chaplain. The staff and students were confused at how I could be

**Scientific discussions usually have three components: facts, theories, and philosophical or religious statements.**

a science teacher *and* the chaplain. Most people thought the two had to compromise each other. I was even more disturbed at the way that most students felt they had to choose – science or Christianity?

You don't have to choose! Why not? Because the God who made the world and gave us the Bible *is the same God* who established and maintains the laws of science and gave us the brains to investigate



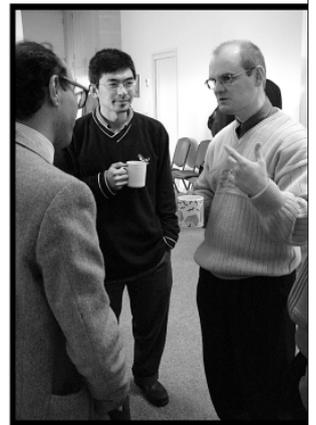
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this world using them. So it makes sense that what we learn of God through science should be consistent with what we learn about Him in the Bible.

To show my peers just how well I could be a theologian and a scientist I went through a phase where I began to put my science first. I started to let the philosophies that so often accompany science overshadow the great truths in the Bible about God's role in the origin and design of this world. This was not right either! It took a year or so before I began to get it right: not a scientist first; not a Christian first; but a Christian scientist.

**D**on't want to have to choose between science and the Bible? How did I find the balance? I think there are four traps we need to avoid. First, don't let science say more than it should. Second, don't fear the answers science gives us about our world. Third, don't try to make the Bible say more than it actually does. Fourth, don't try to explain more things than we have the answers for.

Trap 1: In scientific discussions there are usually three components: facts, theories, and philosophical or religious statements. Facts are things like geological observations, genetic similarities between species, the speed of light, the shape of the

galaxy. Then there are the various theories of evolution, and other theories like the Big Bang. The philosophical or religious statements include things like: "this happened without intervention from God" or "this shows God doesn't exist" or "this removes the need for God to have created

**We must remember that these statements that so often accompany science are not scientific at all.**



us". We must remember that these statements that so often accompany science are not scientific at all. Science investigates the natural world and can neither prove nor disprove the supernatural God. Take care not to let science say more than it should.

Trap 2: Christians should not fear the facts science has shown us, nor stress over the various theories which try to explain those facts. Remember, the God who gave

us the Bible is the same God who gave us the laws of science. And if some of the assumed facts and theories turn out to be inaccurate, further scientific investigation will expose this. Science is not to be feared, but embraced for what it can teach us. Science cannot remove our need for God nor put Him out of a job. However, Christians need to regularly reject the pseudoscientific statements that are actually belief statements. The Christian scientist puts the Bible's statements about the supernatural together with the facts and theories of science.

Trap 3: When you read the Bible, take care that you don't make the Bible say more than it actually does. Why? You'll get yourself into a pickle trying to reconcile the scientific record with your extended "biblical" record. The Bible doesn't answer all our scientific questions. God doesn't tell us how He effected Genesis 1:1-2 (by big bang or otherwise) nor how much time elapsed between Genesis 1:1, 1:2, and 1:3. And while He makes it clear that He created through spoken commands ("Let there be light", etc), He doesn't spell out how those commands were effected. So don't add to God's word.

**T**rap 4: There are many things the Bible is very clear on, but there are also many things it doesn't explain. I want to know about the various species of prehuman fossils. Are they in God's image or not? Exactly how did God make us? Why is the universe so old and so large for one small earth? As our scientific investigations advance, I may get some answers to these questions. Or I may have to wait until I get to heaven for my answers. Waiting, while frustrating, is always safer than trying to force an answer that satisfies both current scientific knowledge and solid biblical studies.

Well, that's my story. I can be a Christian scientist by avoiding these four traps. Maybe this is a way you too can embrace both science and the Bible.

*Dr Greta Gaut has a PhD from the University of Queensland in neurophysiology and a B Th from SMBC. She is a Council member of PLC Armidale, NSW.*

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# God's fingerprints

*Evidence is growing of intelligent design in the universe.*

**T**he heavens declare the glory of God. Men are without excuse because God's eternal qualities can be seen from creation. Yet the question remains, how do the heavens declare the glory of God? Or again, what is it *precisely* in the world that testifies to God's divine nature?

In recent years Christian scientists have divided sharply among themselves on this question. On one side there are those who might be described variously as theistic evolutionists or methodological naturalists who would deny special miracles in creation but see God's fingerprints on the regular laws of nature which lie behind the universe. They argue that God's existence is especially evident in the anthropic principle – the way in which the universe and our own planet seem fine-tuned for the evolution of intelligent life. Change a law here or a constant or parameter there and nothing happens – no life, no evolution. The miracle is the unlikely coincidence that our world should be a place where life is likely.

Against these, scientists from the more radical, but increasingly powerful, Intelligent Design (ID) wing seek to demonstrate the opposite idea. While adhering to a weaker form of the anthropic principle and agreeing that it is remarkable that the universe should be rigged to sustain life, ID scientists insist that the universe is not a place where life is at all *likely*. In fact, they argue, the formation of life is so fantastically unlikely that only an intelligent designer can explain it. There are just too many coincidences required to produce the simplest of cells or the tiniest beneficial genetic mutation.

**J**udging between these two camps is not easy for an outsider to professional science. Specific arguments often play out in the stratosphere of high-level biochemistry, making it almost impossible for lay observers (such as this one) to determine who's right. But science is not the only thing going on here. For many of those engaged in this debate the conclusion seems to be almost pre-determined by philosophical and theological issues. For example key ID proponent Philip



**Andrew  
Moody**

Johnson sometimes makes it sound like Christians cannot believe in evolution because methodological naturalism is indistinguishable from outright atheism.

On the other side, leading anthropic principle advocates such as Sam Berry and John Polkinghorne urge that scientists cannot believe in special creation since the first rule of science dictates that the universe is governed by regular principles. Without claiming any authority to judge the scientific arguments in this case I would like to question both these starting premises.

Firstly from a conservative Christian perspective, I think it is important to allow that some kind of evolution might be right. As long as we can reconcile ourselves theologically to an old earth and pre-fall animal suffering (surely the bigger hurdle) there is no reason why God might *not* have created in the same way He works most of the time: through the operation of His regular natural laws. The day-signifies-age reading of Genesis 1 has a respectable (pre-evolution) pedigree and – in the modern era – has been said to cor-

respond to the ages of evolution from the terrestrial observers view.

Furthermore there are distinct attractions to theistic evolutionists' view of God. A deity who is so wise that He is able to construct a self-assembling machine which conforms to His will – and even accommodates the prayers of His saints – without the need for tinkering or adjustment does sound like the transcendent God of the Bible who establishes His plans and purposes from before the creation. If we include a caveat that methodological naturalism does not rule out all *extraordinary* miraculous activity then it is hard to find too much to object to. Despite their frequent tarring on this issue, Christians have been less "fundamentalist" on this issue than atheists for whom evolution has always been necessarily true.

**B**ut the caution against narrow dogmatism applies to the theistic evolutionist camp too. If Christians should allow that God might create through regularity and gradualism, scientists should allow that He might not. The theistic evolutionist is right that it is methodological naturalism which has hitherto enabled the scientific enterprise, but the unbending assertion that there can therefore *never* be a special intervention from God commits the inductive fallacy of assuming our past experience will always hold true in the future. Furthermore even if we definitionally limit science to the exploration of regular events in the universe this should not mean that special creation is impossible – merely that it is not scientific.

Besides all this, it is questionable

***Evolution as  
chance event  
may not be  
consistent with  
either science  
or theism.***

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whether the methodological naturalist's view of evolution as chance event is consistent with either science or theism. What does it actually mean, for example, to say that the universe produces life by *chance*? If we are simply using the word to describe situations so complex that we could never trace out their causes or predict outcomes, then that is well and good – there is no inconsistency here with either methodological naturalism or theism. All we have here is God working out His purposes through complex secondary causes.

**B**ut if we want to suggest that things like genetic mutation or the assemblage of amino acids are actually random in the sense that there is *no* cause then we have left the territory of science and entered the realm of metaphysics for the simple reason that an event for which there is no natural cause is by definition supernatural. This should be anathema for the methodological naturalist and is indistinguishable from the vaunted "God of the Gaps" view of reality where God steps in to perform a miracle now and then. It was precisely for this reason that Einstein attempted to hold out against the Copenhagen theory of quantum indeterminacy where things like atomic decay just *happen*. It was for this reason too that he and others tried so hard to resist the evidence for the Big Bang. When things start happening for no reason then we have to start talking about God.

Or at least we should. For Einstein, randomness meant "God playing dice" with the universe. Because he had a Spinoza-like impersonal view of God who was inseparable from the Laws of nature, he had to invoke an additional element (dice) to explain how things could just happen. For a theistic scientist who believes in a transcendent God, apparently random events should be signs, not of

**For Einstein,  
randomness  
meant "God  
playing dice"  
with the  
universe.**

*God playing dice* but God making choices. Yet this connection is seldom made by theistic evolutionists. On several occasions I have seen Christian science-writers invoking the randomness inherent in the uni-

verse to explain that God is not fully in control. One scientist had sadly come to accept this as the explanation for his child's disability; others have used the same logic in connection with disasters such as the Tsunami. This is wobbly scientific philosophy generating unbiblical theology.

The final point about methodological naturalism is not so much about theology as anthropology. For the theistic evolutionist, God can still act freely and govern the world of science because He stands

outside time and space and has already set the parameters which give rise to the universe. Yet can the same be said about people? If natural laws govern all the occurrences within the created universe then the same must apply to the workings of our own brains. There can be no human responsibility and no genuine choice since what we do is simply the natural outworking of brain chemistry and external circumstances.

Some theorists attempt to avoid this conclusion by vague talk of complex systems and emergence. Others more desperately invoke the magic of quantum mechanics to smuggle indeterminacy back into the human world. But neither of these will stand. Whatever results from the complex interaction of a billion brain-cells, it is still caused as surely as other complex systems like weather patterns or ant colonies are caused. Free will does not and cannot arise out of strict causality. Meanwhile, the idea that quantum events might affect human decisions is more promising philosophically, but only because it knocks a hole in the natural order with a tiny miracle – and thus creates a gap for something outside nature to reach into the mind machine and pull the levers.

**H**owever the growing consensus amongst tough-minded scientists is that free-will and consciousness are illusions. The mind is merely a product of the brain; everything we do is predetermined and unavoidable. This is the unavoidable conclusion of methodological naturalism and it is death to Christian theology. If human deliberations are really the sole product of natural forces Adam and Eve never really chose to eat the fruit and Jesus was simply programmed to give His life for us on the cross. The only differences between a saint and murderer are accidents of genetics and environment.

So, perhaps unexpectedly, in the end the debate over creation and evolution turns out to be more importantly about human nature. God may or may not have used evolution and Christians and scientists should be free to debate it. God's creative activity may or may not be achieved solely through His own laws. But a rigorous methodological naturalism locks *us* out of the universe as responsible actors. Christians must reject it.

*Andrew Moody is a member of the Holy Trinity Anglican church in Doncaster, Melbourne, and is completing his Masters Degree in Theology at Ridley College.* ap

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# Made for life

*Chemistry and the “anthropic principle” argue against evolution.*

**G.** K. Chesterton is recorded as saying that people who do not believe in God will believe in anything. Since the theory of evolution became the accepted explanation in the West for the origin of life, many people have uncritically latched on to it as a basis for not believing in the God of the Bible.

