

We're back!

Sydney's independent Anglican evangelical voice speaks once more

After a ten-year break, we are back. Welcome to our new readers, and to older ones who remember when financial restraints forced us to cease publication in July 1987. We're back because of our concern to see the biblical evangelicalism of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney further preserved and strengthened. A strong biblical witness in the wider Anglican communion and secular Australia is increasingly important.

Historically, evangelicalism has nearly always declined from within. Current events indicate that today is no exception. Three movements threaten evangelicalism from within: 'experientialism', 'traditionalism' and 'redrawing the line backwards'.

Experience valued above Bible

We are appealing to human experience over biblical teaching.

We have changed the questions we ask and the way we ask them. The New Testament is dominated by questions such as "Who is Jesus Christ?" and "What has he done for us?". The question it asks concerning human experience is "What must I do to be saved?".

Union with Christ is not 'an' experience, but a permanent, historical reality created by Christ himself which we enter into when we cast up our faith into him. How does that experience *feel*? It involves 'suffering' and 'trust' in the promises of God.

Last May, at the Synod Conference on Women's Ministry, both sides of the women's ordination debate were asked questions concerning biblical exegesis. It was a major departure from classical, biblical evangelicalism when speakers

from the pro-side answered not in terms of the text of Scripture, but in terms of their individual stories. This type of experientialism makes it impossible to place our trust in Scripture as the ultimate rule of faith. Since the eighteenth-century, such experientialism has been the seedbed of theological liberalism.

Traditionalism

It has been said that "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." The apostolic gospel must never be changed (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Tim 1:8-14), for it is the way that Christ continues to do his work in the world; but for the sake of that work, even the way we conduct gospel ministry *must* change. (1 Cor 9:22-3).

The problem we face is losing our trust in God's commands and promises, and replacing it with trust in the traditions of men, even traditions that once were good and beneficial. The pressure to embrace traditionalism remains whenever we make it a priority in our thinking and action to remain recognisably Anglican, at the expense of remaining recognisably evangelical.

Moving the line backwards

The third threat is that we keep on shifting the line backwards in order to remain within Anglicanism, and so we hope be heard as evangelicals. It is odd that we are rejoicing over Lambeth's move against allowing practising homosexuals to be ordained, when there are many, more central, teachings of Holy Scripture that our denomination has progressively watered down, ignored or denied outright over the last 200 years:

the ultimate authority, sufficiency and reliability of Scripture in all matters of faith and morals, the substitutionary and unrepeatable nature of Christ's atoning sacrifice, the 'body and bones' resurrection of our Lord, that this Jesus Christ is truly man and truly God, that he is the only Mediator between humanity and God, that he is exclusively the way back to God, the reality of the judgment to come and the priesthood of all believers.

Over time we have fought and lost these battles in Australia as elsewhere. We have seen manifest unbelief enshrined in our new prayer books, agendas of conferences, official pronouncements and the ordinances which govern us. Each time we have allowed the line to be drawn further backwards. As evangelical Anglicans we have argued that by doing this we can remain on cordial terms with others in the denomination and thus live to fight other battles. But the New Testament gives us an evangelicalism which must actively seek to draw the line forward.

Historically, liberalism springs directly from evangelicalism. Without the unflinching exposition, teaching and application of the doctrine of the New Testament, uncontrolled by denominational concerns in the opposite direction, evangelicalism loses its roots and is sunk.

It is the hope of the Directors of the Australian Church Record that even if you do not share our opinions, you will find the paper helpful in understanding our evangelical concerns. ●

UEC conference on church planting

Dave Thurston

From 4-7 May, 500 people from all over Australia and from many denominations came together with just two things on their mind—evangelism and church planting.

The conference, "Evangelising Australia Through Church Planting", was hosted by the United Evangelistic Council of New South Wales. The UEC is a group of evangelistically-minded people from a range of denominations who have organised evangelistic events throughout the years, notably the Billy Graham Crusades.

Heads of denominations attended the opening banquet. The conference heard from Sydney's Phillip Jensen, Frank Retief from South Africa and David Jackman, Principal of the Cornhill Training College in London.

Interviews with church planters about their church plants and the problems they encountered shifted the focus from theory to practice. The practices of church planting turned out to be many and varied.

Ivan Lee, rector of St Aiden's Anglican Church, Hurstville, said hearing the problems people had planting churches was encouraging and enabling and helped people to see the potential for church planting, even though the

work was hard. It encouraged people to think creatively.

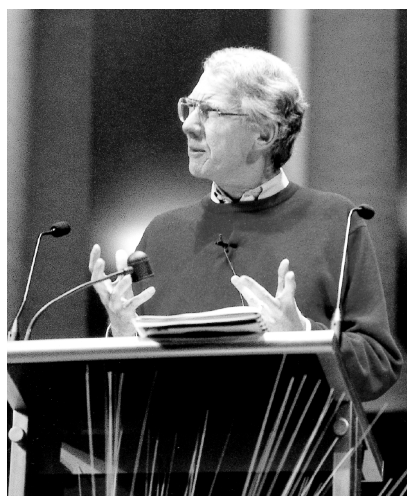
Some 50 elective workshops were offered on topics such as 'Large church evangelism and church planting', 'Evangelistic Church Planters: training and selecting', 'Starting From Scratch', 'Marketplace Christianity', and 'Evangelism in the post-modern age'.

Frank Retief told the story of what God had done through church planting in South Africa. He reminded us over and over again that evangelism is a deadly serious business. Telling the gospel is no game—there is a heaven to forfeit and a hell to pay.

Although the talks and workshops were valuable, I found the morning tea and afternoon tea were some of the most productive and strategic times of the whole conference. Getting to know people, networking and wrestling with issues that were raised in the talks made these times a highlight.

I came away from the conference thinking that so often our vision is only as big as our own short-sightedness. Church planting is now on the national and denominational agenda. Planting churches will happen, it's not a question of when it will happen, but who will do it.

The conference made me see that if



David Jackman expounding Ephesians at the UEC conference.

we are to hold true to the plan of God and aim to change our culture then we need good churches side by side all over the place, reaching into our world with the gospel.

Church planting is often seen as threatening, and church planters often face hostility from established churches. However, it seems to me that church planting will only be a threat if we are not doing it.

No need to pray for guidance—God wants it. The question is, will we be involved? ●

The Australian CHURCH RECORD

October 1, 1998 Issue 1877

Testimony from Bruce Ballantine-Jones,
former editor ACR

"I am delighted that the *Church Record* is resuming publication. Throughout most of this century, the *Church Record* has played a pivotal role in presenting and extending evangelical Anglicanism. There is a greater need than ever for an independent Anglican voice so that people can both read and contribute to the dissemination of Biblical ideas."

Contents

John Chapman on
our surprising gospel page 2

John Woodhouse on
the 'beasts' challenging
evangelicals page 5

It's time (again):
the Lay Administration agenda page 8

Barry Newman on
the Prayer Book bishop page 10

Mark Thompson on
real Biblical authority page 15

Joshua Ng on
misreading Scripture page 15

Peter Bolt discovers that
Spong is right page 15

Uncommon Christianity
in a post-denominational age page 3

Views from the UK:
John Richardson on Lambeth page 4

David Höhne overhears
theologians discussing the trinity page 6

Problems and solutions for women in ministry page 7

Fear of Flying: bishops on the move page 11

Was Lambeth a moment of hope? page 11

Colette Read wonders
whether God is in our Bibles page 11

Church planting in the US page 12

Andrew Heard planting on the coast page 12

John Lavender on
Christians who won't keep quiet page 13

Leslie Ramsey on the future of our children page 13

Bangkok News: The Gabbotts page 14

Gary Koo asks:
can a Christian vote One Nation? page 14

Bill Salier and Greg Clarke on
the hopes of the new millennium page 16

A Surprising Gospel!

John Chapman

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 we are told about a model response to the gospel.

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians he commends them because their response is such that 'everywhere' people have heard about them. He says "You became imitators of us and the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead; Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1: 6-10).

This model response has two parts. First: They turned to God to serve him, the living and true God. Second: They put their trust in the Lord Jesus as their deliverer from judgment.

What was the gospel preached?

What did they hear which enabled them to make such a response?

There is only one God

They must have been told that the idols they were serving were no gods at all. They were either mistaken or wilful in their previous religious views. There was one true and living God. In the past he had made himself known in many ways but now he had done so in the person of his Son, Jesus. To continue any longer in idolatry knowing this would be to defy the God who had spoken. Many heard Paul and believed what he said. They turned their backs on idolatry and turned to serve the living and true God.

This comes as a surprise to our twentieth century ears. There was no possibility of multi-faith here. For the Apostle to the Gentiles, to be religious apart from the God who had revealed himself in Jesus was an error. Like the prophets of old, idolatry was not to be recognized as a viable alternative to be tolerated but as a folly to be repented of (Isa 44: 12-19). We don't know exactly what the Apostle said in

Thessalonica but we do have a summary of what he said in similar circumstances in Athens (see Acts 17: 16-33).

In our own time we must come to terms with the fact that all religious views are not equally valid. To be religious, apart from Christ, is to invite God's wrath. We must part company with the world-views around us whose tolerance is expressed in a desire for every person to be right no matter what they might believe. This is not the way of the Lord Jesus (see Luke 11: 23) and must not be the way of his disciples.

There is only one Saviour

If the first aspect of their response was repentance, the second was faith, expressed in waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus, their deliverer.

Just as their repentance was directed to the true and living God so their faith was directed to Jesus. It wasn't directed to some vague religious idea. They were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. His resurrection from the dead showed this beyond any doubt. (Acts 2:22-36). They believed he was Lord and, as such, was able to be their deliverer.

Now we come to a second surprise. They had placed their faith in Jesus the Christ who delivered them from the judgment of God. They must have been warned that judgment day was a reality and they believed it and acted accordingly.

What a shock this is to us! We can hardly come to terms with our mortality. We think we will last forever, and we are even encouraged in this by well meaning but misguided Christians who tell us we can have 'heaven' now (in one form or another). This may be why we insist that all the preaching we hear must be relevant. It must be useful for the here and now. I have some sympathy with this, but if it means we never talk about death and the judgment to come, we are doomed to preach a gospel that would have been foreign to the Lord Jesus and his Apostles. This is a heavy price to pay.

When was the last time you were reminded, from the pulpit, of the judgment day? If you are a teacher of God's word, when did you last preach on it? Looking at Genesis 3:4 may help us to see why sinful people like us find judgment hard to believe or forget to

tell people about it.

The biggest surprise of all

Did you notice how the judgment day was described? Paul says "delivered from the *wrath* to come". This is a big surprise for us. Somehow we feel as if wrath, with its connotations of rage and losing control, is not a 'noble' way to think of God.

God's wrath is a way of describing his complete and implacable opposition to sin and evil. He will punish appropriately and I, for one, am glad that this is so. Sin and evil in the world are so destructive. The prospect that justice will never take place is too horrific to contemplate.

Jesus himself told us that there is a judgment day and it should be feared (Luke 12:1-10). The Apostle certainly had taken this to heart and he warned the Thessalonians.

What was it the Thessalonians had been told which caused them to believe that Jesus could "deliver them from the wrath to come"? What else could it have been but that Jesus bore the anger of God, which we deserved for our sins, when he died on the cross?

What was it that caused the Lord Jesus such anguish in the garden of Gethsemane that he describes it as "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt 26: 38)? It could not have just been his impending death. Many martyrs have faced death with a confidence and resoluteness, which makes it impossible for this death to be such as theirs. There is something qualitatively different in this death. He is to bear away the sin of the world and in doing that he undergoes the wrath of God which sin deserves. That is why he is able to deliver us from the wrath to come. He substituted himself for us. This is how it is described in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God".

As I have thought about the response the Thessalonians made to Paul, I have been challenged to look again at the content of my evangelistic sermons and to see if the people who hear me would be able to respond in this way. I think that I will do well to take this to heart, as their response is a model to us all. ●

Justification by faith: still on St Paul's heart

This year St Paul's, Carlingford hosted two days devoted to the discussion of the doctrine of justification by faith. Once regarded by reformed Protestants as 'the main hinge on which religion turns' (Calvin), some recent trends threaten to undermine the importance of this article of faith. At the initiative of St Paul's, people gathered in February to hear papers from both biblical and theological angles, having already read the book by N.T. Wright, a representative of the newer views, *What St Paul Really Said*. The second discussion in June continued to focus on Wright, particularly his reading of the book of Romans, and attempted to draw out some pastoral implications of the discussion days.

The conclusion was that Wright and 'the new perspective on Paul' have read neither the reformers nor Paul correctly. Wright's rhetoric tends to marginalise and trivialise the conservative evangelical position, and his air of authority, combined with a minimal presentation of argument is problematic. There are serious gaps in Wright's presentation, which distorts the gospel and provides the church with a different kind of mission. The Reformers have read Paul correctly after all, and, given that the neglect of this doctrine has serious pastoral implications, it is important not to compromise this message. ●



Ministry Training Scheme

The Ministry Training Scheme (MTS) was established in 1978 with the goal of recruiting and training men and women for a lifetime of gospel ministry.

MTS is an apprenticeship-style 'hands-on' training in the ministry of the Word of God and prayer, running for two years full-time. The trainees are "preaching today to train for tomorrow". We are hoping that they will both understand and experience the power of God's word in saving people and building the church. This year sees nearly 100 trainees training in 35 training teams around the country.

The recruiting arm for the MTS Program is the fellowship known as Club 5. After small beginnings in 1988 with 25 people attending a weekend conference to consider full-time ministry, this group has now grown to about 600 members. The strength of Club 5 is its national network of 250 like-minded 'coaches' who recruit and coach people considering ministry.

The annual October long weekend Conference is always excellent, with 450 members and 200 coaches in attendance last year. During the weekend, members attend various components, such as the 'School for

Bible Teachers', as well as hearing from keynote speakers. This year Dick Lucas from St Helen's Bishopsgate, London, and Phillip Jensen from Centennial Park, Sydney, will be addressing the topic of "Preaching the Word of God".

