

GOOD NEWS

A U S T R A L I A

Editors: Paul A. Porter and Robert C. Cooper

MAY 1988

No. 8

CHICM 1988 Congress Supplement

Ours is an age of revolution—youth revolution, sexual revolution, racial revolution, colonial revolution, economic revolution, technological revolution and philosophical revolution. Amidst this chaos the key issue is the identity of man and the nature of reality. At a recent Toronto (Canada) convention of about 100 physicists and philosophers, scientists and sociologists, economists and educators from around the world this statement emerged:

The world is so complicated and scientific and technological development has grown so rapidly, that it is impossible for human beings to see anything as ultimately real any more. The amount of knowledge and information that exists in the world has doubled seven times in the last 2,000 years—and as much of it has appeared in the 1980's as in all of history up to 1980.

(Toronto *Globe and Mail* August 31, 1987).

Yes, knowledge has multiplied, but has wisdom? Man who asks the questions has become a question to himself and the ultimate question is right there. Every ideology is ultimately an anthropology—if man is only an animal and not made in the image of God then he can be forced into the image of society in all its depravity. Who we think we are determines all else. Poets have complained:

Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,
The best lack all conviction, while the worst are
full of passionate intensity. (W.B. Yeats)

We need a theme—then let that be our theme,
That we poor grovellers between doubt and faith,
Sun and northstar lost and compass out
The heart's weak engine almost stopped
Time timeless in the chaos of our wills
That we need a theme—something to say,
something to think between dawn and dusk,
something to hold to, something to love. (Anon)

In the days of the Judges no one used the highways,
only the byways. John 5:6. That's the way it seems now
in the moral realm. Ours is a century that has killed
more people than all other centuries combined—over

In His Image

by Desmond Ford

100 million—and why not, if man is just animated dirt, a biological accident, a temporal monstrosity? But if he is a child of God, then that's another story.

Strange, how man uses his reason to rebut the truth that the universe is rational. If thinking is like itching, how can chaos communicate with chaos? Why does that which happens inside the mind parallel what happens outside? Why should the uttermost star obey the laws propounded by human logic if the mental cogs originated by chance? Only with a Creator does all make sense, only then is reasoning valid and value objective.

Dostoyevsky has one of his characters say: "If there is no God everything is permitted." And Nietzsche said similarly: "If there is no truth, everything is permitted." Both saw the ultimate logic of relativism.

Strange, is it not, that man is so over-equipped if this life is all there is. He alone of all the creatures is discontented with himself and his surroundings. Birds accept the air, and fish the water, but man is never at home in time. "For men are homeless in their homes, and strangers under the sun, they lay their heads in a foreign land when the day is done."

Only one option makes sense of existence—the Christian option. The One who invited all men to find their rest in Him could say without vanity: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." His words, alone among those of the millions of men, are self-authenticating to the hungry searching heart. Read the story of Ruth for a parable as to how rest is to be found. See Ruth 1:9; 3:1,18. Rest can be found by kneeling at the feet of our kinsman redeemer in whom alone is strength (Boaz means "in him is strength") as the mighty Lord of the harvest. He welcomes the outcast who is excluded by law, and enfolded in his embrace we become fruitful and we are at rest. Then we know who we are. □



A Poor Man's Coat

by Ron Allen

"IF the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession. Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it.... it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 24:12,13).

For modern people, righteousness usually means an ethical absolute. But there was a time when righteousness did not necessarily mean rectitude. It meant conformity to an inner relationship. For example, in Genesis Er, the son of Judah, dies and Judah promises Tamar his wife another son, Shelah. As time passes, Judah fails to keep his promise to Tamar. She therefore disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah. When her pregnancy becomes known, Judah calls for her to be executed. But she then reveals to the community, that Judah is himself the father of her child. Then Judah is forced to confess: "She is more righteous than I..." Genesis 38:26. Tamar was righteous because she had acted in loyalty to the family relationship which expected her to raise up descendants for her dead husband.

The social ramifications of righteousness are especially clear in the book of Job. When Job's life is overtaken with calamity, his

friends accuse him of unrighteousness thus:

"You stripped men of their clothes leaving them naked.
"You gave no water to the weary.
"You withheld from the hungry.
"You sent widows away empty-handed." Job 22:5-8.