Much has been written about biological evolution in recent years. However, a shift in scientific opinion is starting to emerge. Evolution has now become a theory under attack as the molecular biologist, Michael Denton, has recently pointed out in his landmark book, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Adler & Adler, 1986). While biologists are still grappling with the possibility of “macroevolution”, that is, large-scale evolution occurring over geologic time that is said to result in the formation of new species or taxonomic groups, Denton is right to point out that more attention needs to be paid to what has been termed “chemical evolution”, which is a term that expresses what evolutionists believe concerning the origins of life. We must not tacitly assume that life just evolved randomly from simple chemicals (biogenesis) via the formation of complex molecules capable of reproducing themselves. In fact, what we now know about chemistry does not support this theory.

**L**et’s go back to 1953 when Stanley Miller of the University of Chicago reported the sensational claim that he had taken the first step towards creating life in a test tube. Miller mixed some simple gases together in a glass vessel and then passed a powerful electrical charge through it. This produced some small amounts of amino acids which are the chemical building blocks of life. Miller believed that his experiments actually reproduced the “primordial” or “prebiotic” soups of chemicals that existed at the dawn of time on earth. He further believed that he had demonstrated the mechanism for the formation of life.

The interesting development that is taking place today is that Miller’s original interpretation of those early experiments



**Joe Mock**

is now being downplayed by evolutionists in view of the better understanding we have gained into molecular biology. What has led to this about-face?

To discover why evolutionary biologists are in retreat on this issue we need to understand some basic facts about amino acids and proteins. Amino acids are the building-blocks of proteins. Proteins are formed by the linking together of amino acids in the correct sequence. Proteins are essential to the function and structure of all living cells.

**“Darwinianism cuts in only when life has got going: we cannot appeal to Darwinian evolution to explain how life began.”**

PAUL DAVIES

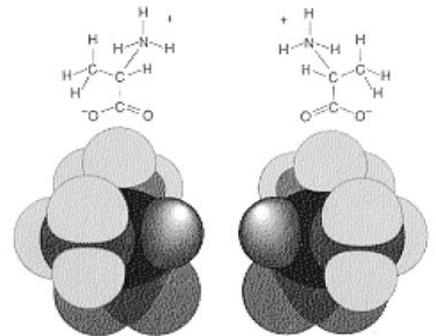
the protein that is vital for the transportation of oxygen through the blood system. The synthesis of all proteins is determined by a complex molecule known as DNA.

In fact, it is just over 50 years since James Watson and Francis Crick at Cambridge University identified the structure of DNA as a “right-handed” double helix. This discovery opened up the whole discipline of genetics and gave birth to molecular biology. Significantly, nucleic acid molecules (DNA and RNA) contain information that can be decoded and reproduced. It is the information that is stored on the DNA molecules that is critical for the process of protein synthesis. Such information determines the sequence of amino acids that are linked together to form protein molecules.

It needs to be pointed out that molecules in nature are often either “left-handed” or “right-handed”. As it turns

out, the amino acids are “left-handed” while many of the sugar molecules we are familiar with are “right-handed”.

The diagram produced shows the “left-handed” form of the amino acid alanine on the left and the “right-handed” form of alanine on the right. They appear almost indistinguishable but a closer look reveals that the two forms are actually mirror images of each other. However, because they are not mutually superimposable they are not the same molecule! Furthermore, because they are not the same molecule they behave differently in certain chemical processes.



For one to hold to chemical evolution one would have to believe that left-handed amino acids evolved somehow from simpler molecules (that are neither left-handed nor right-handed). The point is that left-handed molecules would not be formed under normal conditions. Furthermore, one would have to contend that the right sequence of amino acids (very, very high numbers here!) attached themselves to one another to form proteins.

**S**imilarly, one would have to believe that the correct molecules (bases, sugars and phosphate “bridges”) attached themselves, eventually forming the first DNA molecule complete with the information not only to organise life but also to reproduce itself. The odds for these processes to take place randomly are akin to something like throwing an enormous pile of Scrabble tiles on the floor and randomly forming all the words for the Westminster Confession of Faith in the correct

sequence! In other words, practically zero.

Many scientists today believe that primitive forms of life have arrived either via meteors (eg from Mars) or have been formed in volcanic activity through fissures in the floor of the oceans. The first view is reflected in the present heightened interest in the search for life on Mars (or on Europa, one of the moons of Jupiter). The second view has found supporters since the discovery in the 1970s of extreme heat-loving microbes known as hyperthermophiles on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. The forms of life we are more familiar with rely on sunlight as their energy source. However, these primitive microbes are classified as chemotrophs because of their ability to metabolise chemicals directly into biomass through exploiting chemical and thermal energy without relying on sunlight. These recent discoveries have been interpreted as undergirding the confidence of many scientists in the various plausible, present-day theories concerning the origin of life. Are they right?

**O**ne highly respected scientist, British-born Paul Davies, now with the Australian Centre for Astrobiology at Macquarie University, has written prolifically about the origin and evolution of life and the search for life beyond earth. Davies concludes, "Darwinianism cuts in only when life has got going; we cannot appeal to Darwinian evolution to explain how life began." However, if Darwinism offers an unlikely, even impossible, explanation as to how life began, is there a more promising alternative?

From about the mid-'70s some scientists began realising that it was more than coincidence that all the seemingly arbitrary constants in physics have one strange thing in common – they are precisely the values you need if you want to have a universe capable of producing life. This has come to be known as the "anthropic" principle (from the Greek

word for mankind). This term was first coined by Brandon Carter, a colleague of Stephen Hawking's at Cambridge University, at a symposium celebrating the 500th anniversary of the birth of Copernicus in 1973 at Krakow, Poland. Carter produced a paper called "Large Number Coincidences and the Anthropic Principle in Cosmology". Essentially, what Carter claimed was that all the apparently arbitrary and unrelated constants in physics have one extraordinary common factor – they seem expressly designed to support the existence of life, particularly human beings.

***"My road to atheism was paved by science... But, ironically, so was my later journey to God."***

LEE STROBEL

The anthropic principle may be best understood in terms of a very fine-tuned universe that gives every indication of having been designed for one overriding purpose: the existence of all forms of life. Further, the physical constants of the universe appear to be on a razor's edge. A small variation in any of these physical constants would make the universe inhospitable for life. For example, the process of nuclear fusion is how energy is produced in stars such as the sun. If the charge on the electron was only fractionally different from what it is now, then stars would not be able to fuse hydrogen and helium. By the same token, if the strength of the strong nuclear force (this is the force that holds the nucleus of atoms together) were to be only 2% greater, then diprotons would be stable, with a result that hydrogen would fuse too easily. Such small variations would have huge implications for the existence of life.

Paul Davies was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1995 when he delivered an address entitled "Physics and the Mind of God". In his address Davies asserted: "To me, the contrived nature of physical existence is just too fantastic to be taken on board as simply a 'given'. It points forcefully to a deeper underlying meaning to existence. Some call it purpose, some design. These loaded words, which derive from human categories, capture only imperfectly what it is that the universe is about. But that it is about something, I have absolutely no doubt."

Famous British physicist Fred Hoyle who opposed the Big Bang theory of universe with his counter-proposal of the

Steady State theory wrote in his 1994 autobiography: "After a lifetime of crab-wise thinking, I have gradually become aware of the towering intellectual structure of the world". Since then an increasing number of scientists have used the terms "intellect", "structure", "purpose" and "design" when speaking of the universe.

The Bible declares that God created the whole cosmos through His word and that the work of His fingers is evident in the universe He created and which He continues to sustain. There is no need to apologise for the existence of God. It is true that men and women are blinded by sin with a result that they require special revelation from God in the form of the Bible. But they are not so blinded that they cannot see the "structure", the "purpose" and the "design" of the universe that point to an intelligent Designer.

**T**he anthropic principle doesn't "prove" the existence of God. But if God were not to exist we would be very hard-pressed to account for the razor's edge on which the physical constants are balanced. It certainly makes far more sense to believe in the existence of God than to believe in the theory of a random universe as proposed by Darwinists.

However, as C.S. Lewis realised, to believe in God means we must change our lives to come under His sovereignty. American journalist Lee Strobel was a spiritual sceptic until his conversion in 1981. He had become convinced that science had made the concept of a Creator irrelevant. He wrote, "My road to atheism was paved by science ... But, ironically, so was my later journey to God." In Strobel's book, *The Case for a Creator*, (Zondervan, 2004), he applies his journalistic skills to examine scientific evidence that points toward God. As a former scientist who specialised in chemistry, I can say that there is far more physical evidence to support the notion of a personal Creator than there is to believe in a purely random universe. The notion of intelligent design makes sense. Lee Strobel's book is one that readers may want to consult for further reflection on how the evidence points in the direction of intelligent design. It also has a very helpful bibliography for those who want to explore the subject in-depth.

*Rev. Dr Joe Mock, associate pastor of the Indonesian Presbyterian Church in Sydney, has a PhD in chemistry, in which he tutored at Sydney University.*

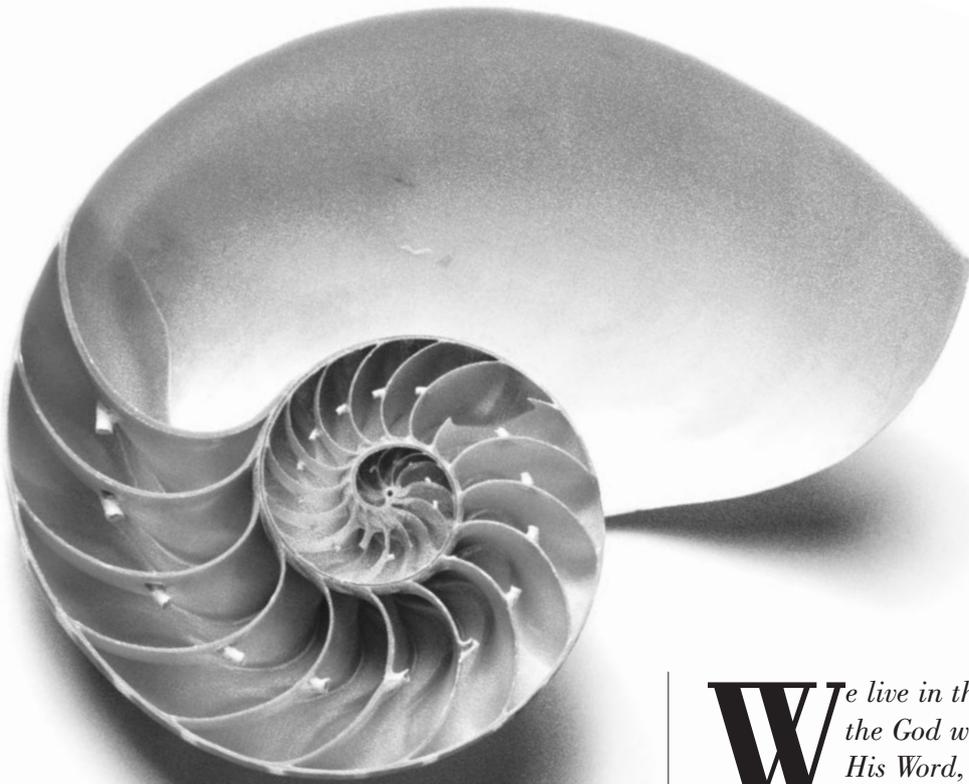


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**W**e live in the Age of Science. Because the God who has revealed Himself in His Word, the Bible, and in His Son, Jesus, is a God of order, we can make sense of the Universe He created in terms of logical mathematical laws and principles. The sun doesn't rise and set at predictable times, year in and year out, because we have a formula that determines it. Rather, we can devise a formula to describe and predict what happens because God causes things to happen in an orderly way. We should be thankful to Him for this because it makes life much easier.

