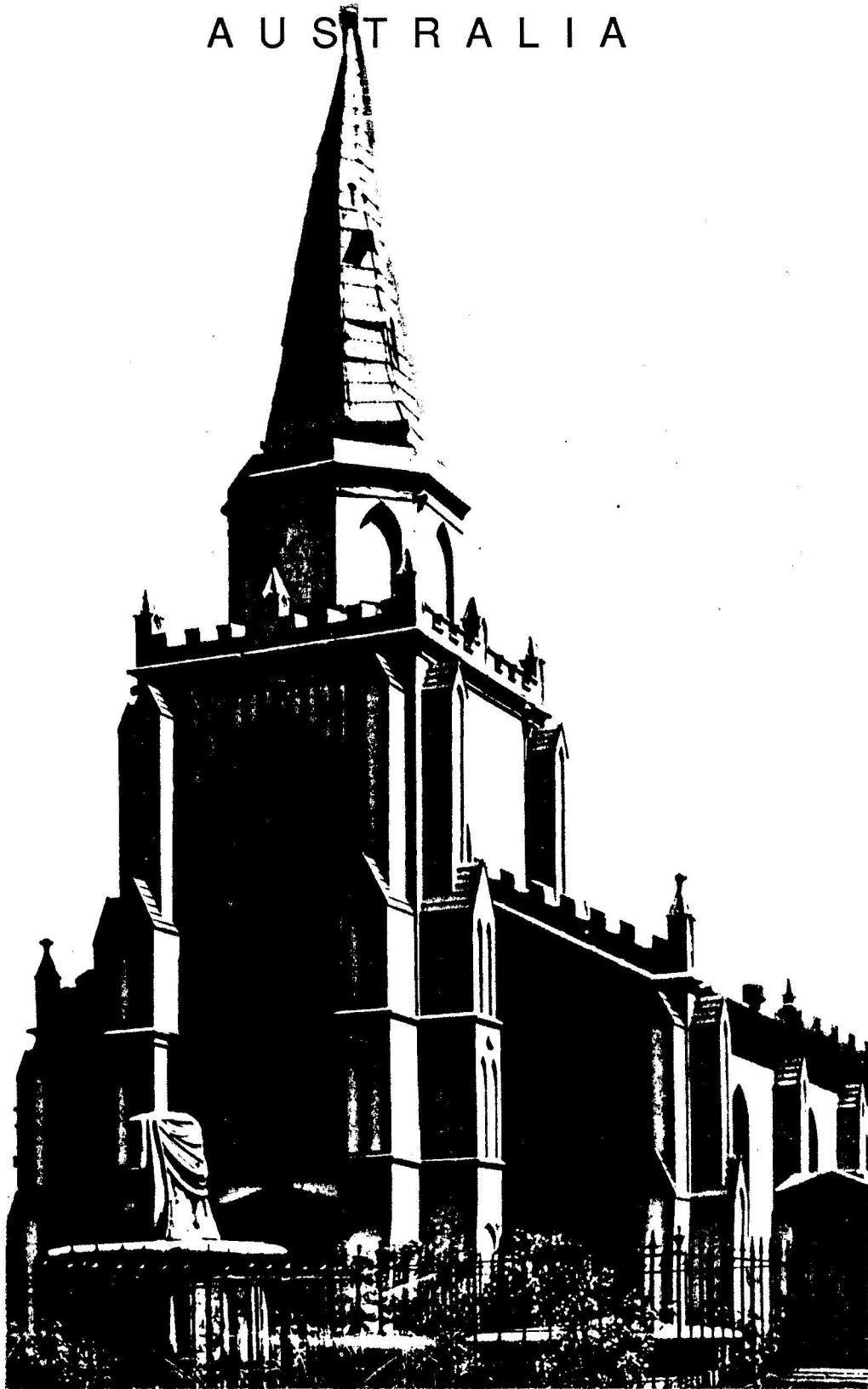


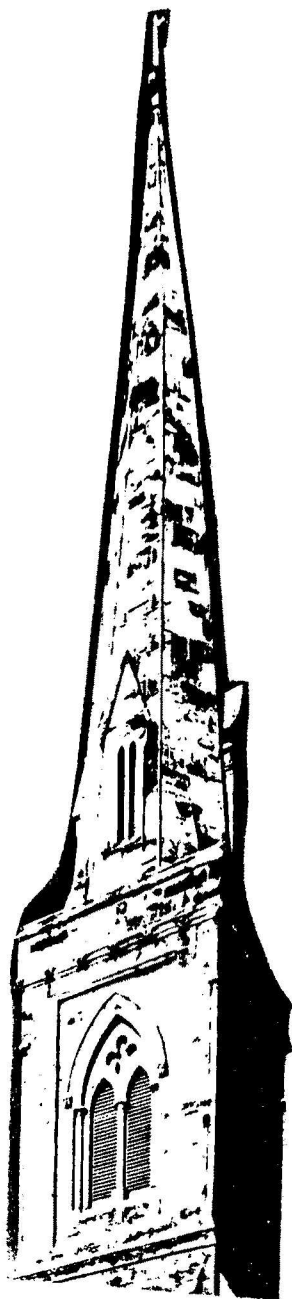
GOOD NEWS

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A U S T R A L I A





Editorial

Truth may be taught by contrast. More often, truth is obscured, even contradicted by the means used to convey it.

Some thirteen to fourteen years ago, I remember an American youth preacher who epitomized the latter maxim. Six feet eight and darkly handsome, he energetically gyrated his way through preaching for forty-five minutes about specific evils. No detail seemed too sordid to be excluded. Many of the younger teenagers present appeared enraptured. Most were more comprehensively inducted into a knowledge of sin than their previous 13-15 years had achieved. Significantly, the older teenagers and young adults were disturbed. Indeed many discreetly left.

Eventually, five to seven minutes were spent denouncing evil while three to four were dedicated to extolling the virtues of a life based upon Christ.

