

THE AUSTRALIAN

1898-1997
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YEARS OF PUBLISHING

Christian

NATIONAL JOURNAL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AUSTRALIA

Vol. 99 No. 21, 30 November 1996

PRINT COST APPROVED RP349181/00-410



Photograph: Ralph Petty



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NATIONAL JOURNAL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AUSTRALIA

Vol. 99 No. 21, 30 November 1996

Editor: Don Smith, Production Manager/Sub Editor: Nigel Pegram Issue 14 December Deadline 5 December, Issue 15 February Deadline 23 January, Issue 16 February Deadline 6 February. Address for All Correspondence PO Box 101, Essendon North 3041. Telephone (03) 9379 1219, Fax (03) 9379 0015, E-mail aceditor@ozemail.com.au
Member publication of the Australasian Religious Press Association. The Australian Christian is published by the Board of Management of The Australian Christian, a Department of the National Conference of Churches of Christ in Australia. Keith Aird, Chairman (SA); Lindsay Mott, Treasurer (Vic); John Batchler (Tas); Kevin Bray (ACT); Tom Glynn (NSW); Bob Smith (Qld); Allen Smyth (WA). Printed by New Litho Pty Ltd, 63 Sunbury Crescent, Surrey Hills Vic 3127. Responsibility for electronic material is accepted by Don Smith, 2 Larkspur Ave, Doncaster 3108. This publication is indexed in the Australasian Religion Index. ISSN 0004-8652. Advertising Rates: Displayed: \$5.50 per column centimetre. Classifieds: \$14.03 for the first 25 words and 25c for each additional word.



Editorial

Wonder As a Gift

DON SMITH

Christmas for me as a child was a time of mounting excitement. After school broke up I often enjoyed sitting on the long counter of my father's tailor shop watching him finish the pre-Christmas orders, listening to the customer's holiday plans. * With our own family, life went full circle with four excited children gathered around sliding doors which gave access to the Christmas tree and presents. And now we face Christmas with a mini invasion of some of our interstate grandchildren. * I'm sure that a sense of wonderment has characterised each of our three generations as we have anticipated the great day. * Looking back over the years of working life, I was always conscious of the December tasks and deadlines which demanded attention before walking out of the office on Christmas Eve. There seemed never enough time to absorb all the spiritual significance of Christmas. Keeping a sense of wonder is paramount! Karth Barth, a German theologian, observed that wonder occurs when we encounter a spiritual or natural phenomenon never experienced before. In her play *The Man Born To Be King*, Dorothy Sayers has Mary and a shepherd's wife conversing on Mary's feelings about her new baby. Mary responds, "I feel as though I were holding the whole world in my arms—the sky and the sea, and the green earth, and all the seraphims." * Barth observes of the Biblical stories that they alert the hearer to a central fact: this history is concerned with a fundamentally new event which is not to be identified with other events occurring within the limits of time and space. This new event is the world's reconciliation with God. Little children will wonder at the Christmas stories. We can too! * I hope you enjoy Christmas and that considering all the experiences of 1996, whether good or sometimes quite difficult, you will find deep within you a renewed sense of wonder in the nativity story. The wonder which stirs within can sustain us with an ever deepening experience of inner joy and sense of purpose in our discipleship and journey. Wonder can be God's gift this Christmas. *



Christmas

In this first of our two issues on Christmas, we look at a variety of topics, including having to work on Christmas day, what the Bible says about it and how some find it a less than joyous time.

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The Australian Christian welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters up to 175 words stand the best chance of publication. All letters may be edited. We reserve the right to omit letters altogether.

Theological Education

To the Editor,
There were four articles, written by four different persons, in the "AC" which centred on "Theological Education" (5.10.96). All four were well written and complemented each other. It was a very helpful and satisfying issue except in one vital aspect; none of the four writers defined their subject. I have no doubt that all College Lecturers and ordained ministers comprehend the meaning of the word "theology", but I doubt whether many of those who occupy the church pews each Sunday do. One who I asked said it was something students learnt at College; another said that it was the same as religion. May I suggest that a competent person be asked to write an article for *The*

Australian Christian explaining the meaning and content of the word "theology".

—Howard Barnden
(Echuca, Vic)

Uplifting Hymn Singing

To the Editor,
How I enjoyed the "Special Hymn Singing Hour" at Gardiner Church of Christ, Vic, on 10 November. It was uplifting to sing well-known hymns heartily. "Silent Night" was sung beautifully in German, Korean, English and Dutch. I particularly enjoyed the Korean choir's rendition of two well-known hymns. Congratulations to the minister and congregation! What about some more support from other churches for the next one on 2 March 1997.

—Helen Page
(Boronia, Vic)

Future Shock

To the Editor,
I was fascinated by Graham Agnew doing an "Alvin Toffler" in his article "A Day in the Church of 2046" ("AC" 19.10.96). So I decided to do an "Alvin Toffler" myself with a fictional Church of Christ in Caneridge in 2020.


All of the teenagers of 2000 have married and moved to other areas. The most mobile turn of the Century group, the 25-45s, have mostly gone, updating their homes or moving to more up market jobs.

The most stable group, the 45-60 age group of 2000, the "baby boomers", are now 65-80 and make up most of the church and the community. Intelligent, creative, dynamic and mostly retired they are making Caneridge into a great church.

Whereas in the 50s and 60s of the last Century the field of outreach was to youth, now programming, socialising, camping and evangelistic outreach are directed to the

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Letters to the Editor

65-90's, now the largest and most influential group in the community, and with the advancement in health science is likely to remain so.

Caneridge is working with other churches in town to meet the needs of the decreasing number of young people. Also, with other churches, they are trying to find ways of mission to the 25-50s who are still the cynically disillusioned who bore most of the pain of the 1980s and 1990s.

—Gordon Stirling
(Boronia, Vic)

Homosexuality

To the Editor,

I was saddened to read Mark Fletcher's letter ("AC" 7.9.96) stating his views on homosexuality. Regardless of whether homosexuality is by choice or orientation, or a condition one catches, or an inner state of being which is with someone regardless of their upbringing, it is not, according to the Bible, something God accepts or condones. It is condemned by God in every passage mentioning it.

As the Christian life is based solely on God's values, I believe that we should also condemn homosexuality, in all its perversions. However, also based on the Bible, we are called to love all sinners, teaching them of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and making disciples. Forget the

world's values, if we are to earn the name of Christians then we must take Christ's values and again be salt and light to our world.

—Susanne Jones
(Bundaberg, Qld)

"Multiculturalism" Inappropriate

To the Editor,

"Multiculturalism" is an inappropriate term to apply to the church of Jesus Christ ("AC" 2.11.96). Culture refers to the values, rituals and practices of particular social groups.

Within the wider society the word is frequently used as a euphemism for "multi-racial". However different racial groups can share the same culture.

Once people have accepted the Lordship of Christ and submitted themselves to his ordinances, there is a commonality which transcends race and culture (Col. 3.11).

This does not, of course necessitate uniformity of worship and practice. "Culturally diverse" is perhaps the more appropriate term.

—H.E. Hayward
(Pymble, NSW)

Images of Jesus

To the Editor,

In a recent reply to my letter on "Images of Jesus", Mike Barker does not state in what way the "lib-

eration" Jesus is a distortion of the historical Jesus.

Perhaps Mike has in view one of the following distortions of liberation Christology.

1 That a preferential option for the poor distorts the universal offer of salvation. Jesus' identification with the powerless is an expression of inclusivity, not exclusivity.
2 That political action on behalf of the poor reduces Jesus to a political Messiah. Liberationists maintain that the sin that keeps people in bondage and the salvation that sets them free has both personal as well as social structural dimensions.

3 That a Christology "from below" is anti-Trinitarian and denies the

deity of Christ. This is simply false.

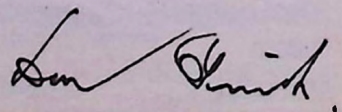
4 That the "liberation" Jesus necessarily advocates revolutionary violence. L. Boff sees Francis of Assisi as a model for liberation.
5 That this Jesus is unconcerned about an encounter with God. L. Boff maintains that the ultimate root of liberation theology is the encounter with God in the poor. Mainstream Latin American liberationists reject individual-community, sacred-secular, body-soul and earth-heaven dichotomies in favour of a holistic and contextual approach to the theological and Christological task.