Sadly, modern scientific man believes that science comes first and the concept of God comes later. The Bible tells us that God comes first, and science comes second as our way of understanding what He normally does. The Bible also tells us that "miracles" happen, ie. God sometimes works in an unusual way, like when the sun stood still (Joshua 10:12-14), or when Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish. Modern man has to deny the possibility of miracles because he approaches things the wrong way round.

In Corinth, even when science was much less developed, the same error was present. People thought they knew better than God, that man's wisdom was superior, and the error was creeping into the Church as well – with disastrous results. As we study how Paul deals with this, let us ask God to help us see where we are in danger of making the same error today.

**Bruce Christian ▶**

DAY 1

*Called... to call on Him*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3**

**THE POINT** In a few short sentences to begin his letter, Paul sets down who he is, by what authority he speaks, who the Corinthians are in God's eternal Plan, how they should respond to this truth, and the blessing of grace and peace they can anticipate as a result.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• Paul is commissioned (sent out, "apostled") in the name of Jesus the Messiah ("Christ") as part of God's sovereign design (1). He therefore speaks, not with human wisdom, but divine authority: we cannot dismiss any parts of his inspired epistles we happen to dislike/disagree with by simply saying, "Paul got it wrong."

- Paul sees his fellow workers as brothers/sisters in Christ (1).
- The Church in any particular place is God's Church; it is not a human institution. God sees it as a concord of all people everywhere who cry out to Jesus for salvation (2 – cf Rom. 10:13).
- In Jesus we are not only made holy (sanctified), but called to be holy; in Scripture, what God does by grace and what He requires us to do by obedience are never divorced from each other (2).
- God the Father's gift of grace/peace is only available through the Lord Jesus; there is no grace/peace apart from Him (3).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What two errors occur when we divorce grace from obedience?

DAY 2

*God is faithful*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9**

**THE POINT** A noticeable characteristic of Paul's letters that we have in Scripture is his optimism about God's grace and sovereignty, enabling him to speak so confidently and encouragingly to the infant churches. We will see this to be significantly true of the Corinthian correspondence when we come to his strong words of rebuke and discipline later in the letter. At the outset, he encourages them to see that they can share his confident optimism because their faithful God is in full control.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• It is appropriate to thank God for one another because, through the Lord Jesus, He is the source of all that we have and are (4).

- In the way they understood the Gospel, borne out by the way they spoke, Paul could see real spiritual fruit from his labours among the people who made up the Church at Corinth (5-6).
- Because of God's faithfulness, and because it is He who took the initiative in bringing us to faith in Jesus (9), we can trust Him completely to provide us with all the spiritual gifts we need (7), and the endurance to last the distance (8), until Jesus returns (7, 8); thus, we can be confident to stand before Him on that day (8).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are you confident of God's grace for yourself? ... for others?

DAY 3

*Church... or "cult"?*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-16**

**THE POINT** The one thing we need to keep in mind when divisions start to arise among believers is that the Church is not a human institution centred on individual personalities and approaches; it is only ever Christ's Church, and should therefore exhibit a clear, indivisible unity in every aspect of its life, work and witness.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• Because the Church belongs to Christ – since it is He alone who died to bring it into existence (13, cf 6:20, Rev. 5:9) – Paul can appeal for unity within it in the name of Christ Himself (10).

• Division comes from allowing personalities of individuals to

dominate thinking/policy instead of looking to Christ. We can assume the "I-follow-Christ" party was also led by a forceful person who marginalised any who saw things differently (12).

• Ministers of Word and Sacrament need to be especially careful not to let their status/authority become a cause of division (13-16).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you find yourself thinking in terms of "my church" or "their church" or "the Rev. Ego Tripp's church"? Is this a problem?
- Are you aware of any divisions in the fellowship of believers to which you belong? What is the source? Do you contribute in any way? What can you do to help break down divisions?

DAY 4

*Foolish wisdom*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-25**

**THE POINT** One of the most important lessons we must learn is that the only way of eternal salvation is through the cross of Christ. This solution to our plight can never be arrived at by human logic.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• Paul's commission to preach the gospel (ie. "evangelise") eclipsed any other function that might be a valid part of "ministry" (17).

• By its very nature, the cross has its own dynamic. Of course the idea of God becoming man and deliberately taking the road to crucifixion in order to save His people is ridiculous to humanistic thinking, but that must not deter us; the cross saves (17f).

- Man's idea of wisdom is on a collision course with God's revelation in the cross; the two are totally incompatible (19-20, 25).
- Man will never find salvation by human reason (21a, 22b) or by spectacular feats (22a); it can only be found in the cross of Christ, foolish as this may seem to the natural man (23-24).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Have you been in a situation where there is direct antagonism between human "wisdom" and what God says in His Word?
- Is there a tendency today to avoid preaching the cross because it is offensive? Have we shifted our emphasis a bit so as not to offend people because we're worried about declining numbers?

DAY 5

*Trophies of God's grace*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31**

**THE POINT** It only takes a moment's reflection on what God has saved us from, and what He is changing us into, to realise that it is all His work from start to finish. We must not boast, because we have contributed nothing. God's power to make us fit for heaven by His provision of a Saviour puts all human wisdom to shame.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• As is typical of the Church in every age, including our own, the Church at Corinth consisted not of stars but of strugglers, not celebrities but simple folk, not somebodies but nobodies (26).

• It is consistent with God's whole approach to the work of redemption, including His choice of the way of the cross, that His chosen people who will one day reign as kings are the weak and foolish, the lowly and despised. This is to demonstrate that it is all by grace; it is the lesson Israel failed to learn, both before and after Jesus; and sadly today churches are slow to learn (27-28).

- Jesus is everything we need for salvation: the understanding of it, the attributes required, and the full purchase price (30).
- The only legitimate boasting is boasting in the Lord (29, 31).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• In the light of this passage, should we make a big deal out of a celebrity becoming a Christian? What are the dangers in this?

DAY 6

*The old rugged cross*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5**

**THE POINT** Paul now reminds the Church at Corinth that his own personal experience among them bears out what he has been saying. We will see later in this letter, and in 2 Corinthians, that one of their major problems was the presence among them of people who took pride in their spiritual superiority, in wisdom and in signs and wonders, including tongues-speaking. Paul shows how out of place such an attitude is under the shadow of the cross.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• Paul made a point in his ministry of not trying to impress people with clever, polished or smooth oratory, because he wanted them to see that the source of power was in God him-

self and not in well-contrived arguments, programs and presentations (1, 3-5).

- The single focus of Paul's preaching at Corinth was Jesus as the crucified Messiah; nothing else mattered apart from this (2).
- One of Paul's most important discoveries in his ministry was that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Why is the cross so important to Gospel preaching? What are the fruits of preaching that fails to emphasise the cross?
- In our age of hi-tech communication devices, is there a danger of falling into the very trap that Paul is warning about here?

DAY 7

*The mind of Christ*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16**

**THE POINT** The psalmist and Solomon point out that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7). Paul agrees. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to fear the Lord (John 16:7-11). Man in his natural state is without the Spirit and so devoid of God's true wisdom; in fact He sees it as foolishness! Since God is the Creator of the Universe it is His wisdom alone that really matters, not human wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit can give us God's wisdom, a wisdom that is centred on Christ (cf. Col. 2:2-3), so Paul refers to it as a "secret" wisdom, once hidden but now revealed in the Gospel. Such a process was always God's eternal Plan and intended for our glory (7).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- True maturity comes from knowing, as a personal, spiritual reality, the God who made us (6). It is His Holy Spirit who makes this possible (9-10), communicating with our spirits, and thus putting us back on the same wavelength as our Creator (11-13).
- The champions of this world's "wisdom" are doomed (6); their lack of true wisdom resulted in their rejection of Christ (8).
- The world's way and God's way are mutually exclusive (14).
- Once we have been born again by the Spirit of God, and only then, we can discern things in a Christ-like way. We no longer need to be influenced by the world's way of thinking (15-16).

DAY 8

*We are all only servants: NB!*

**THE PASSAGE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9**

**THE POINT** Having drawn their attention to the radical difference between spiritual thinking and humanistic thinking, Paul now applies this to the way the Corinthians are doing church. Their actual behaviour betrays their wrong thinking. Party spirit in the Church is the result of putting individual personalities in the place where only Christ should be. It is worldly thinking.

**THE PARTICULARS**

• When we are born again through faith in Christ we begin a spiritual journey that involves growth and development. We don't suddenly become perfect/mature. But there's a real problem if we just remain as spiritual infants, with no evidence of the

Spirit's sanctifying work changing us to be like Christ (1-2).

- Individual personalities in the Church are only ever servants of Christ to whom He has given different jobs to do. Treating them as more than this produces competition and division (3-5).
- Regardless of what contribution we each make to the life of the Church, it is only God who causes the growth to happen (6-7).
- We are God's Church; our job is to serve Him faithfully (8-9).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

• Is there evidence of "Corinthian" type thinking in your Church fellowship? How do you contribute to it? What will you do?

DAY 9

*After the fire, what?*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

**THE POINT** In verses 8-9 Paul had hinted at two things he now takes up in more detail: he changes the model of the Church from a “field” to a “building”; and he speaks about accountability. The “building” model serves his purpose well, not only to show how Jesus is the only foundation, but to show how the way we build on this foundation will have consequences for us on Judgement Day.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul knew that all he achieved was only by God’s grace (10).
- Each of us is only a part of the greater work God is doing (10).
- Jesus Christ is the only foundation on which God is building His Church – not humanism, or social action, or scientific

knowledge. Unless Jesus is its foundation it is not God’s Church (11).

- It’s not only the foundation that’s important, but how we build. Paul is addressing people he assumes are heaven-bound, ie. part of the Invisible Church whose foundation is Christ (cf. 15), but when Jesus returns we will all be required to account for how we have built on the foundation. If we’ve built with worthless material, the Judgement Day fire will leave us with nothing but salvation, no satisfaction of seeing fruit for our labour (12-15).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What are you doing in the Church? What is gold? What is hay?

DAY 10

*No more boasting about men*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 3 : 16-23

**THE POINT** When the Church becomes bent on impressing the world, and especially when it adopts the world’s methods to do so, it loses sight of what it really is – God’s Temple, and the beneficiary of all things. Everything Paul has said in chapters 1 and 2 make it clear that there is no connection between the world’s “wisdom” and God’s wisdom in Christ; each is foolishness to the other.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- We, the Church, are God’s Temple. We replace the Temple that was destroyed under God’s Judgement of Jerusalem in 70 AD. A “Third Temple” won’t be built there – we are already it (16).

- God is serious about His Church and will deal harshly with any who try to destroy his sacred “building”, His people (17).

- Self-deception is a subtle, dangerous thing. Alarm bells should ring loudly if we find the world is impressed by our “wisdom”. We’re on much safer ground if the influential people in our society are writing us off as foolish because of the Gospel (18-20).

- Our hope is not in men since Christian leaders actually belong to the people anyway (minister=servant!). In fact, the saints in Christ inherit God’s whole cosmos (21-23, cf. Eph. 1:18-23)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Is this world’s glory costing you your inheritance in Christ?

