



WORLDVIEW

E - M A G A Z I N E

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Intro:

From the Publisher

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Welcome to the first issue of *Worldview Magazine*. What a daunting task it is to launch a whole new magazine! Why would anyone bother?!

There are lots of reasons why people go into publishing. I occasionally browse through the plethora of magazines in the local newsagent and I'm overwhelmed by the number. Each one of these has its own spin, focus, and 'target audience'. Those which are genuinely informative are in the minority. Celebrity gossip columns, magazines promising eternal youth, New Age spiritual guidance, those which celebrate sporting prowess or the primal instincts of lust, wealth and power; I feel assaulted (and sometimes defiled) as I walk through the isles.

Amidst the clamour and visual noise and philosophical undercurrents, I struggle to find anything much of real value at all. Almost without exception, each in some way appeals to the base instincts of man, for no more apparent higher purpose than attracting advertising dollars. So many words and images in a sea of words and images... and most with nothing worthwhile to say!

The last 7 years of my professional life has been devoted to Christian magazines and it's a cause of great sadness when I see these kinds of publications subject to strict (and sometimes petty) censorship. It's my view that objective analysis of con-

troversial issues should always be encouraged. We must avoid that critical point where journalism becomes propaganda - when we assume that our readers are ignorant and need to be told what and how to think!

We say, quite unashamedly, that this is a Christian publication. But in our age of relativism do phrases like this clarify or confuse? What does it really mean? It needs some clarification: Our goal in publishing is to examine all things through a particular framework of understanding which we call the 'Judeo/Christian worldview.' At its most basic level it means that we believe in *objective reality*, ie: truth. Truth is, we assert, the very Spirit of Jesus Christ himself. Herein is our particular bias and on this rock we stand. But our appreciation of Truth is not limited exclusively to discussions of Bible passages or narrow definitions of orthodoxy. Truth [Jesus Christ] permeates every facet of life: He can be discerned in music and art; in science and nature; in philosophy, invention, in poetry and in... publishing. These things will hopefully be the topics of future issues. If there is a central purpose behind all of this it is to encourage people to think - to expand our world view and to encourage us to think 'outside the box' of our usual paradigms. I invite your contributions on a wide range of issues - the only

criterion is that you approach your subject thoroughly and intelligently. In our journey we plan to discuss a wide range of issues: theology, ecology, economics, gastronomics, global events, social trends, recreation, reconciliation, politics and polygamy. In other words, we plan to take a broad look at life and culture and address a wide range of themes... particularly those which provide practical insights and contain information that promises to enhance our appreciation of life.

Worldview exists only as an electronic magazine and is distributed by you! If you like what you read, then please pass it on to your friends (or enemies for that matter!). And if you *really* like what you read, then please consider supporting what we are doing. Consider it a voluntary subscription. You are welcome to print hard copies yourself and your collection of issues will grow into a permanent and valuable resource that you can keep on file. Some will, no doubt, inform me that the current format is not user friendly for viewing on-screen. My choice of format is deliberate. It is intended to stand in that middle ground between a printed magazine and website. I hope people will get into the habit of printing it and passing it on. For the poor souls with bubble jet printers I have kept the graphics to a minimum (with the exception of the cover - so

don't print it!). You may see some changes in format as time goes on. Please comment.

I wish to acknowledge Dr Robert McQuillan and John Hewitt who have given me unprecedented opportunities to serve the body of Christ and gain experience in Christian publishing. I also wish to thank my good friend Alister Cameron for his encouragement and insightful perspectives; the editor of *Evangel Now!*, Mark Vainikka, for his ongoing support and a host of other people who have encouraged this venture (see credits p2). Not all of these will necessarily agree with every viewpoint I publish, but will nevertheless be gracious enough to celebrate my efforts and pray for my success.

Last, but not least, I wish to acknowledge my patient, longsuffering and supportive wife, Roslyn, and each of my beautiful children, Elyce, Justine, Joshua and Jonathan. These guys continue to pay the price for living with a slightly eccentric visionary. I love you! Perhaps it's fitting that the first issue coincides with the beginning of Spring in the southern hemisphere - it marks a new season for us as well. Previous years have been spent publishing other people's values - today we begin to share those things which we believe are important to the Church and the world.

Andrew Ford
currently lives in Seoul,
South Korea with his family
and works on trade issues
at the Australian Embassy.
He also spent 5 years in
Korea as a child.

LAND OF THE MORNING CALM

It is said that calm precedes a storm.

*Ongoing tension between North and South Korea keeps
political analysts on their toes and defence forces on stand-by.*

*Andrew Ford provides an insightful analysis of Korean
people, their history, culture and religion.*

What images do you associate with Korea? Maybe you have heard about the Korean war – the American television series *M*A*S*H* portrayed a view of the war that could hardly have been further from reality – or maybe you own some clothes or toys made in Korea, or a Korean car. Another common view of Korea is gained from the TV news with images of riot police and students or workers clashing. Or perhaps you have heard that some of the largest Christian churches in the world are in Korea.

Just as kangaroos, beautiful beaches and *Waltzing Matilda* are not all that define Australia, these images are only a small part of the tapestry that is Korea. For years known as the Hermit Kingdom, or now dubbed by its tourism promoters as the Land of the Morning Calm, Korea is one of the most fascinating, forgotten and frustrating countries in the world and one with which I have had a life long association.

When we speak of modern Korea we are actually speaking of one country that has cruelly become two. A tour of the gigantic, grey stoned Korean National War Memorial in South Korea's capital, Seoul, is one of the best places to learn about and understand Korea's 5000 year old history of war which culminated in the Korean war of 1950-53. As you tour the graphic exhibits and descriptions, Korea's many war heroes are honoured – men who have fought bravely to defend the

country against numerous invaders. Sitting on the peninsula jutting out from mainland Asia, Korea has been a constant target for invasion from the Mongols, the Chinese and the Japanese. One of Korea's most famous victories was in the late 16th century when Admiral Lee Sun-shin, though vastly outnumbered, defeated the mighty imperial navy of Japan using tactical manoeuvres and possibly the world's first iron clad battleships.

However, from 1910 until the end of the Second World War in 1945, Japan occupied and ruled Korea. During that time, Koreans were forced to give up their language and their names and adopt Japanese ways. This period of occupation, coupled with a long history of repelling attackers, means that Koreans are survivors who have been forced by their circumstances to stand strong together. Coupled with a strong Confucian ethic, this gives Koreans a fierce sense of loyalty to each other and has produced one of the world's most strongly homogeneous cultures. Koreans have their own language, their own foods and a distinct societal structure, which marks them as different from their near neighbours.

While liberation from Japan came in 1945, as occurred in Germany at that time, the country was annexed into two, arbitrarily using the 38th parallel, with Russia occupying the North and the USA the South. As a result, two opposing political systems emerged. In 1950, the

communist North attacked the South and the Korean war began, one of the most brutal, senseless wars of all time. After three years of constant fighting, with over 2 million lives lost (including 340 of the 8,000 Australians who fought in Korea), a ceasefire was signed which remains in place today. As a result, what was once one nation has become two bitterly opposed rivals, one a symbol of communism and the other a symbol of economic growth, who technically remain in a state of war. A Demilitarised Zone runs the full length of the border of the two countries; a four kilometre wide stretch of vacant land closely watched from both sides.

The South is now one of the world's largest economies – Australia's third largest trading partner – with growing influence in world affairs. The North is one of the world's most closed countries – one of the last vestiges of communism – yet with millions starving due to the mismanagement of this formerly resource rich nation but with one powerful trump card; a large army ruling over a populace mostly loyal to the world's only hereditary communist leadership.

For almost 50 years, both Koreas have

lived under the sceptre of a war that could be resumed at any time. In the South, 37,000 U.S. forces provide a presence and a deterrent against the North to attack. Should they do so, they would face certain defeat at the hands of the combined UN forces. This hasn't stopped an endless litany of provocations from both sides. Through the last 50 years, Korea has retained a key place in the thinking of the world's strategic analysts. Geographically located between three of the world's powers in Japan, China and Russia, the South has been a bulwark against the tide of communism while the North represents a buffer between China and the capitalist nations of Asia.

In the streets of Seoul today, it's often easy to forget the threat of war until another 'incident' briefly reminds the people that Korea has an uncertain peace. The current Government of longtime opposition leader Kim Dae-jung espouses a policy called 'Sunshine' meaning that it is seeking to engage the North in dialogue and relationship. So far, the policy has been mostly unsuccessful, save for a few token visits to the North by one of Korea's top businessmen and some visits by tour groups to a remote mountain resort.

It is often said that Koreans are both the most ardent communists and the most ardent Christians in the world. Christianity first reached Korea in the nineteenth century when a number of Catholic missionaries and local believers were martyred for their faith. Protestant missionaries arrived in the 1880s and since that time, the Christian population has grown to the point where around a third of all South

Koreans consider themselves Christian. The Full Gospel Church in Yoido in Seoul, pastored by Rev. Yonggi Cho, boasts the largest membership of any church in the world. Koreans are also volunteering for the mission field in droves, as mission agencies struggle to keep up with the level of interest. Yet in the North, where the church was once strong, communist ideology has resulted in all but a token representation of the church being crushed.

One thesis is that one of the reasons that Christianity has spread so rapidly in South Korea has been the homogeneity of the people which has made it easier to share the faith. Yet I have been told that this mono-culture and loyalty has meant that Korean missionaries have found it very challenging to adjust on the mission field. Likewise, missionaries from other cultures have found Koreans a challenge. As a result, many mission societies are putting programs in place to better prepare Korean missionaries for the challenges they will face when they leave Korea and enter a new culture, including learning to speak and understand English in a more practical way than is taught in Korean schools.

