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AUSTRALIA

VAGANCY



**HELPING
THE
HOMELESS**

DR GORDON MOYES

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Editorial

Ron Allen

Love has nothing to do with utility. It can't be assessed by its practicability. Love asks not, 'Can you give it to me wholesale?' Love doesn't keep score. It is not subject to customary rules of measurement. Wordsworth said:

*'Heaven rejects the lore,
 of nicely calculated less or more.'*

When Jesus was at lunch in Bethany, a woman stole into the room where he was eating and broke a container of precious perfume over his feet. Judas was there and his reaction was, 'Why this waste?' But the woman loved Jesus, the cost matched the fervor of her gratitude to him. Judas looked on the woman's gift and thought only of markets and finance. He missed the meaning altogether. Not till after he had betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver, did he begin to appreciate the woman's action and the scale of values that moved her.

When people fall in love, they sometimes question each other 'Why do you love me?' But love needs no justification. It is its own reason. When we send gifts to family or friends, we remove the price tag. Isn't this because we feel strongly, that our regard for them ought not be gauged by a price?

God's love is unique because

it is 'without money and without price.'

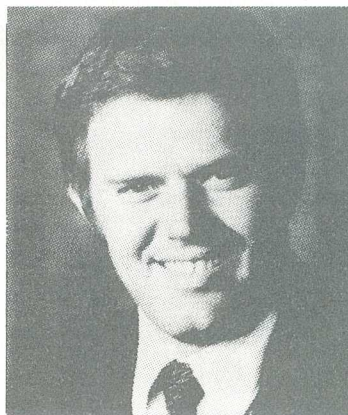
*'At the devil's booth all things are sold,
 Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;*

*For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
 Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking;
 'Tis heaven alone that is given away,*

*'Tis only God may be had for the asking;
 No price is set on the lavish summer,
 June may be had by the poorest comer.'*

Humanity, under the spell of sin, has degraded love to a calculable item. In Australian political, social and family life, there is need for an ethical point of reference; independent of all, which all could look to as both arbiter and inspiration for an improved citizenship. Is not Christ the logical choice for such a role? His moral integrity is unquestioned. Is not his love greater than all other loves? Will Australia fair, advance very far in 1996 if there is no model of human excellence to strive toward which does not outstrip all previous ones?

Christ is our Champion. He breaks the alabaster jar of his body and envelops the world in his kindness. His love, widely received and practised, would make our country a better place. Let's go with him; following wherever he takes us.



Pastor Ron Allen
 Executive Editor
 Good News Australia

A Time To Kill?

Megan Best

Is it ever right for a doctor deliberately to terminate the life of a patient?

Megan Best, an experienced palliative care practitioner and government policy developer, sets out for us what euthanasia is and isn't, why she sees it as unnecessary, and the dangers of legalising the practice.



Support for euthanasia has developed in a climate of expanding medical frontiers.

The practice of maintaining life at all costs, has led to the call, for the right to 'die with dignity'. It sounds noble - but this means different things to different people. The debate surrounding euthanasia has become confused with ethically disparate issues, such as the right to refuse treatment, and the right to receive treatment to relieve physical suffering. The term 'euthanasia', should be reserved for the deliberate and direct action taken by a doctor to terminate a patient's life, usually for compassionate reasons. If euthanasia is performed at the patient's request, it is voluntary, otherwise, it is involuntary. The terms 'active' and 'passive' euthanasia, are ambiguous and so should be avoided.

Euthanasia should also be distinguished from the good clinical practice, of withdrawing or withholding life-prolonging treatment. This may be appropriate in the face of worsening disease, or when the burden of treatment (for instance, from distressing side-effects,) outweighs the benefit. This is a difficult medical decision which needs to be made carefully, in consultation with the patient and family. Sometimes, the severity of distressing symptoms, necessitates the careful sedation of patients in the last days of life. Appropriate drugs and doses are used. Neither of these practices is euthanasia, as the intent is to relieve suffering while waiting for life to end naturally. Contrary to common understanding, morphine given in therapeutic doses, does not shorten life.

Physician-assisted suicide, where the doctor takes no direct action to end the patient's life, but merely assists by providing the means, (usually in the form of

medication) distances the doctor from the consequences of their actions. It cannot, however, be morally distinguished from euthanasia as the intent is the same.