DAY 11

*Judge not...*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-5

**THE POINT** Paul is very conscious of the trouble caused both in and to the Church when we set ourselves up as judges of one another’s ministry. In verse 3 of chapter 3 he had spoken about “jealousy and quarrelling”, and that is exactly what happens when we see ourselves as being in competition with each other. By passing judgement on the ministry of others we help to advance our own cause. All this reveals a wrong understanding of ministry.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- We must never forget the word “ministry” means working as a servant (of Christ); a master entrusts his servants with spe-

cific responsibilities and expects them to act faithfully. The Apostles were entrusted with God’s revelation of the Gospel (1-2).

- Paul was not aware of any failure to be faithful in the ministry committed to him, but he didn’t even trust his own conscience; the final arbiter would have to be God Himself. Because of our limitations, none of us has the right, or ability, to judge another; rather we should leave such judgement until the Day when the Lord comes again and His light exposes any ulterior motives we may have managed to keep under wraps in our serving (3-5).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What has God entrusted you to do? Are you being faithful?

DAY 12

*Scum for Jesus*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 4:6-13

**THE POINT** Paul now gets to the heart, the application, of all that he has been saying. He has already applied it to himself and Apollos (3:5) but that is only by way of illustration. His real target is the Corinthians themselves. He is so concerned about where they have gone wrong, and what is happening as a result, that he resorts to sarcasm to make his point more powerfully. By adopting the world’s ways the Corinthians have become “rich and famous”; by remaining true to God, he has become scum.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- “Do not go beyond what is written” had probably become a catch cry among Christians to remind them that Scripture

alone was to be their guide; they were not to be influenced by the apparent “wisdom” of “scientific” man, by ideas that have their source in man and inevitably lead to pride and prejudice (6).

- Submitting fully and humbly to God’s Word is a way of admitting our dependence – that all we have and are comes from Him (7).

- Unlike the Corinthians, Paul and Apollos are being treated like slaves being led into the arena to be humiliated as fools, to be beaten, to die. He uses the language of Jesus’ Passion (8-13).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Does the Church try too hard to win the world’s approval?

DAY 13

*Not talk, but power*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-21

**THE POINT** This passage reveals the depth of Paul's concern for his spiritual "children" in Corinth. Sarcasm aside, what he desires more than anything else is that they will display the family likeness: in particular, the evidence of real "Kingdom" work – the Spirit's power in their lives rather than the pretension of arrogant talk.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul's motivation was only the Corinthians' spiritual health and welfare; he didn't want to shame or intimidate them (14, 21).
- Paul wants them to see him as their true father, not one of many teacher/guardians who simply do their job out of duty (15).

- Timothy is a faithful, reliable member of the "family" whom Paul can rely on to represent the family values in a truly Christ-like way. Sadly, this could not be said of the Corinthians (16-17).
- The Corinthians felt safe in their arrogance; it was unlikely, so they thought, that they would see Paul for some time (18-19).
- God's Kingdom is characterised by authentic spiritual power that flows from Christ-like living, not by a lot of hot air (20).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do we see the Church as a family, with deep, mutual concern for one another's spiritual welfare, or just like a nuclear family?

DAY 14

*In the name of our Lord Jesus...*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-5

**THE POINT** This is a very sad chapter in the Bible. To this point in the letter we've been building up a picture in our minds of what Church life was like in Corinth, and especially what the leadership was like. Over the last couple of days Paul has been helping us to see some of the problems among them. But we could never have anticipated what we read today. Paul's greatest concern is not the reality of immorality among them, but the fact that they are arrogantly accepting it and therefore allowing it to infect the spiritual life of the whole fellowship. This must not be.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- To our great shame, church members sometimes practise a

lower standard of moral behaviour than that of unbelievers (1); but to let this go unchecked is even more distressing for the Church (2).

- Gross sin demands drastic public discipline. Excommunication from the Church fellowship (see vss 2, 7, 13) into Satan's realm of the world will hopefully bring the offender to his senses, kill his lust (or even his body! cf Acts 5), but, in the process, finally have the effect of saving his soul when the Lord returns (3-5).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- In the light of this passage, does the Church today take a firm enough stand against sexual immorality within its membership?

DAY 15

*In the world, but not of it*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-13

**THE POINT** God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses serves in His Plan of Salvation as a picture of the Church's deliverance from the old life of sin. Christ is the Passover lamb. The yeast-free bread points to a sin-free Church. All this marks us off as a people separated from the world to be God's special people. But God's people are also given the responsibility of being light and salt in a dark, decaying world, and to be effective in this task they will need also to rub shoulders daily with the world. Paul wants the Corinthians (and us) to be clear about these things.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Boasting is often used as a cover-up for failure in obedience (6).

• Yeast is a good picture of sin because such a minute amount can have such a powerful, far-reaching effect (6-7, cf Matt. 16:6, 12).

- Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the reality to which the Passover Feast pointed. Just as no yeast was to be present at the Passover (Ex. 13:7), so the Church should not gather at the Lord's table with any hint of sin within it (7-8, cf. 11:27ff).
- Sinners outside the Church to be mixed with and not judged; sinners inside the Church to be judged and not mixed with (9-13)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do we have trouble getting this last point the right way round?

DAY 16

*My (un)learned friend!*

**THE PASSAGE** 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8

**THE POINT** Again, Paul is applying the principles he laid down in the first part of his letter to another situation in the Church. If believers and unbelievers are on wavelengths that are 180° out of phase as far as wisdom is concerned, how could believers possibly expect unbelievers to make wise, just decisions for them in a legal dispute? Surely, "winning" with this sort of justice is defeat!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus said his followers will judge the world in the age to come (Matt. 19:28); it is therefore incongruous for them to ask unbelievers to settle their relatively minor disputes here (1-3).
- An insignificant believer who is taught by the Spirit is a wiser

judge of disputes than a "learned" unbeliever (4-6, cf. 2:14-16).

- The failure of Christians to resolve disputes among themselves without resorting to the secular courts is a warning of a much deeper spiritual problem that needs to be fixed up first. They had overlooked Jesus' basic teaching in Matthew 5:38-42 (7-8).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- It isn't always easy to apply this teaching in our society where there are certain legal requirements concerning trusts/property etc. Nevertheless, do you think that as our society becomes more litigious we are too ready to follow the world's "wisdom"?

## DAY 17

*A very timely rebuke***THE PASSAGE****1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-20**

**THE POINT** God's people have totally different values from the world, not only in settling disputes (1-8), but also in matters of morality. (It is good to remember this when browsing the TV guide!)

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Being born again has a radical effect on our whole life. We are cleaned up, made holy, and declared OK before God the Father, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection (11). We are no longer among those, as listed, who are excluded from heaven – so should not live like them (9-10).
- Like our society, some Corinthians argued that sex is as much

a natural, God-given function as eating, and so it is OK to satisfy every whim of appetite, regardless of the fact that God has confined it to the bonds of marriage. The Lord says, "No!" (12-13).

- Because "I believe in the resurrection of the body" (the Apostles Creed), I belong to the Lord body and soul. Sex is a meaningful physical union (Gen. 2:24), not a casual sport (14-17).
- Contrary to the Greek view of the body, for us it is a holy place in which the Holy Spirit lives and purchased at the cost of Jesus' life. Everything we do in/with it must honour God (19-20).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do we take this passage of Scripture seriously enough today?

## DAY 18

*Will I? Won't I? Will I?...***THE PASSAGE****1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16**

**THE POINT** The Corinthian Church seemed to be going through a tough time which was making the commitments of family life difficult. They therefore sought Paul's advice as to whether staying unattached might be the best option under the current circumstances. He addresses this and talks about principles of marriage in general.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Given the prevailing crisis in Corinth (? probably intense persecution, cf. 26), the best option is to be single (1, 6-8). But, if the emotional pressure gets too great, marriage is a better option than immorality (2, 9). And if marriage is the option

then there is an obligation both ways to fulfil the normal sexual expectations, unless a short temporary abstinence is agreed upon (3-5).

- In Christian marriage, divorce is not to be contemplated, and especially not for the purpose of marrying someone else, as the Lord Himself had made quite clear in Mark 10:7-12 (10-11).
- In a marriage where only one partner has become a Christian, the believer should try to keep it together for the sake of God's blessing on the family, and in the hope of the unbeliever coming to faith; but if the unbeliever wants to go – so be it (12-16).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How has singleness/marriage aided/hindered your devotion?

## DAY 19

*Calling and contentment***THE PASSAGE****1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24**

**THE POINT** Paul rounds off the point he was making yesterday by suggesting that, while happily taking any opportunity the Lord sends along, the Corinthian believers should normally make changing their current life situation a very low priority. As Morris says, "When high seas are raging it is no time for changing ships."

**THE PARTICULARS**

- We should all see every situation in which we find ourselves as God's calling, and an opportunity to serve Him (17, 20, 24).
- Our cultural background (circumcision/uncircumcision) or our status in the community (slavery/free) is of little consequence to our ability to serve God. What really matters is

whether we are living in obedience to His Word. Paul himself had learnt the important secret of contentment (18-22, cf. Phil. 4:11-13).

- Our relationship to Christ overshadows every other relationship we are in; and that relationship was bought for us at the cost of His blood. We owe everything to Him alone (22-23, 6:20).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- In what ways does your present situation in life (work, family, relationship) give you an opportunity to serve God? How does it hinder you? What other realistic possibilities present themselves? Should you change? With whom can you discuss this?

## DAY 20

*The time is short***THE PASSAGE****1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40**

**THE POINT** A considerable amount of Jesus' teaching concerned the suddenness of His return, and being ready and doing His will when He comes. Becoming too engrossed in the affairs of the world can be very distracting, even if those things, like marriage, are quite good and acceptable before God. Whatever crisis the Church at Corinth was facing, severe persecution or some other hardship, it served as another reminder that "the time is short" (29).

**THE PARTICULARS**

- In the same vein as yesterday, challenging times are not the best times for making major life-style changes, like marriage (25-28).
- The more we look to Christ and wait in the hope of His

coming, the less we'll be influenced by the things of the world (29-31).

- There is nothing wrong with marriage, but in times of persecution/opportunity it can be the source of divided loyalty (32-35).
- In 36-38, the man's "virgin" could be his fiancée or his daughter. Both possibilities present problems with the text. Probably the main point Paul is making is the one he made in 1, 8-9, and 25-28.
- Widows are free to remarry in Christ – but is that best (39-40)?

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Are you fully committed to serving the Lord as you await His Return? What legitimate improvements is it right for you make?



## Across Australia

### Egyptian visit

The Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Rev. Dr Sobhy Ouida, visited Melbourne for four days last month. He spent time with Moderator-General Bob Thomas, Victorian Moderator Dr Alan Harman, the Arabic congregation and the South Yarra congregation. His visit followed the recent visit Mr Thomas made to Egypt to strengthen ties with the Egyptian Church. Dr Ouida died soon after his return to Egypt of natural causes.

### Canadian visitors

Ann Street (Qld) congregation in central Brisbane welcomes people from all over the world into its life and witness. Among regular visitors are Don and Donna Bailey who come from winter in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in Canada to summer in Brisbane. Don is a Professor Emeritus from the University of Saskatchewan and a Visiting Professor in the School of Human Movement Studies at the University of Queensland. This year they visited Ann Street for the 11th time.

### Ecuador mission

Chandra Smith (Chatswood, NSW), an APWM missionary serving with SIM in Ecuador, is seeking to raise funds to purchase a four-wheel-drive vehicle to allow her to take the Gospel to unreached, poor rural villages in desperate need of improved health care and the message of salvation. The full purchase price of a suitable vehicle is \$35,000, about half of which has already been given. Any donations can be made to Chandra Smith Missionary Fund, PO Box 831, Stanthorpe, Qld 4380.

