

# GOOD NEWS

## A U S T R A L I A

Solus Christus — Solo Scriptura — Sola Fide — Sola Gratia

No. 1 September '87

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## The Shepherd, the Cleaning Lady and the Fat Man

What is God like? A schoolboy once said: "God is a person who looks to see if anyone is having a bit of fun--so he can put a stop to it." A clever person once said: "I saw God last night: she's black."

When Jesus was a boy, he probably spent many hours screwing up his eyes thinking about what God is like; because when somebody asked him this question many years later, he was quick with his answers. God, according to Jesus, is like someone chasing stupid sheep. He is also like a cleaning lady who snoops around on her hands and knees in a dark room. And he is like a fatman running down the road.

### Sheep Chaser

Just imagine. Here is a sheep, wandering away from the rest of the flock to eat an extra bit of grass. Only a little bit of grass, mind you; but this animal is not very intelligent, and there is more grass just around the corner, and before he knows it--he's lost. And he is in the desert. And it's hot and dry in the desert, and sheep need lots of shade and lots of water, or they die very quickly. And what's more, there are wild dogs and lions in the desert who are hungry. But the shepherd of the sheep, says Jesus, left the ninety-nine other sheep in the wilderness to go after the one which was lost. And he found it. And he was so pleased that he called all his friends together for a party. In just a few hours, that stupid, dumb sheep had become the most important animal in the flock! He even got a free ride on the shepherd's shoulders.

### Cleaning Lady

Now let's look at Jesus' second story. Here is a lady with ten silver coins, and one of these coins, for some strange reason, decides to roll itself off the table, and it lands into a pile of dust behind the sofa. It must have been a dirty, dark old house, because the lady has to crawl round on her hands and knees with a brush. Afterwards, she cleans herself up and calls a party. All the neighbourhood hears about it. All because of one coin. Just one.

### Fat Man

Then Jesus talks about a rich man who has two sons. The father is probably a fat man, because rich people in Bible times loved to eat, and they liked to get fat because then people thought God was blessing them. The younger son gets bored, living with this rich, fat man, so one day he collects all the pocket money owing to him for many years to come and sets off to a distant country to have a bit of fun. And because he has lots of money, he makes lots of friends: lots of boy friends, lots of girl friends, and finally, (when he is out of money), lots of pig friends. Then he thinks: "This is ridiculous. My father's servants get a better deal than this. I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." So he says goodbye to the pigs and returns to his father. And when the rich, fat man sees the boy coming in the distance, he sprints down the road, throws out his arms and kisses him. Just like that.

## REFLECTIONS ON BALLINA CONGRESS

Why worship and how to worship? What are we prepared to give in developing a form of worship?

Robert Cooper's Saturday two-part presentation provoked and provided some answers. His initial assertion that "no worship is worse than no worship at all" startled some of us. He emphasised the importance of continued worship, even if it is only with a small group.

If we believe, then we worship. When belief dies so does our worship. Can belief be strengthened by expression of doubts? We agreed it could, and where better to do so than to a friend in a Fellowship group. In this context the meaning of Hebrews 10:25 . . . not neglecting to meet together . . . becomes more meaningful. Such close interaction can be difficult in the typical 'large church' worship situation.

The varied answers to "What do I value as the single most important part of worship" were generated by the 'buzz' of small discussion groups. (Robert noted that we all talked more freely within these groups than in public! Perhaps there is a pointer here for future Congress activities.)

The important point to emerge from the interchange was that for small group worship to be successful we must learn to accept each other for what we are. We can meet together on the basis of our all being forgiven sinners. Our interaction with one another should be regarded as a 'ministry'. Ron Allen noted earlier in the day that to be a Christian is to be a 'servant' (see 2 Corinthians 4:1).

Personal involvement and active participation, cultivation of a sensitivity to others' needs, ministry to one another by mutual encouragement, expression of doubt or belief, meditation, praise God in song and music and careful reading of the Word all go to making up the true STUFF of worship.

Jesus came 'not to be ministered to, but to minister'. If we accept our role as servants/ministers for Jesus' sake, then worship can become a precious, vital and spiritually rewarding experience.


DR JEFFREY T. WATTS.