For further details about the work of the Ministry Training Scheme or the Club 5 conference:
Phone: (02) 9663 1854;
Fax: (02) 9313 7045;
email: mts@mts.com.au

THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH RECORD

The Australian Church Record is an evangelical newspaper in the Reformed Anglican tradition of the historic creeds and the 39 Articles of Faith, and the standard of teaching and practice in the Book of Common Prayer. We accept the Scriptures as God's word written, and as containing all things necessary for salvation and the final authority in all matters of faith and behaviour.

Publisher:

Robert C. Doyle, Chairperson,
 Australian Church Record
 (ACN 000 071 438)

Executive Editor:

Peter G. Bolt

All enquiries:

PO Box 218,
 Camperdown NSW 2050

Uncommon Christianity in a post-denominational age

Editorial

Uncommon Christianity

In earlier days, Australian religion was a 'common Christianity', a sort of faith of the lowest common denominator. This compromise with the culture kept Christians happy with the thought that they were living in a 'Christian society' founded on the Ten Commandments. Morality was the religion of the ordinary person and the churches were regarded as the guardians of decency. Moralism or wowserism was spiritual poison.

Today it is clear that we are not a Christian society. This is a good moment for Christians. It makes Christianity stand out. Christianity is uncommon—and we therefore have a better chance to communicate the essentials of the gospel without interference from the background static of moralism. Furthermore, the terrible consequences of turning our back on the word of God are evident in society and will become plainer as time goes on. Abusive relationships, the mauling of the family, persistent cheating and fraud, greed expressed in gambling and business, youth suicide, the destruction of language and meaning, blatant sexual immorality—these are not the signs of a happy and well-adjusted society. Just by being uncommon, by

loyalty to the denominational church as such and are extremely mobile. This simple, single fact, is either an opportunity for the denominational churches or a mortal threat.

The post-denominational generation of believers is extremely precious to the churches. They are small in number, but humanly speaking, they will carry the gospel forward in the next era. They have been bruised by a cynical and avaricious society. This makes them all the more serious about belief. The best of them will support that denomination which shares their unwillingness to compromise and which delivers.

Centres of truth and love

Denominational bodies must support their work in word and deed, doing everything possible to multiply their numbers.

Fortunately, an increasing number of such churches has overcome the inertia of the decades to break free of inherited patterns. There is considerable interest in the business of planting and growing churches. But in order to maintain and propagate authentic Christianity, they must be churches which have two fundamental qualities: truth and love.

Love they must. The ills that lie at

Likewise, speak and live the truth they must. Our contemporaries have learned to distrust words. Promises are treated with cynicism, since the world knows nothing of the utterly reliable promises of God. The Bible is God's infallible speech, and each church should therefore have at its centre a source of light and truth unknown to the world and powerful in sustaining God's work amongst us. An attractive truthfulness will distinguish the church which hears the word of God—and keeps it.

The perils of panic

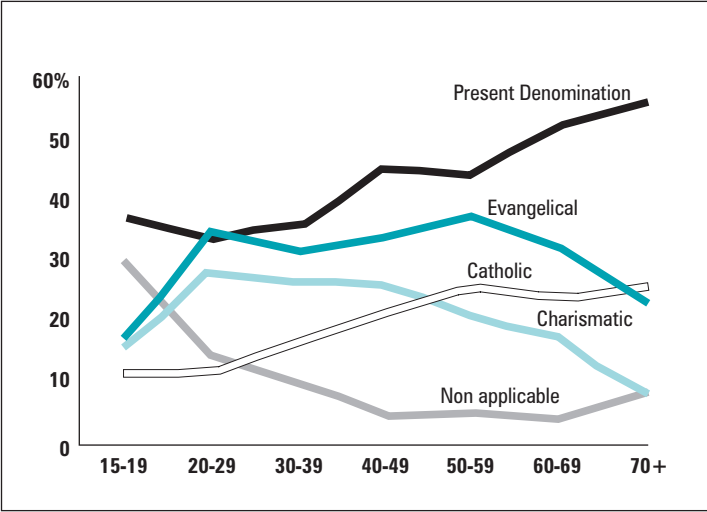
Uncommon Christianity is uncomfortable. It is alien to virtually all the educational and media forces that are brought to bear on the individual day by day. At various points it brings us into sharp conflict with our peers.

It is easy for denominations and churches to panic under pressure whether through pragmatism or compromise. With pragmatism, truth is forgotten in the search for a formula which will lead to a growing church—experiential Christianity; the craze to provide meetings so welcoming that they become mere entertainments. The test of success is not whether the word of God is being obeyed, but whether the new practice works in terms of happy customers.

Compromise arises when the stress of living in a society which does not endorse the Christian message becomes too great. We come to terms with our culture and try to conform new readings of the Bible to the natural theology of the world. Current moves to ordain women as presbyters fall into this category. They are often justified in terms of what will bring people to the churches. But the post-denominational generation is far more clear-sighted. They want churches which do not compromise with the world. They want uncommon Christianity.

Follow the last clear order

Here is a useful military maxim. In a confused and turbulent situation, seek to follow the last clear order you have been given. In our case we have to follow the clear word which God gives us in the



Scriptures.

From these centres of love and truth will come the Christians who stand for love and truth in society. This is the way in which Christianity will be transmitted in this and the next generations. Christian witnesses will need to be supported by that same integrity in love and truth from Christian leadership in local and denominational bodies. The tendency to support the insupportable and to condemn the courageous is an unfortunate middle-aged response to post-denominationalism. 'Trust the wisdom of the young' is not a bad rule of thumb.

The primacy of Christ

The churches belong to Jesus Christ. The question is whether we are prepared to let him run them. The point at issue is the authority of Scripture, since that is the way in which he rules over us. Many are the temptations to compromise and so avoid our duty to him.

The church that serves the Lord will be marked by a deep desire to learn the word, to explain the word, to follow the word, to pray by the rule of the word, and to make known the word. However radical or conservative its pattern of meeting may be, it will aim to meet the Lord in his word and by the power of his Spirit. This is the path to truth and love—may our nation be famous for such churches! ●

Which denomination has been most significant in your faith journey?

In order to maintain and propagate authentic Christianity, we must plant churches which have two fundamental qualities: truth and love.

being obedient to God's word and proclaiming God's word, we have the chance to do good. But we must not lose the opportunity by compromise.

Post-denominational Christians

Australian society has changed utterly. The great pillars of an earlier era—banks, schools, unions, lodges, sporting codes—have all had to re-invent themselves or perish. While the churches have been slow to change, a new generation has arisen. They owe no

the heart of contemporary life mean that true love is rarely experienced. Contemporary people find it hard to commit themselves to others in word and deed. In contrast, it is the love of God that makes us Christian. We know what love is, because God himself has committed utterly to us in his dear Son. His Spirit teaches us what his grace is. A genuinely Christian church will be a community of love and will represent that uncommon Christianity which the world needs to see.

Donations needed and welcome!

This edition of ACR has been funded by interest from the trust funds the Australian Church Record administers. We would like to produce two or three editions a year and supply them free of charge. Our funds only allow us to produce one.

If you would like to see further editions, and can help us financially, please send your donation to:

The Hon. Treasurer
Australian Church Record
P.O. Box 218
Camperdown NSW 2050.

This edition cost around \$8000, and except for layout, printing and postal distribution, was produced by voluntary labour.

Local Snippets

John Chapman Foundation launched

On 27 March, the Department of Evangelism hosted a dinner for 220 people to launch The John Chapman Foundation. Archbishop Harry Goodhew was a part of the proceedings as was the Department's former director, John Chapman, who has bequeathed his name to this new venture. John Chapman has given leadership in evangelism for 30 years and is widely known and loved both in Australia and many places overseas. The foundation aims to provide the necessary funds to enable the Department of Evangelism to appoint more evangelists and trainers in evangelism to face the challenges of the future. For more information, phone (02) 9265 1582.

Remember '59!

Next year is the 40th anniversary of the '59 Billy Graham Crusade. On May 10, 1959, 165,000 people packed Sydney Cricket and Show Grounds for Billy Graham's final address. The impact of the crusade has lasted for 40 years. Make a note of May 10 1999, when a Service of Praise and Thanksgiving is planned to be held in the Pitt St Uniting Church. All enquiries: Donald Howard (02) 4658 1022.

Views from the UK

After Lambeth—all friends together?

John Richardson offers ACR readers a view from the UK



Whilst the Lambeth Conference seems to have passed almost unnoticed in Australia, it was watched intensely in the UK where the debate on human sexuality attracted keen attention for two reasons. First, homosexual lobbyists had made it clear months in advance that they would push this subject to the top of the agenda. Second, Conservatives felt that a 'Yes' vote to homosexual revisionism would split the church, probably irreparably.

In the event, the revisionists were massively defeated, leaving many Liberal bishops in a state of shock. But the impact on the Conservatives was

heard and promising further dialogue, which was signed not only by the predictable personalities from ECUSA, Canada and New Zealand but also by over 40 UK bishops. More worryingly, some of these, such as John Gladwin or Roger Sainsbury, would be thought of as evangelicals. However, this action must itself be seen in the light of other trends within the UK.

Since the 1950s, UK evangelicalism has grown from a despised minority to being part of the 'acceptable face' of Anglicanism. Unfortunately, this acceptance has been accompanied by a strengthening of Anglican institutionalism. Central to this process is the concept of Episcopal Collegiality, which has also focused on the debate on homosexuality.

In 1991 the bishops jointly issued a discussion document called *Issues in Human Sexuality* which quickly became the unofficial 'official position' of bishops asked for their own views on homosexuality. This ploy was less than innocuous because of the notorious section 5.6 which not only allowed that lay Christians could live in active homosexual relationships but virtually required the acceptance of those relationships by every congregation:

"...there are others who are conscientiously convinced that... they have more hope of growing in love for God and neighbour with the help of a loving and faithful homophile partnership... where mutual self-giving includes the physical expression of their attachment. [...] It is...

important that *in every congregation such homophiles should find fellow-Christians who will sensitively and naturally provide [support and love] for them...*" (emphasis added)

This effectively allowed Liberal bishops who approved of homosexual relationships to do so without admitting it. Yet in the name of 'collegiality' no UK evangelical bishop has ever disagreed with *Issues in Human Sexuality* publicly, even though some must disagree with it privately!

This reflects the situation of UK evangelicalism from the level of Archdeacon upwards, where evangelical appointees have universally failed to challenge the prevailing Liberalism. Thus, Archbishop George Carey has declared publicly that he is a Christian first, an Anglican second and an evangelical only third. Similarly, Gavin Reid, the Bishop of Maidstone, has stated that for him to promote evangelicalism would be to play 'party games'. Evangelicalism is constantly treated as if it were a matter of ecclesiological culture rather than theological truth.

This weakness is the result of two key influences. The first is the massive impact of the Charismatic movement, which since the 1950s has opened the floodgates to a thoroughly uncritical spirituality. This was recently exemplified by the 'Toronto Blessing' which arrived at Holy Trinity, Brompton (home of the Alpha Course), ostensibly from the Vineyard churches in North America. It was only after people had 'bought into' the phenomenon that

it was realized that its true origins lay more dubiously with Rodney Howard-Browne and the 'Word Faith' movement.

In the wake of the Charismatic movement, shared experience has become more important than shared ideas. It has also meant that evangelicals and Liberals seem to be talking the same language since both are keen to appeal to the 'Spirit'.

The other key influence is the decline of evangelical theology. Again, this can be traced to the experientialism of the 1960s influenced by the Charismatic movement. However, the result is twofold. On the one hand there is a lack of theological depth across the board. On the other, there is the development of 'fuzzy edges', so that formerly unthinkable ideas (such as Clark Pinnock's 'openness of God') are gaining credence amongst evangelicals.

The picture is not entirely bleak. Dick Lucas and the Proclamation Trust, for example, have had a massive impact on clergy and young people. David Peterson is strengthening the training of Anglican clergy through his work at Oak Hill. The Moore College Preliminary Theological Certificate course is being done by upwards of 200 people across the UK. The gospel continues to be preached and some churches are growing.

But the gains for the gospel in the UK have only come about where there is theological clarity and spiritual courage. Where these have been absent, evangelicalism has been sidelined and the gospel ultimately distorted. Lambeth was a victory, but not for 'inclusivism'. ●

Being almost as accustomed to defeat as the English cricket team, they were similarly at a loss to know how to handle victory.

just as great. Being almost as accustomed to defeat as the English cricket team, they were similarly at a loss to know how to handle victory. Was it a fluke, or did it mark an upturn of fortunes? To answer this, we have to look at the context in which Lambeth took place.

The defeat of the homosexualist agenda resulted from an alliance of Western political skills with Third World voices and votes. However, such a defeat would clearly not have occurred if the Western bishops had met alone. Indeed, a statement was issued following the vote, regretting that homosexuals had not been properly

Man-centred evangelistic methods slammed



The English *Evangelical Times* has questioned the framework of a new survey on local-church evangelism co-produced by the Evangelical Alliance (EA) and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance (EMA), which was very enthusiastic about the 'Alpha Course' originating from Holy Trinity Brompton.

Although sharing the report's desire for 'confidence in the gospel' and 'integrity of believers' lifestyles', *Evangelical Times* argued that many Christians lack gospel confidence not so much because of today's pluralistic, multi-faith culture—as proposed by the study—but because of 'an absence of true, radical Christian experience on the part of many professing believers'. The newspaper pointed to an 'inside' problem: "Christians brought up on a diet of charismatic worship, feelings-based religion and 'power evangelism' are understand-

ably stumped when called to give a reason for the hope that is in them." It contrasted the successful method of the early church, preaching the gospel as the power of God, with the methods of today, in which people are sent out "into the world like children to do a man's job, more often armed with a gospel guitar than with the sword of the Spirit". To the *Evangelical Times* the report had all the marks of being a study "to give scientific credibility to the Alpha Course. Those who dare to question the biblical validity of these courses can now be refuted by statistics. After all, three out of four evangelical churches can't be wrong".

