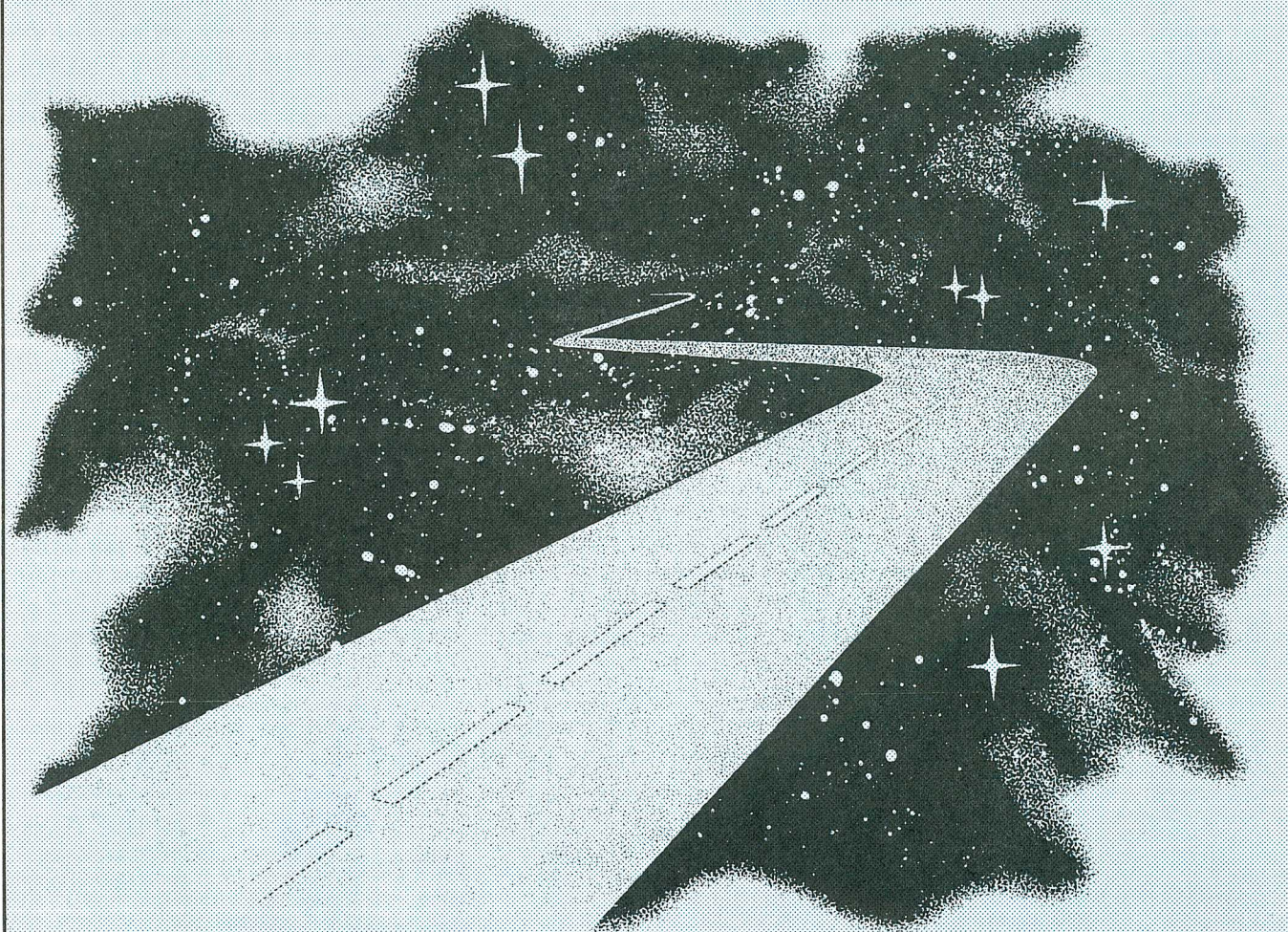


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Editorial

Modern living equates with increased stress for most persons.

Significant stress derives from being unemployed or living in the shadow of retrenchment. The 90s have seen an explosion in workaholicism as workers seek refuge in their jobs from external threats. Equally, they have taken from many the dignity and self-esteem that employment has traditionally provided.

Middle management has become an increasingly endangered species as Campbells attempts to swallow Arnotts which in turn had previously swallowed Swallows. Japanese companies hire Australians on the basis that middle and higher management is not open to them. Loyalty in the workplace is reverting to a master-servant basis, with little other than patronising demonstrations of loyalty extending downwards.

Stress also stretches into Australian's personal and group relationships. Decreasingly, is solace sought from congregations, or from church youth groups by the average Australian. Even sporting allegiances have lost their permanent sense of security. The team members who comprised your favourite football team this year, may well be the backbone of the opponent's next year, or even this year if the greed factor is strong enough. Even secret societies such as the Masons and Lodges are declining in numbers.

At the personal level, broken relationships have become a tragic norm. Homeless teenagers and adults are increasing. Nor is homelessness restricted to those from traditionally poorer families. Over 30% of the adult male residents of the Matthew Talbot Refuge in Sydney have a university degree. Teenage suicides among Australian males is the second highest rate in the world. The lucky country has either lost

it's luck or is suffering from dementia.

Are Christians exempt from such stresses? No, they are subjected to the same wicked forces and personal tragedies as others. As was Jesus. While on earth, Jesus suffered the stresses of disappointment in the betrayal of principle and friendship of key disciples. Later he felt the agony of feeling eternally separated from his Father culminating in both the spiritual and physical suffering of the crucifixion. From a human dimension, Jesus must have become frustrated by the spiritual stupidity of those he came to save. Engrossed in their own spiritual worlds, many contemporaries failed to discern the spiritual healing that Jesus offered to them.