—John Arthur
(Marangaroo, WA)

Update

This last week we welcomed Lindsay and Lorraine Jacobs to our office. Lindsay is the General Secretary of the World Convention of Churches of Christ. Lorraine serves as the Associate Secretary. They were accompanied by Ron and Dot Brooker. Ron is the new President of the World Convention and is very much focused on the forthcoming Convention in Brisbane to be held 2-6 August, 2000. It was good to hear from the Jacobs of the many positive things happening in our churches around the world. In this issue we carry a report from Poland. There are more to come! Ron is also preparing a report on the Calgary Convention along with comments on Brisbane. I believe the World Convention has taken a considerable leap forward and is poised to become a significant agency within our international network.

Don't forget to use the gift subscription offer in this issue. Several days ago a minister telephoned to say that in a group Bible study he was leading, discussion arose about our issue on Postmodernism. The issue raised all sorts of questions which the group has asked him to discuss at their next meeting. It is good to hear of the paper being used in such a way. We now have one remaining issue for 1996. Some readers have yet to finalise their account for 1996. We shall welcome payments by 31 December. If all the outstanding amounts are paid we may make it into the "black" which will represent a great turnaround in our finance. And yes, we would also welcome any gifts for our computer equipment.



Weak Message

Harcourt's new sign and profile



Everyone was in their working clothes when the members of the Harcourt Church of Christ had their first community working bee for many years.

Guttering was realigned, painting done, new curtains erected, minor repairs effected and lots of odd jobs done.

However the main cause for the bee was the erecting of the new church sign against the hall wall. Measuring 6 metres (20 feet) by 1.4 metres (4 1/2 feet), you can't miss it with its message: "Harcourt Church of Christ,

Seven Days Without Prayer Makes One Weak". It is hoped that all who pass along the Midland Highway will now know what the building is and what it stands for.

One inventive member has also set up a floodlight coupled to a time switch so the sign can be seen 24 hours a day.

Along with new brochures and presentation folder it is hoped that the church will gain a new identity with residents and visitors and bring God's love to a broader circle of people.

COCOA Worker Wins Award

Recognition for a caring Christian



Dr Paul reaching out to and caring for the needy in India

Dr Iris Paul, Director of the Reaching Hand Society (see "AC" 3 August 1996) in Orissa state, India, is this year's joint winner of the prestigious Dr Robert Pierce Award from World Vision International. The award honours individuals who contribute significantly to humanitarian service with evangelism anywhere in world. It carries a cash prize of US\$5,000 to be used in the individual's area of work and a plaque. Dr Paul has been working with India's tribal people for almost 20 years. These people, who mainly live in the Bondo Hills of Orissa state, are believed to have one of the most primitive cultures on earth today.

Living among the people in very primitive conditions, Dr Paul and her team bring much-needed medical treatment, literacy, water resource management and crop development programs. To date 200 of the estimate 900 tribal villages have been contacted. Many new churches have been started and handed over to the Indian

Mission Society for development. Recently I spent six days with Dr Paul in the Bondo Hills. I was overwhelmed by the commitment and drive that she demonstrates in reaching the lost and suffering for Christ. Perhaps the best testimony to her work are the words spoken to me in confidence by the Superintendent of Malkangiri Jail where the Reaching Hand Society conducts weekly programs and church service: "I have never seen a person work so hard and be so generous to the poor." From an active Hindu Government Official this is high praise indeed! The Overseas Mission Board through its Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCOA) is the main financial supporter of Dr Paul's personal ministry and joint sponsors of the Reaching Hand Society. If you would like to give a gift to support Dr Paul's work, please forward to COCOA at 180A Gray St, Adelaide SA 5000. All gifts over \$2 are tax deductible.

—Jeff Weston
(Executive Director)

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Mike Folland, Chairman Vic-Tas Department of Ministry, 77 Capel Street, West Melbourne Vic 3003. Phone (03) 9756 7240;

High Fliers

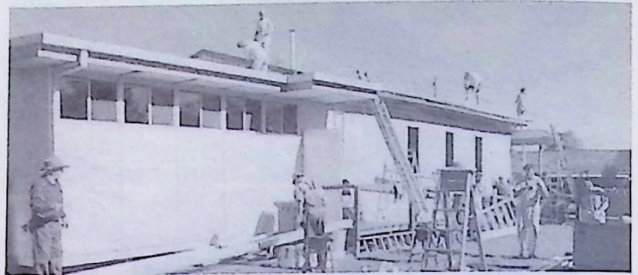
Plane flight for hostel residents



A flight over Port Phillip Bay and central Melbourne were recent highlights for a group of five high fliers from the Christian Guest Home, Oakleigh, Vic. They enjoyed an hour flying on a clear day in company with two staff members. Similar experiences are a regular part of the recreation program. Kate Duggan is the hostel manager.

A Helping Hand

Volunteers help with work on Aboriginal church's buildings



Blackburn, Vic, members were joined by workers from Shepparton, Vic, and Orange, NSW, to assist in renovations of the Moorooopna, Vic, chapel. Repairs to the building and two coats of paint to the interior and exterior of the building were completed in one day. The Federal Aborigines Board has expressed appreciation for the work done at no cost to the Board.

Assistant Director

Australian Churches of Christ
Overseas Mission Board Inc

Applications are invited from persons with financial, publicity, promotional and theological skills. We recognise that some skills can be developed on the job.

The Assistant Director will share with the Executive Director and work under his guidance in the areas of administration, publicity, deputation and education. The financial accounting of the Board's funds will be a particular responsibility, with back-up from secretarial staff.

Salary will be as for South Australian ministers and housing will be provided if required. The Board is located in Adelaide. A duty statement is available on request.

For further details or in making application, please contact the Executive Director,

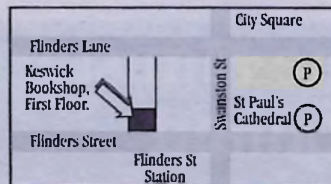
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Brian White Inducted



Over 220 people attended the induction service for Brian White at the Dandenong, Vic, church on 6 October. He was inducted by Dr Greg Elsdon, President of the Victorian-Tasmanian Conference. Margaret Nicholls, a Commissioner of the City of Greater Dandenong also attended. A light luncheon followed where Brian and Joan were welcomed. Brian has previously ministered in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales.

World Convention Citation

Recognition of work in our churches for Gordon Stirling

At the recent World Convention in Calgary, Canada, the World Convention of Churches of Christ recognised the outstanding service Gordon Stirling had given to Churches of Christ in Australia and New Zealand by awarding him a World Convention Citation. Unfortunately Gordon was not able to be at Calgary and the award was accepted on his behalf by his daughter Mrs Beth Butler. At a morning service at Boronia, Vic, (Gordon's home church) the Boronia members, together with 74 Calgary Conventioneers, witnessed the presentation of the



award to Gordon by Ron Brooker, President World Convention Churches of Christ.

Following the service a luncheon was held in Gordon's honour. Visitors included members from Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania. Those attending were also able to share with Gordon as he celebrated his 82nd birthday. Congratulations Gordon!

Churches of Christ in Australia National Coordinator

Applications are invited for the position of
National Coordinator for Churches of Christ in Australia.

The position involves the coordination of the networks of National Council and its Agencies. Administration of the work of National Council and pastoral care of the Agencies is also required. This position requires communication of the work of National Council and representation of Churches of Christ at a national level.

The position is half time (0.5) and location is negotiable.

The successful applicant will understand the culture, ethos and theological stances of our churches and have proven leadership and management skills.

A full job description is available.

Applications and inquiries may be made to the Conference President, Mr Robert Leane, c/o 263 Melbourne St, North Adelaide SA 5006, by 31.12.96. It is anticipated that the position will begin early in 1997.



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Leadership 2000

Follow up conference of real value to participants and their churches

The Christian Projects sponsored study tour to the United States was offered to applicants who were willing to bring themselves and at least two of their board or elders to the Follow Up Conference at the Wollongong Church during November. One elder said, "I only came to support our minister." She groaned at the thought of another weekend church conference. As she and sixty others went through the process of hearing how the Leadership 2000 participants benefited from the study tour and how some churches were already implementing new directions in their thinking, her attitude changed. "But now I am glad I came. We now understand the vision our minister has for the congregation." "This study tour has been a real eye-opener for me." This state-

ment was made by Graham Bagley, an elder at the Engadine, NSW, church, who has raised thousands of dollars for Leadership 2000 planning programs through the Christian Projects Trust. Graham, who paid his own way to accompany the study tour, went to see first-hand the dynamics of a Leadership 2000 program. "As an elder I began to see the importance of supporting the minister's vision, rather than being a restrainer. I suddenly became aware of the possibility of new directions." "We have a lot of new concepts to process," said another elder. "Our next board meeting will have a longer and more positive agenda." "It was an exciting tour, but I am not sure I liked everything I saw," said one of the ministers who had been sponsored by Christian Projects. He told the Follow Up

Conference that while larger churches have exciting agendas, there were times when he felt uncomfortable about the "Power Play Politics" evident in some congregations.