### Appointments

On 17 July the Presbytery of Melbourne West ordained Andres Miranda as assistant to Rev. Peter Owen. Mr Miranda, whose native language is Spanish, will work with Mr Owen in further developing the Melton church and in the work of the Brimbank church planting congregation.

On 25 June the Presbytery of Sydney South inducted Rev. Luke Inyul Yoo as minister at Chester Hill Presbyterian Church.

### Seniors celebrated

Jason and Jane Coghill were guests at a Celebrating Seniors Afternoon held in early July at the Braemar Presbyterian Homes for the Aged in Bicton (WA). Organised by Rev. Paul Bloomfield, the afternoon was well attended. It featured The Braemar Singers and the youth choir from Bethany Independent Presbyterian Church, while Rev. James Nocher preached and sang. Three councillors from the City of Melville came, including deputy Mayor Clive Robarts.

### Early Christmas

At the end of July, Bicton Presbyterian Church (WA) held a "Christmas in July" function, at which a fully catered traditional roast Christmas dinner of turkey and ham was served. The guest speakers were Bert and Penny Pierce of the David Shearer PIM Patrol who spoke of their recent extensive patrol in the mid-west of WA.

### Hebrew club

A "Hebrew Club" for ministers and others wanting to revive their biblical Hebrew has started to meet at PTC Melbourne (684 Elgar Road Box Hill North) under the leadership of Dr Greg Goswell. The group have begun to read slowly through Genesis 1-11 and will meet every second Tuesday 2pm to 4pm until 27 September. Attendance is free.

### Braemar expands

The Presbyterian Church has won council approval to add another 11 beds to its 46-bed Braemar Nursing Home in East Fremantle. Glenn Muskett, CEO of the church's five local Braemar facilities, said five of the new beds would be added to 18 already reserved for dementia sufferers. "There's a huge shortage of nursing home beds (in WA)," Mr Muskett told the *Fremantle Herald*. "Whenever we have a vacancy there is a long waiting list."

### Uniting Church down

A study of losses from the Uniting Church of Australia over the issue of homosexuals in leadership in the church showed about one quarter of the losses occurred after the 1997 assembly and three quarters after the passage of Resolution 84, allowing gay ministers, in 2003, according to the Evangelical

Members of the Uniting Church (EMU). Some 6500 attenders have left the UCA, many of whom were leaders in their congregations (including 51 pastors/youth pastors). EMU reports that 109 congregations have split, with an average loss of 50 people per congregation, and 41 new congregations have been formed outside the UCA. 14 Uniting churches have closed and one presbytery is dysfunctional. Other churches are waiting to see what decisions are made at the next assembly in 2006.

### PLC premiere

Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne produced the premiere of *The Getting Of Wisdom – The Musical* from 27 to 30 July. The production is based on the classic Australian novel *The Getting Of Wisdom* by Henry Handel Richardson, the nom de plume of distinguished old collegian Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson. *The Getting Of Wisdom* is a reflective and part-fictionalised account of Richardson's years as a boarder at PLC (1883 to 1887). Her experiences as a country girl in a privileged school, her relationships with other students and her growing awareness of the demands of conformity and young womanhood, all played a part in developing her curiosity to explore her artistic potential on the other side of the world.

The concept was proposed by PLC Principal Elizabeth Ward in 2003. The production follows the life of a boarder named Laura, played in progression by year 8 student Whitney Winspear, Erin Hutchinson, year 10, and Iona Roy, year 11. The cast featured 80 PLC students from Years 7 to 11 as well as 15 PLC staff members, with the aid of Associate Professor Bruce Steele of Monash University.

### Vale

A service of celebration and thanksgiving for the life of Rev. Marinus Kuilder was held at St David's, Toukley (NSW) on 23 May. The preacher was the Very Rev. Jack Knapp. Rev. Neville Wilce led the service. After Home Missionary service and studies at St Andrew's Theological Hall, Mr Kuilder was ordained in 1979. Due to ill health he retired in 1987 from Kingsford-Maroubra to Toukley where he regularly assisted with pastoral work. Marinus is survived by his wife Dien and three sons and a daughter and their families.



## Around the World

### Suicide and sharia

Meetings of British Muslim leaders in London and Birmingham last month condemned the terrorist attacks in the British capital, but they couldn't agree on one key issue: Are suicide attacks forbidden by religious law? One group said yes, the other said not always. Some clerics argue that such strikes can be used against an occupying power — an exception that offers the radicals religious backing for their attacks.

"There is a very clear split between what the Islamic leaders said about whether suicide bombing is right or wrong in places such as Palestine, Kashmir or Chechnya," said Lord Nazir Ahmed, a House of Lords legislator and a well-known Muslim moderate in Britain. He said the split made it easier for extremists to take root.

Britain's largest Sunni Muslim group met in Birmingham on Sunday and issued a binding religious edict, or fatwa, condemning the suicide attacks that killed dozens on three London subway trains

and a double-decker bus as the work of a "perverted ideology". The group's governing council said the Koran forbade suicide attacks and called such terrorism a sin that could send the perpetrators to hell.

Three days earlier at the London Central Mosque, 22 imams and scholars also condemned the July 7 attacks and said the four British Muslim suspects should not be considered martyrs because innocent civilians were killed. But the Muslim leaders stopped short of condemning all suicide bombings.

*Associated Press*

### Staines murder appeal

The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) petitioned the National Commission for Minorities in New Delhi last month, seeking an appeal against the acquittal of the three accused in the Australian missionary Graham Staines murder case, claiming that it has "emboldened communal elements to strike horror against Christians".

In its petition, the council said the murder of Pastor K. Daniel and Pastor Isaac Raju in Andhra Pradesh was a case in point.

"It is significant that in their confessional statement, the alleged murderers

have stated that the example of Dara Singh and his accomplices had inspired them to act against Christians," the council said.

### Gay adoption

The Scottish government has announced proposals that would give unmarried and homosexual couples equal rights to adopt children. Many churches in Scotland are unhappy about this possibility. Morag Mylne, convener of the Church of Scotland church and society council, remarked, "For a child, welfare is seen in terms of security and happiness and stability and a loving environment." Mylne added: "The church sees marriage as the best way of providing exactly that situation of stability and security and happiness." Under the present laws, individuals in non-marriage relationships and homosexual relationships may adopt, but they may only adopt as individuals, and partners are not included in the arrangement.

### Lesbian wedding

A former president of a Reformed Church in America seminary has been disciplined by his denomination for presiding over a wedding ceremony of his lesbian daughter. Norman Kansfield, 65, the former president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey, was suspended from the ministry after a church trial in which denominational leaders determined he violated church doctrine for performing the ceremony for his daughter, Ann, and her partner.

*WA Baptist Advocate*

### Canada's gay marriage

Canada last month became the world's fourth nation to grant full legal rights to same-sex couples. Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin signed the legislation making it law, hours after it was approved by the Senate late Tuesday night despite strong opposition from Conservatives and religious leaders.

The bill gives homosexual couples the same rights as those in traditional unions between a man and a woman, something already legal in eight of Canada's 10 provinces and in two of its three territories.

The Netherlands, Belgium and Spain are the only other nations that allow gay marriage nationwide.

The law comes after years of court battles and debate that divided families, reli-

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gious groups and even political allies. The Roman Catholic Church, the predominant Christian denomination in Canada, has vigorously opposed the legislation.

*Associated Press*

## Pro-evolution fightback

**A** grass-roots group troubled by recent Republican triumphs and the influence of the Christian right is fighting back in Northern Virginia by defending the teaching of Darwinian evolution, a battleground in the national culture war.

An e-mail last month seeking support from more than 300 local Democratic campaign volunteers and other potential supporters described efforts across the country to challenge evolutionary theory. It warned against “politically infused theological pseudo-science” and said silence risks undermining Virginia schools and weakening the state’s economy.

The group wants a statewide repudiation of intelligent design, a movement positing that life is too complex to spring from chemistry and biology alone.

## Hatred law in UK

**T**he British Government is pressing ahead with plans to outlaw incitement to religious hatred despite warnings from Christians that the move would worsen relations between different faiths.

Representatives of more than 1000 individual churches across the country – including Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian faiths – handed in a petition to Downing Street, urging Tony Blair to ditch the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill.

The Bill, which returned to the Commons for its final stages before it goes to the Lords, creates a maximum seven-year jail sentence for anyone convicted of intending to stir up religious hatred.

The churches’ fears were supported by Danny Nalliah, 40, a Melbourne Pentecostal pastor, who last year was found to have breached Victoria’s religious vilification laws after complaints from Muslims. Mr Nalliah came to the Commons to warn MPs that they were about to make the same unintended mistakes as Australian politicians.

## Christian exodus from Iraq

**R**epresentatives of Iraq’s minority Assyrian Christian community are charging that their numbers in the coun-

try are sharply and rapidly dwindling as many flee to border states to escape persecution.

In a pointed statement released yesterday, the chairman of the Religious Freedom Coalition on Persecution of Christian Iraqis, William Murray, said that between 60,000 and 80,000 Chaldo-Assyrian Christians have fled Iraq since the fall of Baghdad in 2003.

“Christian women are harassed, have acid thrown into their faces, are kidnapped and raped,” Mr Murray wrote. “They seek some safety behind the Muslim hajib. Many Islamists incorrectly accuse Iraqi Christians of being agents of the American military or other elements of the so-called Christian West.” The statement went on to accuse Muslim terrorists of kidnapping Christian children and bombing churches and Christian businesses.

## Arrests dash hopes

**A** wave of arrests of Chinese Christians since March has dashed hopes of greater religious freedom following enactment of the new Regulations on Religious Affairs that went into effect March 1. The crackdown ranged from Jilin province in the east to Xinjiang province in the far west. Around 600 house church Christians in Jilin, many students and professors, were detained in May. In Henan province, approximately 100 pastors from the area were arrested while meeting for leadership training. On June 8, Roman Catholics reported a wave of arrests conducted by the Religious Affairs Department in Hebei province and the establishment of a provincial “Catholic Church Unit” created for the sole purpose of crushing the Catholic Church.

*Compass*

## Protestants persecuted

**R**ussian Protestants are facing the hardest pressure in 10 years, according to Rev. Igor “Nikki” Nikitin, chairman of Senior Bishops Council, Association of Christian Churches in Russia. He complains of the disruption of services at churches, arrests of pastors and bishops, burning of church buildings, churches pulled down, and wide mass media campaigns against the Christian churches.

Pastor Nikitin told *Assist News Agency*: “A huge mass media campaign was organised to promote the Orthodox ideology and bring indignity and discredit to all other confessions. There were many arti-

cles about the leaders of the country, including President Putin, showing their devotion to Orthodoxy, publishing pictures with their confessors, and exaggerating the term “traditional and non-traditional religions in Russia”.

Nikitin says the Orthodox Church has initiated special conferences, such as one in May called Neo-Pentecostal Sects in Russia: the threat of religious extremism.



## On the Agenda

### Desert treasure

*Danielle Haas, Jerusalem*

**A** secretive encounter with a Bedouin robber in a desert valley has led to what one Israeli archaeologist hailed as one of the most important biblical finds from the region in half a century.

Chanan Eshel, an archaeologist at Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, said the discovery of two fragments of a nearly 2000-year-old parchment scroll from the Dead Sea area gave hope to biblical and archaeological scholars that the Judean Desert could yet yield further treasure.