Why is it so important to separate these issues? In much of the discussion and legislation dealing with end-of-life matters, euthanasia is mentioned in association with the right to refuse treatment, 'living wills', durable powers of attorney and rights to receive palliative care. Imagine the dilemma if one were required to vote for, or against, such a package! There is a grave danger that the pro-euthanasia lobby will be greatly advantaged by such a ploy. Surveys in Australia of attitudes towards euthanasia, have given misleading results this way. It is essential that the issue of euthanasia be addressed separately and terminology is clarified, in this very important debate.

In Australia, legislation concerning end of life issues has been dealt with on a state basis. Laws relating to living wills, (specifying the measures you want taken in the instance of future illness, should you be unable to request such when the time comes), the right to refuse treatment, power of attorney, and provision of palliative care - have been passed in various states and territories over the last decade or so. In May 1995, the Northern Territory passed legislation allowing terminally ill adults, under certain conditions, to be helped by doctors to die. Similar legislation is now on the agenda for NSW, ACT, Victoria, SA and WA. On an international level, euthanasia is illegal in the Netherlands, but doctors are guaranteed immunity from prosecution if they report each case to the authorities. In the state of Oregon, USA, physician assisted suicide has been legalised, but the legislation is currently in-

active due to a US constitutional challenge by *Right to Life* groups and the Catholic church. It is worth mentioning that the European Association for Palliative Care Position Statement and the House of Lords inquiry in the United Kingdom last year, both firmly opposed change in the law to permit euthanasia.

Marshall Perron, who introduced the Private Members Bill in the Northern Territory parliament, is widely thought to have been influenced to support euthanasia, by the suffering experienced by his mother, prior to her death. Modern palliative care can do much to alleviate suffering in the terminal stages of life, and is aimed at improving the quality of life for the dying (It is not widely available in the Northern Territory). It is no longer true, that our options are only to die with pain or with euthanasia. The civilized solution is to implement programmes of palliative care, that make it accessible to all who would benefit from it. Our government is committed to this. Euthanasia is unnecessary.

Many in our community claim, that faced with a terminal diagnosis, they would want to be able to demand euthanasia. However, research, and the experience of those that work with dying patients, have found that requests for euthanasia are uncommon, and rarely sustained after symptom control is established and care organised. Many requests are made at a time when the patient is depressed, however, the patient does not persist after treatment is commenced.

Let us consider some of the dangers of allowing this very permanent act to be legalised. With legislation and social acceptance of euthanasia, could we really avoid burdensome patients being subtly pressured to request termination of their lives? Consider the pressures on family and medical resources, especially in time of economic difficulties? Holland, one of the few places in the world where euthanasia is practised within legal guidelines, is often cited as an example of how careful legislation can avoid abuses of the law. However, a recent study by the Dutch

government (the Rummelink Report) has shown, that for over half of the cases of medical decisions at the end of life - where there was an 'explicit' intention to hasten death - the decisions were non-voluntary. Also, a recent case in Holland, involved the lethal injection of a 53 year-old depressed woman who was not terminally ill. So much for the idea that euthanasia can be contained within certain guidelines. We might also ask if the commitment and resources would be made available to improve our care of the dying, if an easier and cheaper alternative was available. Legislation of euthanasia is dangerous.

Yet, with all the advances of modern medicine, there are still patients who will suffer in the last stages of life. This can be due to poor understanding on the part of the doctor, of modern, palliative care techniques. The palliative care associations of this coun-

It is no longer true, that our options are only to die with pain or with euthanasia.

try, are attempting to improve this situation. Some patients have problems that persist, despite the best medical care. Yes, there are limits to what we can do, even in the 1990s. This is the situation where sedation may have to be considered. Sometimes suffering persists, when all physical problems have been addressed. We live in a broken world and suffering will always be part of the human experience. Sometimes, all we can do is pray, care and wait with them for death to come.

What should we do for this small number of people who rationally request that their lives be terminated, after all our attempts to care for them are still not enough? Here we come to the is-

sue of autonomy - (the right of the individual to determine the timing and manner of their death)- versus justice - (the right to protection and security of the person as expressed in the larger values of society). In view of the small number of people requesting euthanasia, I would think that the notion of justice must prevail, in order to provide protection for the frail and vulnerable who wish to live. We do need to respect autonomy, but not as an absolute. Surely, it is the responsibility of our society - and our calling as Christians, to care for those who cannot care for themselves. I am reminded of the anecdotes coming from Holland about the despair of the elderly, who are afraid to go to hospital when they are sick.