Christ's preaching demonstrated that truth may be effectively taught by contrast. Notice the focus of the following extracts from the Beatitudes (J B Phillips).

"How happy are those who know what sorrow means, for they will be given courage and comfort."

"Happy are those who suffer persecution for the sake of goodness, for the kingdom of God is theirs!"

"And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake. Be glad then . . . for your reward in Heaven is magnificent."

Realistically, Christ acknowledges the existence of "sorrow," "persecution," and "slander" but he contextualizes them with hope and promise. Contrasts are drawn, but while the youth preacher dwelt on that which he claimed to condemn, Christ foregrounded the phrase, "How happy are they" and concluded each contrast with further positives such as "be given courage and comfort" or "for the kingdom of God is theirs!"

Modern society too frequently both absorbs and reflects the preacher's emphases. Cynicism and pessimism become twin ulcers festering the hearts of individuals yearning for injunctions to be happy.

Good news stories don't rate. Bad news stories lead the news nightly. Modern Christians ought to be challenged to refocus on Christ's injunction "to be happy". Indeed, we need to individually and collectively help lift the pallid pessimism around us and claim the promise.

"Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for goodness, for they will be fully satisfied!"

— Rob Cooper

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THE GOSPEL AND THE SEASONS

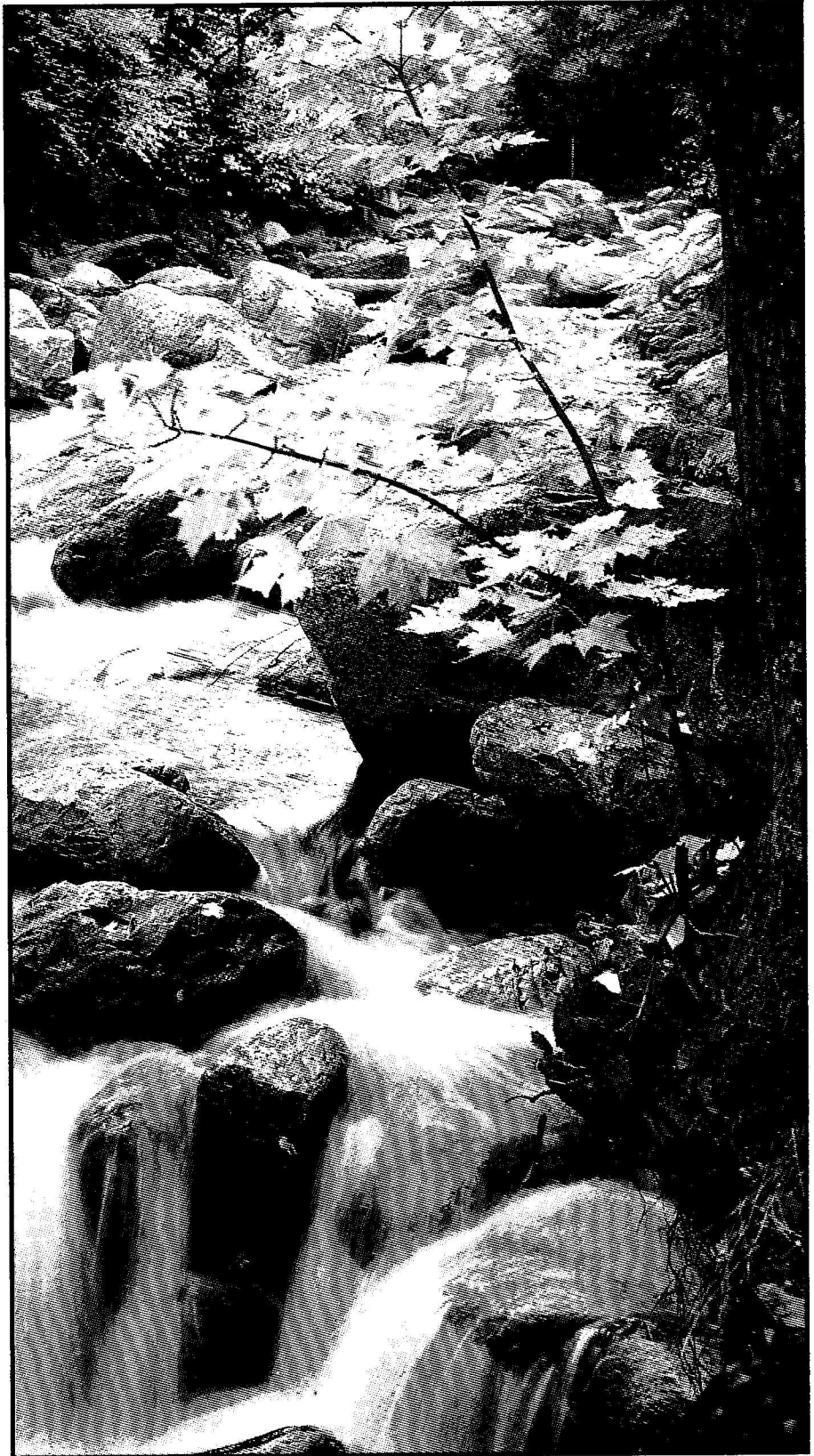
Desmond Ford

At the New Year, in light of the gospel, we need to look afresh at our life-style.

Sisyphus was the mythical king who worked in all seasons. The gods condemned him to ceaselessly roll a huge rock to the mountaintop whence it would fall back of its own weight and roll to the bottom again. Said Albert Camus, "The workman of today works every day of his life at the same tasks and his fate is no less absurd." Please note the words, "ceaselessly," and "every day".

They bring us to the relationship between work and seasons and the gospel. Have you ever thought about the connection between them? "Of course," you reply. "Everybody knows there's a buying spree at Christmas and many attend church. Then there's a reluctance to spend when taxes are due, and many pray the taxman won't get them." Please try again. Think of the connection between the activity of night and day, hibernation and springtime, what it once used to be on Sunday and the rest of the week.