"Children's ministry is a focus for the future," said another participant. He commented on how growing churches found that the whole family could be won to the church and to Christ if the children found the church to be an exciting place.

"I greatly appreciated the support of the senior ministers who came and I have got to know them as real people," said one participant. He told the Conference that he had new reference points for guidance as his church grew and developed. (The senior ministers who attended Leadership 2000 were not sponsored by Christian Projects.)

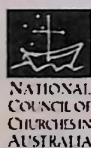
The third Leadership 2000 study tour that was held in September was the first to have such a Follow Up Conference. Judging by the reactions it gave a new dimension to the effectiveness of this unique training program. It not only gave church boards an op-



portunity to experience the impact of the study tour, there were also opportunities to translate cultural aspects of larger churches in the USA into an Australian setting. Another study tour is being planned in 1998 or 1999 and will probably include training opportunities for leadership in larger churches as well as specialist ministries. All participants and their churches would express their appreciation to Christian Projects for their valuable support in this specialised training program. Churches represented were: Ballarat (Vic), Berkeley Vale (NSW), Blackburn (Vic), Blackwood (SA), Campbelltown (NSW), Doncaster (Vic), Epping (NSW), Glen Waverley (Vic), Hardy's Bay (NSW), Horsham (Vic), Knoxfield (Vic), Launceston (Tas), Marion (SA), Narellan (NSW), Northside (NSW), Ringwood (Vic), Southport (Qld), Telopea (NSW), Toowoomba (Qld), Warnbro (WA), Warwick (WA) and Wollongong (NSW).

—Ted Keating
(Coordinator)

THE CHRISTMAS BOWL



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Churches working together

1995 Index Available

The indexing of the twenty two issues of *The Australian Christian* for 1995 has been completed. The distribution process will be varied this year. Copies will be posted to readers only upon written request accompanied by a five dollar payment to assist in meeting expenses.



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Exchange a Boon

Reciprocal ministries for Maylands, SA, and Boonville, USA

After ten and a half years as minister with Maylands Church of Christ, SA, Richard Lawton, with his wife Dawn, is spending five months as an exchange minister in Boonville, Missouri, USA. This follows their attendance at the World Convention of Churches of Christ in Calgary, Canada.

David Puntney, minister with First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Boonville, is spending those five months at Maylands, with his wife Norma.

Before becoming a minister, David Puntney was a language specialist with the US Air Force

in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Italy.

David was also an adjunct history professor for fifteen years at the Disciples-related Chapman College. He has ministered in California, and for ten years in Boonville.

He has a strong community involvement, being president of the Board of Directors of his local water board, a director for Habitat for Humanity, a member of the boards of the county human development corporation, the citizens advisory board for the local prison, a sheltered workshop, a committee for emergency food

and shelter and a member of Lions International.

Norma Puntney is part-time music director at First Christian Church and leads the Maylands choir in the absence overseas of its choir leader, Errol Crouch.

The Puntney's daughter, Marilyn Kyrylenko, son-in-law and two grandchildren live in Lockleys, an Adelaide suburb, and are delighted at the prospect of having the Puntneys in Adelaide for five months, including Christmas.

Boonville is a town of 7,000 people on the Missouri River. It started life as a fort and then was a trading post. It was the site of one of the first battles of the American Civil War, when Missouri was still trying to decide which side it would be on, and was named after Daniel Boone, who lived nearby for some time.

The two ministers have swapped jobs, houses and cars, and the



Richard Lawton, currently at Boonville church, USA

Lawtons get the Puntney's labrador retriever dog, Puddin. David Puntney commenced at Maylands Church of Christ on 1 September.

Such is modern technology that before leaving Adelaide, Richard Lawton received an e-mail welcome message from an 80-year-old (give or take a few years!) woman with the e-mail address of GranNan!

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Nollamara World Outreach Week

Missionary visitors promote awareness in WA

Each year in August, Nollamara, WA, church holds a ten-day awareness exercise. Its purpose is to inform, encourage and focus on some aspect of cross-cultural missionary endeavour. This year the two guest speakers were from Papua New Guinea. Fay Christensen is a long-term missionary with Churches of Christ in the Ramu River region and Field Chairperson. Fay was joined here by Yabru Jerry, a pastor of the Madang Church and Conference Pastor overseeing Growth

and Development in the region. This was Yabru's second visit to Australia. On this occasion he was ministering to non-aboriginal people.

Fay and Yabru's visit extended over four weeks. During the first ten days they preached at both services on two Sundays. During the week they attended home groups, where they were able to effectively present the task of nurturing churches in PNG. The mix of Sunday preaching and home group interaction was most effective.

During the second fortnight Fay and Yabru, together or separately, visited twelve city churches. An extra bonus was a Monday to Friday Country excursion, with meetings with the Collie, Bunbury and Busselton churches as well as the Busselton Christian School. What initially was to provide impetus to one church, became a great opportunity for the ministry of the Overseas Missions Board to receive clear and stirring exposure in Western Australia.

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Applications to: Mr Paul Briscoe, 12 Fernbank Crescent, Mulgrave Vic 3170, (03) 9795 6913. miriam@deakin.edu.au or fax (03) 9547 5112.

Fleurieu Reunion

Old college friends reunited on Fleurieu Peninsula

It was "full house" at Victor Harbor, SA, when the church celebrated the induction of Graeme Rogerson into ministry on 13 October. Graeme and Bronwyn Rogerson have now been reunited with fellow college students of 1978, Grant and Julie Simpson and Chris and Mary Ambrose in serving the Fleurieu Peninsula churches of Goolwa, Strathalbyn, Mt Barker, Milang, Pt Sturt, Goolwa and Victor Harbor. State Minister, David Brooker, who was best man at Graeme and Bronwyn's wedding, conducted the induction.

Elder Wally Bradley (on the right in the photo) welcomed the Rogerson family into the membership of the Victor Harbor church, and said that the church has been without a full-time minister for most of this year. "The arrival of the Rogerson family has generated a great sense of anticipation," he said. "And the congregation is looking forward to joining with them in a new partnership in ministry to those within the church and in the wider community."



"Graeme has served in ministry at Richmond (1980-83) and Hartwell (1984-1996), Victoria, and brings with him a wealth of ministry experience," Wally said. "Bronwyn is planning to use her training in church administration and women's ministry, and daughters Helen and Leanne are already using their talents in music and the building up of relationships." "There is a strong sense of excitement and wanting to move forward," Graeme commented. "And I am looking forward to continuing the ministry of Jesus in this place." He went on to say that the town is a popular holiday location and he has a vision of Victor Harbor servicing the wider church in terms of becoming a centre for spiritual retreat and renewal.

Tour to India

The Daund Church in Western India is to celebrate its 75th Anniversary in February 1997. A tour group from Australia will depart 8 February to share the celebrations.

The group will also visit other areas of the Conference work. Three days will be spent at Delhi and four at Singapore before returning to Australia on 27 February.

Cost of air fares and accommodation:
\$3000 (Some meals extra)

If you are interested in being part of this wonderful experience, please advise the OMB office before 16 December. The tour is dependant upon sufficient numbers.

Contact Jeff Weston, 180a Gray St, Adelaide 5000. (08) 8212 4446.