In response, Job asserts his righteousness:

"I have not rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune.
"I have shared my wealth with my household.
"I have always welcomed the traveller in my house.
"No stranger passing my dwelling has ever spent the night in the street."

Job 31:29-34.

To meet a stranger in ancient times was to encounter social claims. To act in accord with those claims was righteousness. Righteousness was not something that existed in a vacuum. It was predicated on a relationship. Biblical righteousness is sociological.

In Israel, righteousness was understood in the context of the covenant with Yahweh. Righteousness was faithfulness to the covenant norms as laid down by the Lord. Deuteronomy 6:25. On God's side his righteousness was his faithfulness to his covenant promises. He kept his promises by doing things for Israel. He rescued Israel from her enemies. He

fed and watered Israel. These things were called righteous acts.

The faithfulness of God is often juxtaposed to the unfaithfulness of Israel. Israel always failed in her relationship obligations. With the passing of time the covenant became more and more weighted with God's mercy. Mercy kept the relationship alive. Consider, for example, Psalm 103:6-10. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquity...."

The Bible assumes a relationship between people and a supreme person. That relationship itself is part of our humanity. Though we have done everything to ruin it, God has done all to establish it. We need to be maintained, not just physically, but socially and psychologically as well. We need someone to relate to us absolutely at the level of personality. In the gospel, God the supreme person holds us in perfect relationship to himself. He is faithful to us. He is eternally vigilant over us. Because of this we are more than things or "it"s. We are PERSONS whose personhood throbs with authenticity and vitality.

The New Testament says that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. He has acted faithfully in relation to us. This does not mean that God has made righteousness an important element in a bargain between himself and us. Rather, His righteousness has pursued us and overtaken us. In the gospel we are grasped and held by righteousness--the righteousness of God.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21. □

When is a Church not a Church?

by Desmond Ford

When the true Christ came, He came in disguise. They expected a conqueror, but He came as a carpenter; they expected a king but He came as a peasant; they expected one who was lofty, but He came in lowly guise; they expected one clothed with glory but He came clothed with humility; they anticipated their Messiah would proclaim law, but when He did come He proclaimed love.

The true church, like the true Christ, is always in disguise. Read Revelation 11 and see how the professing church is trodden down by the gentiles—the heathen world. The world has always made more converts from the church than the church from the world. See in that chapter how only two witnesses, (a lowly number), proclaim their Lord—not as lawyers but as ones giving testimony. See them put to death by Antichrist in the streets of the very same city which crucified Christ, (11:8), and observe closely that the next time that Jerusalem is referred to it is called Babylon. (Revelation 14:8). Thus is shown the popularity of error, the hatred of truth, and the vast capacity for degeneration that is present in all human institutions including the church.

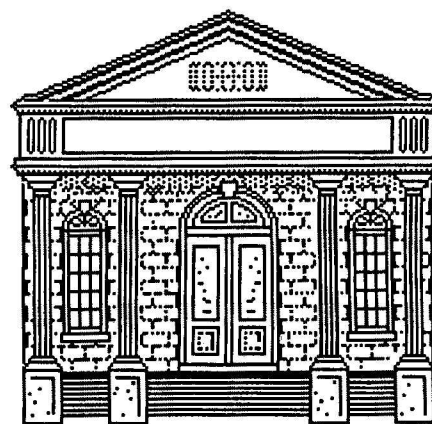
Gandhi said he would have become a Christian but for the Christians. Nietzsche challenged: "Let these Christians live like those who have been redeemed and I will believe in their

Redeemer."

Because the true gospel is ever crucified between two thieving false gospels the professing church is ever more Babylonian than Christian. Those perennial religious thieves are legalism and antinomianism. Both lack the true love and the true faith which are central for the genuine gospel of God. Consequently those who use religion as a pillow seek only rest whereas the true gospel brings always trauma as well as rest.

Christ uses the following metaphors in picturing the Christian life: the yoke, the towel, the sword, and the cross. A watered down gospel offering only an anaesthetic is not the genuine article. But look at that man Simon on the Via Dolorosa carrying his cross behind Christ—there is a picture of the true church. See Mary breaking her expensive box of perfume—there is another picture. See Christ washing His disciples' feet—a third picture. And most of all, observe the Man hanging on the cross!