Now of course, rich people are not supposed to be seen running. Only children and servants do things like that! Important people get around more slowly, with a little more dignity. Especially fat people. At high speed, they look funny. It is also rather dangerous. Then the son begins his little speech which he has practised in front of the pigs. But the rich, fat man is not the least bit interested in listening to the speech. Instead, he calls his servants and says: "Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." So they begin to celebrate.


Later in the day, the older brother who has been working in the field decides to come home for supper. On the way, he sees in the distance a campfire. He hears music, and he sees the father's servants, dancing around the fire with their tambourines. Seated near the fire, is the rich, fat man, surrounded by his rich, fat friends. And they are all looking so pleased. They are all smiling from ear to ear, and you can see nearly all of their teeth. All of these rich neighbours are slapping the old man on the back and chuckling to themselves, because, moving around amongst them is the younger brother who has come home. Then the older son looks down at his own dirty shoes from the field, and he notices that his brother is wearing a brand new pair of fancy sandals! He looks at his own dirty overalls, and then he sees that his younger brother is getting around in a dinner jacket! He looks at his own empty lunch box, and he notices that his brother is about to stab his fork into the fatted calf, which even rich people only eat on very important occasions. He looks at his own dirty hands, and then he sees the father's ring flashing on his brother's finger, just before he plunges that fork into the pot! And he says to himself: "It isn't fair. It simply isn't fair." And of course, he was quite right, wasn't he? It wasn't fair at all, was it?

And that is the point Jesus wishes to make. All of these stories are found in Luke chapter 15, and the reason Jesus told them is given in the opening verses. There we read: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them." Now, when Jesus heard this, he didn't try to defend himself, even for a moment. Instead, he simply replied: "You are quite right, Pharisees. That is exactly what I am doing. I am receiving sinners. And what's more, God does the same. He receives sinners too. He receives young sinners, and he also receives older sinners. He receives all sorts of sinners, gladly, the moment they realize they are lost. But not a moment before."

PAUL PORTER



"Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers."



3 John 2

# DOWN CAPERS No. 1

The Down family lived on 'the fringe of the wetlands.' Neil Down and his wife Peg Down had five sons. Their names were Satchmo or "Mo" Down, twins Ben Down and Bob Down, Stan Down and Mark Down. One was married to Ida Down - that was Stan, who had given up a promising career as a dodgem-car attendant in the city to marry Ida, a seamstress.

Neil Down was a prayerful old patriarch. Together with his wife they had been typical Aussie battlers for nearly fifty years. Hanging on the rusty gate of their farm was a battered board that read, "Down On Their Luck".

Mo Down, like his brother Stan, had spent some time in the city but returned to the farm with a legacy of militarism and strine. None of the sons, except perhaps Ben Down, could really be called hard workers. The youngest, Mark, appeared to be the most intelligent and was well versed in current affairs.

The whole family were prone to debate. Mark mentioned one morning at breakfast that the radio reported United States government officials were in trouble because they had sold guns to Iran to help pay the Contra rebels in Central America. That started a family dog-fight.

"They're only shooting Communists," Stan blurted into his cornflakes.

"Comhose! Aorta chop thredsov," shouted Mo, stabbing the air with an index finger and glaring cross-eyed at the floor.

Neil Down demanded they simmer down. "Communists or not, they're still human beings," they insisted. "If we shoot people just because they differ with our viewpoint it wouldn't be very Christian-like."

"But that's what Christians do, don't they?" said Mark with a smirk creeping around to his ear. "I've read how they speared thousands of Arabs during the Crusades, and burnt lots of reformers at the stake . . . and . . . well . . . they just seem to get rid of everyone out of their own churches too who disagree with them. Assassinating characters and shooting people with a gun is no different in principle, is it?"

"You have a point," his father answered, "Christians and Christlikeness are often poles apart."

"But Christians are supposed to eradicate evil in the world, aren't they," Mark challenged. "They're supposed to keep society pure."

"I'm not so sure about that," Peg Down chimed in, "but if it's true then surely the method is important. How could you be sure that everyone who gets killed in a war is immoral. Those bullets would be killing a lot of innocent people too. That's the trouble with any fracas, whether it be a divorce, or a church witch-hunt, or a world war - in all hostilities some innocents suffer. You can never justify shooting two people to rid the world of one immoral one. I say we ought to leave the judging and the purging to God. Vengeance is His. He will repay."