We too are exposed to stress. However, we can be immune from one of life's most killing stresses – the stress of guilt. As Christians, we can know that we are accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ in the perfect antidote for the consequential self-doubt and personal unworthiness guilt produces. While recognising our limitations and weaknesses, we may move confidently into the value Christ placed upon us as demonstrated by his life, death and resurrection.

Not all external stresses will pass us by. However, just as Jesus derived comfort from communing with his Father at moments of high stress, so can we. Furthermore, in fellowship with fellow Christians, we can also align our lives with God's original plan for us. Spiritual harmony dilutes life's tensions. Absolute spiritual harmony is a deep reservoir of peace.

– Rob Cooper



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*How can you be over the hill when
you have not reached the top yet?*

CHANGE AND ETERNITY

by Wayne G. Pobke

A friend of mine recently celebrated his 28th birthday. That is to say, twenty-eight years and some two hundred plus months. This is perhaps a friendly way of speaking of someone whose age succeeds five decades. At the time of his birthday, I heard the saying 'over the hill' referred to. With his active lifestyle I am not at all sure what he means.

You have heard of this saying also when people of varying ages refer to themselves or others as being 'over the hill'. Mostly, people use this saying in a non-complimentary way, meaning that the best part of both the quantity and quality of life is over. However, rightly understood, the saying is nonsensical.

When I was a boy, I lived at one time in the Barossa Valley in South Australia. Outside our farmhouse was a large hill. I used to love riding a go-cart down this hill. The effort to get to the hilltop was demanding, but the long steep ride down the slope was always exhilarating. In this case, to get 'over the hill' and race down the slope was something much to be desired.

I once heard a fellow theology student at Bible College say that over the previous year his life had not changed all that much. As far as appearances go he was probably right, but life is not just appearances and it is constantly changing. Our bodies change continuously as we are subject to ongoing cell renewal and life-span development or

ageing. Our minds change continuously as we learn new things or change our appreciation of things. Even our spirituality changes as our relationship with God, others and the world changes.

Life is continuous change. Without change our lives would be limited to mundane reality and sameness. Change is excitement. Is it not the case that in life there are many hills that we climb? This always takes some effort and sometimes there are hard experiences as well. However, once 'over the hill' the ride down the other side is satisfying as life coasts along. This is how life is, so we might as well make the most of it. Here are some helpful hints from the creator of all life.

There are three dimensions of what may be regarded as the whole person. There is the physical body. Then there is intelligence which exists in every cell but reaches its apex in the mind, where intelligence may be communicated by language. Then there is the inner being or spirituality which contains the God qualities of life and love. The apostle Paul recognises these three dimensions and writes about them in Romans 7:22-23.

He writes of the inner being which is often referred to as the heart or spirit. This is that part of our being which becomes God directed when we accept Jesus as Lord of our life. Then Paul mentions the body. The body has its own agenda, needs and desires. The body is not changed when we become Christian, but some things we do to the body may change. The body stays itself, which includes being subject to the processes of getting older. Sometimes the body has its desires which are not particularly God directed. Many times Paul writes of the sins of the body. Finally, Paul mentions the mind which is where the real Christian warfare takes place.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul again refers to the body and the mind.

The body, he says, needs to be presented to God as part of our spiritual worship. With God the body is very important. It is not just a vessel to house the spiritual being, as it is often thought of by many Christians, and thus, not regarded as very important. The body is important and it requires the application of positive attitudes and a healthy lifestyle to look after it well.

Next, Paul refers to the mind. If you want to change the way you live you need to change your mind. It is okay to change your mind. It is easy to be a conformist. You just go along with the flow — you do not even have to think about it. Significant changes for the better, either in a society or on a personal level, come from non conformity otherwise the status quo remains. There is much to be said for an individual in relationship with God who stands up for what is right and good.

We see then, that the body has its own needs and desires. Our spiritual being may sometimes indicate a different course. Thus, unless the mind is directed toward what is right you may end up doing things that you do not want to. Logically, you may know that to do such things is stupid, but you go ahead and do them anyway. Drug addiction, alcoholism, over eating and smoking are particular examples of this type of behaviour. But, when the mind is God-directed it becomes a power to change the entire life.

The mind is like a fertile field — what you grow there is what you are. Computer people speak of 'gigo' (garbage in, garbage out). A lot of people enjoy watching TV programs like *Neighbours*, *E Street*, *Home and Away*, or *Chances* which suggest that unless you are regularly changing your boyfriend or girlfriend every few weeks your life is not very exciting. Or some people surround themselves with negative people and end up being negative themselves. The mind is an active

process, so what you plant there is what you get.

Should the mind be directed only to God and good, then 'gigo' becomes 'God in, God out', that is, God manifest in one's life, or 'good in, good out'. Only by such control of the mind can the entire life come into God-centred living. How do great people become great? It is not by accident or chance. It is by what they think about. All thought is creative and powerful. Through thought one can change one's life,

Sow a thought, reap a habit;

Sow a habit, reap a lifestyle;

Sow a lifestyle, reap a destiny.

These thoughts are brought out by Paul in Romans 8:5-6 where he says the mind is the key ingredient to how the life proceeds. Only the mind that is God-directed can result in the whole person having abundant life and real peace. It is not God that changes our lives by zapping us with some kind of spiritual magic, it is us. We do the changing. We do the changing through our minds as we have free choice as to how we operate our minds. We direct our minds and through our minds direct our lives. God has given us a mind and it is up to us what we do with it. Unless you change your mind you do not change your life. This is a timeless reality.

Let us take two examples where our thinking about eternity and ageing can change our entire perspective on life. What we think about in regard to eternity and ageing will determine what part of the hill we are on.

In what I think was Jesus' favourite book we read, 'Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God' (Isa 40:28 NIV). The Lord God is eternal. He is without beginning. He is without end. He is without limit. He is without time. God is always there. This is what eternity means. Eternity is not time. It is quality. Eternity is greatness. It is goodness.