Think of Alaska. Its winter season brings depression and increases the rate of suicide among women. If in Alaska there is a clear connection between human productivity and the seasons, maybe, to some extent, the principle works where you live also. In ancient Israel, an average



of four months a year were holidays (or holy days). Suicide and insanity were very rare indeed in old Israel.

The connection between business and seasons

Albert Speer, author of *Inside the Third Reich*, knew all about the connection between business and the seasons. Consider his comments as the tide of war turned against Hitler:

He [Hitler] continually flouted the old rule that the higher his position the more free time a man should have available. Formerly he had abided by this rule.

Overwork and isolation led to a peculiar state of petrification and rigour. He suffered from spells of mental torpor and was permanently caustic and irritable. Earlier, he had made decisions with almost sportive ease; now, he had to force them out of his exhausted brain.¹

When Hitler ignored the seasons, his work became mechanical and lacked creativity and skill. The higher echelons of modern business rarely make that mistake. Airlines have strict rules about the number of hours pilots are permitted to work. Few business magnates clutter their days. They are too interested in making quality decisions to permit attrition of their energies by minor matters.

John D Rockefeller took a half-hour nap every noon. General George C Marshall was so busy directing the US Army in World War II that he felt he had to rest at midday. Winston Churchill worked in bed till about 11.00am. After lunch he went to bed again for two hours.

American philosopher Lewis Mumford knew all about the relationship between business and seasons. Here are his words:

A routine of work which ignores the need for rhythms and change may lead to frustration, impairment of function and productive inefficiency.

He is saying the best way to undo is to overdo. All biography and all

history (as well as nature) supports him. So do most philosophers. Plato said:

If anyone gives too great power to anything, too large a sail for a vessel, too much food to the body, too much authority to the mind, and does not observe the mean, everything is overthrown, and in the wantonness of excess runs in the one case to disorder and in the other to injustice which is the child of excess.

Scholars who work the mind for more than six hours a day often run into what is now called "overload amnesia".

This is a permutation of the here today, gone today memory dysfunction that occurs more specifically as a response to overloading yourself with data. When overtaxed, your memory will not only release the data that you were trying to retain but also may arbitrarily purge other files as well. This is often experienced when trying to assimilate data when you cannot control the flow, such as in a classroom, conference or lecture. This is why, after listening to a particularly ponderous speech, not only can you not remember a thing the speaker said, but you forget where you parked your car, too.²

In Christian service, the need for living according to the gospel of righteousness by faith is often demonstrated. (The rest we have in trusting Christ's work alone is symbolised by the physical rest of the Sabbath.) Before Dwight L Moody understood that the efficacy of his work depended on God, he was making 200 house calls a day, yet achieving little. Only when Moody saw that, without God, sweat and toil are not necessarily productive, did the world come to hear him.

A universe of rhythm

The ancient Greeks argued as to whether permanence or change was

the reality of the universe. It was Parmenides versus Heraclitus. The reality is - rhythm. Both change and continuance. To ignore either is bad business.

Everything in the universe appears to be based on rhythm. Consider the cycles of the heavenly bodies. On our planet we mark day and night, the seasons, the tides, etc. Many body cells work in relays, while others rest. Only a portion of kidney nephrons are functioning at any given moment. They then rest while others go on shift. This is also true of the brain and other organs.

A nursing mother produces milk as the baby suckles at her breast. But when the infant rests, so do mother's breasts. Body temperature and blood pressure levels follow circadian rhythms. We think of the heart as constantly working, but the truth is it only works nine hours out of twenty-four (when beating a moderate rate). It rests a total of fifteen hours a day!

If we don't work seasonally, rhythmically, we soon won't work at all. The most effective business person is one who can say at the proper time, "As regards my daily business, I am closed for repairs."

The fourth commandment - to remember the Sabbath and to rest - epitomizes this vital principle. To violate it is to violate life itself. The first time the New Testament mentions the Sabbath it is connected with Christ's great invitation to come to him and rest (Mt 11:28-12:12). Physical rest, when linked with rest of heart, is an ordained sign of the gospel. (Read Hebrews 4 and you will find that the New Testament clearly teaches this.)

More examples of rhythm and rest

Jumbo jets are not always over the oceans. They are regularly at rest, being checked over. Aren't you glad? Are you of more or less value than an airplane?

Some years ago scientists experimented with a flock of sheep. The

sheep were given regular electric shocks until they manifested symptoms of nervous breakdown. Later, the same sheep were given the same shocks but with significant rest periods between each series of shocks. There were no breakdowns.

Often men and women working in factories break down from sheer boredom. If they don't break down, they break out in extravagant behaviour. The regular grind must be interrupted. We are made of the earth and must follow its ground rules.

The plea for rest

A great modern churchman saw the point clearly. When broken down in health – his lifework stopped – he wrote a special Christmas card to warn his friends.

Slow me down, Lord. Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tension of my nerves and muscles with the soothing magic of the singing streams that live in my memory. Help me to know the magical restorative power of sleep. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations, . . . of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to read a few lines from a good book. Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send my roots into the soil of Life's enduring values that I may grow towards the stars of my great destiny.

Personal experience

I was born with the temperament of a hyperthyroid squirrel. Everything has to be finished yesterday, and let not a minute escape unfilled. My Scottish ancestors on one side may have been covenanters. Certainly, they had their intense temperament.

I recall my paternal grandmother. She was born on the border between Scotland and England, and lived to 100 years of age. The recurring impression I had of her was one of congealed will and the energies of a

coiled spring. My dad inherited the same seriousness which I have also traced in the faded letters of his forebears.

With these excuses made, I acknowledge the overwhelming drive I have to get things done as close to the time of their commencement as possible. Graduate degrees were done posthaste. Technical books I have written – with extensive footnotes – have been written under pressure.