Christmas

Preparing the Way

GREG FOOT

“Noel, Noel born is the King of Israel.” The words of the familiar carol came easily to mind as the tune wafted through our local supermarket yesterday, competing with the clanging of trolleys and the incessant beeping of the checkout machines. I looked at my watch and noted that it’s less than six weeks to Christmas. I wondered how many shoppers recognised the seasonal music. *

Has Christmas become an annual ritual? Something to be endured for the sake of the kids? The visit from relatives we can’t stand (you can choose your friends, but...!) What a relief when

There’s so much to do in the next few weeks, and not enough time. The Editor of this journal hasn’t helped either by giving me a deadline for this contribution!

it’s all over for another year! We can put our feet up, enjoy sun, sand and surf and the Boxing Day Test on the telly! *

There’s so much to do in the next few weeks, and not enough time. The Editor of this journal hasn’t helped either by giving me a deadline for this contribution! *

How can I possibly find the time to prepare myself to celebrate the single event that more than any other before or since, changed the course of human history? *

“Prepare the way for the Lord,” said the prophecy of Isaiah about the role of

John the Baptist. In essence, John warned the people of his day in the strongest language, to clean up their act: “God’s Christ is coming soon. Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matt 3:10) *

What would John the Baptist say to today’s world if the Messiah was about to be born on 25 December 1996? There is much happening today that would be familiar to Jesus. Many women continue to give birth to their children in conditions much more basic even than Mary, yes even in Australia. Many are refugees, as Jesus became soon after his birth. Many live in lands occupied by foreigners, as Jesus did. Many suffer as Jesus did, under cruel regimes that entrench injustice and oppress people. *

If Jesus was to be born in Australia this Christmas, would his parents live in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs or Sydney’s north shore? Would they have top hospital cover and be able to afford a well-appointed private room at a private hospital with the doctor of their choice? I doubt it. *

Look how God chose to come among us. He was born out of wedlock, to put it politely. He was born to a peasant couple in an occupied territory. A couple with not enough money or influence to avoid being pushed around by the bureaucracy. So they were forced to have their child while roughing it, sleeping in a shed with the animals. *

What does this tell us about God? What does it tell us about how to prepare for Christmas in Australia in 1996? *

Jesus came as he put it, to “bring good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives and freedom for the oppressed.” Immanuel



means God with us—all of us, not just those like me who attend a predominantly white middle-class church in Australia. *

Jesus came to give himself away. He came to show us how to serve each other in true humility. *

At Christmas I give gifts, and that’s good. It’s a much bigger ask, a far greater challenge for me to give myself to others. Not to be served, but to serve. *

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 9:3-5) *

I’m going to try to make time to prepare personally for this Christmas. Thank you Mr Editor for helping me to begin the process. *

Greg Foot is State Manager of World Vision Tasmania and attends Hobart City Church of Christ.

Christmas

Not Always the Best Time of the Year

PAM CLAPSHAW

January is our biggest month at the Crisis Centre. People hold it together until Christmas, then comes the let-down.

—Crisis Centre Coordinator *

This year most of us will enjoy our Christmas lunch and the gathering with family and friends. The only worries we may have will concern the handling of those last minute holiday arrangements. Some will look forward to reunions with distant family members, others to times of rest and relaxation over the quietest month of the year. For an

Why does everything stop over Christmas and January? It's such a lonely time, there's nothing to do.

—Lady in her 70s

increasing number of Australians, however, the Christmas-January period is the down time of the year—not a season they eagerly anticipate. Some of these people will include: *

- The aged who live alone without the support of family. Some may actually have family but be geographically or socially isolated from them. *
- Single people of any age without close family or friends to share this festive time of the year. *
- Non-custodial parents who long to see the excited faces of their children on Christmas morning but are denied this joy. *
- The bereaved who face the stark reality of an absent family member at the

Christmas dinner table. A loss hits especially hard at this time of the year. *

- The unemployed and low income earners who feel the financial strain of attempting to buy “acceptable” presents for their children while still managing to pay the bills. So often a credit card is the short-term answer, but anxiety soon sets in during January and February when the bills begin to appear. *

- The alcoholic who faces one of his/her hardest tests at Christmas with the constant round of office parties, get-togethers and drinks with friends. *

I remember clearly the days I worked in the Community Health system. Foolishly, one year I volunteered to do a significant amount of the client intake over the Christmas period. This entailed being the first point of contact for clients coming to or contacting that centre. I wasn't going away that year so had decided not to take holidays until after the school holidays were over. Naively I thought I was about to enjoy a few quiet days with time to catch up on some reading. Never have I worked so hard! Homeless people, lonely people, hurt people, grieving people—they all arrived on the door step or rang wanting to talk. My eyes were opened to the reality that Christmas is not a happy time for everyone. *

How should we as Christians respond to this? *

- We need to see if there are lonely, hurting people within our own community of faith who would love to be included in our family Christmas celebrations. *
- We also need to look to our neighbours, contacts and work mates. Maybe



there are people in our circle of friends and acquaintances to whom we can and should show the love of God. This can be practically demonstrated by their inclusion in our Christmas festivities *

- There will be those beyond our normal circle of influence. Some may live within our own country, others may be overseas. At this time of the year when we enjoy so much materially, we need to consider our responsibility to those less fortunate. Organisations, such as COCOA, give us the opportunity to help those in need. At this time of giving and receiving, we who have received so much need to share this abundance even in some small way with others. *

“When the time had fully come God sent his son.” (Gal 4:4) *

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the coming of the Saviour into our world. As we remember the greatest gift of all may we be sensitive to those who will struggle this Christmas. May we share our lives, our homes and our resources to give enjoyment to others, and so in just a small way reflect the love of God to us in Christ. *

Christmas

The Bible on Christmas

JEFF MAY

Around the world preachers are wondering what to say this year. Christmas presents us with the dilemma of the best-known, most often heard bits of the Bible and the most misunderstood, softened message that gets through. So much sentimentality, so many stereotypes—how do preachers find something new to say and how to be hard-hitting enough to let reality through? *

The fact is there is not just one Biblical story. The fact is that Jesus was prob-

So we open the book to see what it says.

Mark says nothing at all! That which will fill our lives at every level of the next few weeks is apparently not even worthy of comment according to Mark.

ably born in 4 BC. The fact is that if 25 December is taken seriously the shepherds would have been frozen to death on the hillsides before the angels arrived. Who wants to hear this sort of thing from the pulpit? The story of a pregnant unmarried teenager is hard enough to smooth over and make acceptable. Young people still have the nervous giggle when the word "virgin" is used. *

So we open the book to see what it says. Mark says nothing at all! That which will fill our lives at every level of the next few weeks is apparently not even worthy of comment according to Mark.

John is on another track, another way of saying things that is probably a more attractive preaching text if the truth be told. Matthew and Luke present us with the stories we know so well. They are the cause of the nativity scenes, tea towels on young heads and foil stars making their precarious journey across the stage. *

What is the source material? We are told that Mary held on to these things and thought a lot about them. I reckon she would! I imagine that she told the story about all these things some years later as the church began. It is no wonder that Mary gets an honourable mention in the first chapter of Acts. I wonder if there were raised eyebrows and a note of disbelief as she told the stories, or was it that because of the wonder of the present happenings, a ready acceptance of her recollections was given? *

The Bible, (Matthew's and Luke's gospels) tell us that a young girl was told by a visitor she was going to have a baby as the direct action of God. She and her fiancé accepted this. The birth of the child coincided with a census and necessitated travel to her husband's home town. No bookings had been made and there were no vacancies. A male child was born in a primitive place. Others were aware that this was something special and a mixture of awe, adoration and jealousy was directed at young Jesus ("God saves"). This little dark-skinned baby was taken to hide in Africa for a while. Nothing much is known of what happened for the next twelve years. *

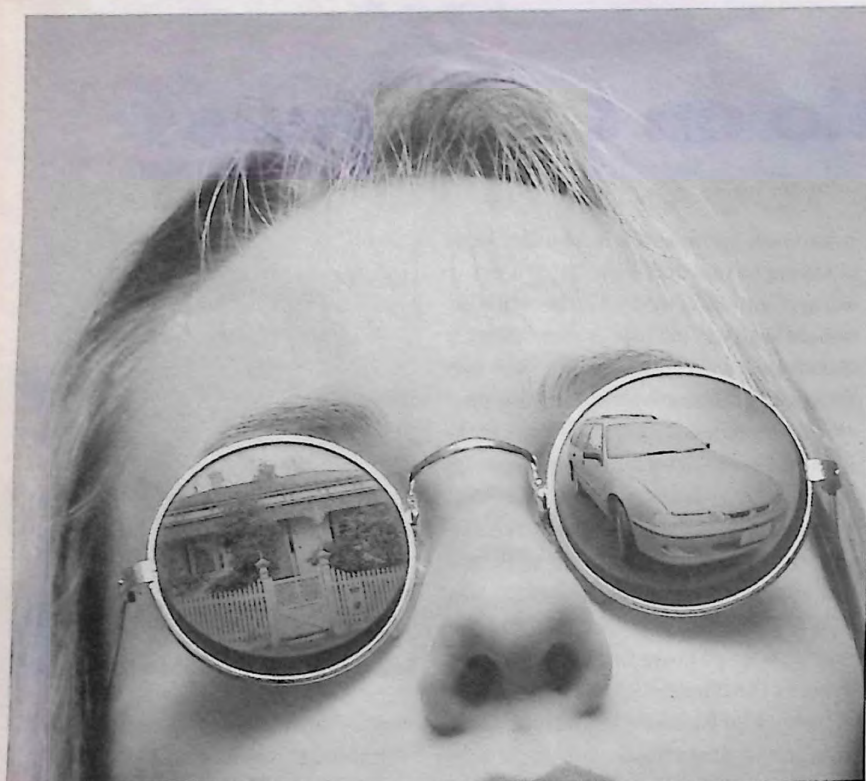
The real story is God making an interesting, fairly quiet and undignified entry into human history. God got under our skin to communicate with us person to person. This communication



may be rejected, but cannot be misunderstood. It was an act of love, a riches to rags story. This is incarnation—God in the flesh! This is the Bible on Christmas. The birth stories exist only because of who the boy grew to be. Only after the resurrection is there real interest in the beginning. Even then, for Mark, these familiar stories are secondary to the adult Jesus and what he did. *