In many ways, South Korea is still a country emerging from its long history of having to adopt a siege mentality. Up until the last 10 years, South Korea also has not had a democratic Government. Successive Korean Governments adopted tough measures to maintain 'law and order', often using the rationale of the security threat from the North; travel outside the country was largely restricted and the economy was closely 'guided' by the Government, who worked in close association

with big business. The 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul were very much a turning point and a source of great pride for Koreans as their country was showcased to the world. Like many countries, Korea is now succumbing to the inevitable tide of globalisation. The economic downturn of 1997-98 has also provided a sombre reminder of the fallibility of Korea's economic system. As a result the Government is seeking - so far mostly unsuccessfully - to break the nexus between big business, the banks and government.

Korea's faces many difficult challenges – not least the potential that the two Koreas may one day be reunified – a stated policy aim for the governments on each side of the border. Koreans also have a crucial role to play in God's plan for the world, whether it be as missionaries or because of the special place the country occupies in the geo-political-strategic-economic sphere.

A tour of the Korean war memorial in Seoul usually finishes with a visit to the grounds outside, where there is a large monument to those from many nations who fought and died in the Korean war. The monument is topped by a statue called the 'two brothers'. It depicts two soldiers, brothers, embracing as they confront each other on the battlefield. One is fighting for the North and one for the South. My prayer for Korea is that the grand hope encapsulated by this statue will one day become a reality – that Korea and Koreans will practice the ministry of reconciliation, whether it be with each other in their homeland or in countries beyond.

'Koreans also have a crucial role to play in God's plan for the world, whether it be as missionaries or because of the special place the country occupies in the geo-political-strategic-economic sphere'

SIGNS FROM GOD

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Many years ago sociologists predicted that around the turn of the century a social phenomenon would overtake the earth. They called it *millennium fever*. It would be evidenced by an increased interest in religion and much speculation about the apocalyptic events of Christ's return and the end of the world. But their predictions came not so much from astute observation of social trends, but rather from observation of history. Interest in end-time events has always been at its zenith at the turn of any century. But this is not just the ticking over of another hundred years - it's a whole new millennium. Actually, the new millennium doesn't begin until 2001 - a fact which most commentators conveniently ignore - everyone's attention is fixed, it seems, on the calendar turning from 1999 to 2000. In most people's minds at least, this is the beginning of the new epoch.

It seems the sociologists were right. But millennium fever is actually not as intense as I would have expected. The Christian church in the late 70s and early 80s was much more abuzz with speculation of Christ's return - fuelled by books such as Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great*

Highly respected Australian journalist Mike Willesee recently co-hosted *Signs from God*, which recently went to air throughout the US and Australia.

***Signs from God* had a distinctly Catholic flavour and quite impressively documented some paranormal phenomena which would worry many Protestant evangelical believers.**

Planet Earth, and others such as *Cosmic Conspiracy*. Every evangelical and his dog had his own angle on who the Antichrist was going to be and when 'the rapture' was going to take place. I remember thinking to myself in 1980 that Jesus' return would be in no more than five years. Twenty years later we are still waiting. Perhaps our expectation has waned, but hopefully not because we've grown indifferent - I hope we've just grown a little wiser and like those wise virgins of Jesus' parable we've just "trimmed our lamps"¹ in preparation for what could be a longer wait.

But the fact is, we have more reason today to expect Jesus' return than we did before. Many of the signs are here: War in the Middle East and Europe, significant developments in Israel, the recent earthquake in Turkey - just to name a few. But it seems now that even the secular world is starting to suspect that something cataclysmic is afoot. TV networks at least are recognising an increased interest in these things and are airing overtly religious programs in prime time - something we would not have seen just a few years ago. Highly respected Australian journalist Mike Willesee recently co-hosted one of these programs which went to air live throughout the US and was recently shown here in Australia. *Signs from God* had a distinctly Catholic flavour and quite impressively documented some paranormal phenomena which would worry many Protestant evangelical believers. Much of their suspicion is provoked by references to the virgin Mary who, it was alleged, had a mediating role in some of this. Stigmata (the phenomenon whereby wounds similar to those suffered by Christ on the cross miraculously appear and disappear), bleeding photographs and statues, apparitions of Mary, spontaneously appearing miniature portraits of Jesus and Mary on rose petals - all

of these get a good evangelical's blood boiling and reaching for his Bible to refute why such things cannot *possibly* be from God.

Signs from God particularly focused on a Catholic Bolivian woman named Katya. Katya claimed to be able to actually see and hear Jesus and was able to write messages in various languages. These messages, she claimed, were shown to her by Jesus. She was also able to accurately predict when the next stigmata would occur and surprised Willesee and his film crew by giving them a personal word [from Jesus] that their work in documenting all this was blessed by him. When the stigmata occurred - as predicted - it appeared convincing. We saw the appearance of small wounds which progressively grew into severe sores on her hands, feet and face. Her agony throughout all this was apparent. The next day her wounds had substantially healed and DNA tests on samples taken from the wounds confirmed it to be real blood.

I watched all this very critically as the 'Science Tests Faith' presentation unfolded. The scientific analysis was unconvincing in its attempts to appear objective. It appeared at times as if they were trying to confirm certain presuppositions rather than analyse every aspect of the phenomena. But I was reasonably convinced that something supernatural was happening and that if it was all a hoax, it would have required the complicity of the film crew as well.

From a theological perspective it is no surprise that supernatural things happen. The question, however, is this: from where do these 'miracles' originate? We ought not automatically assume that these signs are from God when the Bible clearly tells us that the devil is quite capable of supernatural trickery². Most Christians are open to the possibility of supernatural occurrences: conservative

Global Trends

Signs

evangelicals believe in answered prayer, the fulfilment of Scripture, etc. Pentecostals and charismatics are more ready to accept 'signs and wonders' such as miraculous healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy and a host of other miracles. But even most Bible-believing and Bible-centred Christians have to stop and think when it comes to 'signs' of the type covered in *Signs from God*. These 'signs' were exclusively Catholic. Perhaps this reveals the particular bias of Willesee and his crew who did not venture outside the Catholic church in their search for signs from God, and consulted only Catholic clergy to assess the validity of them. The challenge for many non-Catholic believers is to know what to do with phenomena which are immersed in Catholic tradition and beliefs. What do we assume about Mary's alleged role in all this when the Bible clearly says that Jesus is the only mediator between God and men?³ What do we do when Jesus allegedly refers to Mary as 'my mother' during one of these 'prophetic' sessions? Do we discount it altogether? The Catholic church itself seems hard-pressed to know what to make of it all.

This much is clear: when it comes to subjecting supernatural phenomena to biblical scrutiny the problem is always in filtering out the human factor. It's reasonable to assume that even genuine experiences are sometimes distorted as they pass through the filter of an individual's own belief system. Should the fact that these events are subject to embellishment or interpretation cause us to discount them altogether? Embellishment of spiritual revelation certainly happens within pentecostal circles: How often have you heard a prophecy from the Lord delivered in King James English? (I thought God would have a Hebrew accent!) How often have you heard words of prophecy proceeded by the phrase, "And the Lord God would say unto you this day..."? This is clearly a manifestation of pentecostal religious culture - a very human phenomenon - but it is not [in and of itself] necessarily a valid reason to discount the message or its spiritual validity. What if Katya was really hearing from God? Could it be that she simply interprets everything she hears through

the filter of her Catholicism? Some things in *Signs from God* were clearly spurious. No matter how convincingly supernatural any occurrence is, if it draws people away from Christ to Mary worship (or anything else) we should rightly view it as spiritually suspect. God may very well speak in unusual ways, but we still need a reliable criterion for filtering what is spiritual deception.

One thing that struck me about Katya was her apparently genuine humility. The cross was central in all of it [albeit in a very unusual way] and the nature and character of God did not appear to be misrepresented. Apart from some uncomfortable references to Mary and the nature of the 'signs' being completely outside my own paradigms of the way God works, the final thrust of her message was thoroughly biblical: "The Lord Jesus is alive today, don't try and live independently from God, turn from your sins, judgement is coming and Jesus is returning soon." To that we can say a wholehearted "Amen!".

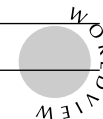
There is no doubt that we live in confusing times. Jesus warned that false prophets would abound and possibly deceive even God's own people. We must be ready to carefully evaluate everything. But we cannot be closed to the fact that God may choose to operate outside of our own paradigms in order to reach some people who come from a background completely different from our own. Claiming to be exclusively right will not, in the end, protect us from error. After centuries of church history it should come as no surprise that God is not particularly committed to defending our favoured religious institutions or rigidly narrow definitions of orthodoxy. Jesus will not be held captive by any denomination or tradition - the eternal message of salvation through Christ is far too important for that.

Bibliography

¹Matt 25:7

²Cor 11:14; Exodus 7:10,11

³1 Tim 2:5



Senior Partner

by Ivan Vail

There is a story I love to tell about Stanley Kresge and his wife that illustrates the giving principle. I trust it will encourage you; it is not meant to coerce.

Apparently Stanley, when first setting up a business, decided that he would make God the 'senior partner'. When thinking to himself about the implications of what that meant he concluded that God would have to take 51% of the profits. A short time after applying that principle he found he could give 80% and then 90% and finally 99%. You ask how is that possible? Well Stanley and his wife started the K-Mart chain in the United States. The fruits of honouring God are very evident in this story.

But wait; there's more. Wesley Dewell tells the story of staying with the Kresges and noting how this couple continued to drive an adequate car rather than the latest 'state-of-the-art' model in accord with their philosophy of living frugally in order to give more to the Lord's work. Wesley saw this best exemplified one morning as he noticed Mrs Kresge standing beside an automatic pop-up toaster that had lost its pop, waiting for the tell-tale click to say the toast was ready. This is the wife of the man who holds the franchise to K-Mart. When queried on it, she said that they refuse to buy a new model if the current one does the job. That way they can give more to support missions around the world.