The research of decades was compiled in weeks. But one pays for such greediness of time. Tendencies to indigestion and insomnia appear. At times of extreme weariness, the glories of existence weariness, the glories of existence seem to lose their luminescence. The quality of decision-making is impaired. Worse still, innocent family members suffer, much as the land bears the marks of a recent tornado.

Strange. Obvious truths sometimes take half a century to get through to a resistant psyche.

Not animals nor gods

Many thoughtful analysts of the art of living have suggested that our first duty is to be a good animal. Every domestic cat knows the truth of what I am writing. Walt Whitman wrote:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd, . . . Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.³

Samuel Butler declared: "All the animals except man know that the principal business of life is to enjoy it."

On the other hand, Robert Browning was convinced "a man's reach should exceed his grasp." Some historians say that most people who have accomplished significant things have been at least slightly neurotic.

Perhaps we are to cherish what Plato called the "mean". We are to shun the grossness of animals, and also the incorporeality of the gods.

We are but men and women. Made in the image of the divine, we also bear the animal imprint of the earth. Therefore, we dare not violate the rhythms of our creation: rhythms of action and rest, surging and receding, involvement and detachment.

In tune with God's creation

Autumn leaves tell us all creation must pause for the work of recreation. The recurring evening twilight and the earth which lies fallow beneath the snow, echo the same truth. How is business for you? Have the phases of the moon, the alternation of the tides, and the cycle of the seasons, some counterpart in your diurnal course?

Look at your life-style. What does it teach others? Does it say, "I really believe the gospel of rest"? Or does it frantically teach, "I believe in righteousness by works"?

Step back and you will jump farther. Rest awhile and you will finish sooner. Be still and know. And grow.

Surely he was the wisest of all humans who invited us: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mk 6:31). □

Footnotes:

1. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p294.
 2. Richard Saul Wurman, *Los Angeles Times* magazine, January 22, 1989, p11.
 3. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself*, p32.
- (GNU, January 1990)

A Kaleidoscope of Diamonds

This new set of books by Desmond Ford is both a defense of the Christian faith and a devotional manual.

Volume 1 is structured so that a non-Christian may read it without prejudice and offers guidance for successfully encountering the problems of Christian life and witness in a skeptical world. 130 pages.

Volume 2 elaborates the marvellous pattern of the Calvary event. This volume also offers a strong defense for a rational Christian faith. 160 pages.

Vol 1 \$12, Vol 2 \$13, or both books \$23. Prices include package/postage within Australia.

THE AGONY OF DIVORCE

Divorce is a crisis . . . an open wound. *Debra Rowe* writes of her experience of the racking feelings of insecurity, rejection, failure, loneliness and guilt of a broken marriage and the discovery of her need for the Lord. Debra Rowe works with the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Australia. Debra is involved in a 'single-again' ministry known as the *Fresh Start* Divorce Recovery Seminars.

It was in June of 1970 that I awakened in the hospital bed and the uncontrollable crying began.

A nurse came running in to see if she could assist me in perhaps easing the pain, following the birth of my third child. In between sobs, I explained to her that these were tears of joy, of extreme happiness, "Because," as I informed the nurse, "I had everything I've ever hoped for since I was a child dreaming about my future life. I'm married to a wonderful husband who's an attorney with a successful law career ahead of him, I now have three beautiful, healthy children, I have a lovely home, two cars in the garage, you name it . . . yes, I have absolutely everything!" Certainly, 1970 was a very good year. I had it all, resulting in those tears of incredible joy!

It was only four short years later when that unbelievable announcement came from my husband that he simply wasn't happy any longer in our marriage. All he did know for sure was that he wanted out. He never intended to hurt me or the children but he simply didn't love me any longer and he felt that it would be best for all of us if he filed for a divorce. As far as he was concerned, the eleven-year marriage was over. It was only months later that I discovered that this person who knew me better than anyone else on earth was "trading me in" for his secretary. You only read about this sort of thing happening in women's magazines. It doesn't really happen, least of all to you.

Of course, I went through all of the "normal" stages following such a scenario. I first denied that this could be happening. "We have too much

invested in our marriage," I argued. "Our relationship is not that bad,



It occurs to Rev Billings in the middle of point 2 that point 3 misses the point entirely.

you can't really mean this, our love has brought three children into the world."

Anger came next which sometimes turned into rage and hatred so strong that it frightened both the children and me. Then I began the bargaining techniques, such as, "I'll change, I'll bleach my hair blonde, what if I devote more time to you, whatever it takes, just don't leave me." When I finally realised that my "what-if-ing" was not going to alter the situation, I dived head-first into depression. He was gone, the kids and I were alone and the future lost all of its significance to me.

Have you ever seen those photographs of Hiroshima after the bombing? Well, my insides must have surely resembled those photos. Everything that had once been stable in my life was now in shambles.

The feeling of rejection was overwhelming and my self-concept dropped to nothingness. All the

"props" on which I'd built my happiness and selfworth had been knocked out from under me. The pain was too intense to bear.

I recall those sleepless nights, sitting in the loungeroom in darkness, wishing I could somehow escape the reality and the pain of what was happening. Within a few months I found the escape.

One afternoon I glanced at the crystal decanter of brandy in the diningroom. The crystal had been a wedding gift and the brandy matched the colour of the wallpaper which gave a nice touch to the decor of the room. It occurred to me that a few sips of that brandy might help me relax and this would finally allow me to enjoy a decent night's sleep.

Not in my wildest imagination would I have dreamed that those few sips of brandy that night would be the beginning of twelve long years of escaping people, my negative emotions, the world and life around me as I consumed alcohol and drowned out relationships with people who, after all, would only hurt you anyway if you open up to them. The need for self-protection was paramount in my mind as was the avoidance of being hurt again.

The drinking increased as did my dependence and addiction to it, until it became all consuming. My children

when reaching their teenage years moved back to their father, proving to me once again that the more vulnerable you were, the more people hurt you and this did not exclude your own children. My daughter once wrote to me, "You have drunk yourself into a hole dug by your own hands and you don't even flinch at the rumble of the earth below or the tremble of the walls giving in around you." She was right. I was wallowing in self-pity, bitterness, and self-destruction and finally I came to admit it.