These Bible stories go to great lengths to communicate that which most would like to forget. Jesus was a real person. He was a human being. We still live with that mixture of Greek dualism that says matter and spirit are incompatible, that for God to become flesh is an impossibility. Christmas presents us with the impossible task of putting two snooker balls on the same spot on the table. True God and true man, that is what the Christmas stories, the carols and characters are trying to get across. *

The Bible on Christmas is the beginning of the story that, in the fullness of time, "God sent His Son born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that He might redeem those who have been kidnapped by the law." (Gal 4:4. *The Message*). *



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Christmas

Work, Work, Work



CATRIONA FERRIE

Seven years ago, I handed my resignation in to the hospital because of my terrible Christmas off-duty and a few other issues. However, because the management "didn't want to lose such a valued staff member", a new ward and two-week holidays with Christmas in the middle was the outcome. I was relieved and happy. *

We had only been in Australia for three years then, and because no family members lived nearer than 18,000 miles, it was, and still is, very important to be together on Christmas Day. There is no

Nurses provide a 24-hour service for sick patients and Christmas Day is no exception.

extended family to cover us in the event that both of us have to work. We are "it", and it's something we couldn't do to our two young girls. So how do we work around it? *

Nurses provide a 24-hour service for

sick patients and Christmas Day is no exception. However, I now work in a clinic situation that closes over Christmas, allowing me to take time off. But my husband has looked incredibly tired after a night shift when he's been met by two excited girls who have shown remarkable restraint in not opening their presents until their father comes home. A "cat nap" on the couch after Christmas dinner and he's back to work that night. Just repeat the last paragraph each year and you have the general picture. It makes a Christmas Day off, a real blessing. *

Every year through this hectic time, I ask God to reveal something fresh in the meaning of Christmas and he always does. I have marvelled at the "Star of Wonder", and another year Mary was constantly in my thoughts. This year will be something entirely new and there are always Christ moments for us as a family at Christmas, regardless of what shifts we work or how busy we are. *

DAVID M. COOK

“It's five past 8 ... latest reports have Santa at the fruit checking station on the WA border ... apparently they're questioning him over some suspect cargo ... it seems some of us are going to be going without our Bananas in Pyjamas this year.” *

With my family in the eastern states, and me leading a patently bachelor lifestyle, I was the first choice for the late Christmas eve on-air shift at Sonshine FM. *

I didn't really mind the idea of working over Christmas; it's just another night, right? *

Despite appearances, radio announcing is a lonely occupation. It's always a little lonely on the night-shift. Although

you're talking to an entire city, it seems the city doesn't talk back all that often. Especially at Christmas, when the city is a little more preoccupied than usual. *

I hadn't expected that Christmas would bring an added dimension to that shift. *

As I spoke, I could see other Christmases happening in my mind's eye: some children listening to the clock radio forcing their eyes to close in sleep, while mum and dad listened in

Although you're talking to an entire city, it seems the city doesn't talk back all that often. Especially at Christmas

the background while wrapping presents or preparing a family lunch. I spent the space between each of the music changes trying to figure which of these Christmases I really belonged to. Was I a guest or a host? *

People would call "Just to say 'Hi!'" ... The service station attendant who'd had a slow night ... The taxi driver who'd be working until 3 am. *

I realised that I'd been invited to a few small parties in Perth that night. Sure, I was lonely ... but not alone. *

I suppose I should've realised that. * "That's Christmas according to Billy Joel, ... after the latest from Amy Grant ... Hey, to all those who've called up to correct me—yes, I know a banana is actually a herb, not a fruit." *

Catriona and David are members at our Warwick, WA, church.

Christmas

Celebrating Christmas

JOHN GILMORE

I visited a village of resettled refugees in Cambodia. People living on poor, dry and barren land. I was impressed and overwhelmed by their determination and pride in their achievements. I saw the bundles of lemon grass grown to be sold in the market for a few cents. When told of their monthly income, I was silent. The income gap between them and me is vast. There I was, a wealthy westerner, observing and visiting people who have many more skills than I. People with a determination to not miss the opportu-

The use of Christmas decorations in Asian societies where the Christian population is very small suggests that Christmas is a celebration of western culture.

nity of a new start. Their village, and the local school were built with the support of Christian people around the world. Money given through such appeals as the Christmas Bowl Appeal. * It is almost fifty years since Methodist minister Frank Byatt suggested that an empty bowl was to be placed in the middle of the Christmas dinner table. Into that bowl was to be placed the cost of the meal that was served. The bowl was to be called "The Christmas Bowl". The money was then to be distributed to those in need. In 1947 the focus of the Christmas Bowl was on relief in the aftermath of the Second World War. * This Christmas two things have not changed: the invitation to give to the

Christmas Bowl, and the increasing reality of need and suffering. What has changed is the comparative affluence of the "developed" world and the increasing poverty of most of the world. Our affluence is acutely highlighted in the way we celebrate Christmas. *

We seem unable to disentangle our celebration of the Christmas event from the western culture and consumerism that invades our lives. The extravagance of spending, the papering over of cracks in relationships, the excess of food consumed, and the abundance of gifts are signs of something other than the celebration of the birth of the Christ child. The use of Christmas decorations in Asian societies where the Christian population is very small suggests that Christmas is a celebration of western culture. *

How can we stand apart from such cultural agendas? First we might slowly and carefully read the first few chapters of Luke's Gospel, followed by an equally careful reading of the daily paper. The second step could be a time of reflection on what has been read in order to make some connections between both. In Luke, justice, compassion, vulnerability, hope and joyous expectation are at the heart of the Christ event. Our daily papers tell the much of the opposite. Human tragedy, war making, economic and environmental exploitation, the vulnerability of refugees, natural disaster, increasing profits are woven with the occasional story of the triumph of the human spirit. Having reflected on these themes—what then? *

Why not place the bowl on the table? Why not celebrate a simple (humble) Christmas? Why not seek to give witness to a new view of this season that sets it, and us, apart from western consumerism? Why not act and give



through the Christmas Bowl? Such giving will be a sign that Christ means something more than being indistinguishable from those around us in their celebration of Christmas. *

The annual appeal for the Christmas Bowl has as its target those in need. This includes people of the third world where survival is a challenge. It includes the Australian Aboriginal Community with its desperate need and disadvantage. It includes wealthy Australians, whether Christian or not, who have forgotten or become inoculated against, the reality of human suffering and frailty. The Christmas Bowl program relieves, supports, advocates, educates, empowers and guides those in need and those that give. *

The Christmas Bowl is the Church's appeal. It is conducted on behalf of the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia. Churches of Christ are members of the NCCA. It is our appeal. Its theme for 1996 is: "Together we can keep the flame alive". Please make use of the envelopes provided and give. *

John Gilmore is minister at Mulgrave Church of Christ, on the faculty of CCTC and represents us on Christian World Service (NCCA), which conducts the Christmas Bowl.