Make no mistake, it is quite possible that euthanasia will become widely available in Australia in the near future, unless there is violent community opposition. In our non-Christian society we cannot expect our opposition to euthanasia, on the basis of the word of God, to be generally accepted; but we can be informed of the issues, so as to influence the way this terribly important debate goes on. We are talking about reversing one of society's most basic laws - that we should not kill one another. The impact will be immense and cannot be limited to the individuals involved. We ought to write letters to our politicians, stir up informed public debate, volunteer to help at our local hospices, and pray for those people who can find no meaning in their existence and have no reason to restrain the idea of terminating it.

In the end, God's timing will bring all lives to an end. His timing is perfect. Those last days of life can be a time of tremendous growth for individuals and families and we should not try to rob them of that. Currently, too many people are making un-informed decisions to support euthanasia, because they know of someone who has died a horrible death. We need to let them know of a better way.

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Obligated

Ron Allen

When the first fleet arrived at port Jackson in 1788, two races confronted each other on the shoreline. Each believed in the special virtue of their own ways. The British, who laid claim to the Great South Land, brought with them a tradition of superiority; long held and practiced on the fringes of empire elsewhere. It is said that when the British drove the Irish into the woods with winter coming on, an officer remarked 'How godly a deed it is to overthrow so wicked a race.'

Our forefathers thought similarly of Australian natives. They lived in contempt and fear of them for seventy years. Hardly had such feelings begun to ease, when a new threat - in the form of thousands of Chinese - began to arrive on the goldfields. A speech delivered by a public figure in Newcastle in December 1873 and reported in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, shows what many European Australians thought of the Asians. A portion of the speech runs thus:

'This country had been entrusted to them as a portion of the British race ... they had found it in the possession of a benighted race, and had improved it, and it behoved them to hand this colony to the next generation, fair and unspotted by pagan immoralities. If John Chinaman came of a race like their own, the danger would not be so great. But he was an alien and a black-leg. And he did not come into the market on equal terms with the white man.'

On 16 May 1888, one hundred years after the first fleet, Sir Henry Parkes made a speech which pointed toward what would eventually be called, the White Australia Policy.

'I contend, that if this young nation is to maintain the fabric of

its liberties, unassailed and unimpaired, it cannot admit to its population any element, that of necessity must be inferior of nature and character.'

The Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901, marked the beginning of fifty years of legislated 'ethnocentrism' in Australian public life. But this feature of our history does not bespeak a unique failing on our part. All races appear to believe that their own kind are the cream of creation. Even individuals who claim a liberal and humane disposition in theory, often find it hard to practice when placed in enforced, close, inter-racial contact. Many Aussies, living in certain sectors of our big cities, have found this to be so. Government multiculturalist policy, has brought a

colourful array of human tribes, face-to-face with one another. A visit to the local shopping mall, can bring the householder into contact with faces from India, South-East Asia, Kenya or Latin America. For many, this is an enriching experience. For others, it is all a bit much. They are unhappy with the erosion of a national identity, with which they grew up and in which they felt secure.

The immigration debate will no doubt continue vigorously among us for a long time. And rightly so. But Christians can make a contribution to it, based, not alone on pragmatism or personal preference, but on what they have learned from Christ and His gospel. Consider Christ's impact on Paul, author of the New Testament



letter to the Romans. He introduces himself with this explanation, 'I am obligated, both to Greeks and non-Greeks. Both to the wise and the foolish.' (Romans 1:14). The apostle claims to have been gripped by a momentous truth which had bonded him to peoples of other races and classes. The truth at issue is the Righteousness of God, revealed in the gospel. (Romans 1:16-17.)