*This article first appeared in **Beyond Words**, and is reproduced with the kind permission of Wycliffe Bible Translators.*

EAT, LIVE AND BE HEALTHY!

Is your family experiencing needless pain, suffering, sickness or premature death? You might be missing God's wisdom for natural health and not realising it!

Thomas Jackson, from Tennessee, USA, was 17 when first afflicted with acute arthritis. His very painful illness lasted for ten years and destroyed a promising basketball career. He then discovered the Bible, which showed him how to completely restore his health through a total change of lifestyle.¹

As a Toowoomba home-maker, Rosemary's testimony is equally as inspiring. For 27 years she suffered from chronic fatigue. Her family tried numerous health supplements and 'wonder foods' but to little effect.

Late in 1997, she reverted to a raw food diet, coupled with extra sunshine, water, fresh air, exercise (as able) and some new, key nutrients, including Green Barley Juice.² The response has been amazing and she is now well on her way to full recovery. Consequently, Rosemary, too, is encouraging people to change their lifestyles. Her experience points to natural cures to health problems.

After many years of casual interest in the subject, in July 1997, my wife, Jo, and I saw a series of videos on natural health. We began to earnestly research the health sciences and the Bible on healing, and have not stopped

since. We continue to find reports pointing to tens of thousands of healing testimonies world-wide.

There is consistent prevention and cure from all kinds of cancers, cardio-vascular diseases (CVD), arthritis, gout, 'stones', PMT, diabetes, ulcers, osteoporosis, skin diseases, AIDS, flus, cataracts, Alzheimer's, migraines, MS, Candida, epilepsy and most diseases.

This research spoke to us deeply about natural health and vitality in our lives. We recommend that you read some of the biblical keys for yourself, such as those found in Genesis 1:29; Jeremiah 30:12-17; Daniel 1:8-16; & 1 Corinthians 3: 16-17. (PS: If you would like a Bible, please write to us and we will send you one FREE!)

QUOTE: THOMAS EDISON

"The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patient in the care of the human frame, in diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease."

Source: Biernoff, J. & L., 'Nutrition Manual 6', Environmental Health and Nutrition, Toowoomba, QLD, 1997

God created mankind to live in a state where OPTIMUM HEALTH IS NORMAL. For most of us though, we live an opposite life and/or don't realise what is subtly going on deep inside our bodies.

It is not something related purely to old age. Disease often strikes the aged because it has had more time to develop. These days, acute disease is hitting the young just as readily. Indeed, weak body cells and structures are being passed on to the next generation. Yes, there are all kinds of germs and infections to blame but we still hold the keys as to their effect on us and our children.

This sorry state of affairs is more the result of modern

society's affluence. As with the ancient Egyptians, it comes from a condition called *toxaemia* and arises from the way in which we eat, drink and live. You might say that the influence of modern affluence is leaving us with much effluence.

Our bodies were created to be remarkably 'self-healing' for optimum health. Disease occurs where we put toxins in and fail to maintain our immune and defence systems. As Thomas Jackson remarks, "We spend the first forty years of our lives spending our health to get our wealth and the next forty years spending our wealth to regain our health."

If we will give our bodies a chance and work toward naturally restoring our health balance, then disease can be largely reduced from our lives. We will live longer, more productive lives.

So how do I do that, you may ask? Throughout the upcoming series of 'Eat, Live & Be Healthy' articles, we will discuss the eight key areas of natural health. They are all in the Holy Bible, starting with the book of Genesis which describes how we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

The keys to optimum health and well-being are simple and straightforward. Anyone can apply them and be greatly blessed. Join us to begin an amazing journey towards renewed vitality!

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*All biblical quotes taken from: International Bible Society, 'The NIV Study Bible', Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MN, 1985.

Self-Sufficiency

Garden Preparation

WONDEROUS WORMS!

Ken & Chris Weatherall live in the historic central Victorian goldfield town of Castlemaine, Australia. They run a Bed & Breakfast for people who need a quiet and interesting place to 'get away from it all.' For bookings, or for more information about worms, you can contact them at: kenchris@castlemaine.net.au or ring 03 54725292

It has been said that every piece of soil on the planet has been through the gut of a worm at least once! In your backyard these amazing little creatures are able to convert organic material you would usually send to the garbage dump into a useful product very quickly. They can make vermicompost, a mixture of castings (worm manure) and compost, from waste such as fruit and vegetable scraps, autumn leaves, tea bags, cardboard and weeds, for use in your garden.

Everyone who attempts to develop a garden has a vision of healthy flowers or vegetables, yet often we struggle and achieve only mediocre results. The image of a paradise on earth is there, but our soil, the time available, and our knowledge of how to best tackle the problems seem to shift reality away from the dream. Surely everyone has, like me, built a compost heap that won't break down, planted vegetables in soil too poor to nurture them or unable to hold the moisture required.

Much of the solution can be provided by a sustainable and environmentally friendly worm bed. Compost worms can work wonders. You can avoid the more arduous and costly solutions of importing better soil or continually using purchased products.

Vermicompost can give remarkable results when used to improve your garden soil. Raised beds of vermicompost will give

good gardening results immediately. This rich material may need protection from invasion by tree or weed roots. A layer of plastic underneath can be used, taking care not to puncture it when digging. Mine are constructed as large planter boxes. They can even be built on paved surfaces.

The liquid that seeps from the worm bed, known as worm liquid or worm tea, can be collected and safely used as you would use a fertiliser.

Nutrient levels in vermicompost and worm liquid will depend on what the worms were given to eat. They will differ in performance from chemical fertilisers, by increasing the microbial activity in your soil and improving moisture retention, giving far better results.

So perhaps every gardener should have a worm bed. But, a word of warning, the small commercially available plastic beds will do little other than produce a small quantity of fertilizer for your favourite pot plant. Sure, they will provide you with an opportunity to watch worms at work and breeding. And, as with all little creatures, the opportunity to marvel as we understand them more.

Converting the compostable waste from an average household (Estimated at around 60% of waste destined for landfill) will take a bigger box. Worms will die when bed temperatures exceed 30 de-

grees C and a small box rapidly becomes effectively smaller on a hot day as the heat penetrates and the worms are forced to the centre of the box. Too much green material in this sort of setup at any time of the year will result in very high and possibly fatal temperatures generated from organic breakdown.

What is needed is a simple approach to keeping worms, where large quantities of waste can be processed and the worms can live in a easy going environment, where they will be safe and require only occasional attention. In the next issue I'll give you some hints on the easy way of keeping worms.

WORLDVIEW

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THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

Dr Barry Chant is the founder and president of Tabor College and is a respected authority on the history of the Pentecostal movement. He is also author of a number of books ranging from children's stories to church history.

The Australian Pentecostal movement today seems to me to be facing a similar problem to that of the Methodists a hundred years ago. Methodism had departed from its early Wesleyan roots and was becoming more respectable. It had ministry training colleges, buildings, schools and impressive publications... and there were those who cried for a return to the old ways and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

William Taylor (1845-1934), the founder of what is now the Wesley Mission in Sydney, was convinced of the need for churches to emulate the methods of the apostles — apostolic methods will still produce apostolic results. Taylor's passion was expressed in a sermon he preached in 1912, the one hundredth anniversary of the first Methodist meeting in Australia. Methodism's only safety lay in its spirituality. And he pleaded with them — *Back to Wesley! Back to the upper room! Rekindle the waning fires of the Church's inner life! Give the Holy Ghost an opportunity!*

It would pay them 'a thousandfold' to stop everything for a year and fall to their knees to ask God to 'alter the atmosphere of the Church.' He challenged the ministers, 'Put fire in the pulpit, and you will soon get fire in the pew.'

'Let the Church go to its knees and master the art of tarrying there, and then, ere this year closes, there shall come to our great Church the one thing, the only thing, that can permanently settle this question — a Pentecost, bursting upon us with all its original power.'

Another who cried for revival was John Watsford, the first Australian-born Methodist minister. He saw six causes

for concern in 19th century Methodism:

Distraction from the all-important work of saving souls; too much reliance on special services and special agents; growing worldliness of the Church; modifying of grand old doctrines; neglect of the doctrine of entire sanctification; neglect of weekly class meetings.

The Pentecostal movement today faces similar challenges. I want to consider some contemporary issues - some which may prove to be controversial. If so, I hope they will stir us up to some useful thinking, praying, reflection and debate which will lead to a positive outcome.

Negative Trends in the Pentecostal Movement Today

● *An unbiblical emphasis on experience*

This has been reflected in phenomena associated with the 'Toronto Blessing' and 'the River.' One popular visiting preacher told the crowds he addressed in Sydney to 'leave their brains at the door' and just enjoy what was happening. Another warned people not to question, because 'a critical spirit will damn you to hell.' In a recent conference, a prophecy was given telling pastors to burn all their old sermon notes and get 'fresh fire.'

There's a strong focus on encouraging people to achieve personal victory through responding to altar calls, having hands laid on them or being 'slain in the Spirit.'

There is nothing in the New Testament to encourage Christian living by laying on of hands. Christian victory is attained by walking in the Spirit, praying in the Spirit, putting off the old, putting on the new, putting to death the flesh etc. (see Ephesians, Colossians).

Are we training people in an ultimately destructive way

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This article is adapted from a lecture given at the Annual Conference of the Association of Pentecostal and Charismatic Bible Colleges of Australasia in May 1999.