Against such "deferential praise and guileless promotion of the Alpha Course", *Evangelical Times* predicts that the distorted and man-centred theology of the Alpha Course "will produce another generation of Christians with no confidence in the gospel and perpetuate the very prob-

lems identified earlier in the report".

"What evangelicalism in Britain requires is not more Alpha Courses, or targeting, or man-centred enter-

People are sent out "into the world like children to do a man's job, more often armed with a gospel guitar than with the sword of the Spirit".

tainment. It needs salt-of-the-earth Christians who will witness with love, live with integrity, and testify to their Lord with confidence, knowing whom they have believed; believers who let

their light shine before others as they live and serve with honesty and uprightness, whether in the workplace, the marketplace or even the playground. Our society needs bold preachers, and mobilized congregations, who discern in the gospel of Christ the power of God unto salvation." ●

Some challenges facing evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century

John Woodhouse

1. The beast of our own confusion: The challenge of evangelical identity
The first is to think that ‘evangelical’ means just one of the many different brands of Christianity available. A very good brand amongst others, its advocates would claim, perhaps even the best brand—but humility would prevent us from saying so!

This seems to be the situation amongst Anglican evangelicals in England. The book *Evangelical Anglicans: Their role and influence in the church today*, edited by R.T. France and Alister McGrath, for example, views “Evangelicalism” as a party, a group within the wider church, whose history can be described, and whose contribution can be evaluated.

But that is not what evangelical used to mean. At an earlier time evangelical was a name that expressed a self-conscious commitment to the biblical gospel which was “not satisfied with being described as one particular brand of Christianity.”¹ In 1970 John Stott put it like this: “It is the contention of evangelicals that they are plain Bible Christians, and that in order to be a biblical Christian it is necessary to be an evangelical Christian.”² Nothing less. And it claims that deviations from evangelical Christianity are deviations from authentic Christianity.

This leads to the second way in which the word ‘evangelical’ has become misunderstood. Like the word ‘Christian’, it has become so *widely* used to mean so many vague, undefined things, that it now means very little.

So what does it mean to be an evangelical? Perhaps the word has been so emptied that we need to redefine our identity, although hopefully a new term will not be adopted. Historically, to be an evangelical did not mean to belong to a party. To be an evangelical meant (and should still mean) to believe a theology. It meant (and should still mean) to believe in the inspiration and infallibility and sufficiency of the Bible, God’s word written; to believe in the sinfulness of humankind who need to be saved from God’s wrath; to believe in substitutionary atonement: in the death of Jesus Christ in our place, bearing for us the penalty due to our sin; to believe that all the benefits of Christ’s work for us are received by faith alone; to believe that such a response of faith in Christ was dependent on the work of the Spirit of God bringing us to new birth; to believe that Jesus will return to judge all people.

To be an evangelical used to mean to *believe THAT*—and to believe that *THAT* is authentic Christianity.

2. The beast of our own cowardice: The challenge of believing and acting on the truth of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit
Evangelical Christianity will always be radical, because it cannot be content with the way things are, either in the church or in the world. To believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, sufficient word of God is to believe that all human ways should submit to the divine authority of that word. Something is not *right* simply because it has been done for 400 years, or because it is widely practised or

believed, or because it has been written into a Constitution, or because to change it would cause a furore. There is *nothing* that should escape the scrutiny of the word of God.

And so evangelical Christianity in form and practice will never be a static thing. It will be calling on the world to repent and on the church to reform and on ourselves individually to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, in order to live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way, growing in the knowledge of God (Col 1:9-10). These generalities can be readily translated into specifics.

The 1662 Prayer Book was a wonderful accomplishment—only surpassed by 1552! But it was not perfect. There were those with whom we should identify at the time who saw some of its weaknesses. As the rest of the Anglican Communion presses effectively to change the standards of the Book of Common Prayer in liberal and catholic directions, it is not good enough for evangelicals to simply defend the status quo. We ought to be pressing for change, for the continuing Biblical reformation of our churches.

The challenge is to reform our churches and our denomination so that they transparently express the truth and reality of the gospel of Christ today. That must be the controlling agenda in our churches and in our Synod. But this reformation must not stop with our churches. The challenge is to call the people of this great city, and this nation, that “they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). The energy and prayers of evangelicals should be directed to that end.

3. The beast of unbelief: The challenge of the world
The form of the world’s hostility is a complex thing to analyse—perhaps impossible. No doubt it has many angles and aspects, but prominent among these is the “relativism” that has won the day (now called “post-modernism”).

The gospel is under challenge from the belief that nothing is absolutely true. Tolerance is the virtue born to relativism. Discrimination is the great sin against relativism. And since the gospel is intolerant and discriminating—it condemns what is wrong and distinguishes wrong from right—relativism challenges the gospel’s right to be heard.

Gospel people will want to respond to the challenge of the world’s relativism. We will want to proclaim the gospel in our relativistic age in such a way that it is heard. We will therefore want to expose the impossibility of relativism.

It is interesting, isn’t it, that our relativistic age, which castigates the gospel’s absolute claims, is itself intensely moralistic—in a selective kind of way. It is almost as though the bottled up moral sense of our society, which has not been allowed to express its outrage at the Mardi Gras, has found relief in having something to let off at. The terrible discoveries of the Wood Royal Commission aroused an uncharacteristic burst of moral outrage. The Stolen Generation report

has had a similar effect, and rightly so. But is anyone noticing the inconsistency? It is pleasing that hardly anyone can bring themselves to argue that paedophilia is just an alternative life-style or that paedophilia is probably genetic and so should not incur blame; or that critics of paedophilia are “paedo-phobes”. But is anyone noticing the hypocrisy?

Take care. This is dangerous territory. We must not allow ourselves to be portrayed as less outraged than society at the horrific abuse of children that is paedophilia or the injustices carried out against aborigines. Indeed we ought to be more outraged. We know God. And we can therefore see the darkness of human sin for what it is. But the mind that refuses to have God in its knowledge is depraved (Rom 1:28). And pagan moral outrage will be turned on good things. It will not, in the end, be able to distinguish between right and wrong.

The only way in which the gospel can be heard in its own true and absolute terms is when the challenges to relativism are heard. Evangelical voices should be added to the many voices of outrage at whatever is outraging the society at the moment—provided that what is outraging the community is in fact wrong. But do you see that as we do that—it isn’t enough. We are only identifying a point at which we agree with our unbelieving society. In itself this will not help people to hear the gospel’s challenge to relativism. And the gospel’s great challenge to relativism is the news of *God’s* judgment: the wrath to come.

It is true to say that nothing is more difficult to speak about today than God’s coming judgment. Nothing is harder to explain to our world than the reality of God’s wrath against all human godlessness and wickedness (Rom 1:18).

4. The beast of denominationalism: The challenge of the Church
The denomination presents a challenge to evangelicals, in the challenge to recognise the denomination for what it is. The denomination and its structures, the institution, is not to be equated with the church that Jesus Christ is building.

This organisation is an instrument which can help or hinder the cause of the gospel. Our labours with regard to

this organisation must be directed and motivated by a desire to see it help and stop it hindering.

The Anglican Church of Australia, as an institution, has been largely taken over by liberal catholicism: liberal

We have a challenge on our hands. Will we stand for authentic biblical Christianity and against deviations from it?

theology and catholic ritual. The new prayer book—rejected by our Synod—is an expression of this, because it plays down gospel truths, like the wrath of God, and shifts the liturgy firmly towards liberal catholicism—and not only in the Lord’s Supper.

The Synod was right to say no to the book, but it made a mistake in making that ‘no’ half-hearted and encouraging the Archbishop to authorise as much of the book as possible. Far better to get to work wholeheartedly at developing thoroughly evangelical liturgies. Would that not clearly be better for the gospel?

Another example is afforded by several church plants that have provoked uproar from some. There appears to be a concept in our denomination that diocesan, and perhaps parish, boundaries give people a monopoly on gospel work in “their area”. You can go to Africa to preach the gospel, but you must not cross the Hawkesbury without the permission of the Bishop of Newcastle!

We have a challenge on our hands. Will we stand for authentic biblical Christianity, and against deviations from it? Will we be true radicals in the world and in the church? Will we declare the gospel of God’s absolute judgment in a relativistic world? Will we see our institutions for what they really are, and work within them, alongside them, outside them, and, if necessary, against them to see that the gospel of Jesus Christ is made known?

1 Mark Thompson, “Saving the Heart of Evangelicalism,” in *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis: A Radical Agenda for a Bible Based Church*, ed. Melvin Tinker (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1995), p. 29.
2 Cited by Thompson, p. 29.

Anglican Church League invites you to hear...

Dick Lucas (from St Helen’s Bishopsgate)
Speak on **“The state of evangelicalism in the Church of England and its wider implications”**

at St Paul’s Carlingford (Just off Pennant Hills Rd behind the Mormon Tabernacle).
Thursday, 8th October at 7:30pm.

Synod

Trinity, Freedom, Relationships

David Höhne

Our story opens at a special church conference called by the Bishop to discuss issues of ministry and theology. The issues on the agenda have the potential to seriously divide the church. Two eminent theologians William of Carthage and Benjamin of Caesarea are deep in discussion on one of these issues...

WILLIAM: I'm only going to explain this to you once more. The Creed must say, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father *AND* the Son."

BENJAMIN: So you keep saying, but why is this addition about the Spirit proceeding from the Son so important?

WILLIAM: Because Jesus said: "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit

Son? If so, aren't you also implying that the Spirit isn't really God or, worse, that God himself is some kind of divine hierarchy?

WILLIAM: You miss the point, my dear chap. By insisting that there is an order in the relations of the Godhead we are at one and the same time defending the equality of persons and preserving their specialness.

BENJAMIN: Really? How so?

WILLIAM: Let's take St. Peter's speech at Pentecost for example. There Peter said of our Lord, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Peter was telling his listeners that God the Son was pouring out God the Spirit, who comes from God the Father. That the Spirit comes

yet distinctly so.

BENJAMIN: Oh, I think I get it now. If the Spirit comes from God then he must be divine. If Jesus sends us the Spirit then Jesus must be divine because only God gives his Spirit. So the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. If the Spirit comes from the Father through the Son he is therefore distinct from both of them.

WILLIAM: By Jove I think he's got it! It is the order of the relations within the Godhead that enables us to speak of three persons but only one God. Shall we go back inside to vote then?

BENJAMIN: Wait a minute, we still haven't agreed about the flowers in church!

1500 years later the Bishop has called a special conference to discuss issues of theology and ministry that have the potential to divide the church. Two eminent churchmen with notable ancestry are discussing the issue of women's ministry...

BEN: You are making this one verse do an awful lot of work just to support your position. Besides, this is an issue of liberty and equality. All this business about order seems to be a trick to baptise the suppression of women.

BILL: Don't be ridiculous. When Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man..." he makes his appeal to the orderliness of relationships based in the creation. The very next thing he refers to is Adam and Eve who we know from Genesis 1:26 are both made in the image of God. There is no question that the man and the woman are equal, yet they have an order to their relationships that reflects the God in whose image they are made.

BEN: You're not going to get on the subordinationist band-wagon again I hope.

BILL: Listen you can't deny that the God of the Bible has an order to the way in which he relates to his creation. The Father comes to us through the Son in the Spirit. It is this order that both maintains the unity within God and allows for the diversity of persons. Just think of John 15:26 "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." This order of relationships in God himself is reflected in his image on earth—human beings. So whether it's in a family situation, like in Ephesians 5:21-33, or in a church, the order that the Bible prescribes for relationships between

men and women is based on the order of relationships within God himself.

BEN: Just as I said, you're imposing this outdated view of God on your politics to legitimise denying women their true freedom as God's people!

BILL: Now wait just a minute. To deny the order of relations in the Godhead is an attack upon the divinity of their persons. The creeds were written to protect God's people from that kind of heresy. Do you really think that by denying the fact that the persons of the Godhead willingly subordinate themselves to each other that you can maintain any real concept of freedom, equality or individuality?

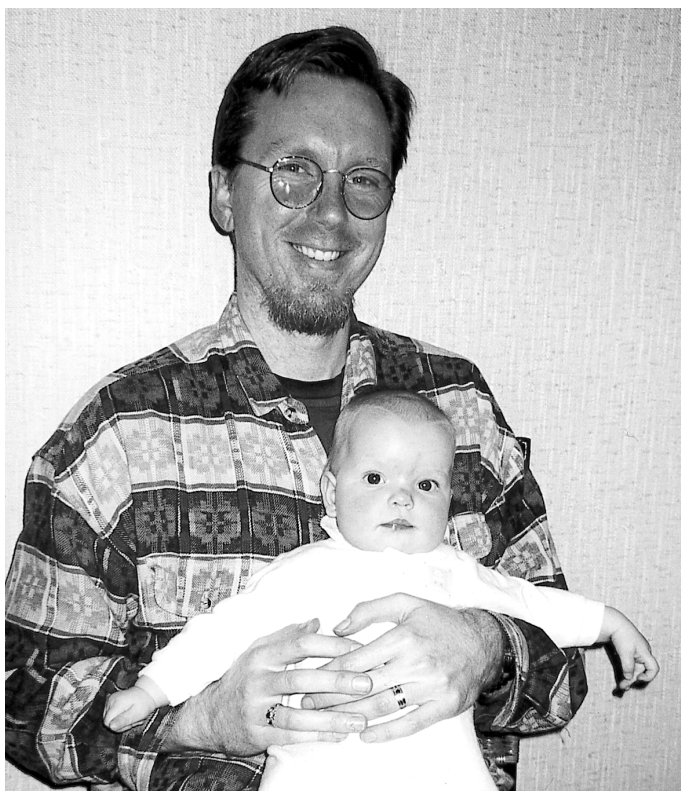
True freedom is seen in the Father who gives up his Son for the sake of sinners, the loving Son who takes the form of a slave as their servant and the divine Spirit who gives life to the dead and gathers those rebellious creatures into the household of the one God. It is only within these relations of loving selflessness that the concept of equality has any meaning in terms of a shared essence and fellowship. The order within which each person subordinates himself to others glorifies both the one and the three. It is only within the schema of other-person-centred community that individuality retains any true substance.