For Paul, this righteousness is not merely a moral quality within God, but a condition of privilege for humans, provided by God. An utterly congenial God-human relationship. This consummate state of affairs twixt Creator and created, is wrought by God through the Cross of Jesus. So efficient is this **Righteousness** of God, that (in terms of their relationship to God and their access to him) it renders differences among human beings inconsequential. 'This righteousness comes from God, through faith, to all who believe. There is

no difference.' (Romans 3:22)

Paul saw that the **Righteousness** of God, set men and women of every class, within the divine friendship. The substantial unity of the human species, is intensified by it. Racial groupings and individuals, no matter what their culture or station, are equally fellowshipped by God. A brotherhood defined by grace, has been brought into being. 'He broke down the barrier ... and created in Himself **one new man.**' (Ephesians 2:14-15). When Paul exclaimed 'But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known ...' (Romans 3:21), he bore witness to a momentous reality, which has everything to do with relationships in human society. With Christ's achievement towering before him, he asks 'Where then, is boasting?' And then, in answer to himself he replies, 'It is excluded!' (Romans 3:27)

The gospel means that racial arrogance is excluded. And something else has replaced it — obli-

gation! 'I am obligated to Greeks and non-Greeks ...' (Romans 1:14). The religion of Christ calls for more than racial tolerance. God's treatment of humans all, has forever fixed the focal point of moral duty in the brother - whoever he is. I owe a debt of love to anyone that God loves. And the urgency of my indebtedness is defined by that love's passion and intensity.

In matters of race, there are plenty of issues for Australians to grapple with as they move toward the end of the century. Immigration and the refugee dilemma - are two. And we still must deal with important concerns relating to our indigenous population. The church's task is to speak into the public debate from the standpoint of God's Righteousness. A safe and just society will be nearer, in reality and prospect, if relations among its people are specified by a measure submitted by God, the spirit of which is made plain, by the Love of Christ.

Presenting Dr. Desmond Ford. 1996 AUSTRALASIAN TOUR THE CHRIST OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Auckland:

February 15 2:00pm 16 7:30pm 17 10:00am-3:00pm Samoan Assemblies Of God 41 Robertson Rd Mangere

Rockhampton:

February 26 Central Queensland University.

Brisbane:

March 1 7:30pm March 2 10am-4pm Mercure Hotel 85-87 North Quay Brisbane City Phone 07-32363300 07-55918830

Cooranbong

March 7-8 7:30pm Salvation Army Church Hall Station St Bonnells Bay Phone 049-831132

Sydney:

March 9 10am-4pm Epping Baptist Church Cnr Epping & Carlingford Rds Epping March 10 6:30pm Hills Vineyard Christian Fellowship Unit 1/10 Salisbury Rd Castle Hill Phone 02-99806920 0294819907

Perth:

March 16 10am-4pm Dianella Uniting Church 450 The Strand Dianella Phone 09-4585469

Adelaide:

March 17 3:30pm-6pm Baptist Christian Centre Hall Church St Norwood

Melbourne:

March 22 7:30pm March 23 10am-4pm Waratah Room Waratah Arts & Entertainment Centre 379-397 Whitehorse Rd Nunawading Phone 053-811330

Helping The Homeless

Dr Gordon Moyes

In every developed country of the world, homelessness is a growing problem. While at Oxford University two years ago, we were beset daily by homeless beggars on the streets of that beautiful city. In Washington D.C. the sight of homeless people living over gratings, under plastic; amid the snows of winter in the capital of the wealthiest country of the world, is appalling. In Tokyo, where Japanese pride does not allow social problems to be publicly displayed, homeless people gather round late night fires, on the side walks. In every major city of the world, homelessness and street living is now commonplace.

In every under-developed country, the problem of homelessness is beyond imagination. The great cities of India, Africa, South America, Asia, have hundreds of millions of people homeless. The problem of homelessness is one of the world's major problems. Poverty, over-population, famine, persecution, refugees from war causes massive homelessness.

Fortunately, Australia has one of the highest rates of housing for its citizens in the world. By sixty five years of age, 84% of people own, or are finalising mortgages on their own homes. Yet, this lucky country still has its homeless. When you are asked the question 'Does bad accommodation make bad people?' Be careful how you answer. There is much evidence to show that bad housing can be overcome by resilient people. That it is possible for some person born in a Sydney slum to end up living in a Vaucluse mansion, and still be a decent person. But there is a lot of evidence to show that people born into poor accommodation, will, in the main, have inferior education; poorer health, lower self-esteem and be among the unemployed,

still living in sub-standard housing.

Most of you do not realise that where you are in life today, is very largely dependent on where you were born and the stability of the family environment into which you were born.

1. WHO ARE THE HOMELESS?

The great sufferers of lack of adequate housing are children. In Australia 1 in 5 are under the poverty line. 800,000 children here have neither parent employed. Then women, 10% of the 5,000 homeless in Sydney each night are women. Due to domestic violence, 13,000 women found safety in women's refuges in Sydney last year, but 23,000 were turned away! Then there are runaway youth; the poor - 2.8 million living below the poverty line here, and large numbers just cannot afford rent.