Worldview has chosen to publish this because we believe it contains some insights of prophetic significance for the Church today - both in Australia and the rest of the world. We strongly encourage church leaders and thinking Christians everywhere to consider Dr Chant's observations.

Analysis

Church Trends

of life and to live by experience instead of faith? The Pentecostal movement has been strong on fads:

The rapture, fasting, deliverance, dancing, falling, groaning, seed faith, prosperity gospel, positive confession, power of praise, scripture songs, praise and worship, spiritual warfare, laughing, crying, etc. Most of these can be valid but the Pentecostal movement has given them first place (one at a time). But nothing should have first place except the gospel!

Rod Lensch writes, 'Without a doubt, heresy creeps into a revival movement when subjective experience is elevated above objective truth.'

● **An unhealthy abandonment of sound doctrine**

Sound doctrine has often been abandoned in the face of expediency, especially in the realm of evangelism. If something will bring a crowd, or result in conversions, the Pentecostal movement has often ignored doctrinal and theological problems.

The popular play *Heaven's Gates and Hell's Flames* is an example. God is portrayed as harsh and inflexible and the devil as relishing the flames (which were made for his torment!). This is a difficult issue - it seems churlish to find fault with a medium which achieves the salvation of souls. But sound doctrine and effective evangelism should go together. It's not good enough to say, 'Oh, he's an evangelist,' as if that allows for any kind of heresy. It is sad that evangelism (a noble profession) has become associated with extravagance, exaggeration and falsehood.

Jesus said, 'I am the truth.' The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and we ought to be people of truth. Expediency should never dictate our message.

● **An unhealthy celebrity mentality**

Most Australians are enamoured by overseas 'big name' speakers. When the *United Charismatic Convention* tried to focus on Australian speakers, attendances plummeted dramatically. From the earliest days of the movement overseas people have always drawn crowds. The post-war Americanisation of Australia is now almost complete — people sing with American accents, kids wear baseball caps (backwards), American TV stars are better known

than Australian politicians! But the Pentecostal movement has been affected more than the general populace: US televangelists draw large sums of money from Australian believers and even though they often represent an unhealthy, celebrity-centred approach to ministry, the biggest crowds attend their rallies. One book publisher claims that 50% of general books sold in Australia are written by Australians. But in the Christian market, only 2% are by Australians.

● **An unhealthy consumer mentality**

Sadly, the Pentecostal movement has picked up the secularist, materialist values of society. The consumer mentality is evident in music, entertainment, 'manifestations,' charismatic leadership, comfort and so on. At Tabor College we have found it very difficult to attract students for Intercultural Studies. There seems to be little interest in long-term mission work. Does this reflect a growing appetite for comfort?

Have we become post-modernist in our approach to the faith? ie: What works for us is what is right. Sound doctrine is, for some people, no longer an important issue.

A couple of years ago at Wollongong a large number of people were urged to be re-baptised if they felt they had backslidden or felt far from God. What happens when they feel that way again? Should they be baptised again? But more importantly, what biblical justification is there for such re-baptisms? This is an example of an unhealthy emphasis on 'blessing' above truth. When the end seemingly justifies the means, ethics and behaviour have at times been questionable.

Like the early Wesleyans, Pentecostals saw revival as comprising two elements — conversions and sanctification. They sought to be baptised in the Spirit because they had a yearning and a longing for holiness. They wanted to be a blessing more than they wanted to get a blessing. Today the phrase 'catch the fire' has been a popular one. But John the Baptist spoke of fire as a cleansing, purifying agent (Matthew 3:11,12). In the New Testament, over half of the references to fire are to fires of judgement! Perhaps we have missed that emphasis in recent years.

● **An unhealthy leadership style**

Some Pentecostal leaders are elevating themselves above criticism or question and people who raise issues may be told they are being rebellious.

Lensch warns us — Charismatics... tend to gravitate to places where the pastor is a dynamic person and a dynamic preacher... The trouble here is that dynamic people can 'wow' the troops and be put on a pedestal like little popes... I am not saying that all dynamic pastors are prone to error but they must not become a substitute for the Lord and his word.

● **There is also an ungodly and unbiblical focus on raising money**

In one church, a visiting US preacher was given over \$100,000 for three meetings. What did Jesus get for the Sermon on the Mount? Other itinerant ministers are insisting on raising their own offerings, and doing very well at it. At a recent conference, delegates were told, in effect, 'Godliness = gain.' I wonder what Paul would say to that? (1 Timothy 6:6-10). These are very worrying trends and signal trouble for the movement.

● **A decline in the rate of growth**

According to Australian Census figures, the movement's recent growth rate is 10,000 below the recorded 1976-81 figures. Whilst growth is still good, Pentecostals still represent only 0.98% of the population — less than either Muslims or Buddhists.

The large influx from the charismatic movement is now over. There is now a move back to mainline churches. Reasons: Disenchantment with leadership; shallow teaching. The anticipated growth of the movement has not occurred as was once expected. Should this slide continue, the next five year period could actually show a decline in membership.

Some Positive Trends

● **A healthy appreciation of spiritual experience**

A focus on experience can be either a weakness or a strength. Experience is essential to Christian living. Jonathan Edwards wrote a classic work on this subject.

Analysis

Church Trends

“Nothing is more manifest in fact, than that the things of religion take hold of men’s souls... I am bold to assert that there never was any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any person... that had not his affections moved.

“The Holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affection... in the affection of love, in love to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to the people of God, and to mankind... holy desire... holy joy... sorrow, mourning, and brokenness of heart... gratitude... compassion and mercy... zeal... It is an evidence that true religion, or holiness of heart, lies very much in the affection of the heart, that the Scriptures place the sin of the heart very much in hardness of heart.”

Donald Gee, the great British apostle, wrote:

“No man possessed of a Scriptural experience needs be afraid of an argument; he is beyond its reach. Any man rejoicing in a living experience of God in his life has a power independent of, and mightily beyond, all external training in logic or theology...”

“The men and women who founded Christianity were those who had been set on fire and kept on fire by burning personal experience. And all down the ages ever since, revival has centred — not around the dust of doctrinal battlefields and the places of exact presentation of some orthodox creed. But rather, where valiant, humble hearts have dared to venture their lives and their all on

The movement needs lucid, scholarly leaders. Without theologically equipped leaders, the Church is destined to remain in shallow waters. It is important to love God, not only with heart, soul and strength, but, as Jesus made plain, also with the mind.

fresh discoveries of the glorious fact and boundless possibilities of the living Christ — the acid test and the most convincing of all proofs — actual experience”.

So although an unhealthy focus on experience is a danger, an experiential faith is essential for healthy Christianity. This is a great strength of the Pentecostal movement.

● **A healthy degree of freedom, initiative and creativity**

There is a remarkable and exciting expression of growth and imaginative enterprise. The whole Church has been affected by what pentecostals have done. There are many examples — new and varied denominations, small independent churches, Christian music and arts conventions, Christian schools and colleges, magazines and journals, etc. There is freedom to follow the leading of the Spirit. The wind of the Spirit blows where it wills and ‘so is everyone who is born of the Spirit’ (John 3:8, NASB).

● **Local leadership**

In spite of the trend towards Americanisation, there is also a growing and emerging number of Australian leaders. Australian Pentecostalism was not started by overseas missionaries — it was indigenous from the beginning. This emphasis is missiologically sound and needs to be sustained and encouraged by good leadership training. We need to be encouraged and reminded that we *can* do it!

● **An increase in ministry training**

This has been a major deficiency in times gone by. Early Pentecostals were often sceptical of theological training. There is a growing sophistication in our churches and many pastors now face Bible College graduates in the congregations on Sunday mornings. Social issues seem more complex and so glib and trite quoting of proof texts is insufficient to satisfy their needs. The movement needs lucid, scholarly leaders. Without theologically equipped leaders, the Church is destined to remain in shallow waters. It is important to love God, not only with heart, soul and strength, but, as Jesus made plain, also with the mind (Mark 12:29).

● **Growing Unity**

The first three Pentecostal churches in Australia were

not even on talking terms and there was much division and suspicion of each other. The formation of the *Australian Pentecostal Ministers’ Fellowship* in 1978 was a major step forward and now there is talk of a closer affiliation of the various Pentecostal denominations under the banner of *Australian Christian Churches*. If Pentecostalism is truly a work of the Spirit, then unity must be a growing attribute. It is up to us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Conclusion

There are two further points that need to be made. Firstly, from its earliest days, the Pentecostal movement in Australia has been evangelistic. Men and women from the first congregation (Good News Hall) travelled from Perth to Cairns preaching Christ. They used every means they could think of to declare the gospel. But when ‘evangelists’ spend more time talking about other things (eg: raising money) rather than proclaiming Christ, we should be very concerned. The gospel is the power of God to salvation and we are in peril if we do not preach it (1 Cor 9:16).

Secondly, the distinctive of the Pentecostal movement has always been baptism in the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that this is the ultimate key to future success. It’s not just any kind of experience - it’s an experience validated by Scripture. The recent focus on revival phenomena of various kinds may have actually worked against biblical revival. I have concerns that there has been a weakening of the biblical position in this area and that we need to reaffirm it. ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ (Acts 19:2) is still a pertinent question.

The Pentecostal movement was born in an experience of the Spirit. If we keep this emphasis, the future of the Church, for all its difficulties, is secured. We *must* build on the positive trends and address the negatives. If we do, we can still be God’s agents for revival in this nation and beyond.

WHITE MAN'S DREAMING*

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has recently bowed to political pressure and has made a statement expressing official regret for past injustices committed against indigenous Australians. But the root of most people's indifference to the issue of interracial reconciliation - particularly as it relates to land rights - stems from white man's inability to realise the deep significance of land to indigenous people and culture.