It was in September 1986 when I attended my first AA meeting and began to hear about God and prayer and church from some of the members who had a kind of hope and joy which I envied. They seemed to have a dependence on God and an acceptance of life which I hungered to understand.

I thought about going to church again but when I did attend several times shortly after my divorce, the sweet, hand-holding Christian couples sitting all around me only added salt to my wide-open wound of aloneness. But suddenly, my desire to live instead of just existing, allowed me to overlook this world of "twos".

I found myself sitting in church in incredible awe as I began to understand that there was a God who loved me with no strings attached and who accepted me even after all of my avoidance and abandonment of Him for so many years.

The story of His hanging on that cross for me and loving me as if I were the only one filled my eyes with tears once again. Yes, they were like those same tears I'd felt in 1970, tears of joy, tears of incredible serenity and tears of overwhelming gratitude to a God who now provides me with the only real security that can never be taken away. Yes, He is my all-sufficient One. He is my El Shaddai. □

Australian Presbyterian Life LIVING TODAY, May 1990

ABC of ministering to Divorcees

Practical suggestions how Christians can minister to the need of the divorced/single-again individual

- a** The pastor sets the tone for the church. If he is interested in the needs of the divorced within his congregation, the members will sense it and their concern and interest will be influenced by him.
- b** The session needs to meet with representatives of the divorced/singles within the congregation in order to be educated as to how the church is meeting their needs within the church body, how it feels to be a single in this church and how the divorced/singles can contribute to the church programs.
- c** The church can designate a "Singles Sunday" with emphasis on Biblical insights relative to being a single, the loneliness factor, invite your single friends, etc. Permit several singles/divorced to address the congregation, give testimony, etc.
- d** The church can offer an "Adopt a single" program within the church with the idea of a family/couple "adopting" someone within the congregation who is single. The role model of the Christian couple will be invaluable to the single who needs constant reminding (in this secular world). Additionally, the warmth extended to the single-again and children can serve to ease the loneliness for the adult and absence of father or mother for the children.
- e** Support groups organised by the church can aid the single again in realising that he/she is not alone, others who are going through the same experience understand, the stages involved in recovery are very normal, and the principle of people helping people aids in their respective recoveries.
- f** Yearly seminars/workshops for the divorced are also invaluable and can be sponsored/organised by the church. Again, people coming together with similar problems can learn together as they share their feelings and learn, most importantly, that they're not alone.
- g** Provide "whole" church experiences we well, that is, planning social outings, barbecues, Bible studies, etc where singles and marrieds can intermingle and mix and enjoy each other's fellowship.
- h** Organise, perhaps, one or two retreats a year, that is, weekend getaways, during which professional speakers can address the key issues of the divorce dilemma.
- i** Organise a list of trades people and others within the congregation who could assist the single in time of need or in an emergency, such as, plumbing, gardening, painting, carpentry, etc.
- j** Organise a once-a-week child-minding service for the single/divorced mother who has custody and 24-hour responsibility for her children.
- k** Provide counselling to assist those in need – at minimal cost.
- l** Include singles/divorced in all programs within the church, reminding them frequently of their importance and value to the congregation. □

MINISTRY TO SINGLE ADULTS: THE NEED

Robert W Burns, a minister in the Presbyterian church of America, is a member of the pastoral staff at Parimeter Presbyterian church, Atlanta. His doctoral studies at Westminster Theological Seminary was on the topic of singles ministries. Burns will join a number of other family and marriage counsellors and pastors to lecture on Divorce and Recovery in Australia. Bob is a co-founder of Fresh Start Ministries.

"The survival of the traditional family is perhaps the highest priority on the evangelical social agenda." So writes sociologist James Davison Hunter in his book "Evangelicalism, The Coming Generation".

Evangelicals are vitally concerned about the condition of the family – rightly so. From a biblical perspective, the family is the nucleus of the entire social system. Those who believe the Bible ought to be convinced of the central importance of the family.

However, while consistently affirming biblical values for the family, we must review our definition of what makes up a family unit. For years we have considered "the traditional family" as an intact (never divorced) couple with children, where dad goes to work and mum stays home. Yet this scenario accounts for little more than 8% of families. Other types – such as two-income families, single-parent families, step-families and childless couples – make up the majority.

Peter Morrison of the Rand Corporation's Population Research Centre in the US explains, "People think they are seeing more departures from the norm (in family life), but departures are now 75% of the norm." He continues: "Fewer and fewer families continue the traditional stereotypes. They are more diverse and less stable now than ever before. More children are born to unmarried mothers, and more childhood years are spent in fatherless families. Couples marry later and are quicker to divorce. Over half of the mothers with preschool-age children are now in the work force."

In facing these realities, the church ought to be doing everything possible to build and strengthen strong families. And if you scan the

shelves of the Christian bookshops, it is evident that the evangelical church is responding to this concern.

However, the church has often centred its efforts and resources on that small minority which we earlier defined as "the traditional family". We have assumed that this is our primary target. Yet if we are truly serious about reaching the unchurched we must not stick our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich while crying out "woe is me" over the condition of our society. Rather, we must maintain our commitment to biblical family values while we earnestly reach out to those who do not fit into our moulds. And a large segment of these family units that we are called to reach can be classified as "single adults".

The varied types of single adults

Singles do not fall into one large group. Today's single adult belongs to one of at least five different groups – each with its own subgroups with varying needs and concerns.

The never-married single – The never-married single comprises 56% of all single adults in our country. And they form nearly one-quarter (21.5%) of all single adults of the US population! The proportion of never-married men and women in their late twenties and thirties has more than doubled between 1970 and 1985. A large segment of this group is unchurched. Yet, when the never-married single is reached for Christ, she or he often commits more time and personal resources to ministry than a married counterpart.