Among the homeless, also, are the unemployed, the disabled, the Aborigine and the discharged mental patients. These groups do not easily mix together and welfare staff are stretched to the limit trying to help the variety of needs presented by the homeless.

In N.S.W. some 60,000 people stay in rented premises on the verge of being evicted; some 40,000 stay in refuges, squats, lodges, and places provided by the charities. The remainder sleep in doorways, fire escapes, trains, bins and car-bodies. One young man, who was unable to find accommodation in one of my centres because of overcrowding, slept the night in a dump bin behind our shelter. He woke to violent movement in the early hours as a garbage truck emptied him into the compactor and he was pressed to death. No kid should be sleeping in trash bins!

The homeless are largeley invisible in day time. One of our Lord Mayors told me he did not see

many homeless. I told him that a man had been sleeping in the bushes beneath his window for three years! I took him outside the town hall and showed him behind the shrubs, a plastic covered sleeping area and two cardboard boxes where he kept his possessions. The mayor was aghast and later that week the council gardeners cleaned up the area, removed the shrubs and destroyed the resting place. Two months later, in an underground railway station where he now slept, the body of that man was found, following a violent robbery of his possessions. The homeless live with the fear of violence and death.

The last census showed that 90,000 Australians sleep out of doors or in refuges each night. 195,000 live in caravan parks, and 161,000 are on waiting lists for public housing. Many teenagers drop into hopelessness. Wesley Mission last year counselled over 10,000 young people in crisis. One of our centres cared for over 800 homeless teenagers who have been engaged in drug addiction and prostitution. We saved the lives of over 900 young people who were threatening suicide.

In 1990, 152,000 people were living in accommodation without 'basic amenities' - no internal bathroom or internal toilet. 414,000 people in Sydney and Melbourne in 1991 reported being forced to move involuntarily, over half, due to inability to meet rent payments.

Fifty million dollars was allocated in 1991-92 under the Government Crisis Accommodation Programme for the homeless and those in crisis, and \$161m under the Support Accomodation Assistance programm. One third of the latter being for youth and a third being for women escaping domestic violence.

In 1990-91, 202,000 applicants were on the waiting list for 50,000 government rental places. (Australia's Welfare 1992. AGPS).

2. WHY ARE THEY HOMELESS?

Most people do not choose to be homeless and would not be so if they could find affordable housing. Scarcity of low cost housing is a clear cause of homelessness. So also is poverty. The most significant factors affecting the number of homeless people in a city, included, the local employment structure and unemployment rate, the cost of living, tightness of the rental housing market, and the average household size.

One particular group of Australians who have the worst housing, are Aboriginal families. Survival for Aborigines in the harsh Australian environment has always been intimately linked to their families and kinship groups. European settlement had a devastating impact on Aboriginal families. Only the resilience and strength of Aboriginal families, enabled the survival of Aboriginal culture.

A chronic lack of community services, has resulted in Third World standards of living among many Aboriginal groups. Despite decades of promises, little has changed to improve the basics of life for Australian Aborigines. In 1971, a survey at Royal Darwin Hospital, showed that one in five 'top end' Aboriginal children suffered malnutrition before their second birthday. A study in 1993, found no change. In some Aboriginal communities, half of the children suffer malnutrition. Dr. Alan Ruben, who made the study, says the rate is worse than that in Kurdish or Somali refugee camps.

In 1972, H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, adviser to seven Prime Ministers since the 1940s, wrote: 'We are producing a race of cripples — children who will never be able to lead normal lives, everyone of whom will be a cost to the state'. Coombs warned that unless the 'circle of paternalism, dependance and pauperism' was broken within the decade, it would be 'much more

difficult, if not impossible to solve.' Twenty two years later, it may indeed be too late to do more than 'soothe the dying pillow'. Aborigines do have to change - many illnesses are related to poor hygiene, bad diet, lack of exercise; smoking, alcohol and failure to follow medical advice. But there is increasing evidence that water, working toilets, proper housing and good medical care, have to be provided first. A new study in a remote South Australian community, shows that if amenities such as toilets and water supply are provided, are properly built and maintained - which can be done at surprisingly low cost - Aborigines, contrary to stereotypes, use them enthusiastically, and do not vandalise property. The study showed that under these conditions, there was a 50% reduction in infectious diseases in

**The voluntary sector
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government.**

one year.' (*Born to Lose*. Gay Alcorn. Time, April 11 1994).