Furthermore, basing human relationships on this order gives the partners in the relationship equality before God as his image and the freedom of being distinct from each other. Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 11:3 "Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." The woman is no less human than man as Christ is no less divine than God. Yet God has put Christ the God-man over both the man and the woman. When Paul writes against women's authority over men he is merely restating the order that men and women bear as God's image.

BEN: If our ancestors could speak to us today, I wonder what they would say?

BILL: Well, they weren't always that easy to understand. But, on this issue, they would be clear. I think they'd say to you: "Your vaunted post-modern notions with their cliched categories of democracy and liberty know nothing about the testimony of Scripture and serve only to enslave their adherents to homogenising forces that depersonalise and alienate. What you so disdainfully refer to as antiquated is simply the scriptural understanding of Christian churches throughout history."

David Höhne
(seen here with
daughter Anna)
serves on the
pastoral team at
St Clement's,
Jannali.



of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (John 15:26). This means two things. Firstly that the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, is the Spirit of God—he is of the same substance as God. Secondly, that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of God, is the same Spirit that Jesus the Christ, God the Son, pours out on his servants. Thus in adding the clause, 'and from the Son' we are able to see the true unity and distinction of persons within the Godhead, the One triune God.

BENJAMIN: That the Spirit is the Spirit of God I have no argument with, O learned friend. It's the second part that I don't like. If you say that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, aren't you also saying that the Spirit is inferior to the

from God shows that the Spirit is divine. That the Spirit comes from the Son shows that Jesus is divine. All are equally God and therefore there is no inferiority.

BENJAMIN: Hmm. Well of course we must insist that all persons in the Trinity are divine but do we need to say, that "the Spirit proceeds from the Son" to show this?

WILLIAM: Of course we do, dear boy. In saying this we are defending the divinity of Jesus the Son. What's more, we also preserve the distinction between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit comes from God through Jesus he is at once the same as God and distinct from Jesus. Thus Jesus the Son and God the Spirit are equally of God,

matters

The Archbishop's Women's Ministry Conference Report from a female participant

It was with some skepticism that I attended the Archbishop's Women's Ministry Conference at Trinity Grammar in May. With such diametrically opposed opinions about women's ordination, how can there be some agreement? Is there any middle ground?

The morning started off on a positive note as Archdeacon Trevor Edwards expounded the Word of God. This was followed by a review of two discussions papers circulated prior to the conference: one a case for ordination by Dr Stuart Piggin; the other a case against by Canon Peter Jensen.

Bishop Barnett's insightful comments pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of each paper. He urged us to view ordination as a non-gospel issue whilst maintaining the integrity of

Scripture warning that if 1 Tim 2 is ignored then no Scripture is safe. Furthermore, the Bishop set the tone of the conference as he exhorted us to be sympathetic, to "walk around in one another's shoes".

The subsequent discussion paper presented by the Rev Narelle Jarrett and Dr Ann Young was of particular interest. They outlined the various courses of action available to the Diocese, ranging from ordaining women but not allowing them congregational leadership, to splitting our Diocese in two.

Small groups were convened in order to discuss the options with the view to a satisfactory outcome for all. I suspect that my group was not the only one that struggled. There are plenty of options but very few, if any, that are satisfactory to both parties. It's hard to

see a way forward.

The afternoon was a disappointment. It started off well enough as various women told us about their amazing experiences in ministry and shared their vision for the future. Question time soon changed the tune of the session. What started off as a celebration of women's ministry became a plea for ordination as several panellists shared sad anecdotes about other women in ministry. Some even stated that the only reason that they were so positive in their presentations is because they were told to be. I am not opposed to hearing the hard truths about the struggles of women in ministry but I had thought that the afternoon would look beyond the ministry of priesthood. It was hard to reconcile the afternoon session with the

morning. The previous session had grappled with the question of whether ordination was Biblical. I and many others thought the answer was no. The afternoon panellists assumed the answer was yes. Yet it is awkward to point this out when the stories are so emotional.

Though I have expressed doubts about the outcome of this conference I unreservedly express praise for the manner in which people treated one another. Participants throughout listened with sympathy and respect for each person, truly searching for a loving way to come to a common practice if not a common mind. It is my hope that we will not lose this ability to "walk in one another's shoes" as our Synod continues to find ways to encourage biblically-shaped women's ministry. ●

Black Saturday: Sydney still floundering over women

On 16 May this year, members of Synod met to discuss the ministry of women in a non-synod context. This forum was meant to encourage discussion without the pressure of decision. Although there have been some glowing reports about the success of the day, for others it will go down as 'Black Saturday'.

One female lay person expressed disappointment that the cases for and against were not presented to the group because "it would have carried more weight to hear them". The question time in particular was "woefully handled". Questions had to be submitted in writing before the day. Although there were

many questions received, only a meagre few were selected to be answered. Both 'sides' were assigned a question to answer, although some answered well, others on the panel seemed to forget the function of the question time.

The afternoon sessions were an anticlimax. "Despite the usefulness of discussion groups for relationships and for listening to each other, no satisfactory 'compromise position' could be found by my group or the groups of any others I spoke to", one participant said. "Presentations by women in ministry were interesting, quite well done. But I was still feeling cheated out of the main game," she said. When a question allowed the women to express

their feelings about ordination, all but two were obviously for it.

Patricia Judge, the convenor of Equal But Different (EBD), a group which resists the ordination of women as being unbiblical, has claimed in the EBD Newsletter that the real issues have been obscured by both the conference and the positive reports of the day. She questioned whether, for some satisfied respondents, "the call for unity overshadowed the issues at stake". The forum itself did not allow for an adequate presentation of views and, despite the fact that the conference was to encourage discussion, the question time was stifled. "The question time where any refutation might have taken

place was severely truncated — a great disappointment to those of us who had carefully prepared questions." Although it is useful to understand an alternative position, says Mrs Judge, "this does not obligate acceptance. Consensus, or unity of thought, is a very poor vehicle for establishing truth. Out true unity lies in a shared belief in the words of the Scriptures."

The Conference was meant to help the Synod find a way forward. For those who want Sydney to promote women's ministry in a way that preserves the difference between the sexes that is true to our evangelical heritage, and, more importantly, to the Scriptures, the conference did not offer much hope. ●

Standing Committee solves the women's question

The Sydney Standing Committee will present the following motion to the October Synod:

In response to the Conference on Women's Ministry, this Synod requests that the Standing Committee bring to the first session of the 45th Synod such legislation as would enable a five year experimentation of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper as a principled means by which we may reduce the tensions and synodical divisions over the ordination of women to the priesthood."

This has all the appearance of a most satisfactory solution in the Sydney context, whilst providing good evangelical leadership on the national and international fronts.

Across a number of years of intense

discussion and debate, the synod has already spoken its mind several times. On the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood, Sydney has firmly said 'no'. This motion clearly builds upon the parameters that have been set by earlier synods, even if not always understood or appreciated outside the diocese: women's ministry ought to be encouraged as far as possible, but the line must be drawn at incumbency.

Sydney also has a long and well-deserved reputation for promoting and encouraging women's ministry. The Synod has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to finding ways to continue to strengthen women to serve the Church in biblically endorsed directions. In this motion, Standing Committee has picked up both the pro-

women spirit of Sydney's past and the desire of the present Archbishop, expressed in his calling of the May Conference, to foster this spirit.

If this motion is passed, this will allow women, if duly licensed and duly invited by their parish minister, to take part in the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Two Synods ago, the pro-ordination lobby argued that women should be ordained priests, but never licensed to an incumbency. This motion keeps this same limitation, but, by expanding the allowable diaconal responsibilities, it also keeps faith with Sydney's previous decisions. Priesthood is now clearly about incumbency. The next logical step would be to ordain men to the priesthood when they enter an incumbency.

By not compromising previous

decisions, Standing Committee's motion will enable Sydney to continue to stand firm on the biblical commitment to male headship of congregations. This is the stand that has already been applauded by conservative evangelicals worldwide. In the post-Lambeth glow of desire for an international conservative coalition, Sydney would once again provide a strong lead for those who look to this diocese to stand firm.

Passing the motion will also provide a clear message to the national church, and so provide them an opportunity to address the issue of lay administration.

Standing Committee can be congratulated for offering the Synod the way to solve the question of women's ministry at last. ●

Lay administration vs profound theological error

Who will win?

It is commonly assumed in the Anglican Church that the Lord's Supper can only be conducted by a 'priest' for a 'priest' is needed to lead the Prayer of Consecration.

This prohibition is more in the eye of the beholder than in any valid principle of theology or law and is based on a number of serious misunderstandings.

For four years, the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney has been poised to explicitly provide by ordinance for the authorisation of suitable lay persons and deacons to administer the Lord's Supper in certain circumstances. This appears to be radical only because of accumulated misunderstandings about the Lord's Supper, about the role of the 'priest' at the Lord's Supper, and about the significance of the Anglican 'priesthood' more generally.

Sadly the custom of restricting the administration of the Lord's Supper to ordained priests has come to be so closely linked to a number of theological errors that it has become important to reform our practice in order to correct these errors.

Background: a thoroughly considered reform

It would be difficult to think of any change contemplated by an Anglican diocesan Synod in this country that has received more thorough and rigorous consideration. Theological, legal and pastoral aspects of the proposal have been examined in a series of no less than ten substantial reports to the Sydney Synod over the last 20 years. These reports have consistently supported and recommended the removal of the perceived absolute restriction of the administration of the Lord's Supper to episcopally ordained 'priests'.

The discussion of the 1994/5 Synod resulted in what is perhaps the most

The Appellate Tribunal report indicates that a considerable amount of the opposition comes from a desire to preserve theological opinions that are contrary to the reformed evangelical faith ruled by the Scriptures, indeed contrary to the theology of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-Nine Articles. So long as our practice supports and conveys these erroneous opinions, it is difficult to justify resisting the reform.

Error 1: *The three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons is as fundamental to Christianity as the canon of Scripture.*

A report to the Appellate Tribunal by the House of Bishops said:

"Even if the New Testament evidence is unclear, there can be little doubt that the present shape of the ministry [ie. bishops, priests and deacons] became normative in the church during the same period in which the canon of Scripture and the historic creeds were also accepted. Already by the end of the first century the letter of Clement of Rome to the church of Corinth stated that it was the supreme will of God that priests, Levites and the laity all had their own specific functions and were not to 'transgress the appointed rule of his service'.

"In the case of the canon it is argued that the church simply recognised the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It did not bestow authority on the canon; it acknowledged an authority the canon was seen to possess. However a similar process could also be claimed to be at work in the emergence of the apostolic ministry. The same faith which acknowledged the canon was also led in the same period to acknowledge the ministry [ie. bishops, priests and deacons] as a divinely appointed means of serving the church and preserving its unity." ["Submission by the House of Bishops to the Appellate Tribunal", p. 3]

It is added that essential to this divinely inspired three-fold order is that "only a bishop or priest could celebrate the Holy Communion". For this reason it appears that the authorisation of a lay person to administer the Lord's Supper is regarded as akin to the removal or addition of books from the canon of Scripture.

A report to the Appellate Tribunal by the House of Bishops argued that the three-fold order of ministry was 'divinely appointed' and that it emerged by a process similar to the way the canon of Scripture emerged. This is an impossible proposition for anyone who recognises churches with other patterns of ministry (Presbyterian,

Baptist, etc.) as fully authentic Christian churches. The recognition of the books that have been given by divine inspiration is quite different from the process that resulted in some Christian churches today having bishops, priests and deacons.

If prohibiting lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper preserves or conveys the idea that early church history, in addition to the Bible, reveals the normative will of God, or that non-episcopal churches necessarily fall short of God's will, then there is good reason to remove the prohibition.

Error 2: *Presiding at the Holy Communion is an essential part of what makes a priest a priest.*

Archbishop Ian George wrote, in his reasons in the Appellate Tribunal Opinion:

"It is hard to imagine anything more consistently central to the nature of priesthood than presiding at the Holy Communion..." ["Appellate Tribunal Opinion", p. 52]

This is an understanding of the priesthood that is foreign to the New Testament and to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

At many times and in many places Christian ministers have been thought of, in some sense, as persons who stand between ordinary people and God, and mediate, perhaps by offering the sacrifice of the Mass, or by praying for the people in a way that others cannot. Likewise the Lord's Supper has been given a prominence that it does not have in the New Testament,

A Short History of the Synod Debate

1977	Synod Resolution 9/77 <i>Licensing Lay Persons for Ministry of Word and Sacrament</i>	(Moved: J. Chapman)
1981	Synod Resolution 11/81 <i>Towards a Theology of Ordination</i>	(Moved: J. Chapman)
1983	Doctrine Commission Report: "there is no Scriptural or doctrinal barrier to lay presidency at the eucharist"	(Papers: P.T. O'Brien; P.W. Barnett)
1985	Report of the Synod Committee • lay presidency desirable under certain circumstances • recommended that a person authorised to preach be authorised to preside	(Convenor: R.H. Goodhew)
1985	18/85 Lay Presidency at the Holy Communion • endorses the principle of lay presidency	(Moved: R.H. Goodhew)
1993	Doctrine Commission Report <i>Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper</i> "there are no sound doctrinal objections to, and there are significant doctrinal reasons for, lay presidency at the Lord's Supper. There are also sound reasons based on our received Anglican order for allowing lay presidency. In the light of this the continued prohibition of lay presidency at the Lord's Supper does not seem justifiable theologically. Since church practice ought to conform to sound doctrine, practical problems related to the introduction of lay presidency ought to be dealt with, but should not constitute an obstacle to reform motivated by theological truth."	(Chairman: P.W. Barnett)
1993	Doctrine Commission Report <i>Diaconal Presidency at the Lord's Supper</i> "there would appear to be no theological objection to legislation which would enable deacons to preside at the Holy Communion."	(Chairman: P.W. Barnett)
1993	16/93 Lay and Diaconal Presidency • investigate impact of lay and diaconal presidency	(Moved: W.B. Nicholson)
1994	16/94 Lay and Diaconal Presidency • requests legislation to enable deacons and lay persons, in appropriate circumstances, to preside at the Lord's Supper 16/94 Standing Committee Report	(Moved: B.C. Newman) (B.C. Newman; J.W. Woodhouse)
1995	Third Reading Deferred	
1996	Third Reading Deferred	
1997	Third Reading Deferred	
End of 1997	Appellate Tribunal Report Published	

It would be difficult to think of any change contemplated by an Anglican diocesan Synod in this country that has received more thorough and rigorous consideration.

carefully and thoroughly considered ordinance that the Synod has ever prepared. After this, the opinion of the Appellate tribunal was awaited. When the Tribunal delivered its opinion in January 1998, the one thing it made clear was that the matter was not clear!