Roly-poly Ida Down agreed with her mother-in-law. "Yes," she said, "no-one's perfect. If you wanted to get rid of all the bad in society you would have to blow up everyone. I once heard a padre say we ought to throw out all bad apples to stop the entire box going rotten. The difference between orcharding and national, church, or personal clashes is that people are not apples. Even the worst people can change for the better, so why shoot them?"

"Oh, you women are so soft," sneered Bob Down.

"Yes," shouted his twin, Ben Down, "what's wrong with being radical? Let's shoot our troubles out of the way and then get on with living. Someone has to fire the bullets, even if it's just to protect our family . . . or the church . . . or the country."

"Now calm down," said Neil Down, "Wouldn't it be better to be in the business of changing people rather than shooting them. Christians don't belong on firing squads. Dialogue is what we need - perhaps years of it. We've been known to change cannibals. I'm sure we can change Communists too. That Oliver North chap may be very patriotic and believes he has good moral reasons for shooting Communists, or anyone else for that matter, but I don't agree with hard-nosed fundamentalism. Just because it's right wing doesn't make it right and doesn't make it Christian. Real Christians love their enemies. They don't shoot them. They don't even smear their reputations."

"I agree," chortled Ida Downs as she downed another mouthful of cornflakes, "Christians can be just as patriotic and truly moral by not supplying bullets to shoot Communists."

All goggle-eyed Mark gasped, "Brilliant, that's almost word for word what an American congressman said to Oliver North!"

ED'S



## Meet the Porters . . .

Paul and Desley grew up in Brisbane. They married in that city in 1970. Soon after, Paul studied theology at Avondale College, Cooranbong and graduated in 1976. He began post-graduate studies at the University of Hamburg and he concurrently worked as a Professor's research assistant.

Later, he pastored in Darmstadt (Germany) before resuming post-graduate studies firstly at Heidelberg University and later at Harvard.

After this broad background, Paul completed a doctorate at Uppsala University (Sweden). His thesis researched the origins and backgrounds of Apocalyptic imagery in Daniel 7 and 8. According to Andre La Coque, Professor of Old Testament, Chicago Theological Seminary.

"After this book, no-one interested in apocalyptic symbolism is allowed to ignore the breakthrough Porter made in the field."

After two and a half years of pastoring an independent congregation in Toronto, Canada, Paul returned to Australia where he has been an Associate Chaplain of Newington College, Sydney which is a Uniting Church Boys' School.

Desley Porter (nee Markwell) is a trained primary teacher who has taught in a wide variety of schools and educational systems. She graduated from Kelvin Grove CAE, Queensland in 1968. Currently she mixes relief teaching with being the devoted mother of Chris.

Chris is 85 centimetres of sparkling personality, boyish handsomeness and is the centre of Paul and Desley's devoted parenthood. Chris has a rich imagination and delights even the crustiest of adults.

We welcome the Porter family to their new responsibilities.

ROB COOPER



## From Small Beginnings . . .

**Good News Unlimited** magazine has been appreciated by thousands of readers world-wide for many years. Recently, Australian readers will have noticed the addition of **Good News Watch**. More recently, they will also have noticed the article by remarkable octogenarian, Flora Collett ("This Man Receives Sinners").

In future, **Good News Watch** will appear every second month. Articles such as Flora Collett's and those in this edition will become typical of **Good News Australia**. The current edition represents the small beginnings which by April, 1988 will become a regular 12 page edition.

To facilitate this aim, the **Good News Christian Ministries** Australian Board has appointed Dr Paul Porter to be the full-time editor of **Good News Australia**, **Good News Watch** and a new student magazine to be launched later in 1988. Robert Cooper, a House Master and English teacher at The Scots College, Sydney will jointly edit **Good News Australia**.

Dr Porter and his wife Desley and 3 year old son Chris will be centred in Canberra from January 1988. With God's blessing and the support of our readers we believe the overall ministry of **Good News Unlimited** will be both broadened and strengthened by these moves.