The Bible says heaven and earth

will pass away (Rev 21:1). The things that are seen are temporal. It is best that we do not put too much value on such things. Yet, how many Christians put the main focus of their life and behaviour on material things? When I was a youth the main talk of my church peers was on cars — the latest model, technical details and so on. Very few people care less about such cars now. Much of which they spoke about is completely irrelevant or forgotten. How many people remember the Zeta, or that three-wheeled car? Such material things are just not worth the effort. Sorry all you car buffs, but you get the meaning don't you? On the other hand, the things not seen, the spiritual things, like the love of God, they are eternal. There is no beginning nor end to such things.

It is an exciting notion to realise that we humans were created to be eternal. The Bible, and Jesus specifically, promises that if we believe in him (which does not mean believe about him, but to fully trust him and accept him as Lord of our life) we have eternal life. In this connection please note the exact words of John 3:36. 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.'

Do not miss this. Jesus says that anyone who dares to really believe in him has eternal life. Not will have, not if, not but, not maybe, but has. It is a sure thing. More than that, it is a promise that comes backed by all the power, life, and energy of a risen and living God. The Bible promises that if we accept Jesus we enter into eternal life.

Refresh yourself by reading the story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the grave (John 11). When Jesus tells the sister of Lazarus that Lazarus will rise from the dead, Martha says, 'I know that in the resurrection that he will do so.' A positive comment, but being more positive still Jesus adds, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in

me will live . . . and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (John 11:25, 26 NIV). God created you to live.

Humans are not created to exist for a mere day. Humans, even non-Christians, widely believe in eternal life. All sorts of ideas abound among humans and through the annals of human history about an afterlife. Where does such a widely held notion come from? It is a God-quality that deep within us exists this notion that we exist for eternity.

Think of a wonderful day that you have had. Perhaps you went to the beach. The sun was warm on your skin. A gentle breeze caressed your face, wellness pulsed throughout your entire being. A wonderful day! Perhaps you went for a picnic at the lake or forest. The birds of the bush sang their songs. The ants and the flies kept their distance. It was a wonderful day! Perhaps you remember a time you spent with a special man or lady friend. Time just rushed by, yet you were not aware of it. You have had a couple of days like that in your life haven't you? Remember them, because eternity is better than your best days and it runs all the time. God still has wonderful gifts for us to unwrap. If we allow our mind to get hold of the idea of eternity, how might it affect our life? One way will be in our attitude to ageing.

When our mind gets hold of the idea of eternity then getting older will be no big deal. We can give ourselves permission to get older, getting older is the natural order of things. It is okay to get older.

In the scheme of eternity it does not matter whether we are 28 and 200 months, or 28 and 800 months. Jesus' promise of life removes the fear of ageing and death for the Christian. Death is only a staging post in eternity.

Proverbs 31 speaks of the virtuous woman who laughs as she gets older. Sure the edge and vitality of youth goes off the body,

but inside she is getting wiser and stronger. Which is more important?

You cannot fight age, so you may as well enjoy it. Look at that! Another grey hair — praise God! Grey is 'in' at the moment. Did you know that? Look at the popularity of Paul Newman or Sean Connery. In one's mind one can enjoy oneself and life, whatever one's age.

Much of western society has developed a bad attitude to ageing. To be old is to be not wanted. Society is much poorer for ignoring the contributions and wisdom of its elders. People then go out and fight getting older. They think they had better get hormone therapy, the skin caught up here or tucked there, have a face job, get transplanted hair, replace some old organs, or get the fat sucked out of you. Because to look old, so the attitude goes, means that you are worth nothing. Without youth and beauty what good are you? You have to look good enough to get on the cover of Vogue or Cosmopolitan. I am being cynical to emphasis the point that if you are not looking twenty-eight all the time it is fine. Youth and beauty are overrated.

Allow yourself to age gracefully. Know that your life is getting better and better as the learning curve of your mind and spiritual being blows out further into eternity. Jesus challenges us with his promise of John 3:36 to be eternity-minded. Claim eternity. Give God your life now and for eternity. God's promise to you is: 'Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you' (Isa 46:4 NIV).

Your life can never be over the hill when you have not reached the top yet. And eternity is that hill where you are never at the top looking down into the valley of despair. Eternity lifts our eyes towards unending greatness and goodness — always! ♦

Seeing the Unseen

by Eva Paul

I'm not good at mental gymnastics so it is confusing to be told I am to 'fix my eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.'

Surely if God gave me eyes, He gave them to me to fix on the visible!

This injunction in Second Corinthians is mad. It is the ultimate in mental gymnastics. It is the ultimate in contradictions.

Having once been threatened with blindness, I am conscious of sight, then along comes this absurdity, this patronising nonsense, and from Paul of all disciples — Paul, who ought to have known better after his own brush with blindness.

Sight is precious, and the things I look at are precious. I recall talking with an interior decorator about choosing colours. He said 'Go and look into a flower. Whatever colours you see blended in it are in perfect harmony. Look at them. Then feel confident in applying a proportionate mix.'

Here was a man of the world pointing to me the perfect balance of creation, to the One who knew how to use a paint-box. Always since that brief encounter I have looked at flowers. They grow more lovely by the year, I am constantly excited by them. Every tiny weed-flower, like red and blue speedwell and hare's foot clover, fills me with a sense of wonder. They also fill me with awe and the thought of God.

Sorry, but I fix my eyes on the visible: the running creek, the rocks, the grapevine by the fence; the new tree at the bottom of the hill. And the flowers — always the flowers.

Isn't it odd — Jesus was the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley, and he said of himself, I am the vine — the water — the rock.

Maybe that is what he meant: look at my creation long enough and hard enough and you won't see it, you'll see Me. You'll see the unseen by looking at the seen. Which is exactly what Paul was talking about!❖

CHURCH Officials

by Ron Allen

Only two church officials are named in the New Testament. They are overseers and deacons. (See 1 Tim 3). The specific nature of these two offices is nowhere delineated. However, it is clear that overseers did function as leaders and carers among the church membership. It was required that they be examples to the flock (Phil 3:17). They were to protect the church from its spiritual enemies (Acts 20:29-31). They were to feed the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2). They visited the needy (James 1:17). Deacons had similar tasks though it appears they were subsidiary to overseers.