Each Saturday, some of our volunteers from the Rotary club of Sydney, and Wesley Mission, are rebuilding houses in Eveleigh Street, Redfern. This is Australia's worst slum. Some of these urban Aborigines are generations into poverty, illness, unemployment and despair. Bad accommodation makes worse their plight.

Recently the governor of NSW, Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair and Mrs Sinclair, called in to see the progress of the Habitat for Humanity affiliate we established there. I feel we are seeing the truth of the old prophecy from Isaiah 58:11-12 'The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins

and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.'

As Millard Fuller, the president of Habitat for Humanity, describes this work - 'Habitat for Humanity works in partnership with God and people everywhere, from all walks of life, to develop communities with God's people in need; by building and renovating houses so that there are decent houses, in decent communities, in which people can live and grow into all that God intended.'

3. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The voluntary sector can do more for the homeless than the government. But they must be supported and encouraged. Wesley Mission, on your behalf, strives to - 1. Discover the homeless in each local community. 2. Understand their needs for accommodation, privacy; space, dignity and food.

3. Provide short-term rent assistance, bond money, or guarantees to enable some to help themselves. 4. Provide pastoral care, a tough love, a willingness to listen; care, support, and risk being taken down; abused and hurt, without giving up. 5. Be an advocate in political and legal action. 6. Run a home maintenance service, enabling people to stay in their own places. We repair some 70 dilapidated homes a month for disadvantaged or infirm people, enabling them to stay at home. 7. Provide free financial counselling to help families keep their homes during financial problems. 8. Provide accommodation. Wesley Mission has over 200 centres housing 2000 persons daily.

4. WORK FOR THE HOMELESS

But one key way of helping the homeless is through our development and support of Habitat for Humanity, to build decent houses for poor families. Our work projects are helping Australians get into their own homes where families pay \$1000 deposit, work for 500 hours on their own property, and pay it off over fifteen years with no interest ever being charged!

What Millard Fuller calls 'the

theology of the hammer', is bringing together all kinds of people, churches, and institutions, to build and renovate houses for needy families. It is also bringing us closer to God as we work with one another. 'The theology of the hammer' joins the proclamation of our faith with the working out of our faith; the matching of word and deed.

We can eliminate poverty housing, and homelessness, provided we develop a theology that connects the task with the fundamentals of faith. Jesus summarised very clearly the priorities of the Kingdom of God when he said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it - Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Matthew 22:36-40).

This bringing together of the love of God and love of neighbour, is stressed throughout Scripture. The spoken word, praising and expressing love of God, is one-dimensional and incomplete without the expression of love to people - the deed. Moses, for example, was said to be a man 'of power in words and deeds' (Acts 7:22). The same words were used to describe Jesus: 'mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people' (Luke 24:19). Mark 6:30 tells us, 'The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. The apostle John connected word and deed, 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.' (1John 3:16-18). The greatest demonstration of faith lies in building houses for the homeless.

Dr Clyde Tilley says 'Evangelism is the word-method by which we communicate God's love to the world. Expressing God's love is not a matter of either word or deed; it is a matter of both word and deed. It is a matter of 'show and tell', perhaps most effectively, in that order. Evangelism that endeavours to

witness by word, and social action that endeavours to serve by deed, must be integrated into the obedient lifestyle of Christian discipleship'.

Words alone just do not deliver the message. St. Francis of Assisi certainly agreed that mere words are not enough. Indeed, he said, 'Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words!' Albert Schweitzer, too, acknowledged the inadequacy of words alone, when he wrote about his decision to become a missionary doctor, 'I wanted to be a doctor so that I might be able to work without hav-

houses to convert the new homeowners. Many Habitat homeowners are already strong Christians long before their houses are built. Others do not become Christians because they get a Habitat house. Salvation does not come from Habitat for Humanity. Salvation comes only from God. Our task is to love and proclaim faith, in both word and deed, and leave the results to the Lord. (*The Theology of the Hammer*. Millard Fuller Smyth - Helwys Publishing, Inc. 1994).