“No more scrolls have been found in the Judean Desert since 1965. This encourages scholars to believe that if they bother to excavate, survey and climb, they will still find things in the Judean Desert. The common knowledge has been that there is nothing left to find there,” Professor Eshel said.

He said the two small pieces of brown animal skin, inscribed in Hebrew with verses from the Book of Leviticus, are from “refugee” caves in Nachal Arugot, a canyon near the Dead Sea, where Jews hid from the Romans in the second century.

The scrolls are being tested by Israel’s Antiquities Authority. Amir Ganor, head of the authority’s archaeological theft unit, declined to comment on the find.

Recently, several relics bearing inscriptions, including a burial box purported to belong to Jesus’s brother James, were revealed as modern forgeries.

Steven Pfann, an archaeologist and Bible scholar, said he had not seen the fragments. If authenticated, they would “in general not be doing more than confirming the character of the material that we have from the southern part of the Judean wilderness up until today”.

But he added: "What's interesting and exciting is that this is a new discovery – this is the first time we've seen anything from the south since the 1960s."

Professor Eshel said he was first shown the fragments last year during a meeting in an abandoned police station near the Dead Sea.

A Bedouin who had been offered \$US20,000 for the fragments on the black market wanted an evaluation, an encounter that excited and dismayed the archaeologist, who has worked in the Judean Desert since 1986.

"I was jealous he had found it, not me. I was also very excited. I didn't believe I would see them again," said Professor Eshel, who took photographs of the pieces he believed would shortly be smuggled out of the country.

However, in March 2005 he discovered the Bedouin still had the pieces of scroll. Professor Eshel said he bought them with \$US3000 provided by Bar Ilan University and then handed them over to the Antiquities Authority.

"Scholars do not buy antiquities. I did it because I could not see it fall apart," he said.

Professor Eshel said the fragments constitute the 15th scroll found in the area from the same period of the Jewish Bar-Kokba revolt against the Romans, and the first to have been discovered with verses from Leviticus.

More than 1000 ancient texts – the Dead Sea Scrolls – were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in 11 caves overlooking the western shores of the Dead Sea.

*Associated Press*

## In the lap of the odds

*Barney Zwartz*

**I**t is 97 per cent certain that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead – based on logic and mathematics, not faith – according to Oxford professor **Richard Swinburne**.

"New Testament scholars say the only evidence is witnesses in the four gospels. That's only five per cent of the evidence," Professor Swinburne, one of the world's leading philosophers of religion, said last night.

"We can't judge the question of the resurrection unless we ask first whether there's reason to suppose there is a God; second, if we have reason to suppose He would become incarnate; and third, if He did, whether He would live the sort of life Jesus did."

Professor Swinburne, in Melbourne to give several seminars and a public lecture at the Australian Catholic University last month, said the mathematical probability calculus showed a probability of 97 per cent.

He said the probability was one in two that God exists, one in two that He became incarnate, and one in 10 that the gospels would report the life and resurrection of Jesus as they did. The probability that we would have this evidence if it wasn't true was one in 1000.

Of course this is just the crudest summary, but for those equipped to follow the symbolic logic and mathematical calcula-

tions, they are produced in full in his book *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*.

Professor Swinburne conceded that the resurrection was a clear violation of natural laws. If these were the final determinant, Jesus didn't rise, he said – but if God existed then natural laws operated as God chose.

Any evidence for the existence of God was an argument for the resurrection, and any evidence against the existence of God was an argument against the resurrection.

"Does He have reason to become incarnate? Yes, to make atonement, identify with our suffering and to teach us things. So any evidence He became incarnate is evidence for the resurrection," Professor Swinburne said.

"In the history of the human race only one person lived the sort of life God Incarnate would need to live if He became incarnate for those reasons: a holy life giving good teaching, showing that He believed Himself to be God, saying that He was making atonement for our sins and founding a church to continue that teaching, and also having serious witness reports of his life being culminated by a super miracle such as a resurrection. Jesus was a unique candidate. No other candidate either led the right sort of life or left evidence of a super miracle."

Even Jesus' life is not enough proof, Professor Swinburne said. God's signature was needed, which the resurrection was, showing His approval of Jesus' teaching.

*The Age*



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## Movie Watch

### Million Dollar Baby

Reviewed by Bryson Smith

**M**illion Dollar Baby is the sort of film that stays with you long after the credits have rolled past. For good reason, it won the 2005 Academy Award for best picture. The story line is compelling and at times breathtaking. The acting, soundtrack and cinematography are superb, bearing Clint Eastwood's characteristic touch for understatement. Perhaps most wonderfully of all, there's not a super hero or computer-generated special effect in sight.

As with his previous film, *Mystic River*, Clint Eastwood takes us into a disturbing world – a world of shattered dreams and crippling guilt, of fractured relationships and tiredness. This is not escapist, feel-good fare. It is a depiction of the world as it is. Hard.

The story line of *Million Dollar Baby* follows the career of boxing trainer Frankie Dunn (played by Eastwood) and his ambitious female protégé, Maggie Fitzgerald (played by Hilary Swank). They are an unlikely team, and their journey together takes many dramatic twists and turns. To reveal too much would spoil the drama of the film. Sufficient to say, *Million Dollar Baby* is not a film about boxing. It is a film set against the background of boxing but it is ultimately about how to negotiate life

– how to live with guilt and disappointment, how to keep going when life keeps knocking you down, how to make hard moral decisions... how to properly love someone.

It is an exceptionally powerful film.

It made me long for heaven.

There are however, elements within *Million Dollar Baby* which will make Christians uneasy. At times the language is jarringly offensive. Some of the fight



**He spoke of rest for the soul, forgiveness, freedom, comfort for the weary. Is that what people see in us?**

sequences are brutal. The film also deals with provocative moral decisions, so don't expect to agree with everything the film seemingly promotes. Despite such reservations this is a film well worth watching... and thinking over... and talking about.

Of particular interest is the way in which Christianity is depicted. As Dunn struggles to come to terms with mistakes in his life he attends Mass each Sunday, and after every service he rather sceptically talks to his priest about theology. Though relatively infrequent in the film, these interactions are biting. Abstract

doctrinal discussions on the Trinity and miraculous conception jar the viewer into feeling that the church has nothing to say about day to day life.

At one climactic moment in *Million Dollar Baby*, as Dunn weighs up a heart-wrenching decision, he approaches his priest to ask for advice. Dunn explains how Maggie has asked for his help, to which the priest calls on Dunn to "leave it to God". Dunn replies: "But she's not asking for God's help. She's asking for mine." It's a telling moment. From Dunn's perspective, God is no help when it comes to living in the real world.

Through this characterisation of Christianity and the church, *Million Dollar Baby* throws down a sobering challenge to those of us who are Christians. Our Master lived in the real world. Our Master faced disappointment, weariness, pain and hard decisions. And yet He spoke of rest for the soul, forgiveness, freedom, comfort for the weary, a light burden and an easy yoke. Yet is that what people see in us? Is that what people hear in our churches?

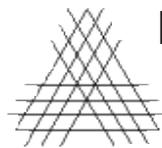
*Million Dollar Baby* is most definitely not for the faint-hearted. But for the person who's sick of special effects, primary colours and happily-ever-after-endings it's one of the best movies to come out of Hollywood for a considerable time. Just be warned. Expect to be thinking about it long after the credits have rolled past.

Bryson Smith is part of the ministry team at Dubbo Presbyterian Church, NSW. 

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# The God brand

*Commerce is guiding young Westerners' religious identification.*

**B**uffy is more important than the Bible in determining the spiritual understanding of vast numbers of teenagers – but that doesn't mean they are secular or anti-religion.

And conservative Christians should not be so quick to dismiss popular culture that deals with the occult such as Harry Potter and Buffy the Vampire Slayer because they reflect a biblical picture – they are “the dark side of evangelicalism”.

So says American academic Lynn Schofield Clark, who was in Melbourne last month for a conference on media, religion and spirituality at RMIT University. Dr Clark explored how young people engage in religion in today's cultural context, which is largely defined by the commercial realm. Unsurprisingly, she found commerce important here too.

She uncovered a phenomenon she calls religious lifestyle branding in which companies who design niche products for religious consumers, especially young ones, often do very well. It was one of the themes of her recent book *From Angels to Aliens*.

“There are people who want to have a meaningful relationship with religion, and religion is something expressed, and in a commercial context it's expressed through what they purchase, whether clothes, music, home decorations or whatever,” Clark says. Companies target the young because 18 to 35 is the key target range for marketing and companies believe that if they can secure brand loyalty in the early years people will stay with it.

**S**ince its inception youth culture has looked to media culture, she says. “It enables young people to shock their parents and be distinctive – hence rock music and horror movies. Young people see it as making a faith tradition relevant, and that's how they experience it. They don't say, ‘it's the commercialisation of my culture’, they say ‘finally I've found a group that speaks my language’.” Religious lifestyle branding looks hip and very distinct from parents.

In Melbourne, Dr Clark gave three examples. First was a fashion Bible for adolescent Christian girls. Market research showed they didn't read the Bible because they found it intimidating. Publisher



**Barney  
Zwartz**

Thomas Nelson released *Revolve*, a glossy magazine format which combined the New Testament with tips on plucking eyebrows or dating. Here's an example: “Time with God: As you put on your sun screen talk to God and it may become as familiar as shrinking your pores.” It outsold the conventional Bible 12 to one. Suddenly, reading the Bible was cool.

*Stories of the  
Apocalypse are  
highly enter-  
taining, ideal  
for films and  
video games.*



Now other publishers have seized the idea, and there are niche Bibles for adolescent boys, children, young adults, older adults and probably one-legged anglers.

Her second example was the Muslim pre-teen band Native Deen, who sing to a gentle rap such uplifting lyrics as “M-U-S-L-I-M, I'm so blessed to be with them”. This band has given Muslim families something from pop culture with which to identify themselves as distinctive. Their popularity grew by word of mouth in the north-east and mid-west United States, so much so that they were adopted by the State Department as a positive representation of how the US is tolerant of Muslims.

The third example was young Indians who have adapted the traditional Sikh/Hindu musical style of bhangra, making it a dance style for rave parties. “It gives young people a way to identify themselves with the traditions of their family and with a ‘homeland’ of India – a place they've never lived. So, like Muslim pop and fashion Bibles, young people can use this music and party scene as a way to self-identify, to brand themselves in relation to a reli-

gious/ethnic identification,” Dr Clark says. Bhangra, confusingly, is also connected with nationalist religious Hindu parties in India.

It also demonstrates another interesting modern cultural development: nostalgia without memory. This, Dr Clark says, is social theorist Arjun Appadurai's phrase for the way people raised in the diaspora associate themselves with south Asia, a place many second-generation immigrants have never lived.

She says Appadurai points out the irony that this nostalgia enables people to want to preserve an India that they themselves have left. They have layered feelings about their “homeland”, and this is expressed in various ways, such as the desire to teach children Hindu traditions but not contemporary Indian politics.

Dr Clark also found in her research that religion has a surprising influence on teenagers who don't consider themselves religious – and whom researchers assumed were secular. It's just that it's filtered, through popular culture rather than church.

“Young people I spoke to did believe in good and evil, and the necessity of fighting evil, and a surprising number did seem to think of evil along the lines depicted in Buffy and other supernatural horror films – demons who encouraged bad behaviour that was punished by an everlasting stay in hell.”