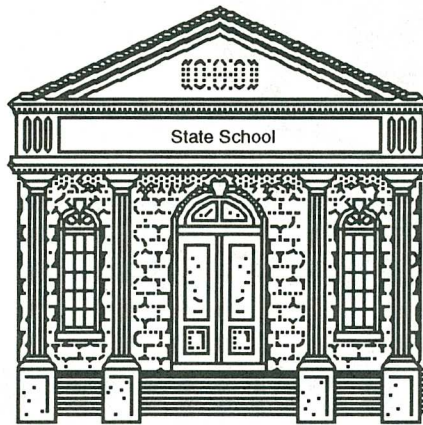
When the apostles went on their evangelistic travels they established churches and appointed overseers (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23). But the time of designation to office by apostolic authority has long past and now the church itself must choose prayerfully from its ranks, those who it would have as leaders. In the late 20th century the church will do well if it adheres to the New Testament precedent of very few officers. It will be important to remember that 'office' and 'gift' were not the same thing in the early church. A deacon like Stephen might preach, not because he was a deacon but because he had the gift of preaching (Acts 7). An overseer might labour in teaching, not for the reason that he was an overseer but because he was so gifted by Christ (1 Tim 5:17). In far too many modern churches, much weight has been given to office. This has hindered the spontaneous activity of the Spirit of Jesus who gives all manner of gifts to the most unlikely people. Church order in the New Testament is remarkably simple. It is arranged on the principle that all Christians are by definition ministers of Christ.

'Each should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms' (1 Peter 4:10).

The proper church order has Christ by his Spirit in supreme authority and Scripture as the all-sufficient guide. The best congregations have overseers under Christ and the rest of the members free to exercise their gifts, whatever they might be. In this matter, smaller fellowships, such as those that meet in a home, are superior. Unlike large congregations, pragmatism does not oblige them to appoint so many of their number to offices which are stereotypical and which therefore often prohibit those who hold them from the liberty of functioning according to the gift Christ has granted. Another advantage of the small household church is that responsibilities of office within the fellowship do not crowd out the use of spiritual gifts in the community at large. The gifts of the Spirit do function to the edification of the church but such edifying does not mean that the gifts are to be exercised only within the family of believers.❖

STATE SCHOOLS ARE GOD'S SCHOOLS TOO

by Theo Fishwick



When a Christian minister comes to a new place, he must sit down and consider these questions: 'How shall I best demonstrate Christ in this community? How shall I involve myself in the life of the community?'

There is no doubt that in our Australian society, the state school is the most important social institution that there is. Here, people of every race, religion, political persuasion and social status send their children to receive a 'good education'. They may not agree on issues of race, religion, politics or social priorities but they do agree on one thing – there is something very valuable about an institution that unites ordinary and extraordinary Australians, rich and poor, black and white, atheist and believer in the common task of providing a 'good education' for their children.

There is so much in our society that divides us. There is so much that polarises us into defensive stances and stained glass fox-holes, that when I sit down to teach Christian Religious Education (CRE) in my local state primary school, I thank God for this miracle of diversity and unity.

Here is one of the few remaining institutions in our society where very different people; parents, students and teachers, work together in remarkable harmony for

a common purpose. Here, my children (three at present) are exposed to the task of cooperating with and sometimes 'putting up' with classmates who have vastly different values. Here they are exposed to world views which are radically different from those of their Christian parents. Here they find out whether the faith that they have inherited from their parents has answers to the hard questions of life, and the hard people of life. Christ really does draw their friends to Himself through their witness.

If it was Luther who said that 'the whole of life is a sacrament', then Calvin would say: 'this community is God's community'. We too quickly forget this biblical perspective on society. We too easily surrender the world to the Devil. Surely, if '... there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God' (Romans 13:1), then the Ministry of Education is God's Ministry of Education, and state schools are therefore also God's schools. The apostle adds with a touch of humour 'because of this you also pay taxes!' (Romans 13:6)

When I walk down the street in Eltham (where I work and live)

these days I almost never get to where I'm going without being greeted by one or two familiar faces between 8 and 15. 'G'day

Mr Fishwick' they shout with considerable enthusiasm. I, for my part, am never quite sure whether to be pleased or embarrassed. These are some of the many children that I have taught in the CRE classes in local state schools over the past six years in Eltham. I know a lot of their parents too, through involvement in various school activities and rosters. Last January we ran a camp for primary school children aimed mostly at the kids whom we knew would be unlikely to get any sort of holiday anyway.

If ever there was a time for Christians to be involved in the state school system, now is most certainly such a time. Jesus said that his Father had sent him '... to preach the gospel to the poor.' (Luke 4:18)

Where are the poor? Where are the fatherless? Where is a call to excellence most needed in our communities? Where are the best opportunities to set forth the love and compassion of Christ? I can't think of a better place than the schools where my children go: the local state primary school. ♦

Theo and wife Lyn have five children. Theo has been the minister of Eltham Presbyterian Church (Vic) since 1986. From APL Today, July 1992



*Being well loved
is the best return
for loving well*

THE ART OF PARENTING *Teenagers*

by George Tichy, MS

To focus on the 'Adolescent' theme is to focus on a very worthwhile subject. Probably no other season of life is so crucial, delicate, and even disturbing as adolescence. It is crucial because the greatest and most important decisions of life are usually made at this time. It is delicate because teenagers are often highly vulnerable, unstable and unpredictable in their psychoemotional responses when facing new situations. It is a disturbing period of life because there are several changes occurring during these years, which completely transform the individual's inner and outer structure – physical, emotional, biochemical, and psychological.