The formerly married – It is well known today that about 50% of all first marriages end in divorce. It is less known that about 60% of all second marriages end in the same way. This group, forming 18% of the singles in our country, comes from all ages, backgrounds, vocations, incomes and values. Each is at a different stage of adjustment to

marriage loss. The formerly married often feel like they are in transition and are often uncertain about who they are and where they are going with their lives. They need support, encouragement and wisdom from experienced friends.

The separated – If the church is considered to be a hospital for the spiritual needs of its people, the separated desperately need the intensive care unit! Representing about 5% of all singles, the separated are caught up in ambivalence and uncertainty about the future. They are experiencing deep feelings of loss. They can have real guilt and/or intense anger about their marital situation. And they can feel very alone and alienated. The separated often consider themselves "the unclean" of the church – friends don't know what to say to them, and church leadership views them only in doctrinal terms. They desperately need care and counsel; yet they are the least likely to get it.

The widow and widower – Those who lose a spouse through death usually feel greater initial support from their extended church family (after all, death is a socially accepted means of singleness!). However, they are still very vulnerable and are often under great stress. They often repress their feelings and deal with their grief alone. They need long-term care, counselling, sensitive friends and support.

The single parent – Single parents can be found in each of the four categories which I have already outlined. In 1960, 9% of all families were single-parent groups. This rose to 13% in 1970, 22% in 1980 and was at 27% in 1987.

In a typical household there are three primary tasks which a parent fulfils: breadwinner, home-maker and parent. In "the intact family" most couples find it hard enough to juggle all three tasks between two persons. The single parent must do all three alone.

Dr Emily Visher, a leader in

blended-family and divorce research, estimates that 45% of the children born in the 1980s will have parents who divorce before they are eighteen. Furthermore, 35% of these children will live with a step-parent before the age of twelve.

The needs and concerns of single adults

In her research on the single adult identity, Carolyn Koons (Singles Ministry Handbook) has discerned five major struggles that seem to take precedence in the single adult lifestyle. The first of these is "being left out" or "not included" by couples because of their singleness. Single adults want to feel a part of the family and the church. They do not want to be isolated into "singles only" groups unless they choose to do so. They want to be respected for who they are and not judged or excluded on the basis of marital status.

The second area of struggle for singles is in the area of finances. This issue hinges on whether or not the single has children. If she or he is a custodial parent, the struggle is how to survive on a limited income. Single-parent women often find themselves having to re-enter the job market and live at a significantly lower economic level than they had before the divorce. Seventy-five percent of single-parent women fall in the poverty level category and are on welfare.

If the single is childless, the challenge is not to have a materialistic, self-centred, "now"-centred lifestyle. Learning how to become a proper steward is a critical need for the single adult. For both the single parent and those without children, good financial counsel is necessary.

Finding rewarding friendships is the third struggle for singles. Single adults (particularly those in the church) often face constant pressures to be paired off in opposite-sex relationships. Yet singles are looking

for honest, safe friendships where they can relax and be themselves without playing games.

The fourth area of struggle concerns children. We have already reviewed the problem of the custodial parent balancing work, parenting and housekeeping responsibilities – let alone having some time to form friendships and have a social life. The non-custodial parent faces the inability to daily invest in the lives of his or her children. While joint custody resolves these problems for some parents, the vast majority of non-custodial parents find themselves isolated from involvement with their children.

The fifth and final struggle outlined by Koons is the challenge singles face with their sexual frustrations and pressures. While it is interesting to note that singles list this below the other four struggles, they still have honest differences in this area! The large majority of Christian singles are very concerned that they control their sexual drive in a manner which is honouring to God. However, they need a support system where they can develop honest friendships and talk about these issues without embarrassment.

What can the church do for single adults?

First of all, the key to successfully reaching single adults is the attitude of the senior pastor. He must be aware of the needs and concerns of the singles in his church and community. Furthermore, he must review his own attitude toward singles and singleness. He will set the pace for the church.

Second, the pastor must value the potential for ministry to single adults. He is "the prime mover" in setting the goals and direction for the congregation. Even his use of illustrations and applications in a sermon reflects what he feels is important. He must take the initiative

to talk with and about singles, to motivate and recruit Christians to a ministry with singles and to assure proper resources allocation in this area.

Third, the session ought to carve out at least an hour in one meeting to talk about these needs (as well as other social issues in the community).

Fourth, the leadership of the church ought to be very sensitive to the level of caring and interpersonal community which is found in their congregation. Check out your atmosphere of acceptance. In *Habits of the Heart* Dr Robert Bellah pinpoints hyper-individualisation as a primary characteristic of our culture. Even in the church we reflect this individualisation by refusing to become involved in each other's lives.

However, the church must act as a responsible community. Singles must develop strong ties with others to remain mentally and emotionally healthy. There is no better place than the community of faith for this to happen. However, it will not occur by assuming that it does occur! We must plan for it and work at it.

Finally, honestly admit that ministry to singles in a small church will be different from that in a larger church. There is a place for both types of ministries in the economy of

God. The small church ought not be intimidated by the programs and numbers of the large church. Often maturing single-adult Christians prefer a smaller congregation where they can become integrally involved in the life of the entire congregation. As a pastor of a large singles ministry for five years, I encouraged many to stay in their smaller church while using our programs as a supplement.

Inter-church cooperation should also be considered by the presbytery. Could we combine our resources to provide a healthy program balance between the church and the larger geographical area? What if one church provided the small groups and a Sunday morning class while the presbytery provided larger, ministry-oriented social functions and occasional retreats?