**T**his is Christianity twice removed, she says. It is filtered first through Christian institutions, then popular culture picks up some stories and imagery. Stories of the Apocalypse are highly entertaining, ideal for films and video games.

“There is definitely a shallowness to some young people's beliefs,” Dr Clark says, “mostly because they have little interest in thinking about religion. It's not that the media have become more influential but that the stories of religion have become less so. Young people don't know the stories of their religious traditions. They know the basic outlines: that religion is something good people do, religion helps you to be a moral person etc.”

Understanding how Buffy or Harry Potter shapes teenagers' worldview can help Christians connect with young people

# Mortal terror

*In a fallen world, we have comfort – and an immortal future.*

**William  
Taylor**

and help young people to see themselves as part of a wider tradition, she says. "Harry Potter, for example, finds out he has these wonderful gifts, and a group of people help him find his calling. Church leaders, rather than resisting Harry Potter and saying it's about witchcraft, could look at the story and examine why it's meaningful and how it draws on stories central to the Christian tradition."

There are other lessons for religious institutions. Dr Clark believes churches need to recognise that young people are looking for signs and symbols that help them distinguish what makes a church unique. If it's too bland, it will be less appealing.

"It's not that you have to be flashy and commercial, but if you choose not to then you have to do that well too. And don't just do it with words. You need a way to consume theology in a material culture.

"But churches can get caught up: we need more video, a better sound system. It's not about that. It's that we live in a society that has taught people to think of themselves as consumers who are seeking out distinctive identities. That distinction doesn't have to be commercial – it could be around the ancient traditions – but it has to be intentionally claimed and articulated."

**D**r Clark has studied the economics of religious branding. One factor, she says, is consolidation in media companies – American media, like Australian, is in very few hands – which allows cross-fertilisation. A film has a soundtrack, released by the record label, the video company promotes, then there's merchandising, so it is in the interests of companies to sell products that allow lifestyle branding. We are going to see much more of it.

What's the oddest example she has uncovered? Stick-on tattoos of the Virgin Mary come close, but Dr Clark settles on an angel Barbie doll, with its bizarre mixture of heavy sexuality and moral purity. All in all, the perfect metaphor.

*This article is reprinted from The Age, for whom Barney Zwartz is religion editor.*

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**W**hat has Jesus Christ to say in the light of the terrorist bombings in London on 7 July? The first thing is the refreshing realism of Jesus Christ.

The consistent teaching of the Bible, from cover to cover, is that we live in a world that has rejected the loving rule of God and as a consequence we face His judgment of wars, rumours of wars, famine, natural disaster and disorder. We will therefore experience in our world the kind of Satanic wickedness that we saw that Thursday.

Matthew 24:6-8 says: "And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginnings of the birth pangs."

Verse 7 refers to the period between Jesus' departure and His return. It is speaking about now. Jesus says: nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. We will hear of earthquakes. And we will hear of famines. There will be no time when this is not so. And this is the consistent teaching of the Bible from cover to cover.

We live in a world where all of us – humanity – have rebelled against our creator. And therefore we will face a world that is strangely hostile to us. Creation itself is subject to futility. And we will all of us experience over time the levels of wickedness and evil that we have seen in the last few days.

**N**ow when we stop to think about this, it is inevitable. In a firm where the employees seek to overthrow the CEO and operate without reference to him or her the fissures will run deep. On a pitch where the players seek to sideline the referee the fallout from

their anarchy is inevitable. In a world where humanity has rejected the loving rule of the creator we are bound, over time, to experience varying levels of human wickedness and evil. To that extent our post-'60s generation has grown up in a most unusual world. And I suspect that we have allowed ourselves to become unrealistic and sentimental about humanity in our fallen world.

We haven't had an economic depression like that of the 1930s, we haven't

***Sometimes, we  
Christians  
think that  
when we die  
and meet God  
face to face,  
He will some-  
how be sur-  
prised. Fancy  
seeing you  
here!***

faced a global conflict like 1914–18 or the 1940s, we haven't experienced an international epidemic, we have been gloriously free of politically oppressive regimes. We have lived in a most unusual time and our

generation have therefore dreamed dreams of universal peace, and global prosperity and an end to poverty. Good dreams. Laudable dreams. But unrealistic dreams, nonetheless.

Now I say refreshing realism not because Christians should kind of rub our hands with glee and delight in the arrival of this level of evil on our shores. It is great to dream dreams and work towards global prosperity. But the realism of Jesus Christ means that Christians are not deluded. Minette Marrin in the *Sunday Times* makes the point that to pretend that "the terrorists will not change the British way of life" or "we will not be intimidated" or "the terrorists will not be allowed to disrupt our lives and ruin all we hold dear" is to spin out a delusion. We have been changed, she says, suddenly and in the aftermath we are continuing to be changed. She then speaks about young people, and she says: "if they are not to retreat into disaffec-

tion and despair what they need is less lying, less sentimentality and more truth”.

Jesus gives us the Truth. He is refreshingly realistic. Our natural human default position is to seek to sideline our creator. All of us do it. We will therefore face varying levels of human wickedness in this fallen world.

Second is the tangible comfort of Christ in a fallen world. And under this point I want us to see that Jesus gives to the Christian tangible comfort both because He brings us into relationship with God now and because He prepares the Christian for a future that is “better by far” (John 14:1-7). Jesus says: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”

When Jesus speaks of “going to prepare a place” He is referring to his death on the cross, his resurrection and his ascension to heaven by which He guarantees a place in God’s New Creation where there will be no more death, or crying, or pain because human wickedness will be dealt with and banished forever.

On the cross Jesus carried God’s judgment against our human rejection of Him. Our guilt has been paid for on the cross. And by paying for our sin Jesus brings us back into relationship with God. So the Christian has a living relationship with God now. And the Christian has, beyond death, the certainty of a sure place prepared for him or her in God’s perfect New Creation.

That means that we Christians can live life in open and living relationship with God our creator who orders and sustains all things certain and secure about the future. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God makes it possible for us to be prepared for death.

On the cross Jesus takes God’s judgment and sentence on all our failures in this life. And if only we turn to Him and follow Him we are then able to enter into an open, fearless, guiltless, free relationship with our Creator.

**N**ow I want to say that this brings real comfort to the Christian in a world where uncertainty is certain. Of course it is utterly naïve of our politicians and press to suggest that nothing has changed in London. Things really have changed. You get on the Tube – things are different. You draw up alongside a bus – things have changed. Ever since the 11 September 2001 things have changed.

Every time I see a plane coming in low over Canary Wharf I can’t help thinking the unimaginable. There is an increased awareness of danger; a new sense of uncertainty.

But the Christian can face the uncertainty both because we are in a living relationship with the God who orders all things and because – whatever happens today – tomorrow is secure for us. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ has gone to prepare a place for us. Christ will come again. I think, sometimes, we Christians



***It is time to take our heads out of the sand. We live in a fallen world.***

think that when we die and meet God face to face, He will somehow be surprised. Fancy seeing you here!

As you leave home you need to remind your wife or husband, if you are Christian, that “not one hair of our head falls to the ground without God noticing”. As you sit on the train, you need to remind yourself, if you are Christian, that not one sparrow dies without God knowing.

As you reach the airport terminal you need to underline to your loved ones, if you are Christian: to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Finally, the direct challenge of Jesus to a fallen world: When Jesus faced a similar, but not identical incident of indescribable wickedness he responded by urging his non-Christian listeners to consider their own relationship with God. Luke 13:1-3 says: “There were some present at that very time who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Notice that Jesus doesn’t point the finger at those who have suffered. They are no different from anyone else. They too need the forgiveness of God and reconciliation. Instead He turns to his listeners and urges them to consider their own rela-

tionship with God.

In a fallen world each one of us will face death and then judgment. None of us is free from the guilt of having lived in God’s world without reference to Him. And therefore, as we face these reminders of the wickedness and fallenness of humanity, Jesus’ challenge is that we ourselves turn back to God and accept the sure and certain offer of forgiveness that He alone holds out.

On Thursday evening I had the opportunity at Aldgate to speak to a number of men and women from the Emergency Services. In every conversation I was able to say, “Did you know that Jesus Himself faced a similar, though not identical incident. He urged His listeners to consider their own standing with God.”

As I went into St Botolph’s at Aldgate I noticed a memorial statue to a famous City gentleman. He was decked out in all the garb of an eminent 17th City gentleman. Underneath it listed his various achievements. But it wasn’t the writing that was so fascinating. It was what he was cradling in his hands – a skull.

**A**very simple message. Each and every one of us here this afternoon will face death in a fallen world. It may be sudden and unexpected as it was for 50 of our fellow Londoners. It may come expectedly after a long debilitating illness. But it will come to us all.

It is time to take our heads out of the sand. We live in a fallen world. All of us have engaged in a side-lining of God in our lives. We need to turn back to God now before we face Him in judgment ourselves.

Let me speak very candidly. One of the 50 individuals who was killed last week had just started coming here to St Helen’s with his girlfriend. They had just completed the Christianity Explored course. The young man was 30. That could be you. And Jesus, lovingly, graciously, kindly warns you. Where do you stand with God? Have you turned back to Him? Have you sought his forgiveness? He loves you. He sent his only Son to die for you. If you turn back to Him you will find He has prepared a place in his New Creation for you.

*This is an edited text of the talk given by Rev. William Taylor, Rector of St Helen’s Anglican Church, Bishopsgate, London, on Tuesday 12 and Thursday 14 July at services after the terrorist attacks of Thursday 7 July.*



Letters

**A good business**

As a member of an Indonesian Christian church I really appreciate the article "It's God's Business" in the July edition of *AP*. Those of us who come from societies overseas where we daily face challenges in the areas raised by the article are greatly encouraged by the insights of Scott Rae's interview.

*Ester Aminawati  
Kingsford, NSW*

**Camberwell commended**

I read the opinion of Phil Betts (*AP*, June), with respect to Trinity Camberwell, with some dismay.

The position of the Church with respect to Trinity Presbyterian Church, Camberwell, is stated in the report of the regular five-yearly visitation by the Presbytery of Melbourne East, 24 August 2004. This report finds: "The congregation at Camberwell is unified and wholly committed to the Christian faith." It commends the session "for its diligent spiritual oversight of the congregation" and "for its desire to reach and spiritually provide for young families", while encouraging the minister "to continue his praiseworthy ministry at Trinity through an exciting time of growth" (received and approved at meeting 20 October 2004 – Minutes 59 and 60).

I trust this additional information is helpful.

*David L Hare, elder,  
Camberwell Presbyterian Church, Vic*

**Long line of martyrs**

Barney Zwartz is incorrect in asserting that "Victoria's religious vilification laws may have created Australia's first Christian martyrs" (*AP*, July).

Barney's implied definition is that "martyr" means those who are persecuted by the state. Others would define it either more specifically or more broadly, as

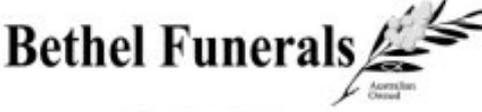
those who die for the faith on the one hand, or those who are persecuted in any form on the other.

Even allowing Barney's definition of martyr, Pastors Nalliah and Scot are not Australia's first religious martyrs. Surely that distinction must go to Australia's first chaplain, the Rev. Richard Johnson, who was hounded and hassled by the Colony's authorities, and actively and passively persecuted for his desire to preach the gospel of grace instead of the strict obedience to the law that Governor Philip desired in order to keep the convicts in line. Johnson suffered persecu-

tion from both directions, including having his church burnt down by his wayward flock!