Although parenting is an exciting experience, it is not an easy task at all. It requires knowledge, maturity, wisdom, patience, lots of time, dedication, understanding, and a high dosage of true love – attributes rarely found in homes where parents are too busy to cultivate them.

This series of topics on 'Parenting Adolescents' will focus on the most important aspects of this relationship between parents and their children. Several basic principles of human behaviour will be discussed and great improvement may be achieved through their diligent use on a daily

basis at home. However, to be successful, parents have to dedicate themselves very seriously to the task of parenting.

Several important areas to be covered include: psychological maturity as a human process of individual development; moral education and how it occurs during adolescence; the difference between adolescence and abnormality; adolescents' most common fears and tears; personal adjustment; social and family pressures; main expectations; difficulties in open communication with parents/adults; psychoemotional stress; etc.

By deciding to have children, a couple takes on one of the biggest responsibilities in life. Even when children come 'accidentally', there is still a parental responsibility for meeting their needs. If they are really concerned about raising their children to be responsible citizens and good Christians, parents must create the right conditions for adequate development of their children. Indeed, this is a matter that will affect their future — a few years ahead as well as Eternity!

Social problems in our world are increasing at an astonishing 'crescendo' rate. No wonder! Consider the failure of two basic institutions:

1. The Church is failing in its main mission of

preaching the gospel openly, widely, and loudly to all the world.

2. The Family collapses at its most fundamental level when couples divorce or don't spend the necessary energy, time and efforts on behalf of their children and family as a whole.

Many couples are so involved in their current worldly affairs that they do not understand the issues I am addressing. Others clearly understand the meaning of the message, but don't have the necessary enthusiasm about the issue; they are concerned about it, but are not strong enough to make big changes in their life. Still others are highly committed to the welfare of their loved ones. They are constantly looking for new perspectives so that their homes can be built on more solid foundations — no matter what the price or the personal sacrifice.

Parents know to which group they belong. They know what their real priorities have been. They know how committed they have been to their loved ones through the years. Most of them know where they fail most and where they need to improve. Thus, the conclusion is that people have been making their own choices all the time, and will receive back only what they have planted through the years.

Human development

Human development is a complex process. It is important to know at least some basic principles about this process, so that we can understand each other better. Life can be happier if we know what is really happening in someone else's life, if we understand the reasons for different behaviours.

One fundamental concept in Psychology, when we try to understand human development, is called Maturation. This is the first aspect we need to learn if we want to improve our ability of understanding others, and then

accepting them.

Now, let us transfer the concept above to the relationship between adults and adolescents. One of the most fundamental needs of adolescents is to be understood; every adolescent is begging to be understood. How frequently adults simply ignore them just because they (the adults) don't know some of the basic principles of human development, of maturation during adolescence.

Studies in Psychology have demonstrated that there are specific stages occurring during the development of an individual. Although they can vary in their duration and intensity, not one of them is ever skipped. It's known that adolescence is a very clear stage of human development. Unfortunately, too few people are interested in knowing the main characteristics of this period of life. Frequently parents, as well as teachers, ignore the anxieties, fears, frustrations, and changes that adolescents are going through. We could do our parental jobs better if we only dedicated more time for learning who our adolescents are and how they are developing and maturing.

Development is a process where everything from the past is combined with the present. It is not an addition of elements; it is an interaction between the old and the new ones. As a result, comes a new personal identity, a new individual organisation.

Another important aspect of human development is the interaction between the genetic factors and the psychological elements generated by the environmental pressures on the person. Don't forget these two forces, the genetic and the environmental, when you judge or evaluate someone else's behaviour.

Character development

Behavioural scientists are interested in studying how character components develop, which is not an easy task, since there are not as

many measurable elements as are necessary for a precise and objective study.

Researchers (for instance, Peck and Havighurst) have found that the typical motives and actions of a ten year old usually persist throughout his adolescent years. The chief aspects of morality tend to remain the same through the years. This is the reason it is so important that parents learn the basic principles of character development so they can take the right educational steps during their children's early childhood. Trying to make changes during the teen years is practically ineffective as far as changing attitudes, because at this age character is not easily altered. What is planted during early childhood will remain as distinctive characteristics of each individual.

Several important considerations are related to these scientific findings, especially for parents who have young kids under four years old, or for those who are planning to have them. There is still time for acting correctly on behalf of their children's education and moral development. But by the age of three or four years, all the basic components of personality, character and moral values have been established, and from then on there is almost no hope for major changes. The first years are the most important of an individual's whole life!

Therefore, when one considers the matter of 'educating adolescents', the first step is to start learning about early childhood. It is too late to start educating a human being when he/she is a teenager. Unfortunately, many parents realise this truth only when they can do nothing on behalf of their children; it is too late.

Educating children is not an easy task, nor a simple duty. It requires knowledge, dedication and expertise. We are fortunate in our day because we have several good resources, such as books, surveys, statistics — all of them provide

plenty of information that can help in raising children. Only successful parents will take advantage of all these helpful tools, using them while their children are still very young. Successful teaching doesn't happen by chance; it results from wisdom and expertise.

Personal adjustment

Nobody likes the idea of having maladjusted persons around — much less at home! The fact is that we don't feel comfortable when there is someone in our family who society considers a poorly adjusted person. We would feel much more secure if we knew for sure that nobody in our family would ever be affected by some personality disorder.

Parents sometimes panic when their children reach the teenage years, previously having dealt with sweet and emotionally stable kids during the early years. Then, parents are suddenly faced with some strange behaviours in their usually normal children. For some couples it is a troublesome time and they don't know how to deal with these new behaviours. If you have teenagers at home, I am sure that you understand very well what I'm talking about.

Parents highly concerned (or even scared) about these changes occurring in their children can relax. It is absolutely normal at this age. What I initially stated does not mean that adolescence is synonymous with maladjustment. The real fact is that during these unique years individuals are going through a period of transition which is very complicated and often turbulent for them as well as for their parents.