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My father has always been a self-reliant sort of man. In many ways the typical tough Australian farmer. Both my mother and father are the kind of people that you have to admire. The years of hard work and hard times have made them very practical, resourceful and patient people - and absolutely honest.

I was just a boy when poor health and hard economic times caused my parents to sell the farm. The day they made that decision was one of the few occasions I saw my Dad cry. It was a decision that my parents made, in typical self-sacrificing fashion, for the good of the family. So why was this a tearful occasion?

Over years of living on and working the land my father developed a deep identification and connection with the land - his small piece of Australia. Selling the farm meant breaking away from something very near and dear to him. The land had become part of his identity. His connection to it could perhaps be described as spiritual. It was a connection that I had too, but one which I wouldn't realise until years later, and it was a connection which is profoundly important both to me and my children.

Today in Australia, as in other parts of the world, the debate is raging about land

rights of indigenous people. Indigenous people's connection to the land is similar to that of the farmer, but one which has grown deeper over numerous generations and is deeply intertwined with their beliefs. They've dug the earth with their hands and eaten the food that grows from it; they've hunted the animals that have grazed upon it and have learned its signs and seasons. The familiar places and landmarks become the subject of stories and legends and serve as memorials of important events in family or tribal history - they become 'sacred'.

Approximately 90% of Australians today live in urban areas and relocate, on average, every 5 years. Urban Australians are culturally conditioned for relocation and understand little of the grief that comes when people are torn away from the land with which they have cultural connections. Their identity revolves around their job or their possessions or their recreational activities. Whilst in East Africa I was amused to learn that a word for white man was 'musungu'. It is derived from a Swahili word meaning 'restless one' or 'one who wanders about'. Perhaps it's this characteristic of the European to 'wander about' that is at the root of our not being able to understand the deep connection that in-

digenous peoples have to their homelands. (One wonders if it is also at the root of our politicians inability to grasp the importance of providing adequate policies for the protection of farmers against the cruel onslaught of global economics.)

I later returned with my children to the 'sacred' land of my father. The current owners were kind enough to let us 'have a look around'. I walked back in time as we visited the places where I played as a boy. The large front lawn was still there where on summer evenings we had played for hours with our dear and long-departed dog - and laughed ourselves to exhaustion. I recalled to my children stories of cubby-huts, haystacks, billy carts and shearing sheds. They saw where my brother survived a snakebite and the place where the family gathered once a year to celebrate 'Guy-Faulks night' around a huge bonfire. My children listened transfixed as I described every detail of life on the farm as a child.

Even though much had changed many of the landmarks were still there: The front gate and the mail-box which my father had made were still in use; the big old familiar gum trees were still standing there like silent sentinels and patient witnesses to the passing of time; the front verandah

where we had so often gathered together to watch the awesome spectacle of thunder and lightning storms roll in.

It was a sacred and precious time which I was able to share with my 'tribe', and one that seemed to make my life snap into clearer focus. I left there feeling a little sad but deeply satisfied. I had recalled where I had come from and part of what defines me as a person. My children also came away with a clearer picture of where 'we' came from. To them it is 'the land of our fathers' - a land which they will never inherit but one which remains special in their lives as it is in mine.

Land rights and reconciliation are not just about the allocation of land. That's a very European way of looking at it. In many cases it may not be possible to restore all of the land which was taken from previous generations. Many of the original inhabitants are gone of those lands have now become the sacred homelands of later generations of new inhabitants. But reconciliation does demand the *acknowledgement* of what is culturally and spiritually important to *all* people and giving due consideration and just restitution to *all* who have been disenfranchised and displaced.

*The term 'Dreaming' is used by aboriginal Australian's to refer to their stories and traditions, their ancestral past, and their spiritual connection to the land.



GAY DOESN'T MEAN HAPPY

The author prefers to remain anonymous at this time, but can be contacted via email at: gumtree63@hotmail.com

**The term 'mate' is an Australian colloquialism, meaning 'companion' or 'close friend' - usually of the same sex. In this context it has no sexual connotations.*

My mind was going around in circles spiralling downwards with depression... I could not cope any longer and attempted suicide. I think an angel saved me that night...

I never thought I was gay; that type of lifestyle was too risky, dangerous and socially distasteful.

My only problem was that I felt this attraction to other boys from the time I started puberty at 10 years of age. I had grown up with my younger sister in a good stable home and never aware that something might be missing from my childhood that would effect me later on in life.

As a boy I was very shy, insecure, and managed to fill all my time playing games happily alone.

I can remember being at Kinda, playing

intensely with blocks, so that I would not have to relate to the other kids. At primary school I feared recess and lunchtime. I had no friends and would walk around and around the school yard looking busy but feeling lonely. I longed to play footy or cricket with the other boys, but had no idea of the rules or the confidence to play.

My father was a quiet, reserved man who worked very hard to support his family by being away at work from 7am until 6pm, and some weekend work to help pay the bills. He had a difficult childhood combined with a poor father figure from my grandfather. I think like most men he was unsure of how to raise his son. All I every wanted was for him to hug me, share his thoughts and feelings on life with me, and to play footy with me. Somewhere along the way I had become distant from my father. My mother's personality was the opposite to Dad's. My mother was more dominate with her emotional expressions, possibly overcompensating for my father, with her love of talking and her affection through hugging and kissing us kids.

After the age of 10 I felt a hunger for the missing males in my life. I had a desire to be close to other boys but had no idea of how, which made me feel alienated. My thoughts turned into sexual fantasies for other attractive boys. I did not act upon my homosexual feelings and hoped that they would eventually go away.

My life changed at 16 as I found myself for the first time surrounded by a group of close mates*.

I thought I had been cured from homosexual feelings as I enjoyed my first girl friend, hanging out with my mates, and noticed my sexual attraction for guys begin to subside. At 19 I started my first job and felt very happy with having money to spend and a growing circle of friends. At the same time I had this growing sense that there was more to life, why was I here, what was the meaning to life? Even though I had a girl friend, mates, a car, and money to spend, I felt there was more to life. I started praying that God would help me find what I was looking for - the meaning to life! The distant God I did not know personally responded in full force as I was bombarded with Christian messages through music and through a church youth group I had just joined. Over the next few months I had this growing sense that God wanted me to hand my life over to Him.

The happiest moment in my life came just after my 20th birthday as I gave in to God chasing me and said "Well, here's my life, its all yours". Immediately I felt this burning sensation in my heart along with this overwhelming love. My life began a new journey as God slowly moulded me to be more like Jesus. Nothing could have prepared me for the intense pain ahead.

Two months later I was counselling a

friend, Jason, after his father's death. I spent a lot of time with him and enjoyed having someone who was not afraid to express their feelings by hugging and touching me. Ever so gradually Jason pushed closer to me and I had no reason to stop him, particularly while my thirst for male friendship was blurring what was actually happening. Sometime later I realised I was in a sexual relationship with Jason and discovered that he was gay. Part of me was in shock thinking how did this happen, and the other half was addicted to the fact that another man loved me as I lived out a childhood fantasy.

In the meantime God had called me to Bible College, so after resigning from my job, I tried to break off this relationship with Jason before my course commenced. We had both become emotionally dependant on each other and talking was not enough to stop the homosexual behaviour.

One night I looked up into the sky with tears in my eyes and poured out my heart to the Lord to help me escape from this friendship. I heard the words "Flee from the youth group." Straight away I left the youth group where Jason attended, moved to another church, and moved away to live on campus at Bible College. My next problem was dealing with the shame, the frustration, the anger and the homosexual feelings that I had suppressed so well for the past 4 years, and having them resur-

Sexual Issues

Homosexuality

face now that I was a Christian.

I wanted to talk to someone who understood my problem. I could not open up to my Christian mates for fear of rejection, and the only other person I knew who understood my problem was Jason.

My mind was going around in circles spiralling downwards with depression. I was thinking this surely has never happened to another Christian guy, and why does it have to be me? I was not willing to share my burden with anyone for fear that my whole life would cave in around me, so my inner turmoil led me to other options of escape. Occasionally I slipped backwards and met with Jason which only pushed my depression down further. I could not cope any longer and attempted suicide.

I think an angel saved me that night after I had been deliberately speeding on a wet and dark night. On a bend in the road my car spun out of control across the path of an oncoming car and stopped a few centimetres in front of a large tree. My heart was racing and I felt God holding me in his hand encouraging me not to escape but to talk to someone. After a few days I had enough courage to share with a female counsellor on campus. She sat and listened, did not expel me, and to my amazement said that I was certainly not the first person to share this type of struggle. She referred me on to a Christian counsellor who recommended that I strengthen my relationship with my father, my girlfriend and my heterosexual mates.

I thought I was finally cured. Had I won? I met with my father more regularly, spent more time with my Christian mates

playing sport and in ministry, and 22 months later married my girlfriend, Sharon, who had been very supportive knowing my history with Jason, who was one of her friends too.

Six years later I was running my own company with one of my staff, Bruce, a mate from church.

I made the mistake of getting too close to him and shared one day about my past struggle with homosexuality. Bruce was athletic and attractive. Somewhere along the way I had nudged into his personal space which he interpreted as a move on him. He started acting very negatively toward me and eventually resigned. He and his wife went to the extent of leaving our church and have refused any contact with me or my wife ever since. I was devastated by his reaction being a friend and a Christian. Sharon and I sought counselling to work through this painful event.

I felt hurt and angry by Bruce's behaviour. I was thinking I don't want to go through this sort of pain again. I subconsciously distanced myself from all my mates in fear that a similar event might occur.

I compensated and sought self worth by pouring extra time and energy into my business which flourished. Sharon and I had our first baby. The needs of a growing family and a thriving business left little time for me to catch up with my Dad or with my mates. Three years later we had another baby on the way, I had purchased an expensive European car, and we had moved into a larger architecturally designed house.