Jerusalem becomes Babylon when it offers only rest instead of rest conjoined with battle. Babylon knows only a gospel of good advice and good views instead of the good news. It has a series of orthodox works and beliefs that bring artificial rest rather than the ecstatic gladness resulting from the knowledge that our sins have been dealt with and the deci-



sion (acquittal) of the Last Judgement is ours already. Babylon has much to say about man while the true church points first to what God has done in the God-man. Babylon fears the second coming and finds witnessing a burden, but the true church, having accepted Christ's atonement, longs for the advent, for it is ready today through His imputed merits. And it loves to witness to God's other lost children, telling them they have already been redeemed. See Romans 5:14-19. Redemption has been accomplished, the judgement in Christ has taken place while that to come is but an announcement of who have accepted the Saviour's work in the Calvary Judgement.

A church is not a church when it ceases to bring forth the fruit of unselfish love—fruit of a living union with the Redeemer. The false church preaches itself rather than its Lord and has forgotten that justification comes freely through the grace of God, meritoriously by the blood of Christ, instrumentally by faith, and evidentially by willing works of love. "The gospel is grace, and ethics is gratitude."

For "I would not work my soul to save, for that the Lord has done, but I would work like any slave for love of God's dear Son." □

Relationships in our century are more messy and more bloody than ever before. Goethe's **FAUST** tells us the reason when it climaxes with a gigantic tidal wave heading for earth's beach, a tidal wave that first destroys those two buildings on the shore emblematic of the church and the home.

Worship and the family are the sources of all that is good and enduring, and once these are destroyed all else collapses.

In our large Western cities one out of every two marriages collapses. Those so blessed as to know and practise the Roman Catholic motto "the family that prays together stays together" have only a one percent likelihood of breakup. The connection between worship and the strength of the family is strong and undeniable. Thus we find both institutions at the very opening of Scripture and prominent in the teachings of Christ.

God intended that marriage, our most intimate experience, should be an image of the privileges available through the other divine institution--worship. The physical and soul union of two humans is but a reflection of the ecstasy of the union between the believer and God. Several entire books of Scripture revolve around this metaphor of marriage as illustrative of the believer's joyous union with God. See Hosea, Song of Solomon, and Revelation particularly, and compare John 2:29 and Hebrew 5:25.

If God is love and we are his children called upon to mirror him in all of life's relationships it is obvious we have sadly failed with reference to marriage. Why? Because we have too often mistaken the shadow for the substance, the image for the real thing.

In a series devoted to relationships we would err if we failed to make some suggestions regarding the most important of all social relationships. Therefore we venture to suggest truths gleaned from Scripture and human experience that all married partners should keep in mind.

1. That they are partners, not master and servant. See Galatians 3:28.

2. That true love is not a continual gazing into one another's eyes but a looking outward in the same direction.

3. That the infatuation of courtship does not last and was never intended to. Love should lastingly prevail but it is the product of the will rather than the feelings.

4. That more marriages fail because of unceasing selfishness rather than infidelity. Marriage manuals often major in sex adjustment whereas the main problem is ego adjustment.

5. That happiness happens inside a person, not on the surface of the skin.

6. That without the safeguard of true religion marriage fulfills the dictum that possession brings indifference, and familiarity contempt.

7. That marriage is a school for character. It is not a playground but a schoolroom—not continual recreation but an education. And therefore it really takes three to be married—and the third is Christ. See John 2.

8. That we should never expect from a human being what we ourselves cannot provide. Only God can satisfy fully and lastingly. A woman's beauty and a man's strength decay but a character built on the gospel survives forever.

We see in the great saints of all ages reflections of the only love that endures. Mother Teresa, who has taken off the streets of Calcutta about 40,000 persons, and whose compassion strives to embrace the poor and sick of the world is a marvellous exemplar. She has told us how we can have heaven right now—love as God loves, serve as He serves, rescue as He rescues, give and forgive as He does, and throughout each day touch Him in His distressing disguise (the poor and the ill). She challenges us: "Do something beautiful for God." True children of God do that spontaneously and continually. □

That We Should Be Called The Children Of God

by Desmond Ford

Families and how to survive them

by Paul Porter

THOSE of you with young children will recognize this book. It's by Roald Dahl who's extremely popular with kids all around the world, and it's called *George's Marvellous Medicine*. Eight-year-old George Kranky has a witchy old grandmother with pale brown teeth and a small puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom. It's Saturday morning, George's mother has gone shopping, and George has to give Grandma her medicine. But since the old woman gets on his nerves, George decides to brew up a concoction of his own. Something whopping. Something absolutely terrific. A real shocker. A sort of explosion. Something to blow away the witchy smell that hangs about her in the next room! To cut a long story short, George's marvellous medicine gets rid of Grandma. She shrinks to the size of a matchstick, then she is no bigger than a pin...then a pumpkin seed...then...then...