What is actually happening during this period of life? Well, what may currently be considered as a poor adjustment is in fact a process of adjustment, although misinformed parents don't understand what is going on and think that something is wrong with their children's life.

During adolescence a person is changing physically, psychologically, and emotionally; the changes are so drastic and dramatic that the individual is rarely able to keep total control of himself. Adolescents need help from adults, especially their parents. They need understanding, tolerance, empathy, and trust.

What teenagers usually need most is what their parents usually cannot give them — because by this time parents are so disturbed by the whole situation that they don't know how to help them. However, parents (or future parents) have the responsibility of learning beforehand whatever is necessary for being of help when the time of need comes.

Adolescence and normality

How 'normal' is it to be an adolescent? Parents are sometimes so puzzled with their adolescent's behaviour that they even question whether or not their children are normal. They are relieved, however, when talking to friends who have children of the same age, as they realise that all parents struggle with the same dilemma.

Behavioural scientists have tried to define what is and what is not normal behaviour. There are three current points of view about this matter:

1. Abnormality differs in nature from normality;
2. Abnormality differs from normality only in intensity;
3. Abnormality differs from normality in quality as well as in quantity.

In my opinion, all three of these concepts are valid depending on the kind of behaviour, and the adolescent's peculiar behaviour is to be included in the second concept — frequency and intensity being the factors that make the difference.

Other aspects included by scientists as part of normal behaviour are:

1. The inner integration of the basic components of person-

ality.

2. The concept of maturity (behaviour according to chronological age).
3. Ability for controlling interpersonal relationships; etc.

Human development occurs in stages, one of which is adolescence; and the way to know whether a behaviour is normal or not is to verify if it fits with the particular stage that the individual is in. We cannot compare adult behaviour with adolescent behaviour, then saying that the adolescent behaviour is inadequate or unacceptable. Consider all the physical and psychological changes taking place during adolescence. We have to understand that behaviour will be affected by those fast-changing elements, therefore different from adult behaviour which is 'stable'.

It is not usually easy for parents to understand and accept their adolescent's 'different' behaviour most of the time because of their lack of knowledge concerning the deep changes during the teen years. Parents of pre-adolescents and adolescents need to be reading and learning about what is going to happen in their children's physical and emotional life. Good relationship during this period depends on the parents' understanding of the whole process, knowing what the adolescent's needs are and how to provide for their emotional stability. An individual's future is being established, and parents have the opportunity of contributing in the process — hopefully with positive influences!

Emotional instability

Have you seen a teenager suddenly crying, apparently for no reason? Maybe you have seen him/her suddenly depressed lying on a bed, being present physically while their spirit seems to be on another planet. Parents who have teenagers will recognise these symptoms.

Such behaviours may cause

parents to suppose that something is wrong with their 'child'. Well, usually nothing is really wrong, the parents just don't understand what is going on inside of the individual who is leaving childhood and entering adulthood. I am not saying that there are no disturbances; I say that to be somewhat disturbed and emotionally unstable at this age is normal, and to be expected.

Why is it normal? Because it is not an individual's choice — it comes as a result of several dynamic changes occurring in the body at this age, combined with other social pressures and expectations of peer groups. Medical and psychological studies establish the relation between emotions and glandular functioning. When the glands increase (or modify) their activity, an immediate change of humour and emotional behaviour is noted; for instance: melancholy, aggression, uncontrolled appetite, nervous habits, various escape mechanisms and even some violent emotional explosions. Bigger physical changes tend to produce more serious emotional disturbances and unbalanced reactions.

There are some social aspects that generate increased emotional tension and even stress, such as: adjustments to new environments; social expectations of more mature behaviour; unrealistic aspirations and dreams; adjustment to the opposite sex; problems at school; vocational uncertainty; obstacles for doing what is wanted; unpleasant or unfavourable relationships at home; parental lack of understanding; etc.

Emotional instability is actually a phenomenon that can manifest itself at any age; it comes whenever certain conditions are present that can initiate the process. The fact is that during adolescence these conditions are more likely to occur with greater strength — causing a greater impact than when they happen to 'balanced, self-controlled, and disciplined'

adults! Parents, teachers, ministers — educators in general — have to be very careful when dealing with teenagers, because they are going through a very sensitive period of their lives, and a wrong attitude can cause serious personality damage — sometimes for life.

Unconditional acceptance

One of the most basic needs of human beings is acceptance. Everyone gets very disturbed and upset when rejected by someone else. Rejection is a painful experience. You know what I am saying, because you certainly have had this experience in your own life.

Maybe you were still a child when some peer rejected you by saying, 'I am not your friend any more'. Or during your adolescence, when your parent said, 'I cannot understand why you behave so strangely'. Or when your boyfriend or girlfriend told you that, 'I thought that I loved you, but I really don't'. Or even later, after some years of being married, when your spouse let you know that 'I've found someone else more interesting than you'. All these cases are strong and frequent examples of rejection — and how painful they are!

Rejection is always negative and leaves deep emotional and psychological scars. This is especially true during adolescence when the individual is going through a series of internal changes, emotional and physical, being highly susceptible to any feeling of rejection. Parents need to understand that unconditional acceptance of their children is a fundamental element of a long, lasting relationship. If you don't accept them now as they are, they probably will not accept you later; prepare to be rejected!

For developing an attitude of acceptance, first of all, it is necessary to understand that our children are not copies of us. They are individuals, usually completely different from us. Although they received their genetic bag-

age from us, they are not miniatures of us. As such, they don't think and act as we do. Usually moved by our own limitations and selfishness, we want them to develop the same system of values as ours, but this is a mistake that can cost us dearly in the near future. They are different people and so they feel, think, and act differently. We have to accept this in order to keep the relationship alive. Their individuality is as important to them as ours is to us.