I thought things were going so well. Gradually I began feeling lonely, my wife

was busy with two children and I was being pushed aside. We had several arguments - one of which resulted in Sharon saying at the heat of the moment "Why don't you find someone else?" My support network of men had fallen away three years earlier and I felt alone. I thought to myself, "my wife is too busy, all men are homophobic (you can't trust them), who will I turn to?" In my loneliness I had no regular contact or affirmation from other men and the homosexual feelings intensified. One night I met with Paul, who was gay, just to have someone to talk with. I met with him several times, and he started to make a move on me. One day I was feeling spiritually weak, tired, and vulnerable and I slipped into a sexual experience with Paul. I had hit rock bottom spiritually. I asked myself, "do I want to follow God, or do I want to head off into the gay subculture?"

At the same time a Christian mate, unaware of my struggle, spent 30 minutes regurgitating the contents of his evening service. I had to stop myself from blushing or breaking out in a cold sweat - the subject was 'homosexuality'. I sat on the edge of my chair as I learnt about Rowland Croucher and his insight into homosexuality. That evening a Christian guy shared his testimony of how he had been healed from a homosexual background. I wanted to hear this for myself. Within two weeks I had discretely obtained a copy on cassette and listened to it in my car. It was one of the most powerful messages I had ever heard as this guy shared how Jesus had healed him. From that moment I was convinced that if he could do it, so could I.

I headed into recovery by seeking counselling through Rowland Croucher and later through *Exodus Ministries* in South Melbourne. I needed to overcome a deep down fear of men and learn that I could trust other men, and that I could be close without becoming sexual. Building up strong healthy male friendships has helped me open up, trust others, and build up my self-worth and identity as a man.

I have had to tackle my own fear of homosexuality, by becoming more educated on the subject through books and conferences. I have had to recall and relive some of my early childhood to gain a better understanding of my early environment and how it has effected my behaviour.

I am not gay even when I feel vulnerable and begin to envy another man. I know God understands.

I don't have to be ashamed to face these feelings. With God's help I can confront these feelings and choose healthy ways of working through them, like talking to a mate and getting prayer, rather than turning them into sexual fantasies.

Healing has not happened overnight, but has been more of an ongoing process of focusing my eyes on the man Jesus and changing daily to be more like him. God has forgiven me through my stumbling of the past and his love desires that I feel complete as a man, so that I may experience the freedom we have in Christ, not the bondage of sin.

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WHERE DID WE GET THIS PHRASE? “THE GREAT COMMISSION”

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In search of the answer to my question I went to the internet and visited the site: <http://www.biblestudytools.com> and did a search. Here are the results: Verse Search result (All English Translations) ‘The Great Commission’ RESULTS: None. No Entries were found matching your criteria. Please try another search or click on HELP to see search instructions.

The phrase *The Great Commission* is most often associated with a verse near the end of Mark. Certainly no less significant than other verses, but is it really that much more significant? What about the verse three down from there that discusses handling snakes and drinking poison?¹ (There is a church near us that does this by the way!).

There is no doubt that the scriptures tell us to preach the gospel and make disciples. That is not in dispute. But it seems to me that if we really emphasized what Jesus emphasized, ‘The Great Commission’ would more likely be ‘love one another’.

My point is this: the phrase *The Great Commission* has become somewhat of a buzz-word and marketing slogan which is all-too-often used to drum-up support for man-made plans. Why not just say ‘preach the gospel’ or ‘make disciples’

instead of ‘The Great Commission’?

I admit that this point is a little academic - the fact of the matter is that we are called to love one another AND preach the gospel AND make disciples. These things are not mutually exclusive. But it does seem to me that we emphasize one of these imperatives and to a large extent ignore the other two... and the one that we emphasize is not the one that Jesus emphasized!

I wrote the first part of this article and then put it aside for a few days to see how the Lord would have me finish it. I initially thought I would just quote some verses which drive the ‘love one another’ message home. This is easy to do, and for those of you who are interested here are a few verses:

Matt. 22:36-40, John 13:34-35, John 14:15, John 15:12-14, John 15:17-18, Acts 1:4-5, Gal. 5:14-15, 1Tim. 6:10-15, 1 John 2:7-10, 1 John 3:23, 2 John 1:5-6, Rom 13:9-10.

If you read these verses, you will undoubtedly come back and say, “OK, I got it, I got it... we’re supposed to love one another!”. But the question is, *how* do we ‘love one another’?

What would we do differently if we were to redefine ‘The Great Commission’ to the simpler, all-encompassing command, ‘love one another?’ Surely ‘preaching the gospel’ and ‘making disciples’ falls into that cat-

egory too². But *loving* requires a particular condition of heart. Ask someone for specifics and you will quickly see how this command is easy to grasp as a concept but difficult to practice.

I discussed this subject with a Christian friend of mine, and here are some thoughts we came up with:

- How would our attitudes be different toward those with different views to us (theologically, politically, or otherwise) if we really loved them?
- It takes some Bible knowledge to preach to a person, but it takes laying down our lives to be able to truly love someone that we don’t naturally like.
- How easy is it to judge a person you truly love? I remember when someone cut in front of me on the road. It made me angry but when I realized that I knew the person my attitude toward them changed. We’re much more willing to be tolerant of people we know and care about.
- We treat many man-made religious traditions as if they were the will of God, yet we treat the true will of God [love one another] as if it’s optional. Our love for others (both believers and nonbelievers) is the gauge which reveals how much we really know God. Make no mistake: *God is love.*

There’s a passage in Collosians that seems to clearly illustrate how we should go about ‘loving one another’:

Col. 3:1-17 “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (NKJV)

Meekness, kindness, humility, long-suffering, a forgiving nature... these qualities are in short supply in today’s society - even in the Church. Good things to remember next time we consider ‘beating someone over the head with a Bible’.

Agree or disagree? I’d love to hear from you.

Bibliography

¹Mark16:16-18

²Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14

Lyn Thiele tells the heart-wrenching story:

A BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING

Lisa didn't know on that sunny April morning that she'd be appearing on the evening news or that her life would be changed in a dramatic way that day.

In the afternoon, after bringing her two older children home from the school bus, Lisa parked at the front door of the house. Matthew, the three-year-old, wanted to play in the car as he often did.

Lisa was in the house for a couple of minutes when she heard the gardener calling, 'Help, help'. She rushed outside to find the car on fire and Matthew still inside it. His little face appeared at the window, crying, 'Mum'. When they pulled him from the car he was still burning. It was a relief when he began to breathe.

The air ambulance took Matthew and Lisa on the seven-minute journey to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. He was in Intensive Care for thirty-three days.

The church around the world began to pray immediately.

Matt had full-thickness burns to thirty percent of his body. His ears were crum-

pled, his eyeballs opaque, the eyelids inverted and shrunken. His head was covered in a black substance which had melted onto him. His back, head, chest, parts of his arms and both hands were burnt, but not his lips. Smoke and toxins had invaded his lungs and he was on a ventilator and heavily drugged to relieve his pain. The doctors said they had never seen a worse case of burns.

Two weeks later his heart stopped for two minutes. His kidneys weren't working. Some of his toes were turning black because his circulation was affected.

Peter and Lisa were told he might live a couple of hours. They talked to him, telling him that it was alright if he couldn't fight any more. Peter said, 'I'm grieving because part of me is dying'. As his grandparents, we wept with them, but God had plans for Matthew and although it was a long, slow process, he pulled him through.

With the tube finally removed from his lung, he was transferred to the Burns Unit. There were many hurdles to cross: a staph infection, candida and other problems. When he cried for two weeks, waving his tiny bandaged hands around in distress, it was more than we could bear. A brain scan, bone scan and heart tests showed no damage. Skin grafts were arranged, cancelled, rescheduled.

We wondered how long it would go on, but by the end of June, he had begun to

smile and laugh. We felt we'd got our Matt back. Lisa was able to cuddle him for the first time and his eyes started to focus. All through this ordeal he was upheld by the love of his family.

A neurologist said there was brain damage, either from the cardiac arrest or the toxins Matt had inhaled, but we asked God to deal with that and any results of the trauma he'd suffered. *And he did!*

Matthew came home on July 31. What excitement. A week later he went to church with his family and now he is walking alone, talking and eating - things the doctors said he might never do.

There is a long road of therapy ahead for Matt, but God will be with him. His eyesight is good, far better than the fifty percent expected; his fingers, though shortened, are functional, and he still has parts of his ears. Matthew will never look the same as he did in April, but he is an alert and energetic little boy; a testimony to the miracle-working power of God.

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REALISING THE NEW COVENANT

The introduction to a provocative five-part series which calls the Church to radically review its customs and traditions and return to a proper understanding of the New Covenant

Why is it that churches throughout the ages have demonstrated a propensity to gravitate back to a kind of religious life that is more reminiscent of the old covenant? ie: Religious systems with laws, priests, temples and sacrifices. Contemporary equivalents of this phenomenon abound in the Church today - as we shall endeavour to illustrate throughout the course of this series. This is not just a problem confined to history.

Is this phenomenon a function of theological ignorance or some twisted propensity within sinful man to gravitate towards those things that will afford him the means of self-justification? Maybe a bit of both.

The new covenant of grace, as foretold by the prophets, brought many benefits - not the least of which is the ability for gentiles (non-Jews) to approach God without having to observe Jewish Law.¹ The new covenant was designed to redeem the poor in spirit and bring freedom from the oppression of law (which brings death) as well as freedom from the tyranny of sin (which also brings death).²

But law, despite it's harshness, has a strange attraction: It offers the proudly religious the opportunity to sing their own praises. For these, the notion free grace is too cheap - the self-made man wants to be able to atone for himself! The Pharisees in Jesus' day were an example of this.