"Where is she?" cried Mrs Kranky. "I've lost her!"

"Hooray," said Mr Kranky.

"She's gone! She's disappeared completely!" cried Mrs Kranky.

"That's what happens to you if you're grumpy and bad-tempered," said Mr Kranky. Great medicine of yours, George."

George didn't know what to think.

For a few minutes, Mrs Kranky kept wandering round with a puzzled look on her face, saying, "Mother, where are you? Where've you gone? Where've you got to? How can I find you?" But she calmed down quite quickly. And by lunchtime, she was saying, "Ah well, I suppose it's all for the best, really. She was a bit of a nuisance around the house, wasn't she?"

"Yes," Mr Kranky said. "She most certainly was." (pp.111-112).

I hope there are no mothers-in-law here today!

For all of their virtues, (and there are many), family relationships produce more unhappiness than any other source.

Take marriage, for instance. The potential for mutual annoyance in the marriage is limited only by the imagination. One woman complained that her husband regularly burnt the hair out of his nose with a lighted match! And then there was the man who hid his wife's dentures so she couldn't go out and vote for Labour! Millions find wedlock a padlock. The husband wishes he had chosen a wife rather by his ear than his eye, and his bride soon discovers that her man snores like a cicada. In matrimony, to hesitate is sometimes to be saved.

Some marriages fall apart because of the "Coolidge Effect."

The Coolidge Effect is based on a report of a field trip to a poultry station taken by President and Mrs Coolidge sometime between 1923 and 1927. The group was so large that it was divided into two parts, and the President and Mrs Coolidge inspected the station separately, with Mrs Coolidge's group leading. When her group reached a particular yard where the rooster was working vigorously at his task of impregnating a large flock of hens, Mrs Coolidge asked the technician in charge, "Does he perform like that all day?" When she was assured that this was so, the First Lady said, "Indeed! Please point him out to the President." When the President arrived at the same yard, the technician conveyed the message. Mr Coolidge asked, "And does he regularly change females? On being assured that this was so, the President responded, "Indeed! Please tell that to Mrs Coolidge." (Gerald Larue, *Sex and the Bible* [1983], 19).

To escape the monotony of monogamy—to get lost in a stranger's body and fly as high as the ceiling on the wings of night—that surely is something! A recent cartoon depicts a world-weary couple in bed with scores of sex manuals scattered like *TV Guides* over the sheets. And one says to the other: "Find any-

thing interesting?"

If a dull spouse doesn't kill your marriage, then beware of the hassles of pregnancy. And childbirth. And feeding. And crying. And stinking toilet training...and adolescence! Not to mention the expectations of your own siblings and parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and second cousins once removed! Who needs families?

Virginia Satir describes the atmosphere in a troubled family:

Whenever I am with such a family, I quickly sense that I am uncomfortable. Sometimes it feels cold, as if everyone were frozen; the atmosphere is extremely polite, and everyone is obviously bored. Sometimes it feels as if everything were constantly spinning, like a top; you get dizzy and can't find your balance. Or, it may have an air of fore-boding, like the lull before a storm, when thunder may crash and lightning strike at any moment. Sometimes the air is full of secrecy, as in a spy headquarters.

When I am in any of these kinds of troubled atmospheres, my body reacts violently. My stomach feels queasy; my back and shoulders soon ache, and so does my head. I used to wonder if the bodies of the people who lived in that family responded as mine did. Later, when I knew them better and they became

free enough to tell me what life was like in their family, I learned that they did indeed feel the same way. After having this kind of experience over and over again, I began to understand why so many of the members of troubled families were beset with physical ills. Their bodies were simply reacting humanly to a very inhuman atmosphere. (*Peoplemaking*, [1972], 10-11).

Even Christian families are not always deliriously happy. The rattiest children in the street are often preacher's kids. In some Christian homes, religion acts like booze—it gives family members their one common interest. Take away their church life and they are like winos without their drinking friends. Ever felt like that?