To be successful in parenting adolescents, parents have to recognise their children's unique abilities, making all efforts to encourage opportunities for developing their uniqueness. The chief goal of parenting is to prepare the children for being mature and emancipated. Yes, one day children will be adults whether parents like it or not. Better to accept them as they are — in preparation for a great future relationship.

Parental time — 'Too hurried to love'

This is the title of an excellent book, *Too Hurried to Love* by C Bradshaw and D Gilbert (Harvest House Publ, 1991). Basically, it deals with the pace of our contemporary life and how it affects the marriage relationship. It shows how the American myth of success can lead to a final loss of what is really important in life.

Thinking of these words 'too hurried to love' brings to my mind the teenager's need of parental time. One of the most frequent reasons for disagreements and trouble between parents and children is lack of communication. People make appointments for everything and their time seems to be insufficient for all the *important* things in life that have to be done. But, what about their children? In early societies children had at least their mother's time; nowadays with the increasing pressure of the *modern* life, Mum cannot be at home any more. Children have to stay alone — and they feel lonely,

never understanding why it is so.

The question for parents is, 'How many hours do you spend weekly in quality conversation?'. The truth is that most families have no set goal about this matter. It is not a surprise to discover that the family is not reunited even at meal time.

Everything has a price to pay. If parents expect good relationships with their children in the future, they have to invest time in the relationship now. The fact is that while children are growing up at home they are preparing themselves for a future departure from home. Then, when they leave home to make their own independent life, the relationship is changed. They are likely to be the parents' friends and not submissive kids any more. If the relationship was not strengthened during the 'home' period, how will it develop later?

Parents in general know that they are failing in their relationship with their children but they miss the necessary energy and courage to cancel some other 'important' activities, using the remaining time to establish a more solid relationship with their children.

Now, let's be honest: What are the most important values in life? Consider how short life is and the possibility of a sudden death. What is really important? What would you like to leave as a legacy to your loved ones? Don't miss the point: relationships are more important than accomplishments.

Discipline

'Discipline' has been a controversial theme from decade to decade. People sometimes stand for it, sometimes stand against it.

Psychologists have been blamed for the relaxation of moral values in our society. Usually cited are the theories that discipline ought not be used in education.

This whole situation is quite confused and needs more accurate

definition. First, let's not blame the science of Psychology based on a few psychologists' assertions and statements. Psychology is a relatively new science which keeps trying to know and explain human behaviour; it doesn't come from the Devil, and ought not to be confused with some parapsychic practices.

Considering the word 'discipline', its real meaning is 'to teach', rather than 'to punish' — as it is usually interpreted. It is important that parents understand this point of view, so that they can use discipline as a positive tool for their child's self-discipline or self-control. Someone is disciplined, or organised, when they can control all his/her activities in a balanced way. In other words, one of the main jobs of parenting is to prepare children for their own emancipation and independence in life. By doing this, parents are working themselves out of a job!

A big problem is created when parents misunderstand the true meaning of discipline confusing it with 'demonstration of power' over the child. In such cases, the child will probably grow up resentful of authority figures, feeling insecure and overwhelmed. It is fundamental to make it clear to children that the goal of all discipline is to teach and train them for life, rather than to control them.

One important aspect of successful parenting is the parents' agreement about disciplinary actions — which is not easy for most couples. To be successful, both parents ought to be a part of the disciplinary process, even if only one of them can be on hand for making decisions at times. It is important for children to know that both mom and dad care about them. Parents may disagree on some points, but children have to know that everything is done for their best — they have to be assured that parents discuss their different opinions in order to find

the best ways for their children.

Firm, but reasonable, discipline

When talking about discipline, it seems that the words 'firm' and 'reasonable' are self-exclusive. Children get really scared when they are going to be disciplined. Discipline usually sounds like 'punishment', and they cannot even consider 'reasonable discipline' as a possibility.

It is true; discipline has to be firm. The only effective discipline is that one which is clear, definite, precise, positive, and serious. To be successful, parents have to establish clearly the 'rules of the game'. There are several homes where children are completely confused because they don't know what the rules are. I don't want to excuse any wrong or bad behaviour, but it is frequent to see children doing wrong because they were not clearly told what 'right things' are expected from them. Two factors which add confusion are:

1. When parents change the rules during the game;
2. When they disagree about some fundamental disciplinary points.

Therefore, the first and most important principle for successful discipline (or teaching) is to define clearly what the rules and expectations are. Further, these rules must be communicated to the children. Several times, parents do not even communicate openly with their children, and then get angry when something goes wrong.

About the necessary firmness of discipline, I recommend a small but very helpful book: *Dare to Discipline* by James Dobson. If you have children at home, and you want to learn how, why, and when to discipline (teach) them, please read this book and practice the principles that it teaches.

Now we come to the fact that discipline has to be reasonable. We adults want everything to be reasonable and balanced.

Children want the same. They actually need it much more than we do. However, it seems that parents have some difficulty (resistance?) for making their disciplinary actions reasonable. It is much easier to dictate norms and rules than discuss them with children! Discussion requires time, openness, reasoning, and flexibility — which adults often hate! But, if you want to be successful with your children's education, you have to observe certain fundamental rules and principles of the educational and developmental process. Firm discipline is highly desirable, but it will be truly effective only if accompanied with reasonable discussion, open heart, and a flexible attitude showing that a legitimate love is behind it all.

Raising new Christians

How many times have you been thinking of your expectations regarding to your children's religious beliefs? If you are a Christian, you know how important religion is for life, and how rewarding it is to have a place, a church, to belong to. What a blessing it is when our brethren at church assume the role of our extended family! No doubt religion is an important element for a balanced and happy living; it brings meaning to our existence and relief to our daily pressures and stresses.

Parents who are religiously active would like to see their children enjoying the blessings of a religious life, too. However, it has not been an easy task to 'persuade' young people about the benefits of being a dedicated Christian. Especially during adolescence there is a considerable increase of resistance against the parents' current values, including the religious convictions and practices. (Do these words sound familiar to you?)