To many the offer of grace seems just too confronting - we don't want to be reminded of our own spiritual poverty and nakedness. Like Adam in the garden of Eden, we look for fig leaves to hide our shame from God. Religion often makes a very convenient fig leaf.

If it's true that these attitudes are observable on an individual level, it's not surprising that we will see them pervading man-made religious institutions as well. In fact, it is observable throughout Church history and it is observable in our day. Time and again when God's grace has visited the Church, the church institution has often either neglected it or sought to nullify it.

In this series of articles I assert that the covenant of grace - the new covenant - has never been fully realised by the Christian Church. Though shafts of light have periodically cut through history, the Church has remained, for the most part, in the shackles of law and unhelpful traditions. Bold souls who 'think outside the box' have often been dismissed as eccentric or burned as heretics. Even in our time the community of faith appears to have little tolerance for those who stray too far from tradition - no matter how Biblically sound their arguments are!

The Church today, perhaps more than ever, needs prophets - not just people who can see what is wrong, but those who can

see what *needs* to be done! The Church needs brave people who are prepared to stand out and put their reputations on the line. The Church needs people who are prepared to do this because they *love the bride of Christ!*

How do you recognise a true prophet? A true prophet will be an advocate of the new covenant. Everything they do and say will be Christ-centred, will testify to His authority and will be consistent with God's redemptive plan for the earth. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy³.

A Historical Perspective

The early Church had its beginnings as a grassroots home-church system which met informally around the meal-table and mostly continued that way, at least in part, for three centuries. Early Jewish Christians sometimes struggled to fully *realise* what the new covenant meant, and were often disturbed by those who insisted on strict adherence to Jewish law⁴. Gentile believers, however, were not as encumbered⁵. The slow drift towards institutionalisation took on new dimensions in AD 313 when Christianity was adopted as the state religion by Roman Emperor Constantine⁶. The state-run church of Rome revived forms of old covenant religious life: *Priesthood*, the *Temple* as a place of worship, *Laws*, and even a *sacrificial* system [of sorts]. The simple days of the early church appeared

to be gone. The next thirteen centuries would see the development of questionable traditions and dogmas amidst a backdrop of constantly declining spirituality - by the beginning of the 16th century the church as an institution had become manifestly corrupt⁷. The winds of social, political, economic and religious change were blowing and the time for reformation had arrived.

The German professor, Martin Luther, among other reformers, was instrumental in shifting the focus of the church back to the essential truths. He courageously exposed many heresies of the church, but is best remembered for the rediscovering the wonderful truth of 'justification by faith'. The political climate gave Luther the opportunity to form a church which was free from what had become corrupt papal authority.

The enemy of the true faith in Luther's time was clearly identifiable: the church institution. Luther would have had a more difficult task today. How do you bring a clear and distinctive message to the Church when it is fragmented across a broad spectrum of beliefs and traditions? His words would not be met with threats of persecution today - but with indifference!

But Luther faced a unique challenge. On one hand he had an unprecedented opportunity to bring change to church

Reformation

Part 1

structure, and on the other hand was under immense pressure to fulfil political and cultural expectations. There were limits on how far reform could go.

Luther did, however, prescribe a type of meeting for 'those who want to be Christians in earnest'. Perhaps this quote gives us some clues as to his personal hopes for the reformed church:

"Those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptise, to receive the sacrament and centre everything on the Word, prayer and love..."

- Martin Luther⁸

We might conclude from this statement that Luther may have favoured a home-based model for the reformed church - one which was separated from the state. Whatever the case, history would not allow it. For the most part, reformation churches continued to fulfil the political agenda of the state on a regional basis in a similar way that the church of Rome had done in earlier years. Protestantism became the religion of northern Europe and identified closely with rising nationalism (Eg: Lutheran in Germany and Scandinavia, Reformed in Geneva and Scotland, Anglican in England)⁹. This compromise meant that the post-reformation church never moved far [in its modes and expression] from the church of Rome. Looking from today's historical perspective, one could strongly argue that the reformation did not go far enough and that the church was never completely reformed.

A Contemporary Problem

This much is clear: The reformation failed to deliver a radically reformed way for believers to gather together and never fully realised the ideal of the priesthood of all believers. More recent evangelical and pentecostal movements which have grown out of those reformation churches have found some freedom, but likewise tend to perpetuate many of the old covenant traditions from which they came. We still see today an emphasis on *ordained ministry* (priests by another name), *church edifices* (temples by another name), *legislated conduct* (law and legalism by another name) and *tithes & offerings* (sacrifice by another name). But there are exceptions: China, Korea, Russia and South America have given birth to churches of a different kind - usually against the backdrop of persecution and economic hardship. These movements have often produced examples of devotion and growth which are embarrassingly rare in western churches. There have been many attempts to analyse and systematise 'keys to revival' based on these churches (prayer, unity, cell-groups, etc). But whilst systems can be formulated, it is not possible to replicate those factors which produce genuine spiritual hunger on a nation level. God has His own ways of doing that.

The reluctance of the contemporary church to move away from the reformation model and embrace radically Biblical alternatives has little to do with political pressure. Our current social climate is completely devoid of any persecution whatsoever. Even without these pressures

the western church capitulates to western society's cultural expectations. In an era where the traditional church is becoming more and more irrelevant, the church has failed to provide leadership or demonstrate any desirable alternative in the spiritual vacuum of today's society. In other words, whilst the world 'sleeps in the dark', we have been 'asleep in the light'¹⁰. In an attempt to renew itself the church has responded in many cases by recruiting charismatic personalities and worship leaders. Others have employed various church growth methods to get more people in on a Sunday. Some of these approaches do address issues of cultural relevance, but they often fail to express kingdom-of-God values or build convincingly authentic Christian communities. Perhaps what is worse is that we have, through well-intentioned missionary efforts abroad, planted an equally unhelpful model of church life throughout much of the developing world. Those we have evangelised often struggle with the inappropriateness of our traditions even more than we do. I've seen examples of churches in poor African communities which struggle hard to maintain elaborate church buildings (complete with pews and visitors books) which are way too expensive and altogether inappropriate in their cultural and economic context. Why? Because a western missionary decided on their behalf that 'this is the way we do church'.

There seems to be few examples of any serious attempt to explore radically Biblical alternatives to the traditional church model. The home church movement is a clear exception. Unfortunately in an era

where success is very narrowly defined, there is little to commend these groups for serious consideration. We live in an age where 'big is better' and material wealth, power and success is equated with godliness. What is going to stop this trend and where will it lead if it doesn't?

Some questions need to be asked:

- Do we love our traditions so much (especially the contemporary ones) that we will resist change at all costs?
- Are we so immersed in our activities that some simple things - the most important things - escape our attention?
- Is our belief in 'justification by faith' just a stated adherence or a living reality?

In coming issues this series attempts to examine each of these issues in turn: Priesthood/ Temple/ Law/ Sacrifice [shadows of things to come] - and see how the contemporary church has failed to fully realise the new covenant.

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TOWARDS AUTHENTICITY

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Imagine you're a pagan. Well... not a fire walking, chicken sacrificing, drum-beating pagan, but a car driving, sports-on-Saturday and barbecue with the mates type pagan. Now imagine you've been invited to church this Sunday. The question I would ask you is this: What in is different in the church from the world you live in every day? My assertion is this: There is a distinctive Christian culture which radically effects the way we, as believers, live and relate to the world. But this should not surprise us - all groups have their own culture.

Cultures have three distinct elements:

- 1) *The way we say the things we do* [language]
- 2) *The way we do the things we do* [customs] and,
- 3) *The symbols we use* [cultural icons].

We Christians have our own language. Some people have nicknamed the Christian jargon 'Christianese'. An example of this genre is the 'brother and sister' greeting (which is wonderfully diminishing). Another would be 'praise the Lord' - a phrase which is often mindlessly used

I realized that the Western Church has been syncretised by materialism and covetousness. Syncretism occurs more subtly than we realize. We have become absorbed in and seduced by western cultural mindsets.

to replace exclamation marks. Another is 'Amen' - and is sometimes used where a simple 'Yes' would suffice. The irony is that a separate culture can develop - a 'Christian' culture - without having much legitimate biblical basis. We may have the forms and go through the motions of Christian life without fully understanding the depth and meaning of being authentically Christian.

Customs

Within Christian culture the central emphasis is *holy conduct*. We have different ethics and morality and this means we act differently from mainstream culture. This holiness is not about rigid and legalistic applications of law, but about the presence of Jesus - the one who makes us holy. Where Jesus is present, holiness is the result. Personal purity is definitely part of God's plan but there is a further, and often neglected, characteristic of holiness which presents itself: Holiness could be defined as 'living to show what God is like'. In other words, holiness carries with it a highly practical element which finds its expression in lifestyle. Mother Theresa, for example, is not considered holy because of her purity, but because of her pragmatism. This broader definition means that holiness is about more than personal purity - it has an outward missionary component. Holiness becomes attractive to mainstream culture only when we demonstrate incarnational models of care and concern. Jesus defined it this way: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16.

There is another aspect of Christian culture that effects the way we act 'Christianly'. How do we as Christians interact with secular culture? One tendency is towards *syncretism*. I.e.: We become *absorbed* by that culture in

the way we *think* and in the way we *act*. We can become absorbed on two fronts: The Cultural mindsets: the way we think and see the world ie: Our values and belief systems. Secondly, material culture effects us: By this I mean the people, places technologies and material things in culture.