Of even more interest, as revealed by the 94 page document providing the reasons for the Tribunal's opinion, is the very great diversity of theological belief that lies behind the differences over the question before us. It is this diversity that shows the debate to be more important than it may at first appear. Objections to lay persons or deacons ever administering the Lord's Supper often come from profound theological errors.

becoming central to church life, and essential for the reception of God’s grace.

However, if a ‘priest’ is an elder, and his responsibilities are defined by the New Testament (and the Ordinal for that matter), his essential work is “exercising oversight” (1 Pet 5:2), to “take care of the church of God” (1 Tim 3:5), “holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9), “to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

If prohibiting lay and diaconal administration of the Lord’s Supper preserves or conveys the unbiblical idea that a Christian minister’s chief duty, and the central way in which he serves the congregation, is the administration of the sacrament, rather than the ministry of God’s Word, then there is good reason to remove the prohibition.

Error 3: *Only a priest is ABLE to preside at the Holy Communion.*

The House of Bishops again:

“Ordination, which involves both the laying on of hands and a prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit to the person being ordained a priest or a bishop, sets a person apart to act in the Christian congregation in the name of Christ. When an ordained priest or bishop presides at the Lord’s Supper this makes it apparent to all who are attending that the true minister of the sacrament is Christ himself acting through his ordained representative. Ordination also empowers the person being ordained to act in a representative capacity on behalf of the whole priestly people of God and to speak in their behalf.” [“Submission by the House of Bishops to the Appellate Tribunal”, p. 4]

The House of Bishops assumed that in the Lord’s Supper something is done that only a “priest” can appropriately do. In fact, what “happens” during the Lord’s Supper is that we hear the Word of God (“Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me”) and as we eat

and drink the bread and the wine we *all* remember that Christ died for us and, trusting in him, we *all* thank God for his indescribable gift to us in the once and for all death of his one and only Son.

There is nothing here that *requires* an episcopally ordained “priest”. The Word of God can, in principle, be spoken by anyone. In thanking God and trusting Christ we all do exactly the same thing. The person who leads the prayers is doing no more than that: leading prayers.

The idea that the elder represents (symbolises) the unity in Christ of the church is a blasphemous presumption.

If prohibiting lay and diaconal administration of the Lord’s Supper preserves or conveys the unbiblical idea that in the Lord’s Supper something “happens” or is done that can only be done by a ‘priest’, then there is good reason to remove the prohibition.

Error 4: *In the Holy Communion, the priest is a representative for the whole church.*

The Honourable Justice Bleby has written:

“As President, the celebrant can be said to represent the being of the congregation as together constituting a priesthood of believers.” [“Appellate Tribunal Opinion”, p. 43]

Archbishop George has written:

“The ordained person carries the authority to act representatively not only for a particular community or communities but for the Church universal in the ways proper to that particular office.” [“Appellate Tribunal Opinion”, p. 64]

Several members of the Tribunal cite Archbishop Habgood, speaking at the General Synod of the Church of England in 1994:

“Celebrating the Eucharist is ...basically about representing the whole church in this action in which this particular little bit of the church is engaged.” [“Appellate Tribunal Opinion”, pp. 13, 66]

There is a cluster of ideas here, none of which is biblical.

The idea that the “priesthood” of the people of God is delegated to the “priest” is a confusion of categories. There is the ‘priesthood’ of all believers (the *hiereus* idea based on 1 Peter 2:5 and 9), and the oversight of the elder (which does not include any *hiereus* idea). The confusion comes from using the same English word ‘priest’ for both. A Christian minister is not as such a ‘priest’ in the sense of the ‘priesthood’ of all believers.

The idea that the elder represents (symbolises) the unity in Christ of the church is a blasphemous presumption. That unity of the Spirit is “represented” or expressed in the gift of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. No less presumptuous is the idea that the “priest” represents “the being of the congregation”.

If prohibiting lay and diaconal administration of the Lord’s Supper preserves or conveys the unbiblical idea that a “priest” is a representative of the whole church before God or before the congregation, then there is good reason to remove the prohibition.

Error 5: *In the Holy Communion the priest represents Christ.*

Archbishop George has written:

“Because the Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ, the action of the presiding minister in reciting again the words of Christ at the last supper and distributing to the assembly the holy gifts is seen to stand in a sacramental relation to what Christ did himself in offering his own sacrifice. So our two traditions [Anglican and Roman Catholic] commonly used priestly terms in speaking

about the ordained ministry.”

“The celebrant, in his liturgical action, has a two-fold ministry: as an icon of Christ, acting in the name of Christ towards the community and also as a representative of the community expressing the priesthood of the faithful.” [“Appellate Tribunal Opinion”, p. 60, citing the Canterbury Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and Professor J. Robert Wright]

There should be no need to elaborate on this error. There is one mediator between God and man (1Tim 2:5). The idea that there are ‘priests’ who somehow stand between us and the mediator threatens the gospel itself. In the Lord’s Supper someone may lead the prayers, distribute the bread and the wine, which symbolise Christ’s death, but no-one symbolises Christ.

If prohibiting lay and diaconal administration of the Lord’s Supper preserves or conveys the unbiblical idea that in the Lord’s Supper a “priest” represents Christ, then there is good reason to remove the prohibition.

While it is true that there are better arguments that can be advanced to limit the administration of the Lord’s Supper to ‘priests’ than those outlined above, it is urgent that we recognise that the prohibition is conveying these

The idea that there are ‘priests’ who somehow stand between us and the mediator threatens the gospel itself.

erroneous notions to many, and is being understood by leaders in the Anglican Church of Australia to express these ideas.

The authorisation of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord’s Supper will help to demonstrate that we do not hold these erroneous and strange doctrines. Not to do so may preserve a deceptive appearance of unity in a denomination where deep differences exist. ●

that may be personally less than convincing to those who fear that they may not be amongst the strongest, luckiest or on Mad Max’s good side.

The *fin de siecle* may be an opportunity for us Christians to speak to our world about endings, new beginnings and where hope and fear ought to be properly located and to remind ourselves that we always live in the light of the end. ●

Continuation of ‘A Deepening Impact’ page 16

the mapping and manipulation of our genes or through various scenarios of space colonisation. Or maybe our salvation will come from beyond in the form of benign extraterrestrials as in *Contact*. Perhaps the feminisation of the race will save us or the one world community created in cyber space?

If nothing else, the publicity and concern over the Y2K or millennium computer bug will help to focus our minds and anxieties—what exactly will happen to banks, mortgages, insurance companies, kitchen

appliances and home computers when January 1, 2000 rolls over? [Nothing if you own a Mac-Ed.] Should you plan to have your millennium party out of range of aircraft flight paths ?

Reading the millennium

As Christian believers we may well respond with calm to this anxiety. From one point of view the millennium is of no significance at all, it’s just an arbitrary number. We know an end is coming and if we’re expecting it on January 1, 2000 it probably won’t come then. On the other hand it’s a highly significant date, if only as a codeword for the future and a useful peg on which to hang all manner of

thoughts and plans, hopes and fears about the future.

It’s as good a time as any to discuss the future of our church, our denomination and our faith—do we have a church able to meet, greet and welcome the people of our time? And with the people of our time thinking about the end of things, it’s a good time to be talking with them about their own end. Maybe we’re seeing a cultural manifestation of the personal ‘sense of an ending’ (to use Frank Kermode’s arresting phrase) that all people have. It’s very human to hope and to fear in the face of an end—particularly one’s own. The movies tell us that the human race will go on, but

Bishops: True, False and

What do we want from a bishop?

Barry Newman

The Prayer Book bishop

The other day I was reading through the Ordinal, attached to my copy of the Book of Common Prayer. It's that series of services that deals with the making of deacons, the ordaining of priests and the consecrating of bishops. The headings alone make us ponder on the importance of bishops. The content of the services then clearly indicates the greater responsibility to be borne by these men. While there are some similarities between the roles of priests and bishops, there are also some very thought-provoking differences. A look at two of the questions put to these two types of candidates makes the point.

The bishop and false doctrine

The fourth question put to both priest (to-be) and bishop (to-be) concerns their readiness and diligence to "banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's word". The

priest bears this responsibility within his cure "as need shall require, and occasion shall be given". There are no such limitations for the bishop. This is to be his task: at all times and everywhere.

He is not allowed to excuse himself on the grounds that the heretic is another bishop, or that the unbelief is encouraged in another diocese. If the Scriptures are not held to be sufficient for salvation, if salvation itself is seen as mediated through the activities of men other than the man Christ Jesus, if his death is not genuinely seen to be that once for all act of God in history, if symbols of the grace of God come to replace the realities of the grace of God, and so on, then the bishop of the ordinal can be no respecter of persons or localities, or diocesan, state or national boundaries. His concern for the truth is paramount.

No good either, pleading that correction will destroy unity. What unity is there when error and truth are seen to survive happily together? Neither is it permissible to argue that a compromise is necessary or that one needs to be simply fair to brethren of a different persuasion, if that compromise or different persuasion involves an attack on gospel truth. That friendships will be lost, that the ability to bargain and persuade will be diminished are even less worthy excuses. That one will not be as free to preach the gospel elsewhere, is simply not worthy of discussion. Hopefully no-one would seriously countenance excuses that refer to being professional, having good manners or preserving good order.

Understandably, concerns about libel, legal action and damages, might make one think twice about being one of God's champions for the truth in public. Yet the Ordinal doesn't allow the bishop to use even such things as these as excuses for lack of forthrightness. The fundamental issues of the bishop are the overriding importance of the truth, the awful conse-

quences of error, the damage that false teachers create in those who listen to them and the need for the godly to be ever on their guard against all forms of falsehood. If one has to suffer for upholding the truth and turning the spotlight on error, then so be it!

Clearly the bishop has unlimited responsibility for exposing error and enunciating the truth. The Ordinal however goes one step further. He must "privately and openly... call upon and

room within this responsibility for 'trying not to know' either. If significant allegations are made, from serious responsible quarters, they must be investigated because the thrust of the onus being laid upon the bishop is to correct and punish, not to remain ignorant.

But will it cost money and will it involve the courts? Will it become public? Will it lead to the uncovering of even worse? However worrisome such

The fundamental issues of the bishop are the overriding importance of the truth, the awful consequences of error, the damage that false teachers create.

encourage others to the same". He is to fulfil this responsibility both by exhortation to act as he must act and also by example. Of course if there is no example to follow, words will have a hollow ring. Praise be to God that we have seen a few instances of godly bishops acting rightly in recent months!

The bishop and the unquiet, disobedient and criminous!

The sixth question for the bishop and the seventh for the priest also have similarities, though with significant differences. Both are to live in quietness, peace and love, the priest: among all men. Furthermore, the bishop is to correct and punish according to the authority given by the Scriptures, "such as be unquiet, disobedient and criminous within [his] diocese". Well, at least there are diocesan limits to this part of the question.

Naturally, no grounds are given here for making distinctions between the famous, powerful or influential. If for instance sexual misdemeanours are involved, the sexual immorality is the sufficient reason for correction and discipline regardless of the person and no matter what his or her office, age or previous respectability. There seems no

questions might be, again they are not the ultimate criterion for a bishop with such a weighty responsibility. If no correction occurs, if no discipline is meted out, the ungodly continue to prosper, the godly are dismayed and confused by such untrammelled behaviour and the victims can only cry to God for justice and redress in heaven.

Bishops, priests, deacons and the laity

Praise be to God when bishops do their duty. But thanks be to God also for those presbyters, those deacons, those Christians of whatever office or standing, who beyond whatever might be required in the Ordinal proclaim the truth with boldness, refute error with wisdom, rebuke the ungodly with humility and discipline the wayward with love. And glory be to God if they do so with little thought of boundaries but with concern for all the people of God, the body of Christ, uppermost in their mind. Does doing the right thing require courage? That's not the question. We are all required to do the right thing, courage or no courage. That's godliness and that's the imperative. And that's the example the laity want from their godly bishops. ●

Barry Newman is a retired lecturer in education and a member of Synod.



Continuation of
'When Bishop
Spong is Right'
page 15

not to endorse homosexuality as a biblically endorsed life choice. Why the glee, if it is not a 'gospel issue'? Presumably, this issue is still worth fighting because it concerns 'godliness'.

But if this is the case, why isn't gender a 'godliness' issue? Since the Bible clearly and consistently distinguishes males and females, and gives different responsibilities to the sexes, then isn't it a part of godliness to maintain the responsibilities set out in God's word? If someone decides to set aside a 'godliness' issue, through ignoring what the Bible had to say about either homosexuality, or gender relations, for example, then surely it becomes a 'gospel' issue? For, in the end, to set aside godliness is to set aside

the gospel.

It is patently obvious that the arguments used by the evangelical feminists seeking the ordination of women and those seeking the affirmation of homosexuals (and even their ordination) are exactly the same. This has been strenuously denied by many evangelical feminists. The recent Lambeth vote has also shown that in this issue as with many others, "consistency is the bugbear of small minds" (with George Bernard Shaw), because many supporters of women's priesting were opponents of homosexual endorsement.