Because church has an important role in children's religious growth, parents sometimes forget

that the most basic religious values are actually established, confirmed, and developed at home. If the responsibility for religious training is transferred completely to the church, failure can be expected. Not because the church is inefficient but because the time the children remain exposed to its influence is too short. Moreover, it is a parental responsibility to dedicate time and energy in favour of their children's spiritual growth

The emphasis on the importance of a deep personal relationship with Christ must receive priority over any differing dogmas that may exist between the parents. It is important to identify what are the 'negotiables' and the 'non-negotiables'. The latter have to be basic spiritual points that both parents will stand for; the former are flexible points of view that each parent maintains as a personal belief. It is important to reinforce the affirmation of faith in Christ while doubts and personal approaches are left behind. To have the same faith does not imply agreement on every detail. Parents have to be prepared for the fact that children can develop a religious platform different than theirs. However, this should not cause disturbance or disagreement — if parents know how to respect people with different opinions and still can keep accepting and loving them.

Religious growth

Teenagers in general don't feel the need for a system of beliefs or for some kind of religious behaviour dictated by an organised institution. They like to believe in 'something', but in order to accept this 'something' they have to consider it valuable, significant, and helpful to the solution of their daily troubles. As adolescence is a stressful age accompanied with a relatively high level of insecurity, almost every teenager needs a religion which can provide consistent faith and a better feeling of

personal security.

Two basic elements in religion are faith and practice. Faith is based on the individual's beliefs; practice means 'working faith'. As adolescence is a period of transition and personal adjustment, the teenager will suffer some pressures on these aspects, too. One of the most frequent reactions during this age is to be against everyone and everything — an attitude that will be manifested in the religious realm too, as far as we consider the normal adolescent. All procedures used for creating a balanced behaviour — all words and acts — will affect considerably the development of the moral character and adulthood.

The fact that deep changes occur in the adolescents' religious development does not mean that they are throwing religion away from their lives. They are only trying to find a system of beliefs more compatible to their personal perspectives about life. There is nothing wrong with the reviewing and re-examining of traditional concepts and postulates. It is through challenge that knowledge grows.

Scientific researches have shown that there are five important aspects always occurring during adolescence:

1. **Interest** — it is usually around the age of twelve when children first start to consider seriously some aspects of religion.
2. **Doubt** — for many reasons, several doubts will come to the adolescents' minds; they want to think for themselves.
3. **Changes** — adolescents need to change some concepts in order to feel that they are 'authentic people' and not mere copies of someone else.
4. **Decrease of practice** — they tend to attend less to church, as well as not to observe so rigidly the church's rules.
5. **Increase of tolerance** — prejudice against other religious groups is lessened; they can relate well to people of other creeds — espec-

ially to the opposite sex.

The highest priority

We have been considering several of the most important aspects of the relationship between parents and their adolescent children. The chief intent of this series was to consider the aspects that are usually responsible for the difficulties in such relationships. Hopefully, the readers gained some insights about the importance of open communication, sincerity, full acceptance, true love, dedication, commitment, etc.

One of the biggest difficulties people have is to select correctly the priorities for life. We are entering into the 21st century, after conquering the Moon, after creating the most sophisticated computers, after developing a technology with no precedent in history, and after having given birth to the most spectacular devices ever seen for a com-

fortable life. But the questions through the centuries still remain unanswered: how to select the true values of life, and how to find the real priorities?

People have been suffering much just because they haven't found the true priorities of life. Money, properties, cars, work, study, sports, addictions — almost everything that you can imagine — have been considered more important than what is really important — relationships, especially the family relationships. Our generation has neglected this aspect of life and paid a high price because of it.

The 'modern' life-style has separated parents from children early in life. Grandparents haven't known grandchildren. Generations haven't met to know each other. We don't have time, we are 'busy'. By the way, have you ever had time for making a break in your (agitated, hurried, fast)

routine of life, trying to recognise what are the true priorities of life? Isn't it true that usually the 'materialistic' gain precedence over the 'humanistic'? Well, if you want to enjoy the best values of life, it is time to stop the hurry and start to love people: to love your spouse, to love your children, to love your neighbours, and to love yourself. You cannot pay for all of this; if you are going to love, you have to put your time, energy, and commitments into action, toward the right direction.

What are your priorities? Have you already realised that your family relationships are the only ones that are truly durable, rewarding, and worth your own life? Well, it is never late to start a new project for yourself, for your life, if you start now. Think about this seriously, slow down your pace, and find time and energy for the highest priority of life: your family relationships. ♦



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Hello Editor

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus. It has been good for my wife and me to have the 'Good News' papers for the long time it has been sent to us. We thank you people again. You may know that I was with Desmond Ford when I first came to Australia.

What Geoff Muirden wrote about the *Love of Money* is interesting and should help people to think about it. There is no way that money was the beginning of sin, the Bible is clear on that. And the Bible is provable, true and correct on all things.

It is important to check the words. Roots are not the beginning of trees and other plants. It is the *seed* and planting that starts the tree, but it is the *root* that makes it *grow* in the soil.

As you wrote, there was no money when Adam and Eve sinned and Satan brought sin all over the world, but when money came the *love of money* has made sin grow. What was written in 1 Timothy 6:10 'The love of money is the root of all evil', is correct. When people are loving money it can make the evil things that exist grow more.

— G Rallings, Tasmania

Can you help?

Audio tape specialist: GNCM would like to make contact with anyone who has expertise in audio tape production and would like to donate their skill. We are attempting to improve the quality of our productions, especially Tape of the Month and would also like to include suitable music and an introductory message to these tapes.

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WELCOME SANDRA

We are pleased to welcome Sandra to the Good News team. Sandra will be working part-time assisting Pat with office work.

Sandra, along with her husband has worked a number of years on an Aboriginal mission in WA and is looking forward to her involvement with GNCM.

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