Christians, put your trust in God first and then help the poor and homeless, because of your



ing to talk. For years I have been giving of myself in words, and it was with joy that I had followed the calling of theological teacher and preacher. But this new form of activity would consist not of preaching the religion of love, but in practising it'.

Jesus said 'Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:16). Habitat for Humanity does not build

faith. With better accommodation they can enjoy a better life, and be in a better position to hear and respond to the Good News that Christ died for their sins. If you are not yet a Christian, respond to God's initiative in Christ.

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BEING THE CHURCH

The Church Revisited

Ray Slade

Jesus established something called The Church. But millions of people have found little in The Church to attract them. Is the structure we know today, what he originally set up? Or did he really have something else in mind? This article identifies a key shift in the church structure and recommends adoption of the ideas practised by the early disciples. It outlines one way of achieving this and the numerous benefits of doing so.

They had followed their Leader through thick and thin. Out in all kinds of weather, they put up with heat, flies, dust and little sleep. On more than one occasion their lives had been threatened by drowning. Almost stoned by jealous Pharisees and having come within half an ear of being captured by Roman soldiers. One wonders if they would have given up their jobs to join the group if they had known they would be attacked by a naked mad-man or nearly crushed by stampeding wild pigs.

There was no doubt about it, being one of the disciples was not an easy task. But as Judas kept telling them, it wouldn't be long before their Leader assumed power and then they would all get the respect they deserved.

And then suddenly, the announcement came. Walking by the seaside one day, Jesus turned to them and said, '... and upon this rock I will build My Church' (Matthew 16:18). But less than a few weeks later, Jesus was dead. No kingdom! No church! It is easy to see how confused the disciples must have been. You can imagine them saying, 'Let's see if we've got this straight now. Did you hear Him say it Simon? 'Sure did Luke, loud and clear - **I will build My Church.**' "But why would he want to build a new church? There's

nothing wrong with the temple we've got."

Quite clearly, the church that Jesus was talking about had little to do with the temple where people met to worship and pray. In fact, the Church he spoke of had nothing to do with a building at all. Thankfully, it's all been faithfully recorded for us. It becomes obvious as we look at it, that what we've got now, is a long way from what Jesus had in mind.

In very detailed accounts recorded in the New Testament, there are 114 references to the Church. Scan even a couple of them and you will find that the Church Jesus set up was a **group of people**.

'... and when they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by The Church' (Acts 15:4). I've never heard of a building welcoming a person. '... likewise, greet The Church that is within your house' (Romans 16:5). '... be shepherds of The Church of God ...' (Acts 20:28). We don't usually greet the building we enter, and neither does the building need a shepherd. Not one of the references in Acts refers to a place, building or an event. But in each case it is a group of people.

The word 'church' was already in use in Roman times. It was frequently used to indicate a group or collection of people, so it was taken on board by early believers. '... on arriving there, they gathered The Church together and reported all that God had done ...' (Acts 14:27).

But now Jesus was claiming to have a church of his own, which Paul refers to as 'Christ's body, over which he, Christ, is the head'. '... and God placed all things under His feet and appointed him to be head over everything for The Church, which is his body ...' (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Becoming part of The Church is by a most unusual means. It is not by voting, purchasing a place, bribery, subscription fee, or establishing your credibility. If we recognise and believe that Jesus is our only means of salvation, then the moment we choose to be identified with him, he immediately considers us as members of his Church. '... Jesus said ... I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies' (John 11:25).

Don't believe that we need to be voted in by our human authorities. '... for we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body' (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Many people make the mistake of looking for The Church amongst the denominations. Looking for the right shaped building or the type of programme we like will never guide us to the True Church.

If you consider yourself a follower of Christ, you are part of it. Start looking for true believers and you will find other parts of his body - even if you find only one or two people.

The early disciples did not own a building. They met in each others homes. Paul refers to The 'Church at Corinth and Ephesus,' and other places. He even had a group in his own home. It is obvious that these references are not to The Church universal, but to parts of it.

'... so in Christ we who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others' (Romans 12:5). '... for we are all members of one body' (Ephesians 4:25).

Today, the disciples of Christ are scattered all over the world. They may never meet in a lavish building, or wear a denominational label. But together, they form a network of believers, all belonging to one body, known as The Church. *To be continued.*

Ray Slade hails from Melbourne where he lives with wife Bronwyn and daughter Stephanie. Ray is a sound and film engineer; presently working in computing.

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