Bishop John Spong and the homosexual lobby see things more clearly: if biblical gender relations can

be ignored, then the sexual boundaries must be shifted as well. If we are liberated from the boundaries imposed by our biology, then we are liberated from the boundaries of our sexuality.

But it is not simply that the rhetoric of the two movements is exactly the same. In fact there is a profound theological and anthropological link between the two issues. It is really no surprise that the feminist revolution and the homosexual revolution of the latter part of this century have arisen very much in tandem with each other, in both the world and the church. Theologically, the one is the flip-side of the other. To do away with biblical gender relations is to do severe damage to the way God has made the human

race. Any movement away from God's intended relations tampers deeply with humanity, and, yes, it tampers deeply with human sexuality. Aberrations in one area arise with aberrations in the other.

Issues of human sexuality and gender cannot be set aside with a neat bit of sloganism—'triple g' or not. Godliness includes a proper sexuality and proper gender relations. Proper godliness is essential to maintain the proper gospel. Sydney has already held the line on human sexuality, even before Lambeth, now it is time to hold the line on proper, biblical gender relations. The human race desperately needs our lead on this one. ●

Flying

"Restore the outcasts; seek the lost"

Responding to the need for alternate episcopal oversight



Although historically Anglican structures have been closely tied to geography, recent events indicate that the time has come for a new approach altogether. The need for a rethink has arisen in the wake of decisions to ordain women to the priesthood and in the wake of changed opinion regarding homosexuality. Problems arise when individual churches find themselves at variance with their (geographically) assigned Bishop. What happens if the church does not agree with having a female priest suggested to them by their bishop? What happens if their bishop endorses homosexual practice but the church stands by the Scriptural teaching?

These questions are already not simply theoretical. There are evangelical churches who have had major disagreements with their 'ordinary' over exactly these issues. Conservative evangelicals who do not agree with the ordination of women are not being ordained themselves. Increasingly, conservative evangelicals could find themselves disenfranchised from their diocesan structures, for the sake of their biblical commitments—or perhaps even find themselves disenfranchising their bishops! This last 12 months has

seen two parish churches in the UK break relations with their Bishop (the fight even extending to the courts), who had declared himself in favour of homosexual relations.

Some have suggested the provision of 'flying bishops' who can offer their episcopal services to such 'disenfranchised' parishes with whom they share common commitments. Another possibility is that churches approach the bishop of another diocese to form links with evangelicals of a common mind. In a sense, oversight at a distance has ample precedent in Anglicanism's colonial past (how often did the Bishop of Calcutta actually visit Sydney in the early days?).

In this climate, Sydney has a unique opportunity to reach out to evangelical brethren struggling in hostile, or at least, unhelpful diocesan environments. Already there is a smattering of Sydney clergymen ministering the gospel in such environments. Their emotional and theological roots are already with Sydney: why not continue some episcopal relation? But there are also parishes elsewhere in the world with non-Sydney clergy, who would welcome episcopal oversight from a conservative evangelical diocese.

Historically speaking, of course, this would be nothing new. Sydney has acted radically in the past, through long support for the Church of England in South Africa (CESA), which was not always the favoured son of Canterbury. Although the roots of the evangelical CESA stretch back to the colonial days of the late eighteenth century, well before the Tractarian-influenced Church of the Province of South Africa arose, when Bishop Stephen Bradley retired, CESA was no longer a constituent member of the Anglican Communion. At that time Sydney's Archbishop Robinson fought hard to persuade Canterbury and the other Australian Bishops to agree to the consecration of Bishop Dudley Foord as Bradley's replacement. Bishop Foord was consecrated in 1984, against the antipathy of Anglicanism almost everywhere else in the world.

There are already those who have taken great strength from Sydney's stand on Biblical truth. Recent revolutionary changes in Anglican communion appear to present yet another opportunity for Sydney to take another strong evangelical lead. Is it time to offer the alternate episcopal oversight required by our struggling brethren

Lambeth Conference New Hope for the Anglican Church?

Geoff Piggott, Diocese of Newcastle



After almost 10 years of Anglican ministry, I have found some encouragement through the Lambeth Conference.

As a Bible-believing Christian I had great fears that this would be the conference in which homosexual practices would be accepted. In fact the vote taken endorsing the traditional Christian stance was overwhelming.

However, I agree with the Archbishop of Canterbury's view that "If this conference is known by what we have said about homosexuality then we will have failed." It's the issue behind the issue that needs to be highlighted. In taking the stance that the Archbishop himself and the Lambeth majority has taken, God and the authority of the Bible are the big winners.

While I don't know much about the Archbishop's theology, his evangelistic mission in the Newcastle Diocese last year and his leadership in this area of sexuality have given me hope that the Anglican church

world wide has not yet abandoned the basis of our faith. Just before the vote was taken on the issue of sexuality, whilst acknowledging the debate was "painful and difficult", Archbishop Carey said that nevertheless he stood "wholeheartedly with the traditional Anglican orthodoxy. I see no room in Holy Scripture or the entire Christian tradition for any sexual activity outside matrimony." (ACNS LC098, 7 August 1998).

It is a great sadness to me that 70 of the 641 bishops could vote against the final motion. And as for the 45 bishops who abstained, I am incredulous. However, an 81% approval rating for the traditional Christian view speaks volumes.

I am saddened that, for some, biblical standards cannot be upheld. Bishop Randerson of Canberra Goulburn is reported as saying "I think it is totally inappropriate for a conference of this sort to 'un-church' people who conscientiously believe themselves to be members of the church." If this is an accurate report,

then it suggests that human standards, and so conscientious belief, ought to be the bench mark for Christianity. Logically, you could argue that even Hitler went about his business conscientiously believing himself to be right. Once again, I am comforted that the Lambeth conference did not see fit to approve of this kind of thinking.

Lambeth's statement on sexuality has reaffirmed the Anglican Church's commitment to the authority of the Bible. It upheld "faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union", and "that abstinence is right for those not called to marriage." The reason for these decisions was given simply and clearly, "in view of the teaching of Scripture" (ACNS LCO93-5 August 1998).

This can give hope to those of us who exercise a ministry in dioceses where the authority of the Bible is under attack. It seems that we can now appeal to the leadership of the Anglican church worldwide, now that the bishops have so clearly upheld our stance. ●

Digging for dirt in your Bible study

Colette Read



I was catching up with my friend Catherine over lunch. She looked upset. I asked her what was the matter. "It's my ladies' group at church. They're a lovely group of women and they really enjoy getting together but they just have no desire to read the Bible."

Over the next few weeks I pondered Catherine's situation and talked it over with others. To my astonishment Catherine wasn't alone. "They say they want support not Bible study", they said.

Why is it that the thought of Bible study seems so onerous? Why the divorce between 'support' and God's Word?

I guess there are many reasons ranging from mental tiredness after a sleepless night with the baby to lack of confidence in handling Scripture. But perhaps the reasons are more fundamental and more serious than this.

Catherine suggested that it may be a consequence of our desire to feel valued by the world. In the gamut of self improvement courses, the internal Meccas of self discovery and the external activism of self fulfilment, the Bible just doesn't rate. "We have more time and more options. Why would you waste it on the outdated ravings of some fundamentalist fruitloop?"

Another friend thought our aversion was due to bad experiences. She became a Christian through the Sydney Church of Christ and, after refusing to be baptised, was publicly condemned. Before casting her out, the leaders barraged her with Bible verses selected to expose her wretchedness. It was two years before she could so much as open a Bible.

Whilst my friend's experience was extreme, many Christians have been turned off by bad experiences. It may not be tirades of abuse and misuse but something as simple as poor teaching. The sermon may be boring and bear little resemblance to the passage. Even worse, the sermon could be very interesting and bear little resemblance to the passage, prompting exclamations of "I could never have got that message out of the text. I'm so hopeless at understanding the Bible!"

Alternatively, could it be that we have emphasised daily Bible reading to the point of legalism? Scripture becomes burdensome, more like opening your bank statement or a bill rather than a letter from a beloved friend.

Allow me to suggest that the problem stems from our very attitude to God (let's face it, essentially we're as self-centred as spinning tops). Do we read the Bible purely to see what we can get out of it, the 'pay-dirt', or is it about relationship? Let me illustrate this: When my husband comes home at night and tells me what he has done during the day, how he feels about things, what he plans to do, do I respond "Yes, yes, yes, that's fascinating but what do I get out of it"? Surely not. Isn't the purpose to listen, to enjoy the relationship and to respond? I love my husband and love to hear from him.

Yet 'what do I get out of it?' is the very question we ask God. When a Bible study seems irrelevant we tune out. Shouldn't we long to hear about what our Lord has done, how he feels about things and what he plans to do?

Our relationship with God is not a distant one. So close, in fact, that we call him 'Father'. Yet sometimes we show him even less respect than we do strangers. We keep our appointment with the hairdresser but cancel our appointment with the eternal God of the universe.

What I'm talking about is a revolution in our way of relating to God, seeing him as personal not just in our prayer times but as we read his words to us in a group context and alone.

Perhaps we will find that if our Bible reading is for the express purpose of knowing God not just knowing *about* him then worldly standards will matter less and we will endeavour to understand our Lord's Word even when it is difficult.

So we need to ask ourselves: Are we passionate about God? Do we long to hear what he has to say? Do we desire to help others understand and know our Heavenly Father?

In the end it is the Lord who knows us best. He is the God of all comfort. He knows what we are going through because he himself has experienced every temptation and struggle. The Psalms are rich with the wisdom of those who also experienced the joys and trials of being a child of God in this fallen world. We must not be too quick to dismiss knowing God and his support.

When I was a student, the Bible seemed like a text book. It was to be studied, dissected and occasionally obeyed. I was passionate for orthodoxy but somehow oblivious to my personal relationship with the Father. I have come to delight in what God has to say. I still have to force myself to read sometimes but I never regret it.

I am not saying that changing our attitude towards God will solve all our problems but it is an important beginning.

It may be that as we engage in correspondence with the Lord through reading and prayer we will in fact enjoy some pay-dirt—hope for the future, strength for the present and an eternal relationship with the Sovereign Lord of creation—just for starters. ●

Church planting

The Spokane word

Peter Hayward

Spokane, in Washington State, USA.

The North West was the last part of the United States settled by Europeans. If you remember some of those old western movies that picture pioneer families loading their wagons and pushing west, you have an idea of what in fact happened in an area like Spokane, Washington State some 110 years ago.

The nature of its settlement has, to a certain extent, determined its Christian character. It tended to be the rugged individualist who was attracted to this area. The 1000 strong congregation of one of the largest evangelical churches in Spokane has very few College-educated or profes-

sional members. In Spokane the educated professionals are in fact the great unchurched. Those who have gone through the process of College education are left with the impression that a Bible-based church is a haven for the simplistic. They have arrived at the conclusion that an evangelical church is not sophisticated enough to answer the questions of life. On the whole this group, if they are still part of church life at all, are attracted to liberal or new-age churches.

The reason for the attraction to these sorts of churches is not hard to find—by the time people have finished their education they are thorough-going relativists. In conversation with this group, the deepest way to offend them is to suggest that there is anything absolute, whether it be truth or morals. In such a climate an evangelical church gets labelled as fundamentalist because it speaks of a single revelatory authority. It's a familiar problem in Sydney, but it is much more deeply ingrained and aggressively pursued here. There is a tendency in popular evangelical material published to demonize the professionally-educated who are frequently the media. On the whole it would seem that little time and effort has been given as to how to engage or evangelize this group.



It is this group amongst which our church, Christ The Redeemer, is establishing itself. The church was formed nearly five years ago by a group of disenfranchised Episcopalians (American Anglicans). The local diocese in Spokane had become increasingly liberal over the previous 30 years. It was only when the original group of five families started to attend the local Bible Study Fellowship that they began to have a point of reference to understand where the teaching of the Episcopal church had moved to. When they asked whether they could speak to some of the Diocesan officials they were advised that they could do so only on the basis that they did not

bring any Bibles or raise matters of divisive doctrine. These doctrines had to do with the resurrection and teaching on sexuality. In good conscience they could not stay. They formed their own independent Anglican church and, in the process, they discovered that they were in fact evangelical.

Christ The Redeemer now finds itself ministering to a growing number of College-educated professionals. Which, given the character of both the North West since its inception and the character of current evangelical churches, is the most unlikely group to start a new church, at least over here!

After serving in Sydney's West, Peter Hayward is now the minister of an Episcopal Church in USA.



Church planting beyond the denominational borders

Andrew Heard

What will you do to ensure the church doesn't go off the rails in the future?"

It's a good question. It's one I've been asked often. I might add though, never until I planted a church outside of traditional church structures. Since planting the Central Coast Evangelical Church I'm asked it regularly. And it is interesting that it is almost always asked by my fellow Anglicans. It is a good question, but why is it that people

keep asking *me*? The immediate and obvious answer is that people perceive our church, an independent church, as somehow at greater risk of going off the rails. I'm glad for their concern. But still I'm left wondering why they think our church is at greater risk than their own. I've asked a few people that exact question. The answers are disturbing. A typical answer runs like this: "You are no longer part of a large and well established denomination. You don't

have a Bishop and you have no legal constitution requiring you to use the Prayer book".

This shift to a confidence in structures has happened without us even being aware of it. How else could it happen? If we were to see it in ourselves we would run from it. But that it has happened seems undeniable when the cause for concern over a church plant's future relates to little more than it being outside a large well established denomination.

But there's no doubt the structures are a poor place in which to rest our security. To see how crazy this is you only have to look at the percentage of Anglican churches world wide that are still evangelical. I suspect we imagine that because there is still an Anglican church in a suburb we think the future of the church is secure. Surely what matters more is that there is a community of believers who witness to the Apostolic gospel? Just ensuring a church structure exists into the future is no guarantee of that.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not down on denominations in general nor on our Anglican one in particular. Nothing could be further from the truth. However when I'm asked again

and again about the future of our church by an Anglican I'm driven to wondering if the fact that they ask *me* reflects a more widespread problem with their thinking. I'm also driven to

I suspect we imagine that because there is still an Anglican church in a suburb we think the future of the church is secure.

turn the question around: "What will ensure *your* church doesn't go off the rails in the years to come?"