It's All Old Hat

RICHARD BLACK

In this article we explore the world of thought in which the NT was written and how understanding the early church's response provides guidelines for outreach today. *

Some of the philosophical "enemies" that Christianity faces today are the same as Paul and friends faced. The two major strands of thought that existed during their time were held by the Stoics and the Epicureans. We see Paul addressing them in Acts 17. These ideas evolved from a dissatisfaction with the traditional view of a pantheon of gods ruling over the plight of humans, which stemmed back to Socrates. They tackled the issues of the reality of the universe, how it was structured and the meaning of life. They sought better explanations for such lofty questions. *

The Epicureans approached this whole area from the notion that no such divine beings existed (that is, not in any influential way), only universal truths. They came up with the very ingenious concept of the "Atomic Theory". It asserted that the universe was made up of atoms moving in a void and when they collided they formed matter, worlds and eventually humans. (Does this remind you of any modern thought?) With no governing god body to dictate the way to live, their focus was turned to the satisfaction of self. This seems to be a common human reaction when the divine is removed. *

Their philosophy was not one of indulgence, although this certainly happened, but one of balance and moderation so as to squeeze the best out of life. For them everything was by chance,

everything was random. There was no higher good to strive towards, pleasuring self was the only good. *

The Stoics' view on the other hand was that the world was made up of matter that had been made active by being penetrated by *Pneuma* (a divine spirit of sorts). *Pneuma* was both intelligent and benevolent, and permeated everything. So everything was part of the whole divine being, with some things having more *pneuma* than others. *

The New Age philosophy owes a lot to the Stoics. Being benevolent meant that the universe was (in the long run) designed for the best and life was best lived in accordance with this design. Virtue and knowledge (especially self-knowledge) were the supreme good. In practice, this meant trying to live in harmony with nature, society, and the state. *

As we have seen, the seeds of the scientific and New Age mind sets appeared thousands of years ago. The newly-born Christian faith had to face many such alternative philosophies. What is important to note here is how we see Paul dealing with them and also to remember that Christianity impacted and won over cultures where such views were rampant. (We've done it before, we can do it again.) When Paul seeks to win them over he does not condemn, nor does he become defensive. He simply tries to see how God is already working in their situation, so as to work with God. They were religious people, they had a heart for the divine and for learning more about different religious ideas. (Acts 17:21-22) *

As we read the passage we see that Paul revealed Jesus to them

in their own terms and in a manner to which they could relate. People today also have a spiritual hunger which will be expressed in a variety of ways. When we try to communicate Jesus to them we will find that packaged answers will be of little help. They only convey an inability to relate to the person personally. *

We need to seek to understand them and see how God is already at work in them. This requires us to step away from

People today also have a spiritual hunger which will be expressed in a variety of ways. When we try to communicate Jesus to them we will find that packaged answers will be of little help.

defensive attitudes that seek to protect doctrinal truths and allow ourselves to be vulnerable before others. God has proven himself greater than such philosophies in the past, so relax and be alert to the movements of the Master. (Eph 3:20-21) * Richard Black is Assistant Pastor of Grace Community Church, Christchurch (a NZ Church of Christ). He holds a BA degree with a major in classics from the University of Canterbury and is in his final year of his Bachelor of Divinity degree.



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Captured Thoughts

Original verse by Bet McLennan

Bet McLennan is a member of the Boronia, Vic, church. She is something of a folksy philosopher and home spun poet, putting her passing thoughts into verse. She easily sees the funny side of life and writes poems about it with surprise endings. There is also pathos and concern for people in her writings. Her poems are not religious in the accepted sense, but they reveal the Christian values that she lives by. She has chosen from years of jottings a selection

that she calls *Captured Thoughts* and published them with all proceeds to go to her church. The booklet is available for \$5 posted. Contact Boronia Church of Christ, PO Box 405, Boronia 3155.

—Gordon Stirling

Airs of the Kingdom

by *Carole-Anne Fooks and Geoffrey Higgs (Modbury Church of Christ)* \$17.95.

The Church of Christ at Modbury in South Australia has recently published a song book for congregations called *Airs of the Kingdom*. The book is a collection of 36 original Christian songs written by two of its members as their contribution to Christian outreach over the past 10 years.

The songs in the collection cover a wide range of themes with the lyrics largely based on passages from scripture. Themes include Communion, Christmas, Invitational Hymns, Easter, Praise and the Australian landscape.

The songs are generally easy to sing with straight forward melodies and simple accompaniment provided in standard piano format including simple chord markings. The songs are likely to suit a more traditional style of worship service using piano and organ. They could easily be adapted to solos



or choral arrangements for small or large choir groups.

Further information about the music book, overhead masters and demonstration tape is available from the church at Modbury on (08) 8396 4141.

—A. and G. Smith

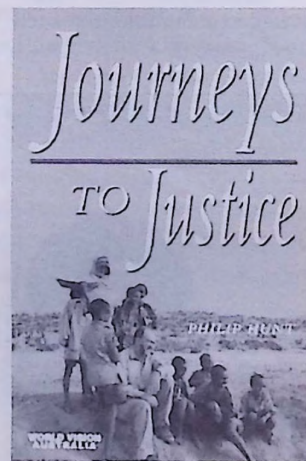
Journeys to Justice

by *Philip Hunt (HarperCollins)* \$16.95.

Philip is a communicator. One of the best. In this book he talks about the journey he is travelling on. The book not an autobiography, but it is autobiographical. It tells of a former disc jockey from Queensland coming to grips with issues more earth-shattering than which song is top of the charts.

Since joining World Vision's staff in 1976, Philip has travelled to many places. He writes of these places in a style that is both easily read and insightful. This book isn't a travelogue in the traditional sense. In describing his visits to every continent, he describes another journey. A journey towards justice, a trip that creates immense change within him and through him to others, including the organisation he now manages. His stories are entertaining. But with a twist that challenges. Philip invites the reader to join him on the same journey, and you can't help, but want to join in. The provocative final chapters remind us of justice in our own country too, and our need to do something about this. Read this book. Prepare to be challenged.

—Paul Cameron



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Thank you Church

VINEY LONGTHORP

Much to my regret it has taken me a long time to catch up with Philip Yancey. His books are a delight, especially his latest opus, *Finding God in Unexpected Places*. This American writer is a superb communicator of theological and spiritual verities; he can make the teachings of such hard-headed thinkers as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and C.S. Lewis understandable, as well as show their relevance to everyday living. Not only that, but Mr Yancey has a wide knowledge of the Christian life and is able to ac-

ment when we encounter people and situations where the things of the institutional church are either ignored, subject to the criticism of the ignorant and the cynical, or not understood.

The following is a fair example of his work; it is a summary of chapter 25 of the book mentioned above, entitled, "The walls come tumbling down." Read—and be inspired.

"The reason formerly Communist countries so quickly opened their doors to Christians after the collapse of Marxism traces back to the testimony of Christians who stayed faithful to their calling ... In East Germany, one of the few Eastern European countries with a Protestant majority, for forty years the church sought ways to serve the 'city of God' while living in an officially atheistic 'city of the world'. Since many avenues (such as television and radio) were closed, early on the church adopted a commitment to care for the neediest members of society, especially the profoundly disabled. And they met together regularly for worship and prayer."

"Against all odds, when the decisive moment for change finally arrived in the Eastern Bloc, the

church led the way in a peaceful revolution. East Germans look back on 9 October 1989, as *die Wende*, 'the turning point'." The crucial event took place in Leipzig, where Martin Luther preached in the days of the Reformation.

From 1982 weekly prayer meetings had been held each Monday at 5.00 pm in four of Leipzig's churches. At first only a few attended. But as the political tempo quickened Pastor Christian Fuerher invited his people to pray for peace. The handful of people became hundreds, then thousands. "The church was the one place where the Communist state allowed freedom of assembly." Very soon, after prayer meetings, groups would walk together in the dark streets, candles and banners in hand.

The news media in the West picked up the story and the German leader Erich Honecker became alarmed and called in the military to stop the marches. The church leaders were also alarmed, fearing another massacre like Tiananmen Square. But the prayer meetings and the marches continued; they now numbered over 100,000. The church and its pastors would not be cowed.

Why did the army not open fire? Some believe that the army was overwhelmed by the display of popular feeling. Then, early in November 1989, "Almost one million people marched peacefully through East Berlin. Erich Honecker resigned, humiliated. Police refused to fire on the demonstrators. At midnight on 9 November, something no one had even dared to pray for happened: a gap opened up in the hated Berlin Wall. East Germans streamed through the checkpoints, past guards who



had always obeyed orders to shoot to kill."

This peaceful revolution spread around the world. That year ten nations comprising more than half a billion people experienced non violent revolutions: Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia, Mongolia and the Soviet Union. Our author records how Bud Bultman of the CNN wrote; "We in the media watched in astonishment as the walls of totalitarianism came crashing down. But in the rush to cover the cataclysmic events, the story behind the story was overlooked. We trained our cameras on hundreds of thousands of people praying for freedom, votive candles in hand, and yet we missed the transcendent dimension, the explicitly spiritual and religious character of the story. We looked right at it and could not see it."

But some did see it. *The New Republic* reported: "Whether or not prayers really move mountains, they certainly mobilised the population of Leipzig."

Several weeks after the 9 October turning point, a huge banner appeared across a Leipzig street: *Wir danken Dir, Kirche* (We thank you, church). An inspiring message indeed to lead us into Advent!

At midnight on 9 November, something no one had even dared to pray for happened: a gap opened up in the hated Berlin Wall.

centuate the positive. Many of us need this kind of encourage-

Hobart City Church of Christ

4-8 Goulburn Street (formerly Collins Street)

125th Anniversary Celebrations

Friday 28 February - Sunday 2 March 1997

Special Guest Speaker: Dr Gordon Moyes

A full weekend of activities will be offered to help celebrate 125 years of faithful service in Hobart.