Another problem: children in Christian homes may feel spiritually manipulated. Not every red-blooded toddler thrills to the thought that Jesus wants HIM for a sunbeam. And when it comes to discipline, lots of kids I know would sooner collect a broken arm than be told by Mummy that they have "disappointed Jesus." ("Who is this Jesus guy, anyway?")

Well, these are just a handful of the challenges facing families today. How do we survive them?

First, as Christians:

We have a singular advantage.

Family members forgiven from above can more readily forgive one another. Assurance of life beyond the grave **should** defuse the mid-life crisis and pre-empt an affair in the office. Husbands are free to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, and filial obedience is "in the Lord."

Second, as Parents:

We can aim that our children in later years grow INTO faith and not away from it. We must not rush them. Excessive God talk while they are young may reinforce the later conviction that religion is for kids. We will probably create more good will with our offspring by urging them to think for themselves, so that one day they will find a faith worth keeping: their own.

Third, as Fallible Humans:

We know there are no sure-fire solutions for a troubled family. People, after all, are verbs—not nouns—and they will remain stubbornly autonomous despite all outside attempts to interfere. In our better moments, we would not wish it were otherwise.

And let's face it: none of us has the whole picture. In this life, while we still "see through a glass, darkly," Jesus remains the Clue rather than the Answer. And it is perhaps as we acknowledge this that we come closest to those we love. □

THE OUTCRY OF SODOM

by Ron Allen

"Then the Lord said, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin is so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me." Genesis 18:20,21.

Why did God save Lot?

Why did God destroy Sodom? Why was Lot saved? The record tells that two strangers were welcomed by Lot at the gates of Sodom. He offered them lodging and food for the night. In so doing he was fulfilling his social obligation to strangers. He was acting righteously. Later in the evening, when the men of Sodom lustfully called for the two visitors to whom Lot had given sanctuary, they violated the relationship which Lot had sanctioned. They acted UNrighteously. The fact that Lot offered his daughters to the Sodomites may shock us. The incident, however, is not related to show how bad Lot was, but to show how RIGHTEOUS he was. Lot refused to outrage his relationship with the strangers.

The men of Sodom had come to ignore their relationships with other people. See Isaiah 1 and Ezekiel 16. They used their privileges to commit acts of injustice.

God said that the outcry against Sodom was great. Outcry specifically means the despairing plea of a victim of injustice. The same word can be translated 'shriek'. It occurs in Genesis 4 where the voice of Abel's blood cries to the Lord from the ground.

Relationships with God and other people

The Bible affirms what is known intuitively: that being human involves relationships with other people. The Bible establishes that mankind is what it is upon the fact of a relationship to God and to other people. And so, God's first question to man the sinner was, "Where are you?" His next question was, "Where is your brother?" The second question is a social question. Both questions address man in terms of his wounded relationships.

Everyone owes something to other people. We all have obliga-

tions, even to those we have never met. Said John Donne: "All mankind is part of me." How are all our fellows on the planet getting along these days? Let's take a look.

The world is divided between wealth and poverty

The world today is dominated by a tragic division. One part of mankind has undergone a revolution and has emerged from it in a pattern of increasing wealth. The other part of the human race is in a situation of worsening poverty.

The world is divided into rich and poor. In real terms, this means that a billion people are starving to death. And this is not because there is not enough food in the world to feed them! In recent years, the world produced annually about 1,300 million tons of food grain. Although the rich nations account for only a quarter of the earth's population they consumed half of that amount. The animals belonging to the developed world consumed another quarter of it. The rest was shared among the world's poor.

The present divided world is similar to the social class order of countries in nineteenth century Europe. Now the third world is the working class of planet earth. Just as the propertied classes of the past predicted economic disaster if eight year old children were prevented from labouring in the mills, so now the rich nations vigorously oppose changes to the present world order which might lower their living standard.

The Church's relationship with all men

The end result of malnourishment is death, but the slow journey towards it is awful in terms of human misery. Chronically hungry people are physically less developed and mentally less alert than those who are well fed. Starving, pregnant women are likely to have

mentally inferior children. One of the cruelest things the rich do to the poor is to blame them for their plight. This contrasts with the standpoint of the Hebrew prophets. They never blamed the oppressed. They never called them foolish. They referred to them as victims who needed someone to listen to their cry. In the Bible, God is on the side of the world's poor. He comes to their aid and defends them against the wealthy and the powerful. The church will reflect the same concern. It will take seriously its relationship to all men, especially the oppressed.