If I'm right that a shift has occurred towards a confidence in structures, what has our confidence shifted from? Paul the Apostle was a church planter. Where did he put his confidence? In God no doubt. But what did he see as God's program for the future? Perhaps 2 Timothy 2:2 holds the key. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

Andrew Heard is the pastor of the Central Coast Christian Community Church.



Tell it like it is

John Lavender

One of the striking features of the Gospels is the large crowds who are attracted to Jesus. Perhaps it is too obvious a question to ask, but how did news about Jesus spread, without national news broadcasts, internet, websites, or daily newspapers?

As we read Mark's account, for example, we are left in no doubt that the news of Jesus spread because people either saw or heard the great things Jesus did and said or experienced the man himself. Think of the leper, who "went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news", or the man who had the Legion of demons, whom Jesus sent home to his family to tell them "How much the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you". The man went away "And began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him".

It seems that once people met Jesus, he had such an impact on them that they just couldn't keep quiet. They had to speak about him!

As a minister of a church in Sydney's outer west I have been encouraged to see much the same sort of thing. Ordinary, everyday people have been discovering the truth about Jesus. Office workers, telephone technicians, mums at home, school teachers and many others have discovered what it really means to be a Christian. They have discovered that a Christian is someone who is forgiven, who doesn't have to work their way to heaven. Jesus has made such a difference to their lives that they want others to know about him. They want their friends, their mates, their family, their unbelieving husband or wife, the people they work with, they want all these people, as well as the thousands who live in their suburb to

know this forgiveness, to know the promise of a sure and certain future, to experience the peace Jesus gives them, the direction for living they find from reading God's word in the Bible.

In the last few months there has been a bit of debate going on in some Christian circles about whether we're all required to share our faith in Jesus with others or whether it's just the job of a few with the gift of evangelism. As we read the Gospels we see that as Jesus changed people's lives they just couldn't keep it quiet. It is no different today! Jesus still changes people and they can't keep quiet! Sure they might need some training or some equipping, some skills in answering tough questions, some thoughtful ways to bring up the subject with other people, some encouragement when times get hard and people ridicule them for what they believe. Yet as in the Gospels



John Lavender is the minister at Glenmore Park Anglican Church.

people's enthusiasm and excitement about what Jesus had done for them drives them to speak.

Wouldn't it be great if every Christian was encouraged and equipped to tell it like it was; to spread the news of Jesus and the difference he has made to them! ●

Children's work: building for the future

Lesley Ramsay

Sydney Diocese has always seen itself as being the diocese that ministers the gospel to everyone. That reputation is in serious trouble when we look at the current state of children's and youth ministry.

According to figures collected through the 1991 Census, 1991 National Church Life Survey and 1995 survey of Sydney parishes (set up by the Archbishop's Working Party into children's and youth ministry) only 6.8% of children (aged 5-14) designated as Anglicans were attending Sunday children's ministries with another 3.3% attending mid-week groups. The youth ministry figures are even worse—5.8 % in youth fellowship groups.

Anybody with even the most meagre of powers of observation will recognise that today's Sunday Schools and youth groups are a far cry from what was the norm in the 1950s and 1960s.

Sydney Diocese did not keep detailed statistics from that period but the English experience was probably very similar to ours.

A survey in England in 1955 revealed that only 6% of the adult population had never attended Sunday School as a child, and that 83% had done so on a regular basis. At that time, 54% claimed to be sending their own children to Sunday School. Figures kept by our Board of Education suggest similar percentages for Sydney.

The impact of that substantial children's ministry of the past is reflected in the spiritual histories of many of our clerical and lay leaders. One of the questions asked in a recent survey in Sydney was: "At what age did you become a Christian?"

Seventy percent of rectors responded that they had done so by age 18, and for the lay leadership, 74%. The leadership of the church in this diocese at this end of the twentieth century has by and large been formed

by significant children's evangelism and ministry as well as faithful Bible teaching to them as adults.

All is not doom and gloom however. The Special Religious Education ministry in state schools is doing significantly better. Eighty percent of nominal Anglican children in primary school have regular Bible teaching, whilst at the secondary school level the figure is 45%. This is great news, but hardly cause for self-congratulation. We have been handed this situation on a platter (many other Australian states and countries around the world have nothing like this privilege) and we are in danger of losing this privilege through apathy and a self-centred lifestyle. It is becoming increasingly difficult to staff our SRE teams because of the difficulty or unwillingness of Christian men and women to organise their timetables to be able to teach one half-hour class each week.

So what do we make of these figures? Hasn't evangelism right across all age groups become much harder? Yes, it has, but in our decision making at Synod and parish levels, we seem to only pay lip service to the importance of children's and youth ministry whilst giving our money and attention to adult ministry. We need to affirm again that apart from Christ, children, just like adults, are lost. Jesus did not regard children as a means to some other end (like reaching their parents) but as individuals in their own right who need to hear and respond to the gospel and be nurtured into the body of Christ. They are not merely the church of the future. They are, and can be, the church of today.

Why are there so few children's workers on church teams, while there is often two specialising in adult ministry? Granted, we do have youth workers but they again are a small minority.

Why is it that our theologically trained men and women coming out of College go into parishes with precious

little understanding of children and youth, their needs and strategies to reach them? Aren't children and youth numerically a great proportion of the flock under their charge?

Is it that our understanding of children and their importance might be reflecting our society's stance on children? I was fascinated to read this paragraph in the latest letter from David Secombe, principal of Church of England in South Africa's () George Whitfield College:

"Bishop Retief wants the College to set up a program to train children's workers. He wants men and women fully trained in theology working full time in children's work. He held a consultation in March, and as I prepare to leave I am trying to get the course into shape—enrolments for 1999 are already arriving. Most people in Southern Africa are under 20. If the program succeeds it will be a great move forward in the kingdom and community building work of the CESA and will certainly attract many from other denominations."

Men and women coming out of College go into parishes with precious little understanding of children and youth, their needs and strategies to reach them.

Where is the program to train children's workers in Sydney? We are not even training people part-time, let alone "men and women fully trained in theology working full time in children's work". Is CESA's attitude to children's and youth ministry part of the reason why their denomination has problems of growth, whilst ours has problems of decline?

These are serious questions which speak directly to our problems of decline and our goals to expand our congregations in Sydney. We cannot continue to be satisfied with reaching



Leslie Ramsay trains others to teach Scripture in schools.

only the children of church-going families. A strong children's ministry will naturally lead into a strong youth ministry which in turn will lead into a strong adult ministry. But even if it didn't have these consequences, children's ministry still deserves our attention. ●

Bangkok despatch one

Stephen and Marion Gabbott

Bangkok means the City of Plums. Thai people prefer to call it Krung Thep, the City of Angels. There are between 10 and 11 million people living in this sprawling aggregation of contiguous urban centres—shopping malls, factories, hotels, nightclubs, markets, condominiums, hospitals, parks, clubs, schools, modern and traditional housing, all jostled together without any obvious system of planning and control. This is a city with 10-lane highways where Porsches can be held up at night by elephants heading for downtown tourist centres.

In truth, it is a City of Dis-Order. Dr. Sumset Jumsai, a resident Thai authority on urban planning recently observed when asked to comment on the city that: “Its destruction is irreversible. The city is dying”. The Prime Minister of Thailand was recently

quoted on the front page of the Bangkok Post as saying: “Frankly, the country is broke”. Today, the same daily paper carried the front page news that there is no longer enough money to pay the army—soldiers are being encouraged to take a month of unpaid leave.

This is a city that assaults the senses—all day, every day: too many people, too many vehicles, too many buildings of every description, too many street stalls, too many beggars, too many broken footpaths, too many brilliant colours, too many drugs, too much heat, too much humidity, too much pollution, too much noise, too much corruption, too much exploitation, too much sexploitation. The decay in buildings and infrastructure is matched only by the decay in human life and dignity.

See with us for a few moments glimpses of the disorder that only God

through his word can change. See these as snapshots if you will and think about them. Make them the menu for your prayers. See the waif of a girl child with her serious face sitting in the sun on the hot pavement, willing passers by to put a few coins in her plastic cup as her mother watches from the shadows to see that she does not flag. Watch the overweight and slightly dishevelled 50-plus Aussie male with his young Thai conquest for the day. Wonder at the two elephants standing patiently amid the pedestrian traffic on the footpath in downtown Bangkok one Wednesday night brought there by owners who can no longer afford to feed them—at least they have not fallen through a broken sewer grate like their unfortunate cousin who had to be destroyed as a result. Gawk at the gaunt, stripped and empty riverside condominium, built to take advantage of the boom times,

lavishly equipped to appeal to wealthy expatriates but now a decaying monument to greed as the muddy, garbage-laden Chao Praya River slides past its gaping front door. Catch the furtive illegal immigrant, welcomed a decade ago for his cheap labour but now the father of four and wondering how he will feed them when he becomes the next victim of a contracting labour market. Hear the quiet weeping of the young German already nearing senility as HIV-AIDS tightens its grip on body and brain, his pathetically loyal Thai companion still at his side, probably with nowhere else to go.

Welcome to Bangkok. Welcome to those for whom Jesus died. Welcome to two Sydney-siders who need your prayers that they might be effective fellow workers with God in this place.

Mission fields save the day

In practically the only issue from Lambeth that the secular press found worthy of report, Lambeth endorsed the Biblical standards of sexuality by a vote of 526 to 70 (with 45 abstentions). In this landslide victory, the western churches were led by those from their former mission fields.

Spong himself has had to apologize for hurt caused by his remark that the Third World bishops were “primitive”.

Well before Lambeth, the bishops of ‘the south’ had seized the lead by issuing the ‘Kuala Lumpur statement’ which was unanimously supported. The statement was adamant that “the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Holy Scriptures about human sexuality” should not be compromised in the practices of the Anglican communion, because this would not help

humanity at all.

Although endorsed by many around the world, including Sydney Standing Committee, the Kuala Lumpur statement sent shock waves to those of ‘the North’ against whom it was particularly targeted. John Spong, controversial Bishop of Newark, responded by posting his Ten Theses on the internet, strongly challenging the resolution.

By the time various items from the resolution found their way into the Lambeth statement on human sexuality, the pot had well and truly been stirred by the non-western segments of the church.

Cultural critique can often be performed only by those outside a culture. The stand of these ‘Third World’ bishops offers a powerful critique to the slippage that has occurred in many Western churches under the influence of sad and painful circumstances in the society at large.

Reflecting on Lambeth in his post-Lambeth “Letter from America” in the

English paper *New Directions*, David Mills reports that conservatives in the USA are “very pleased, deeply grateful to their African and Asian brothers, and also deeply humbled thereby”. However, they are also “aware that Lambeth changes very little for us”. He warns “the terminally optimistic, who assume against all experience that Americans demonstrably addicted to moral and doctrinal change are suddenly going to act as if they were traditional Christians because African and Asian bishops outvoted them.” This is because they are invincible in their conviction they are right and because they have constituencies they do not wish to offend. “The optimists also do not realize how deeply uninterested is even the most ardent multi-culturalist liberal in the beliefs of African and Asian Christians, especially as they agree with the ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘reactionaries’ he must deal with at home.”

Spong himself has had to apologize

for hurt caused by his remark that the Third World bishops were “primitive”. Similar remarks have been made in our own shores, when Peter Hollingworth, Archbishop of Brisbane, took the opportunity to patronise the Bishops from Africa: “The largest bloc of bishops now comes from Africa, the churches quite new in their faith brought by missionaries. Among most, there is a natural tendency to take Biblical texts quite literally, declaring them to be the literal word of God, without analysis or interpretation” (Sunday Mail 9/8/98).

Many Sydney missionaries have laboured amongst the Asian and African peoples. The fact that the Bishops from these areas have now taken such an influential lead provides an opportunity to thank God for their willingness to take his word seriously, knowing that this path offers the only hope for a world in desperate need. Perhaps the mission of the South/East to the West has now begun? Bring it on! ●

I still call Australia home

Gary Koo

October 3, 1998 will be the first time the One Nation party is involved in a Federal election. Even though most of the media attention will be focused on the two major political parties, the performance of One Nation will also be closely watched.

As much as One Nation claims to speak for the ordinary Australian, you can’t avoid the strong anti-Asian sentiment found in their beliefs.

As an Australian of Asian descent I find such sentiments not only dangerous and untrue, but hurtful.

I was born in Darlinghurst, grew up in Ermington, went to school in Carlingford. I follow the Wallabies, I love meat pies, my family owns two Holdens. I have an Australian passport and an Australian accent. Yet given the choice, One Nation wouldn’t have wanted my family to come to Australia, nor given me the opportunity to grow up here. Such sentiments make me feel like a second-class citizen and instead of working to unite Australia, One Nation’s policies will actually work to divide Australia.

The only thing that will unite

Australia is the gospel.

That’s why I think it is amazing that people who love the Lord Jesus, people with whom I will be spending eternity, are not only supporting One Nation, but leading it. Both the secular and Christian press have noted that the leader of the One Nation party in Queensland is a Christian and that there is support for the One Nation party among the Christian community.

But how is this possible? How can a Christian who understands the gospel, who has been called to love God and his neighbour, a Christian

who follows a Lord who does not offer salvation on the basis of nationality, support a party which holds such strong anti-Asian views. Support for One Nation within the church will have a massive impact upon fellowship with Asian Christians as well as being a major impediment to outreach to Asian communities. It would also be a major setback to all the hard work the mainstream denominations have put in to developing cross-cultural ministries. But most of all, it would be unchristian, it would be contrary to the gospel, contrary to God’s will. ●

The Main Game

The authority of the Bible: in theory or in practice?