Not every congregation will have single-adult ministry. But every church needs to minister to single adults. This begins by becoming aware of the singles in your church and your community. And as the church leadership commits itself to a biblical response to these needs, you might just find yourself with a whole new segment of enthusiastic believers involved with you in the life of your congregation. □

Australian Presbyterian Life LIVING TODAY, May 1990

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Several subscribers and supporters of *Good News Australia* have chosen to support GNCM's ministry by investing with GNCM Investments.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REDEEMED

Ron Allen

Nietzsche once bitterly accused Christians, saying, "You must look more redeemed to me if I am to believe in your redeemer." The story of the sinful woman and Simon the pharisee gives us some idea of what is characteristic of redeemed people (Lk 7:36-50). Although these two give us possible examples of the redeemed personality, only one, in fact, was redeemed.

The woman, who was a notorious sinner, had come into the room where Jesus was guest at a feast hosted by Simon. Approaching Jesus from behind she crouched at his feet and with tears kissed him repeatedly. She poured expensive perfume on him too. Her actions were excessive and nothing short of scandalous to the guests present.

We are incorrect if we think that the woman's tears sprang from sorrow and guilt. She had not appeared in Christ's presence for the purpose of obtaining his favour. Indeed no! She was there to give thanks. Her outlandish behaviour was generated by wild gratitude. Her tears were tears of joy.

Simon, who had invited Jesus to his feast, watched the amazing antics of the woman. "Jesus can't be a prophet," he thought. No prophet would allow this defiled woman to touch him. Simon could not understand the behaviour of Jesus or of the woman. Her extravagances were not to his liking. He knew decorum. He knew what was proper. He lived a life of sober rectitude. His religion led him in a path of intelligent enquiry in the Scriptures and scrupulous attention to their precepts. There was no need for him to behave so grossly. Such religious exuberance was uncalled for.

Simon also knew how God should behave. Jesus was not meeting his expectations. There were doubts in his mind about the carpenter's son.



He expected better from a representative of God and he expected better from the sinful woman. Because of Simon's expectations he was shut out of the joy the woman was experiencing. He was also excluded from the great mercy which was the cause of her exhilaration. The woman clung to Jesus. She had submitted her life to him for judgement and found only grace. Her thanksgiving was like that of a criminal who had just seen his death sentence torn up; like that of a prisoner whose chains had just been cut loose. She was not well schooled in religion. She knew little of dogma but she was filled with the excitement of one who had been in great

darkness and had now been brought into the light. She had seen the hand of deliverance.

I think that the behaviour of the sinful woman was the behaviour of a redeemed person. Simon was awfully correct – and thoroughly lost. But the woman was alive with passion. Her's was the joy of liberation. From henceforth her life would be a journey and a progress in that joy. Her progress would not be by reason of her moral advancement. But rather because Christians are increasingly forgiven. No one ever increases before God. Only God increases. The more we know of Christ the more he humbles us and our jubilation grows. □

LETTING SCRIPTURE SPEAK FOR ITSELF

In laying the groundwork in this introductory article for an inquiry as to how the individual can go about letting the Scripture speak for itself, it would be useful to briefly look at two considerations. The first of these is concerned with the importance as to why this practice should be encouraged. The second, with what underlies the implementation of such an undertaking.

Of all the bad habits a believer can acquire as he or she develops a sensitivity to Scripture, perhaps there is none so harmful, so fraught with danger as the one which depends on someone else to provide the understanding of what the Scripture is actually saying.

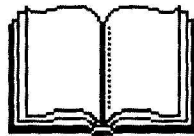
Now of course receiving direction in this matter, from a believer more mature than oneself, is to be commended. But the practice is only a means to an end and should never become an end in itself. It is a habit of dependence and often becomes tantamount to blind trust.

No matter how capable any believer or religious organisation may be, neither is infallible. For no matter how dedicated either may be, each is prone to the making of mistakes, with the possibility of even being at fault – perhaps seriously – given the limitations of the human factor.

This state of affairs has been well illustrated during the past two centuries in the call of certain religious groups to come and join them.

But unfortunately their claim that they stand by the Bible and the Bible only almost always means they stand by their own distinctive understanding of Scripture. Inevitably these distinctions separate one group from another. When this is added to

The first of a series



John Martin*

a group claiming to have some internal, human authority the distinctive understandings have their validity guaranteed for the group. It's little wonder then that such understandings become non-negotiable. Hence, honest enquiry, or let alone impartial, honest examination of Scripture is stymied.

How different is the testimony of Scripture which applauds the believers in Berea. Even though a Paul had passed their way and preached to them, they still searched the Scripture themselves, to see whether the things he had to say were indeed so. (see Acts 17:10-11).

To illustrate what has been discussed above a modern testimony is pertinent. Raymond Franz, although a respected scriptural writer working at the highest level of a large international organisation became aware that he'd fallen prey to a saying – which he thought he'd been protected against from accepting – which declares:

"The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie – deliberate, contrived and dishonest – but the myth – persistent, persuasive and unrealistic."

How did Franz resolve this dilemma concerning his "mythical" appreciation of Scripture? His reply to such a question is revealing.

"Letting the Scriptures speak for themselves – without being first funneled through some fallible

human agency as a "channel" – I found they became immensely more meaningful. I was frankly astonished at how much of their import I had been missing." (*Crisis of Conscience* p.224.)

Hence, the idea that a comprehensive understanding of Scripture is, in the first instance, a specialist's task is a mistaken one. The Bible was not written with this view in mind and if anything discourages the practice.

In this regard the Apostle John makes a particularly pertinent observation. His comment that "when the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13) is extended in a letter he wrote. A rather literal rendition of 1 John 2:27 would read something like this:

"And the anointing which you have received remains in you and you have no need that anyone should teach, but as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and as it taught you, stay in that anointing."

The critical question of course is; how does the guidance of the Spirit go about doing this teaching?

In the next article, this process will begin to be explored by indeed letting Scripture speak for itself. The manner in which the Spirit teaches the believer – through the intelligent reading of Scripture – is fascinating, even exciting. Among other things it is hoped the reader will appreciate the significance of current linguistic insights as to how meaning is conveyed in language – insights which for too long have been either ignored or misunderstood. □

John Martin teaches English in a Victorian school. He was trained as a minister and has since become a keen student of linguistics and text analysis.