All past ministers, members and associates are invited to contact the church office for more details and registration.

Address: 203 Liverpool St, Hobart 7000
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Mark you diary NOW - start saving and book early!

Classifieds

GOLDEN WEDDING

SANDERS John and Betty of Seaford, SA, celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Saturday 7 December. Congratulations, Mum and Dad. Love from Lance, Stewart, Geoff, Mark and families.

SAUNDERS-BARTON Ron and Alice, 19 Asquith Street, Nailsworth SA, celebrate the 50th anniversary of their wedding conducted by Ken Barton on 14 December 1946 in the Margaret Street Launceston Church of Christ.

SILVER WEDDING

SANDERS Congratulations to Lance & Kaylene of Canberra, who will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary on 4 December.

HOLIDAYS

AYR, NORTH QUEENSLAND Travelling up the Queensland coast? Stop over in the "Bountiful Burdekin" at Ayr Shamrock Motel. Friendly service, reasonable rates. Phone (077) 83 1498. Owned and managed by Dudleigh Oakes.

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Hospital Chaplaincy Christmas

GLEN WEGNER

Christmas arouses mixed feelings around hospitals. Sometimes powerful feelings. While the atmosphere at the hospital is one of happiness and celebration as staff do their best to convey a festive mood, Christmas can be difficult for some. This is especially the case if there has been a death. Each ensuing Christmas is likely to evoke memories of that death. *

In the hospital where I work, local churches come and sing carols and greet patients. This helps bring the message of

Big is not always best. Smaller things of the kingdom are only dismissed as insignificant by the foolish.

Christmas to patients who may otherwise be isolated from Christmas themes at this time of the year. *

I recall organising carols for the hospital and having contact with



a choir leader who apologetically explained that she could only gather a quartet from her choir. To make an impression in a 30 bed unit requires more volume than usually comes from four singers. I was concerned how I could best use this quartet, so I assigned them to sing in the Intensive Care Unit where less volume would be appropriated. *

I need not have worried, their effect was dramatic. The group sang unaccompanied in perfect four part harmony. Ever so softly they sang "Away in a manger". In so doing they captured the attention of staff who dared not move or talk. As they held the attention of all in the unit they created a profound emotional response. *

Having finished their carol, and about to depart, they were invited to sing to a patient down the far end of the unit, who was too removed to hear. However, by this time emotions were present and the quartet became a trio. *

As I reflect on this I am reminded of our Lord's parable of the mustard seed. Big is not always best. Smaller things of the kingdom are only dismissed as insignificant by the foolish. Not only can small be beautiful, it can also be powerful. And, as I recall, Christmas began in a small way, with a pregnancy. *

David Johnson

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A Voice from Far Away

MICHAL WEREMIEJEWICZ

During a recent conference in Singapore I was asked to give a lecture about Poland. Among the available maps I found only one map of Asia with Europe squeezed somewhere in the upper left corner. "Looking from Singapore," I opened my lecture, "Poland may seem to be something that that map shows very well, it looks like one of the distant Asian provinces." * Poland may seem to be the same for an Australian—one of the distant provinces of the contemporary world. *

The whole mission of the Polish churches is being accomplished by native workers. This has been so from the beginning.

Seven years ago, Poland became widely known, thanks to the "Solidarity" movement and its leader, Lech Walesa, eventually a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Before the Berlin wall fell into pieces, even ten years earlier, the wall of fear was broken in Poland and independent thinking was born. *

Where are we now, seven years after the fall of communism? * The situation in Poland will be best illustrated by what you can see in the centre of Warsaw. * Warsaw's highest building is still the city-centre skyscraper which was a "gift" from Communist Russia—the monumental Culture and Science Palace. Now there are no political slogans on it as there used to be. In their place are advertisements of big international corporations. In front of the Palace, where communist parades used to take place, is one of the city's largest market places. On every corner of the city centre members of all the cults in the world sell their ideologies. *

Where does the church stand in this situation? *

The Restoration Movement reached Poland in 1921 through Konstanty Jaroszewicz, a Polish re-emigrant from the United States. As a result of his mission, over 4,000 men and women were baptised and almost 100 churches established. *

In their 75 year history, Churches of Christ in Poland struggled with many adversities. In the beginning there was hostility from Roman Catholicism, which was then the state religion, hostile to all other "sects". Then there came the Nazi occupation, followed by the Russians and the subsequent communist regime which lasted nearly fifty years. *

During the 1980s, with the "Solidarity" movement, a new way of thinking emerged. Church leaders began to think not only of survival, but also of how to develop a mission work. In spite of a difficult situation the idea that God is able to work through the church in Poland started to dominate. *

In some churches revivals began and the number of attenders and baptised believers grew. New churches came into existence. The Christian Bible Institute in Warsaw was established in 1984 to meet the needs of the churches. *

When communism fell in 1989, the churches found themselves in an entirely different situation and faced new challenges. *

The new reality was freedom on one hand and the pressure of a capitalistic economy on the other. *

With the fall of communism, people in Poland realised two things: they were free and they were very poor. *

Two more dangers then appeared. The first came from the Roman Catholic Church, which is again trying to secure political influence. The other danger comes from various sects and cults that entered the territories of all post-communist countries in great number. *

This does not however, hinder the progress of our mission work. The churches are growing. During the last year some have grown as much as 15%. The church in Warsaw will soon reach 500 attenders and is one of the largest evangelical churches in Poland. *

Various para-church organisations exist to support the mission of the church. Among them, our Christian Bible Institute serves over 150 students each year, and in its twelve



years, 1,484 men and women have received training. *

There are 27 Churches of Christ congregations in Poland with 1,500 baptised members. Total attendance is over 2000. In Poland a country with a population of 40 million, over 90% are Roman Catholic! The Churches of Christ together with all the other evangelical churches are less than 1% of the population. However their percentage growth is the highest. *

The whole mission of the Polish churches is being accomplished by native workers. This has been so from the beginning. The New Testament Movement was started by a native missionary. The churches were able to survive the war and the communist oppression because Polish preachers did not want or could not leave the country in spite of the oppression. Native preachers are the most effective. * This doesn't mean that support from abroad is unnecessary. Besides the financial help which is needed because of Poland's economic situation, what is most required is support that would in various ways equip native workers for ministry. The future of the churches in Poland depends on them. *

Michal Weremiejewicz is a native of Poland. For the past twelve years he has served as Director of the Christian Bible Institute in Warsaw.

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MARRIAGES

•Jocelyn Halse and Stuart Michael, Dianne Birch and Paul Sanders, Kalamunda, WA •Kath Krivanek and Darren McGriffin, Metro North Christian Centre, NSW •Tracy Vawser and Alastair Black, Warwick, WA

DEATHS

•Flo Cobb, Knoxfield, Vic •Julie Adams, Nailsworth, SA •Kate Skirving, Launceston, Tas •Edna Smith, Noarlunga Centre, SA

WA

KALAMUNDA (David Shalley) 45th Anniversary celebrations included family picnic, church dinner, message from Des Croot, second pastor of the church ... Farewell night held for Paul Sanders, youth pastor for 8 years ... AGM & celebration lunch held on 17 November. ... Families blessed with new babies, Nikolas Roy to Geoff & Lynsey Maxwell, Samuel Mackenzie to Rob & Cath Cox, Levi Scott to Leith & Amy Camden.

FREMANTLE (J. Caporn, R. Fairman) Main celebration of 104th anniversary on 3 November was tea meeting to which 20 former members "came home" ... Church camp at Busselton attended by 23 ... Rejoicing at baptism of Rina Villacorta ... First pre-

Christmas was Bicton UC choir's presentation of a cantata, *The Word* ... At 7.00 pm service Eira Clapton told about some churches welcoming refugees to WA & meeting some of their needs.

WARWICK (G.B. Carslake, K.R. Bowes, R.J. Ratcliffe) July 1997, Jim Longbottom inducted as new senior minister ... Special functions will enable members to express appreciation to Graham & Freda Carslake for 23 years of ministry ... Lawrence Hirsch presented "Messiah in the Passover" ... Elders' Planning retreat ... Young people trained to share their faith, prior to opening of "Chronicles Cafe" ... Louise Smith & Louise Lamothe received Pioneer Pin, highest National Award in Girls' Brigade.