I would suggest that cultural mindsets are more powerful than material culture. Our belief systems and our ideologies effect our responses to the icons in our culture. We are more likely to be syncretised by cultural mindsets than the material things in our society. It's not so much the *things* of culture but our *thoughts* about them

Syncretism

Whilst in Brazil on a missions trip I was amazed at how Catholicism had merged with animism and local folk religions. This is cultural phenomenon is called *syncretism*. On reflection I realized that the Western Church has been syncretised by materialism and covetousness. Syncretism occurs more subtly than we realize. We are just as syncretised and pagan as those Brazilians. We have become absorbed in and seduced by western cultural mindsets. This cultural absorption has carried over into the *Contemporary Christianity* movement of the 80's and 90's. Under the guise of being 'relevant' we have possibly been syncretised.

I'm not proposing any solutions to this, just observing it and thinking it through. Jaque Ellul maintains that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world do not overlap, but they do touch through human lives submitted to God. Working out this point of contact is the art of being a Christian today. We are all living in a goldfish bowl of cultural influences - being *authentically Christian* takes a lot of thoughtful prayer when surrounded by

Christian Culture

Customs & Traditions

Christian culture on one side and secular mainstream culture on the other. In an attempt to avoid syncretism and worldliness, the Church often moves in the direction of *separation* from the secular world. We retreat to places where our own music, culture and language results in the isolation and privatization of the faith. This is contrary to Christ's way. The consequence of this imbalance is that the church often becomes obscure and irrelevant. Being separate has alienated us from the very ones we are trying to reach and undermines attempts to communicate the truth to the world.

I believe the true mark of Christianity is not how pure we are but how we treat people.

On the other hand we may never get it right – we will always struggle to maintain a distinctively Christian stance in a wayward world. We will always be forced back to prayer and the word and to fellowship to find solutions together. This is always a good place to be – a life of dependence on God is what we have been called to live. A life of independent living ie: a life which says "I can work it out without God" is a the same mindset which got Adam into trouble, and one which will do the same to us .

One helpful way to overcome an unhealthy kind of separation from the world is to ask the question: Where would Christ be if he were physically on the Earth today? An interesting idea then emerges: If he is already here [through the power of his Spirit in the Church] why are we not there as well? If we can identify where Christ is working today our challenge is this: How do we get to where Christ is? What would his [and correspondingly our] *modus operandi* be? The Church must go beyond merely claiming to be the 'bastion and holder of the truth'. We must go to the places where Christ is work-

ing. Incidentally I don't look for the crowds or slick approaches to ministry either to validate where Christ is at work. Right now Jesus would be listening to someone over a cup of coffee somewhere. Maybe he is walking with someone or sitting by the bedside of a sick person or cooking for someone. Either way wherever Jesus at work a human being must be his functioning hands and feet. Jesus' method for changing the world has not changed throughout the ages. He is still changing the world one-person-at-a-time through lives open and surrendered to him.

The great truth of the Gospel is that God entered a human culture to communicate himself to those whom he loved. Jesus came to show what God is like. He was, and is, the Son of God. He also came to show what it means to be truly human. The title *Son of man* loosely means 'the truly human one'. The Church's main function is not to promote a lofty idea of 'purity' *per se* but show the world *what God is like!* Jesus went around doing good, what then is good? Micah 6:8 tells us:

*He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

This 'goodness' is a triad of justice, mercy and humility. Historically Christians have been good on the humility and justice part, but mercy [the ability to walk in the shoes of another person] is an area we struggle with. Jesus consistently modelled mercy and compassion. ie: putting *people* first - not cultural or traditional purity. A lot of what Christians today understand to be holiness is just, in fact, separation from worldly culture. A more Biblical definition of holiness is *separation from worldly cultural thinking*. A definition of Holiness which focuses on a shallow cultural definition of purity alone is unbalanced. Jesus consistency violated these cultural norms and challenged those things which kept people from a flourishing relationship with God

Some examples:

- He healed on the Sabbath
- He spoke of the cross [culturally a no-no]
- He ate on the Sabbath.
- He touched lepers
- He touched dead people
- He ate and drank with people of ill repute
- He associated with outcasts
- He heard the cry of the blind and the deaf in a crowd
- He was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners
- He spat on people
- He radically challenged our concepts of how we do the 'God Stuff'

Jesus was radical in the true sense of the word. i.e. He brought people *back to the roots* of what is meant to be holy. Jesus consistently placed people first. I believe the true mark of Christianity is not how pure we are but how we treat people. True spirituality is acknowledging that all people are made in the image of God. People flocked to Jesus because he treated people with love, compassion and dignity. Like Jesus, we must get back to a 'people-first' attitude if we are to fulfil the church's function in the world. People must come before programs, people before personal purity, people before matters of doctrinal, people before power structures, people before agendas.

The question is this: Have we embraced Christian culture in ways which have hindered the true mission of the Church? What forms would we be better to jettison? In what ways can we be more authentically Christian? Do we need to analyse our structures and make changes to enhance community? Are there areas where syncretism has effected our faith?

These are hard thoughts and ones not meant to be answered alone. Answers to these issues aren't determined mechanically but require prayerful exploration of God's word and dialogue in the community of faith. Try asking a few non-believers in on the discussion. It may be eye opening!

UNLIMITED LIABILITY

Jay Ferris and wife, Carleen, live in Golden Valley, North Carolina, USA. For the past 26 years their home has been open for what they like to call 'the household dimension of our inheritance in the saints.' Email: jferris@blueridge.net

It is apparent from his lifestyle, together with that of the early Church, that Jesus did not intend to accomplish his agenda in an institutional context

Where the cost of following Jesus is concerned, most of us remember His response to a young man:

"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."¹

Surely, having no place, is a great cost, so great that most of us can dismiss it as not having relevance for our present circumstances. In seeming contrast to this verse, however, how many of us noticed that Jesus did have a home?

"...Jesus... went and lived in Capernaum..."²

"... he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."³

"... Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to

the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."⁴

"... They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house..."⁵

Whether or not Jesus or His family owned the house, rented the house, or were more or less extended house guests, it is clear that there was a place called 'home', and it apparently included a house.

In the Gospel of Luke, we find the story of the man lowered through the roof just following Jesus preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth:

"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,..." "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."⁶

Having spoken of His anointed agenda in the town "where He had been brought up", He next went to the town, even to the house where He was then living. This is where the man was lowered through the roof.

I need to confess that I do not lose much sleep contrasting my own ministry to that of others: Mother Teresa, for instance. My problems of conscience come from what I am doing or not doing in my own home.

Jesus' agenda was to "preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, bring recovery of sight for the blind, release the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." It is apparent from His lifestyle, together with that of the early Church, that Jesus did not intend to accomplish this agenda in an institutional context. It was not His heart to institutionalize people, but to meet them in their brokenness and transform their lives in a vital community of faith. He brought His work home with Him, one consequence of which was that the roof was torn off of the house where He was staying.

Institutional ministry by its very nature is limited liability ministry. The ministry of Jesus was unlimited liability. Where having a place is concerned, an unlimited liability mindset is one which does not claim even bird's nests or fox holes. It is capable of occupation without possession or grasping.

Our point for present purposes is that having a home, does not disqualify us from following Jesus. The important thing is our attitude about the things we possess, even the place where we live. If our homes are not going to be off limits to the agenda of Jesus, then we must face up to the cost.

Jesus wants to accomplish this agenda from house to house. This means opening

our homes, our families, and our lives, to poor, broken and oppressed people, and broken people break things. In their desperation they, and/or their friends have even been known to tear the roof off.

Are we ready for this? Are we ready for unlimited liability? Or would we prefer to go on touching lives at the relatively safe distance of our institutional programs, churches, and buildings? Perhaps a vital community of faith could both risk, and hope to walk in the agenda of Jesus.

Having flirted with His agenda in the past, it is clear that isolated individuals and families are quickly overwhelmed by the enormity of the task - and the world's response to even limited success. There are more broken people than even semi-sold-out saints can handle. Making the effort, one quickly discovers why, in so many cases, those who take the Lord seriously, do so by appointment, some place else, and for earthly compensation.

Isn't it time for the nets, torn by our institutions, to be mended, and the limits of liability be removed from the Church? Isn't it time for 'church' to cease being something that we do some place else?

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¹Mat 8:19,20, ²Mat 4:12,13, ³Mar 1:45, ⁴Mar 2:1-5, ⁵Mar 9:33, ⁶Luk 4:16-24



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WORLDVIEW MAGAZINE

As a graphic designer I've designed a thousand response forms over the years. But when I came to create one for *Worldview* I felt uncomfortable about approaching it in the usual way. Why? I guess it's because this is not a purely commercial exercise and commercial devices don't seem to belong here. *Worldview* talks about issues which are beyond commercial value. It's insights are free and I desire that they be freely distributed as widely as possible. But we live in a world of economic realities where money has an unavoidable place in our lives - keeping it in its proper place is the challenge!

I'm committed to supplying *Worldview* free of charge. I'm hoping that it will find its way around the world via thousands of PC's into many homes and offices. I hope it will be a great blessing but, to be truthful, I really have no idea how far it will go. I guess that's up to you and those who send it on. All I know is that the Lord has motivated me and has given me a window of opportunity to produce this issue - and there's plenty of good material that still needs to be published.

I hope that at least a small percentage of our readership will recognise that a magazine like this is worthy of support - and pray about what their response should be. For that reason I do include a 'response form'. If you feel the Lord is leading you to support *Worldview*, or would like to, then go ahead and do so. But if not, then just enjoy it as a free gift! Please don't feel pressured or coerced.

Most of all, I ask you to please keep forwarding *Worldview* on and consider sending us some feedback. How has it effected you? Do you agree/disagree with what we have written... and why? You can submit articles and 'Letter's to the editor'. We invite healthy interaction with the articles published. Thanks for your support.

- **Allan Weatherall**, Publisher & Editor

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