RELIGIOUS NEWS

GNCM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Gold Coast, 10.00 am Sunday October 28, 1990.

All states except South Australia and Tasmania were represented at the meeting. In the financial report, the most significant aspect was the various economies which had been implemented.

Major new initiatives include a telephone service called Dial-A-Secure -Future which is being trialled on the Gold Coast. Another initiative is the production of video-tapes of meetings suitable for use for bible study groups, home fellowships or family use. A prototype of this was viewed by members.

New Chairman

Geoff Reilly who had served for two years as chairman stood down and was replaced by his predecessor Bruce Johanson from Horsham Victoria. Dennis Tedman of Kingscliff NSW was re-elected Treasurer.

The new Board was elected by a postal ballot. Phil Heydon of Sydney did not seek re-election. Neville McKenzie of Perth WA was elected along with the eight returning Board members. We regret that due to ill health Mrs Bonnie Stuart, despite being elected, was unable to take up her position on the Board.

GNCM BOARD MEETING

Gold Coast, October 27-28, 1990

GNCM's Mission Re-examined

After much discussion, the following was agreed upon: "GNCM is an organisation for publishing the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom of Grace.

It finds the supreme revelation of that Grace in the complete, unrepeatable act of God in Christ, by which persons are forgiven, justified and secured by the gift of eternal life. It endeavours to help people to live lives of meaning and fulfilment, based on the ethics of Christ's kingdom.

It recognizes the church of Christ in all its forms while seeking to be a useful resource to any local expression of a Christian body.

Congresses

Pr N McKenzie will accompany Dr D Ford in West Australia, South Australia and Victoria for the 1991 congresses.

Pr R Allen will accompany Dr D Ford in New South Wales and Queensland.

Next GNCM Board Meeting

To be held in six months' time.

1991 GNCM CONGRESS VENUES

Rockhampton	March 3	Melbourne	March 22-23
Brisbane	March 8-9	Adelaide	March 25
Sydney	March 19	Perth	March 29-30
Morissey	March 19	Auckland	April 5-7
Canberra	March 21		

NB We apologise for the omission of news re Melbourne and Adelaide in previous reporting.

POLITICIANS ATTACK CHURCH "FAT CATS"

Senator Tate accused the hierarchy of major churches of living in mansions at a time when their parishioners were in times of need. Both Anglican and Catholic archbishops quickly responded by stating that Senator Tate was out of touch if he really believed that such was the case.

CHURCHMAN BECOMES CHIEF OF SYDNEY'S 2GB

The Reverend Gordon Moyes, one of Australian Christianity's most visible personalities on both radio and television has become the Board Chairman of Sydney's AM talk-show format radio station 2GB.

The Rev Moyes forecasts no dramatic changes in format, but does suggest that his record of sound business management of other church-owned enterprises makes him a well qualified person for the position.

He has been on air at 2GB on Sunday evenings for well into two decades with his own Christian talk-show.

THEORY ON AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH

A previously distinguished American professor of literature is raising a storm with his theory that a woman was responsible for the earliest Bible stories and that she wrote them as a work of fiction.

Professor Harold Bloom of Yale and New York universities argues in a controversial new book, *The Book of J*, that in 1000 BC a woman wrote the stories that became the basis for the first five books of the Bible.

He says the writer, known only as J, was a sophisticated Israelite woman, probably a daughter or courtesan of King Solomon, who lived in Jerusalem 3000 years ago.

Several have denounced Bloom's theories. These include Richard Friedman, author of a book on biblical sources.

ODDS AND ENDS

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- Dr Walter Martin
- Francis McNabb
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- Dr William Shea
- Calvin Edwards
- Geoffrey Paxton
- Alan Crandall

Copies of the catalogue are available free of charge.

ANONYMOUS DONATIONS

GNCM gratefully acknowledges receipt of the following anonymous donations in October: \$10, \$100.

BECOME A GNCM MEMBER

If you are enthusiastic about what GNCM is doing you might like to become a member. Members are entitled to attend the Annual General Meeting and to participate in choosing a Board of Directors for GNCM.

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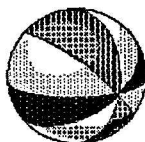
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PLAYTHINGS



Flora Mia

lace and ribbons. I had a jet black doll, dressed in red, with a red ribbon in her soft, curly hair. Her name was Topsy. As I grew, I, too switched to hobbies. Mine were various kinds of needlecraft.

My own children were born during the depression years and had to be content with lead soldiers, dinky toys and ragdolls. As times changed, so did our playthings.

I wonder what games Jesus chose to play with his four younger brothers—James, Joseph, Simon and Jude. (Mt 15:55). Perhaps father Joseph, in his carpenter shop, made bats and balls for them and later, bows and arrows and even sling-shots.

In the New Earth, it is likely that children will play with baby animals.

What about baby elephants, bear

cubs, joeys, young

shrews

and

armadilloes?

Fancy tumbling about in the water with baby otters, or having races on turtles' backs, or sliding down holy mountain on the back of an adder or better still flying high on the wings of an albatross. Don't you think that will be real fun? I do.

"The wolf shall dwell with the

lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them.

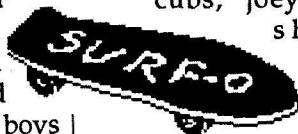
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be there and his servants shall see his face and his name shall be in their foreheads."

That is something to which we can look forward. Love the Lord Jesus, make him the Lord of your life and it's all yours. Promise! □



When I was a little girl my family lived in a house with a large front yard. I had three older brothers so I grew up to be a regular tomboy. We played football, hockey, cricket and badminton together. As the boys grew older and joined in school sports, at home they turned to hobbies such as stamp, coin and butterfly collecting.

I had dolls of all sorts. Many were exactly like the ones on sale today. Dolls with heads of china or plateglass, beautiful long hair, dresses and hats trimmed with pretty



GOOD NEWS

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