SA

NAILSWORTH (Andrew Evans) Minister Andrew Evans & youth worker Andrew Whalland accepted further terms of ministry ... Karen Purdy spending month of university holidays on OM ship *Doulos* ... Men's & Women's dinners opportunities for fellowship & outreach ... Minister preaching series on Christian ethics, highlighting today's topical issues ... YP emphasis with monthly youth services & occasional children's morning service ... Senior & Junior youth groups & Kid's Club continue.

GODLWA (Chris Ambrose) Friendship Centre church parade held, Friendship Centre extended to alternate Monday

evenings ... Sunday Youth Anniversary 27 October ... Visit from Hayden Lush, school chaplain ... Walking group enjoyed first outing ... Church formed sister church relationship with Cann Hall & Harrow Green Baptist Church, London ... Sunday afternoon forum held with topic "Euthanasia", 30 gathered to hear Biblical principles & shared own views.

TUMBY BAY (David Jolly) Church attended Eyre Peninsula Conference at Port Lincoln, David new president ... Church celebrated as five of our youth baptised. BBQ lunch followed ... Sharyn Jolly's mother visiting for week of grandsons' baptisms ... Church full for Combined Churches "Fun Night" with Covenant Players ... Prayer meetings Tuesday & Friday. Open day of prayer each month ... Springtime Fair raised over \$1,200.

MODBURY (P. Hammat, R. McLean) Music seminar held to encourage worship programs ... TNT Youth held sleep over at church ... Ron McLean completing interim ministry 1 December. Excellent service given this last year ... Elders & Executive retreat 9 November ... AGM 12 November ... Youth music group developing to give good lead in service ... Christmas Community Care Support with food from church to needy ... Christmas play rehearsals. Perform in December.

OWEN COMMUNITY (Doug Walladge) Anniversary held 20 October, with visitors & large number of children present. Speaker Malcolm Wilson, Chairperson of Wakefield Presbytery.

Children gave an item & Fellowship ladies sang the introit, with local male quartet also singing ... In the evening the "Sing & Discuss" group enjoyed a time of remembering "The best things about Sunday School & Christian Endeavour".

NOARLUNGA CENTRE (Roger Risson, Peter Clegg) Peter Clegg appointed part-time minister. Robert Wiese appointed Director of Community Care ... Church looking forward to Tony Gibson joining the ministry team in 1977 ... Dianne Crawford appointed Pastoral Care Coordinator ... "Master Life" discipleship group having dynamic impact ... Ministry task groups about to start ... Narelle McElroy received Queen's Award, Girls' Brigade ... Roger Risson attended Church Dynamics Conference.

QLD

BUNDAMBA (Rod Foster) Sunday 20 October saw Harvest Festival of Thanksgiving produce given to Kenmore students ... Dr Martin Robinson hosted seminar session 27 October on ways to grow ... Church camp held mid November ... Two couples attended World Convention ... Youth groups growing steadily. Youth service monthly. Free sausage sizzle & night service held quarterly.

TAS

LAUNCESTON (C. Spaulding, W. Kerrison, J. Ratcliffe) CWF Garden



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—Lindsay Mott, Treasurer

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Church News

party at Dunstan's home at Legana a wonderful afternoon ... Albert van Zetten, CEO of Launceston City Mission, speaker 7.00 pm on 10 November ... Laelia Burke, church planter from Thailand, speaker at a home group on 12 November about her work in South Thailand among Buddhists & Malay refugees ... Church saddened at passing of long time member, Kate Skirving.

NSW

METRO NORTH CHRISTIAN CENTRE (Franklyn Elliott) While Franklyn Elliott has been away Tim Hanna of Carlingford College has conducted a sermon series from Galatians "An Adventure in Grace" ... Guest speaker on 17 November was Earl Roberts of Life Ministries ... Evening speakers have been N. Cox, S. Lynn, R. Garrett & D. & S. Elliott ... On 20 October two

young ladies were baptised in the swimming pool at the Vineys Road property.

VIC

BAYSWATER (P. Clayton) 125th Church Anniversary celebrated 20 Oct. with BBQ on Saturday & with two services & a luncheon, speaker Gordon Stirling. Items from recently-formed choir ... Alan Clark & Daniel Hills, speakers during minister's absence ... Joy Ham, missionary from Nepal, shared in service & at special ladies evening ... Andrew Neilsen involved in Bike for Bibles raised \$1,700 for Bible Society.

COBURG (G. Crossman) Three ladies delegates to World Convention at Calgary ... Anthony O'Shea to join Australian Galilee work party leaving 22 December for Nazareth Hospital ... Bible Study group studying "Friend-

ship with God" ... Friendship Group, Drop in Centre & CWF providing friendship & fellowship ... Sympathy extended to families of members Lorna Holman & Hazel Beer ... Caring ministry of Heather & Geoff Crossman appreciated.

KNOXFIELD (Rod Brown, Jack White & Jason McCheyne) Church will miss Jack White while he ministers with another church prior to ordination ... Elaine McLeod invited to be pastoral care minister & Jason McCheyne youth minister in 1997 ... With church offerings falling, innovative fundraising ideas have been initiated, including toothbrush sales & food taste testing ... Church is supporting mission work of Ward family in Fiji.

BORONIA (Keith Milne, Darryn Hickling) Annual Meeting reports show much work being done during year ... Discussion on worship, fi-

nance & ministry. Kris Condron elected elder, Catherine Riches, Ken Shaw & June Whitney elected deacons ... Gordon Chandler celebrated 75 years as member of church ... 20th Century Folk Celebration featuring music of Geoff Beaumont, with Danny McDowell & Kevin Smith providing music ... "Jam Session" for young people to learn & practice new songs. **TOOTGAROOK (M. Giezendanner)** 46th anniversary held in October, guest speaker Joan Pye. After lunch Joan shared her experiences of World Convention ... Mutual Market held early November attracted good crowd, \$2,500 raised due to willing work of those concerned ... Church annual meeting well attended. A time of rich fellowship looking over the past year and planning for the future ... Several new ladies received into fellowship, bringing a wealth of experience to the church.

Accountant

The Properties Corporation of the Churches of Christ invites applications for the position of Accountant.

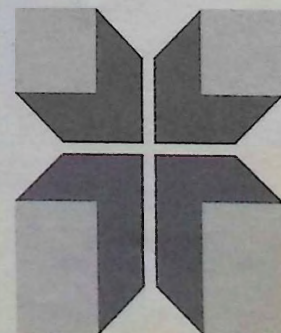
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The End

JANET THOMPSON

I was going home from school, on a crowded train, and I was totally immersed in a book when one of my friends leaned over my shoulder.

"Is that the next book in the series?" she asked. "I'll bet she marries Teddy."

"It doesn't look much like it at the moment," I said, wishing she wouldn't interrupt. She grabbed the book, turned to the end, and read the last paragraph aloud.

"I told you!" she said. *

I was furious. *

All the pleasure of anticipation had been destroyed. The delicious suspense was gone. It was no good trying to explain to her, or expecting her to apologise because she would never understand. She read a book only to reach the end, not to enjoy the journey. *

I never feel tempted to read the end of a story before I reach it in the proper fashion. It would ruin the whole experience. When I read a novel, I place myself in the hands of the author and follow where the plot leads. I fall for every trick and concealment—I let myself be led up the garden path. *

If I have enjoyed the book, I will read it again—later. The second reading is different. This time I can see all the author's devices, and appreciate them. I know where the story is going, so I can evaluate the techniques and trace the development of images and ideas. *

There are discoveries to be made—viewpoints to explore, and underlying meanings



to find. A whole new level of enjoyment is waiting for me. Re-reading a favourite book is like visiting an old friend. *

So, when the Bible reading in church begins, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled ..." (Luke 2:1), I settle down with a thrill to rediscover the greatest story of them all. *

I know this one by heart, but there is always a fresh perspective waiting to be found. Knowing where it will end adds the joys of love and promise to the familiar tale. *

And the best thing about it is ... it's true ... and it's mine! It belongs to you too! *

Happy re-reading—and Merry Christmas! *

The Last Word

The Christ child comes, like every other child, to give the world a message.

What message have I come to give?

—Anthony de Mello

Shopper: That's a terrific train set. I'll take it!

Sales Assistant: I'm sure your son will just love playing with it.

Shopper: You may be right. I'll take two.

My uncle did his Christmas shopping early.

What did he get?

Six months.

Are you having the usual for Christmas?

That's right—relatives!

Christmas? That's when your bank account is seasonally adjusted.

This year I'm giving money for Christmas presents. It's the cheapest thing I can find.

A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell the other one.

You should put your best foot forward when you haven't a leg to stand on.

Today, some children's toys cost more than my grandparent's college education did.

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