God's love - the norm in all relationships

There are plenty of victims in Australia. Lots of poor, unemployed people being evicted from their dwellings, plenty of strangers and aliens in the land, indigenous people who need a helping hand. Christians can join hands with any group that seeks to change social structures, which perpetuate people's misery. Those who are joined to Christ share in his death and life. The body is yielded to God as an instrument of "righteousness." If righteousness is what Christ is then it certainly has to do with relationships. The ethical centre of the faith is Jesus. If the moral government of the life is centred elsewhere (e.g. in the Ten Commandments), it will be possible for us to live quite comfortably in the face of massive social injustice. But if Christ is the law of our being we will be led into relationships with people which we would otherwise have missed. To be Christian is to be joined with the Saviour in his work of deliverance. It is to be caught up in the current of his love, to be included in his righteous act, which is alone the norm in all relationships. We cannot choose any other cause than the one God chose in Christ. □

If The Salt

Loses Its

Savour

by Desmond Ford

Not everybody knows that it was originally planned that Buzz Aldrin should be the first human to walk on the moon. After Neil Armstrong took over that role, Buzz Aldrin's personality began to change and two years later he had a nervous breakdown. All of us need to be needed. We crave significance. We long to be accepted and loved.

Giving and imparting God's love

When the most notorious prisoner of the US penal system, Robert Stroud, became the famous Birdman caring for scores of canaries over many years, he felt as though carried by their wings into the freedom beyond his steel cage of solitary confinement. All of us are in prisons of one kind or another, and only the giving and receiving of love can deliver us. The task of the church is to implement the giving and imparting of the same love that caused the King of glory to exchange heaven for a gallows.

Tragically, most of religion is counterfeit. The sign it is so is that most are more afraid of being sanctimonious than they are of being wicked. Counterfeit religion is idolatrous and enshrines comfort but shuns disturbance, whereas the gospel of Christ ever includes both rest and trauma.

Christ's metaphors

Salt was one of Christ's metaphors for the church. It is prominent in the list that includes light, yeast, a grain of mustard seed, and the sun-clothed bride. In the East, salt was prized much more than now as a valuable seasoning agent which also purified and preserved. On the shores of the Dead Sea were huge mounds of composite materials including at times traces of sodium chloride — traces ultimately leached out by the forces of nature. Even so, says the Master, religion has the tendency to degenerate. His parallel metaphor is the barren fig tree, good for nothing

ultimately but the gardener's axe. Thus the history of religion has ever been one of degeneration and rebirth.

Two major causes of religious salt losing its savour are the perennial Christian heresies—those two religious "thieves" which exist on the opposite sides of the true gospel and which join in its crucifixion. They are legalism and antinomianism.

Don't confuse legalism with being legalistic

Don't confuse legalism with that which is legal. We hope your marriage is legal, but

would ardently desire that it is not legalistic. Legalism is a perversion of the good. It means doing the right thing for the wrong reason or in the wrong way—for example, trying to be good so God will love us. Antinomianism is the opposite error. Seeing that "a man is justified by faith alone regardless of his success in keeping the law," (see Romans 3:28 NEB), it is "living it up" in gay abandon and thus crucifying the Lord afresh.

Two heresies illustrated

It is interesting that the two churches addressed after Rome in the N.T. illustrate these heresies. While Romans tells of the genuine way of salvation systematically, the succeeding letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians warn against antinomianism and legalism. Corinth felt knowledge was enough so Paul told them that "knowledge puffs up but love builds up." At Galatia the believers were trying to guarantee the continuance of their justification by deeds of law, not realizing that "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision" but that what counts is "Faith that works by love," "a new creature," and "the keeping of the commandments of God."

See Galatians 5:6, 6:15 and 1 Corinthians 7:19.

The antidote is the love of Christ - He is the way into the heart of God

The antidote to both heresies is adoration of the crucified and risen Christ. His wounds are windows into the heart of God. Those who understand them, even in part, confess "the love of Christ constraineth us..." How different the world would be if but three words of Scripture were believed—**GOD IS LOVE**. We should so live and so love that others might be tempted to share our ecstatic joy. □

My Testimony

by Stephen

[Readers who attended the Sydney 1988 GNCM Congress will remember Stephen, who hails from Dubbo, NSW. Although Stephen was not a featured speaker at the Congress, we are pleased to include his testimony in this issue. — Eds.]