There are other instances in Australian history of persecution and hardship suffered by Christians, including indigenous and migrant Christians, at the hand of various government institutions. The recent experience of these two Victorian pastors is disturbing and ought to alarm us. But they are not the "first Australian martyrs" by any definition of the phrase.

*Greg Munro  
Scottsdale, Tas*



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David and Josie Brand

# prayer

**AUGUST 2005**

- 21 Pray for the Holy Spirit to use the "Jesus. All About Life" campaign currently running on commercial TV and radio in Adelaide to confront children, young and older people with Christian truth – and consideration of possible similar campaigns in Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Darwin and Perth. Matt. 13:18-23.
- 22 Scottsdale parish, northern Tasmania, including Bridport with about 80 c&a (communicants and adherents), 30 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth) and 5 e (elders); Greg and Catherine Munro.
- 23 Phillip and Antonia Andrew from Epping, Sydney – Mission Partners (APWM) workers in a local church in a large city in South Asia.
- 24 Pray for the Interim moderator David Palmer, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Aspendale-Seaford parish, bayside Melbourne with about 135 c&a, 35 yf and 7 e.
- 25 Clifton home mission station, Qld Darling Downs with about 60 c&a, 30 yf and 3 e; Greg Saville.
- 26 Presbytery of Sydney 23 parishes and 1 home mission station with about 7630 c&a, 2 deaconesses, 3 theological teachers, 1 school chaplain, 1 aged care chaplain, 1 minister to the deaf, 6 theological candidates and 3 retired ministers. Robert McKean clerk.
- 27 Morwell parish, Gippsland, Vic. with about 90 c&a, 5 yf and 11 e; Robert and Mary Boan.
- 28 Pray that church people and others may appreciate the achievements and limitations of natural sciences and their relationship with the Biblical revelation.
- 29 Carol Whipp from Somerville, Melbourne Mission Partners (APWM) partner society worker with WEC, in a Hindi speaking congregation in Wolverhampton, England.

- 30 The maintenance and updating of all church websites and their effective impact both among church people and enquirers.
- 31 The work of TEAR Australia in channeling relief and development help to communities in the "two thirds world" and making Australian Christians aware of this necessary part of the church's mission.

**SEPTEMBER 2005**

- 1 Bill (Director) and Jenny Lutton, and Phil (Administrator) and Glenda Simmonds in the Mission Partners (APWM) office at Picnic Point, southern Sydney (and representing APWM further afield).
- 2 Adelaide Show outreach from a site in one pavilion over the next 9 days involving many members of Lutheran, Christian Reformed, Presbyterian and other churches.
- 3 Noel and Catherine Carpenter from Hobart Mission Partners (APWM) partner society workers training in Australia with MAF for overseas aviation work with WBT (JAARS).
- 4 Pittwater parish, Newport on Sydney's northern beaches with about 55 c&a, 5 yf and 6 e; Philip and Helen Rawlings.
- 5 The translation, production and distribution of God's written Word by the Bible Society, Bible League, Scripture gift Mission and other agencies.
- 6 Presbytery of Western Australia 6 parishes and 4 home mission stations with about 750 c&a, 5 missionaries, 2 theological candidates, 2 retired ministers and 4 under jurisdiction.
- 7 Graham and Sandra Chipps from Leederville, WA in pastoral ministry in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- 8 Tregear parish, outer western Sydney with about 100 c&a, 70 yf and 3 e; Tim and Jenny Wilson.
- 9 Bundoora parish northern Melbourne with about 50 c&a, 40 yf and 3 e; Neil

- and Jayne Chambers, John and Elizabeth Diacos.
- 10 The members and leaders of the 3 congregations making up the Parkes-Forbes-Peak Hill parish western NSW; Craig and Sonia Bland.
- 11 Phil and Glenda Carter from Finley-Tocumwal-Berrigan parish, southern NSW Mission Partners (APWM) partner society workers preparing to work in PNG with Pioneers of Australia in Bible teaching.
- 12 Abbotsford-Five Dock parish Sydney with about 55 c&a, 12 yf and 4 e; Moses and Hannah Hahn.
- 13 Chandra Smith from Stanthorpe, Qld Mission Partners (APWM) partner society workers in Ecuador as a community nurse with SIM.
- 14 Walcha parish northern NSW including Nowendoc and Woolbrook with about 105 c&a, 10 yf and 13 e; Lyle and Kathie Sims.
- 15 Social Services committee of the PCV (Ronald Patterson, Convener) and the residents and staff at Kirkbrae, Kilsyth, Melbourne eastern suburbs.
- 16 Roseville parish northern Sydney with about 110 c&a, 10 yf and 8 e; Graham and Janet Spence.
- 17 Grace Presbyterian Church Wodonga, northern Victoria (with Rutherglen) having about 35 c&a, 5 yf and 1 e; Neil and Jenny McDonald.
- 18 Presbytery of Central Queensland 6 parishes and 1 home mission station totaling 19 congregations with about 805 c&a, 2 retired ministers and 1 under jurisdiction. Charles Kennedy clerk.
- 19 Trinity Church Camberwell, eastern Melbourne with about 230 c&a, 110 yf and 17 e; Philip and Lavena Mercer.
- 20 Chester Hill parish western Sydney including Burmese and Vietnamese congregations with about 40 c&a and 5 e; Luke and Hae Ja Yoo.

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## Books

### Westminster Confession of Faith Study Book

Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.  
 Christian Focus, 2005  
 Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

The title of this book is a little misleading, for this is a study guide not only to the Confession of Faith but also to the Westminster Catechisms as well as the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. The reader who picks this book up thinking that it will be some kind of commentary on the Confession nevertheless will not be disappointed, for Professor Pipa has written a very comprehensive manual to assist in the formation of Christian disciples following the general order of topics in the Confession of Faith (and other subjects) as well as drawing on the time-honoured doctrinal standards mentioned above.

The book has three parts: the study guide proper, then a teacher's guide where the answers to the questions posed in the study guide are given in italics below the original questions, and seven appendices including all of the doctrinal standards drawn on in the main body of the book. It is an absolute goldmine for bible study and sermon preparation.

*Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scots Kirk, Fremantle.*

### Worship

J.C. Ryle  
 Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprinted 2005.  
 Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Writing in 1877, J.C. Ryle commented that "most English people who have any respect for appearances go to some church or chapel on Sundays". Those days are long gone. Debates over worship are very different now, but it is nevertheless still most worthwhile to seek to understand Ryle's strong evangelical perspectives on the subject.

Ryle's main enemy was ritualism, and some of this is more appropriate, naturally enough, to the Anglican scene rather than to other denominations. What Ryle would have made of the Willow Creek experiment is probably not difficult to glean, but it is not immediately addressed in a work such as this, dating from the late 19th century.

In all matters of worship, Ryle asks four questions: "Does it quicken our conscience? Does it send us to Christ? Does it add to our knowledge? Does it sanctify our life?" These are still the right questions, and still need to be asked and answered today. As always, Ryle is clear, gracious and biblical – and one cannot ask for more than that.

*Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.*

### Lady Jane Grey Nine-Day Queen of England

Faith Cook  
 Evangelical Press 2004 Hardback  
 Reviewed by Mignon Goswell

Faith Cook has written a book that brings to life a turbulent period in the political and spiritual history of England. It was published in the year marking the 450th anniversary of this remarkable young woman's death. It is a fitting tribute to Lady Jane Grey, of whom many have heard but few know any details. Raised by ambitious parents determined to see her rise as high as possible, Lady Jane Grey was brought up to understand all the protocol expected of royalty. She was a cousin of Edward VI and was worthy of him in every way. She excelled in her studies and was exemplary in her Christian faith. It was after Edward's death that Lady Jane Grey succeeded to the throne of England.

When sent to court at the tender age of nine she was taken under the wing of the sixth wife of Henry VIII, the fine Christian woman Katherine Parr. Lady Jane's life takes many twists and turns but in it all her faith remained resolute, even through her all too brief period as queen and eventual death. She was an example to those who should have been her mentors. She was able to express her faith clearly and stand for the truth even when that ultimately hastened her death.

Cook has sought to help the reader understand Lady Jane's life by explaining

the "political and religious changes shaking England at the time". The relationships between those who became successively kings and queens in this unstable period are well portrayed. The power that the monarchy held over the Grey family because they were in line for the throne is a sad aspect of this story. The struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism is shown in the lives of individuals and the life of the nation as a whole. Cook writes in a very readable manner. Here is a sympathetic but realistic treatment of Lady Jane coupled with a helpful study of this vital period of history.

*Mignon Goswell is manager of PTC Media at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.*

### Australia's Religious Communities A Multimedia Exploration DVD

Philip J. Hughes, Editor and  
 Sharon Bond, Research Assistant  
 Christian Research Association, 20004  
 Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

Since its foundation in 1985 the Christian Research Association has developed an enviable reputation as a very important servant organisation to the broad spectrum of the Christian churches as they seek to understand their context in modern, secular Australia and one another. CRA has published books, research papers, a quarterly bulletin (*Pointers*) and DVDs.

This latest DVD, the second edition of *Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration*, contains a vast amount of information on the history, beliefs, practices, organisation, statistics, people and references on 170 religious groups, big and small, well-known and obscure, mainstream and esoteric, Christian and non-Christian and all in one very easy to use DVD.

It is a major addition to the CRA catalog and more importantly the general awareness of the religious beliefs and practices of the vast majority of the Australian population. It can confidently be said that there is nothing else like this available anywhere and in any other format in Australia. It is a highly authoritative work.

# Mueller's secret

*The preservation of our joy in God takes work. It is a fight.*

**P**salm 19:7 says that "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul". If every day with Jesus was sweeter than the day before, if life were a steady ascent with no dips in our affection for God, we wouldn't need to be revived.

In another place David extolled the Lord with similar words: "He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul" (Psalm 23:2-3). This means David must have had bad days.

There were days when his soul needed to be restored. It's the same phrase used in Psalm 19:7, "the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul". Normal Christian life is a repeated process of restoration and renewal. Our joy is not static. It fluctuates with real life. It is vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:24, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy", we should emphasise it this way: "We are *workers* with you for your joy." The preservation of our joy in God takes *work*. It is a fight. Our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, and he has an insatiable appetite to destroy one thing: the joy of faith. But the Holy Spirit has given us a sword called the Word of God for the defence of our joy.

Or, to change the image, when Satan huffs and puffs and tries to blow out the flame of your joy, you have an endless supply of kindling in the Word of God. Even on days when every cinder in our soul feels cold, if we crawl to the Word of God and cry out for ears to hear, the cold ashes will be lifted and the tiny spark of life will be fanned. For "the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul". The Bible is the kindling of Christian joy.

**G**eorge Mueller (1805-1898) is famous for establishing orphanages in England and for joyfully depending on God for all his needs. How did he kindle this joy and faith? In 1841 he made a life-changing discovery. The testimony of this from his autobiography has proved to be of tremendous value in my life, and I pray it will also bear fruit in yours: "While I was staying at Nailsworth, it pleased the Lord



**John Piper**

to teach me a truth, irrespective of human instrumentality, as far as I know, the benefit of which I have not lost, though now ... more than 40 years have since passed away. The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

"Before this time my practice had been, at least for 10 years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed in the morning. Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began, therefore, to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning.

"The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to

meditate on the Word of God; searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer.

**W**hen thus I have been for a while making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast-time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father, and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it!) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word."

*By breakfast-time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart.*

GEORGE MUELLER

*This extract is taken from Desiring God (Multnomah Press, 1986).*

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