Mark Thompson

Everyone says they believe in the authority of Scripture. Evangelical Christianity has always associated the authority of Scripture with such notions as its reliability, its clarity, its coherence or unity, and its sufficiency. This has had important consequences for the use of the Bible in theological discussion, debate over church doctrine and practice, congregational gatherings and private study.

In the Middle Ages the standard editions of the Bible were cluttered with commentary in the margins and between the lines. These ‘glosses’ were meant to aid understanding but in reality they diverted attention from the text itself. Biblical study became a matter of ‘glossing the glosses’ or making commentary on the commentaries.

The Reformers insisted that Christians can and should be put into direct contact with the words of Scripture themselves, free of the clutter of commentary and other ‘study aids’. This led to a new type of preaching, a

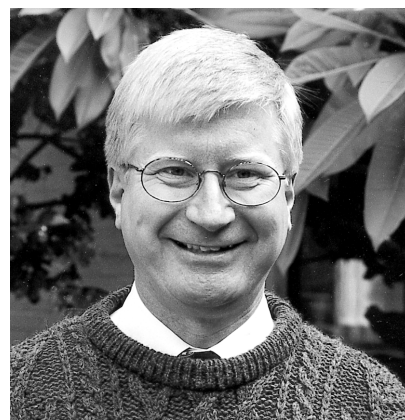
new type of biblical study and a unique place for the reading of Scripture in reformation church services. They did not ignore the contributions of those who went before them but they sought to give concrete expression to their belief that God has spoken and that his word is clear and sufficient as well as being the final authority which tests every human opinion.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether we have fallen into an unintentional compromise of these principles. Our Study Bibles are filled with written ‘glosses’; Bible readers in church often provide their own oral ‘glosses’; pure, unadulterated public Bible reading is minimal; some preaching says more about the ‘glosses’ drawn from scholarly opinion than about the text itself, often leaving hearers who are confused and left wondering whether it is ever possible to know what the Bible is actually teaching.

I want to suggest that the result of these habits we have developed—doubtless with the best of motives—is

an erosion of confidence in the Bible as the Word of God to us. Christian people are led to believe that the teaching of almost every part of Scripture is disputed by scholars—so how can we possibly be dogmatic about it or take a stand upon it? We are made to think (and I have heard one biblical scholar actually claim) that ‘the ordinary Christian’ cannot understand the Bible without being told what it means by the academic guild. What is more, our more recent practice of reducing the amount of direct exposure to the text of Scripture in our meetings has contributed to a lack of familiarity with the biblical story and the theology expressed in it and so has given such claims a partial ring of truth.

Are we serious about the authority of Scripture? Do we really believe that the Bible is God’s Word to us and that God is an effective communicator? Do we really believe that, read carefully and in its context, the Bible is clear and that Christians can act confidently on the basis of its teaching? Are we nurturing a confidence in God’s Word



Mark Thompson teaches theology at Moore.

which produces hearers who recognise God’s goodness in giving it to us and who are prepared to stand against the thinking of the world on the basis of what the Bible teaches? Is it the Bible or the rhetoric of the moment, the force of personality, or the citation of scholarly (or ecclesiastical) authorities which decides the issues when our synod meets? In short, does our practice of the authority of Scripture match our claim to believe in it? ●

Reading and misreading God’s Word

Joshua Ng

Taken Out Of Context” There is at least one occasion when we feel sympathy for politicians. Nobody likes to be quoted out of context, where the words may be accurate, but our sentence is used with reference to a different issue than when we said it.

One of the key principles in interpreting and applying Scripture is to let the words of the author speak in their original literary context—both the immediate as well as the wider context. The “immediate context” refers to the words, sentences, paragraphs which immediately surround the words we are seeking to interpret. The “wider context” includes, especially, the book in which the words are found (eg Galatians, 2 Timothy), as well as sections of other Biblical books which may have a bearing on the subject at hand. Only then can we safeguard Paul’s words (for example) from answering

questions or dealing with issues foreign to the intent of those words.

Finding gender roles where they’re not

An example of this problem is an interpretation of a verse that the women’s ordination debate has made famous. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28) has become the catch cry of many who support women’s ordination. They claim that there ought not be any differences between male and female roles in the church, since both are one in Christ. If males can be ordained, then so can women. Some take this line of argument to its logical conclusion, namely that homosexual and lesbian marriages are all right, since there is “neither male nor female”. It is hardly surprising then that homosexuals can also be ordained! But this whole line of

argument is seriously flawed, because it ignores both the immediate and wider context.

Firstly, the immediate context of Galatians 3:28 is about our status before God: we are justified by faith, not by the works of the Law. It is those who have the faith of Abraham who are sons of God, irrespective of whether they are Jews by descent or not (Gala 3). Once again, the issue at stake is whether Gentiles can be fully accepted by God as his people without first being Jewish. Paul answers with a resounding “yes”, because it is only faith in Christ that matters, not whether you are Jew or Greek, nor indeed male or female. The issue of how men and women relate in church or what respective roles they may or may not have is simply *not* the topic under discussion. To make Galatians 3:28 say that there is no difference in gender roles is to cut that verse from

its immediate context and paste it in a totally different context.

As for the wider context of Galatians 3:28, the whole of Galatians is about justification by faith alone. It makes no mention of gender roles in church. More importantly, when we move wider still to examine the rest of Paul’s writings, there are other places where he does deal specifically with the topic of gender roles in church (1 Cor 11, 14, Eph 5, 1 Tim 2). And in all those passages, Paul’s point is that there *is* a difference between how men and women are to function and relate in church. To quote Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28 in order to make him approve of something which he obviously denies, is nothing other than playing the game by which our media make sport of our politicians. The Apostle’s words, God’s word, deserve to be treated with more integrity than that. ●

When Bishop Spong is right

Peter Bolt

In the discussion over what is biblically legitimate women’s ministry, it has often been claimed that it is not ‘a gospel issue’. What is not explained is why it is not a gospel issue, and, if it is not, why the discussion so often

revolves around such big issues as the authority of the Bible and the Trinity.

This attempt to minimise the importance of the gender debate has also occasionally taken the form of a ‘triple g’ aphorism: ministry is about ‘Giftedness and Godliness, not

Gender’. Once again, despite the delightful alliteration that falls so easily upon modern ears, this needs more justification.

For sure, if you were preaching the gospel, then the issue of ordination of women would not form part of your

presentation. But then again, neither would the issue of the ordination of homosexuals. If one is not a gospel issue, then neither is.

In this last month, Evangelical Anglicans have been rejoicing over Lambeth’s decision [Continued page 10](#)

Strange Days Indeed

A casual glance at themes, moods, events and signs of the times that grab our attention from time to time.

A deepening impact

Bill Salier

At the time of writing it's 498 days, 14 hours, 54 minutes and 55 seconds to the millennium and it's getting closer all the time. All things being equal, you and I will be there to see those three fat zeroes roll around as we say good-bye to the second millennium and together enter the brave new world of the third millennium. What will the next millennium hold? Or will this time and event in fact signal the end? Will January 1, 2000 (2001 for the pedants) be the signal for apocalypse now?

PMT?

Your response to this question, the level of anxiety raised by its very mention is a small indicator of how badly you have contracted a condition known as PMT—Premillennial tension. PMT (aka. premillennial angst) is described as an acute sense of foreboding and heightened expectation relating to the arrival of the millennium and/or the Second Coming. It applies mostly to Waco, Aum Supreme, Solar Temple and Stargate, some

Christian churches and UFO enthusiasts, but can also be found in more ordinary forms. A general sense of unease about 'endings', dinner party discussions concerning environmental degradation of the planet, global warming, unhinged nuclear powers, strange weather patterns and tales of alien visitation are all signs of PMT.

Not everyone suffers from PMT in its acute form, but according to Richard Landes of the Centre for Millennial Studies in Boston, chances are that during the next 12 months the tension and anxiety experienced may very well rise a notch or two for us all.

Same old same old?

PMT is not particularly new. According to many historians there were a whole variety of 'terrors' at the end of the last millennium in 1000 AD. In *Centuries End*, historian Hillel Schwartz traces various reactions to the ends of the centuries from 1290 onwards. Schwartz describes a pattern of rising tension and events associated with the successive ends of centuries, especially from

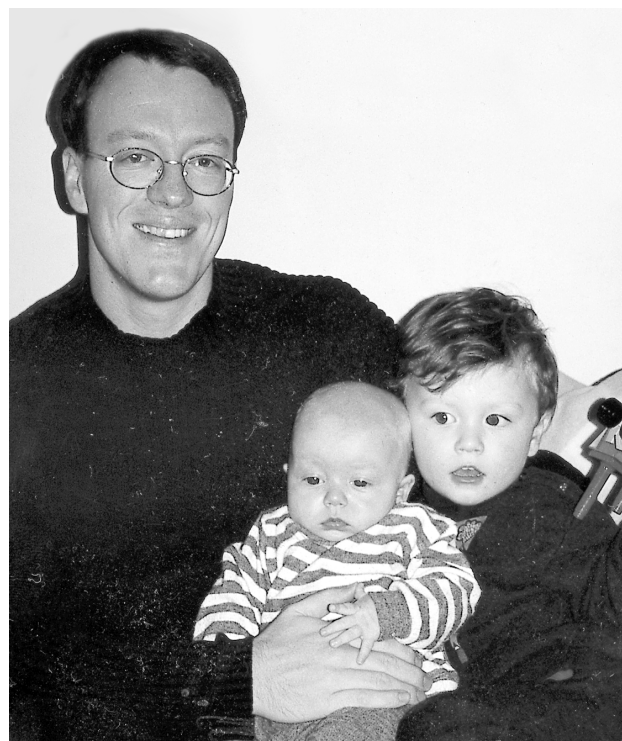
about 1790 onwards when people in the west began to self-consciously describe themselves in terms of a particular era marked out as a century. This general trajectory was brought to a climax in the so-called *fin de siecle* phenomenon around the turn of the nineteenth century. '*Fin de siecle*' describes the mood of the times in Europe and North America, especially from about the 1880's—a sense of fatigue, decadence, disenchantment and weariness as the nineteenth century dragged to a close. The description sounds fairly familiar—a sense of anarchy and anxiety, a celebration of androgyny connected with a discussion around human sexual identity, disputes about the role of women, a focus on the inner life and a quest for the possibility of regeneration.

There appears to be a sudden upsurge in certain types of phenomena around the ends of centuries—a fascination with angels and spiritual beings, an increase in body piercing and decoration, cross dressing. More conventionally there are often predictions

regarding the end of things as they stand, the signs of the times are read for their portents—strange weather patterns, wars and rumours of war and so on. Hillel Schwartz speaks of the 'janiform' nature of the end of century phenomenon. Taking a lead from Janus, the Roman God with two faces, the ends of centuries are marked by a looking back and a looking forwards. They are marked by hopes and fears as prospects in the new era are contemplated.

A deepening impact

So what about our '*fin de millennium*' — the century at the end of centuries, the years at the end of a very difficult and troubled century? Apocalypse is on our mind, at least if the movies are anything to go by. At least two movies out recently deal with the possible end of the world via collision with a meteorite, while Agents Scully and Mulder fight a bleak future in the recent *X-Files* movie. But, as ever, science gives us hope, promising to rid us of disease and imperfection through **Continued page 9**



Greg Clarke, with his sons Edward and Oliver.

Here's hoping

Greg Clarke

The advertising next to the railway ticket booth caught my eye:

*Oceans Rise.
Cities Fall.
Hope Survives.*

It wasn't a new gospel film from the Bible Society, but yet another disaster movie with a ridiculous title: *Deep Impact*. After having my senses numbed by *Twister*, *Volcano*, *Dante's Peak* and that stupid film about the Biggest Foot in the Universe, I was barely registering this latest foray into apocalypse.

But the poster headline was irresistible: hope survives. I hadn't expected to find such theological profundity there by the railway ticket window. It is recorded for us in 1 Corinthians 13 that, along with faith and love, hope remains in this world of shadows. I've read about it recently in personal accounts of life in WWII concentration camps, how people would trade food rations for a story about the future, about life beyond the camp. I've heard it from friends who are grieving, when they speak of longing for the day of reunion with those who have left this world. I've known it in my own life—this deep resolve not to give in to hardship or futility, to cling to

something which makes the present bearable—the future.

How hard it is not to hope.

Recently, I've noticed that even the intellectuals are refusing to be hopeless. Ernst Bloch, a German intellectual, wrote an influential three-volume study entitled *The Principle of Hope*, in which he explored the impulse to hope in the human psyche, as it is expressed in stories, fairytales, politics and philosophy. Bloch identified himself as a "warm stream Marxist", by which he meant that his hope is for not only a classless society, but also for a utopia where all humanity is relieved of their suffering and their labours, and can feel that they have arrived Home. Bloch was also an atheist, suggesting that even when belief in God dies, hope itself lingers on. The deepest of thinkers are haunted by hope.

One of the most talked about philosophers of our century, Jacques Derrida, is credited with fulfilling the nihilistic vision of the German philosopher Nietzsche and others before him in making human hope philosophically implausible. His radical mistrust of all human understanding, and therefore any direction to human life, has resulted in a generation of university

graduates who think that to believe nothing is the most intellectually credible of stances.

That seems to be Derrida's legacy, but he may not deserve it. It surprised me to read these words reportedly from his lips:

Unfortunately, I do not feel inspired by any sort of hope which would permit me to presume that my work of deconstruction has a prophetic function...The fact that I declare it "unfortunate" that I do not personally feel inspired may be a signal that deep down I still hope. It means that I am in fact still looking for something.

Stunning. Even a philosopher who has made a reputation out of destroying hope, suggests that he himself hasn't got rid of it. He is still searching, thank God, and not even the heady world of continental philosophy could completely drain the hope out of him. Hope truly springs eternal—everyone needs it, everyone has it, everyone wants it.

But "hope deferred makes the hearts sick", says Proverbs. How great it will be when the eternal arrives, and