WELL, where do I start? The story of my life is "sin and search, sin and search and a lot of sin, sin, sin." I just think back on my school days of being overweight, filthy and a real pain to my teachers. [Looking back, I can see why they gave me heaps—I deserved it!]. I remember one time it was "out of uniform day"; I came dressed for the occasion with a grease-filled pair of overalls and over the top a large coat with a skull and crossbones on the back. I wore a greasy bike chain around my waist and a long piece of dog's meat chained to my coat, which I would chew and eat when the girls and teachers walked by. In a science class, when they would dissect a rabbit or a mouse, I would chew on the remains. I can see now it was to attract attention or get recognized for something.

The time after I left school was just a waste. I can remember countless days and nights of drinking, vandalizing and stirring up the Police. One time a group of us, about 15 young blokes, cut our way into the back of the RSL and stole beer and grog by the case-full. We found an old, closed-down house and stored the stolen grog in there, and had night after night of drinking and raging on, till some of us got caught one day; and the only reason we got off was because two of the boys involved had policemen for fathers. Even thinking of things gets me confused—I forget at what age I did what and where and when—but the memories still pass through my mind. Ghosts and spirits still haunt me from the past, like spending nights in sleazy caravans with girls whose names are just memories. I remember the countless drug and sex parties I used to attend with mates.

I started looking into churches—all different sorts of churches, looking for answers and the meaning of it all. I went to this church one time; the people were really nice, but I couldn't change. I was in the gutter one night "drunk as a skunk" outside of a dance hall. I didn't know this, but next door this church was holding a meeting, and I just remember looking up and seeing the pastor's face looking down at me. I said "G'day" and that's the last time I saw him.

I also got involved and started going to another church, but it didn't fulfill me. It was still the same, only now there were a lot of rules and regulations and laws that burdened me. I was told about the law all

right, but not how to deal with it as shown in Galations 2:16-17; 3:2-5.

I was going to church and going to King's Cross too many times. We would jump on the bikes and head down to "The Cross" and everything that goes with it. I used to feel guilty because the money I paid the prostitute she would in turn use to buy a hit of heroin. One night a "lady of the night" was in such a panic to get the needle into her arm that she was making a mess all over the floor with the blood coming from her arm, so she asked me to do it for her. When she calmed down and the hit took its effect, I asked her what she was thinking and seeing. She said "Doors. All I can see is doors opening, closing, opening, closing." I felt pretty bad after I left and as I was walking up the other side of "The Cross" there were a lot of old drunken Aborigines selling some old books to get some money for the next bottle of wine. So I chucked one of them two bob and he handed me a book which I put in the pocket of my coat, and about an hour later I went to visit another prostitute. I paid her the money and when finished, as I put my coat back on, the book I had bought fell out of my pocket. To my surprise and hers, the name of the book was *Christianity in Conflict*. Straight away, the girl said: "Are you a Christian?" I stuttered a bit, not knowing what to say, and then she spoke: "Praise the Lord—I'm a Christian too!" Well, that just about blew my mind. After that we talked about the Lord for an hour or so. She belonged to a "Christian Spiritualist" church, and the "good" spirits in the seance told her what she was doing was all right, and as I was leaving she said to me: "God bless, and always keep your faith in Jesus because he really loves you!" Well, I couldn't argue with her—we were in there doing the same thing, but after I left there, I was riding on my bike and something made me stop. I pulled over, got down and in my own funny way asked Jesus to be my Saviour. No preacher, no priest, no "Sunday morning ladies" had ever had the impact that prostitute did and I thank God for her, and at times I still wonder what she's doing and I pray for her!

Later, I started going to another church and joined the Christian Riders, and I really started to grow in the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I thank God for all the churches I was involved in: they helped me grow and learn. But the main and central thing is Jesus our God. Please read Rom 8:35-39. It's beautiful.

For all you people who are searching, take it from me, nothing but nothing can fill that empty space in you—only Jesus! Now I don't belong to any denomination: I belong to the body of Christ, and to him only I give my praise! □