

# The revolution is over Time to pick up the pieces


**I**T WILL HAPPEN QUIETLY ON 1 JANUARY 2011: the revolutionaries of the sixties will start to go out with a whimper. That is the date that the first baby boomers officially retire.

Baby Boomers entered the world in 1946, then blew out the birth statistics through to 1964. As the tail was still being born, the early boomers were old enough to begin to make their presence felt and the 'sixties revolution' began to implement the programme of 'out with the old; in with the new', and revolution *against* became the catchword of that generation and others after them similarly infected with the disease of perpetual change to who knows where. As the dust settles, future social commentators and historians of the period may perhaps be bold enough to use words that are not too flattering: such words as instability, social fragmentation or even

disintegration, rank consumerism, etc. As the same dust settles in Christian Churches, future commentators will begin to notice their own negatives about how these same forces have worked in the midst of God's people.

But 1 January 2011 is the beginning of the end. The revolution must now go into decline. From now on natural attrition will take its toll. It may take twenty more years, but as the world sheds these vast numbers of revolutionaries, a whole new world must inevitably take its place.

What is most vital is for Christ's people to ask, how will they be involved in the reconstruction after the revolution? Will Christian people help to pick up the pieces?

January 1 is the day for new year's resolutions. In 2011 it ought to be the day for new world resolutions. 

## St Peter's Remembers its Foundation




**O**N WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER, ST Peter's Campbelltown held a service to remember Governor Macquarie's marking out of the town of Campbelltown 190 years previously. This initiative enabled the Church to make a contribution to the various Macquarie celebrations being held across the city in 2010, the bicentennial of him taking up the Governorship of NSW.

At the service of Holy Communion, Rev. Nigel Fortescue preached on Zechariah 2, the marking out of the new temple following Israel's Babylonian exile, drawing parallels with Macquarie setting aside land for a

Campbelltown church, and looking ahead to Jesus marking out a place in heaven for his people.

Amongst the congregation were a handful of early settlers, associated with Campbelltown & Airds District Historical Society dressed in period costume, who at the morning tea afterwards joined the pupils of St Peter's Anglican school for a re-enactment of the foundation day ceremony.

In the next decades, NSW will have many more opportunities for bicentennial celebrations. St Peter's has set an early example of how to helpfully bring the Christian heritage of NSW into the broader celebrations. 



'Since man, in his social and moral character, is what he is made by education, the question of his training, even as regards this world, assumes the very highest importance. How much greater still when we take into account the next?'

William Macquarie Cowper,  
The Christian Training of Children by their  
Parents. A Sermon preached on  
11 January 1852.

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# Beyond Admiration

Steve Carlisle



Steve Carlisle ministers at St Matthew's West Pymble

**A** SONG OF MY YOUTH BOLDLY DECLARED 'Jesus was way cool'. It was a song which was to become popular with Christians and unbelievers alike as it gained radio airplay and CD sales. Undoubtedly many people through the ages thought Jesus was 'way cool'.

However it has never been the case that admiration for Jesus is what saves. Many who clamoured around Jesus during his public ministry had admiration for him, indeed they thought that he was 'way cool' for the miracles


he was conducting for the masses. Yet these are the same ones of whom Peter said 'you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross'. Indeed admiration quickly turned into hatred, wickedness and sin.

The same is true of humanity today. Many admire Jesus for his teaching, his example and his opposition of the culture of the day. However, admiration does not save. Indeed an admiration for Jesus often masks a rejection of that which Jesus came to achieve. Paul says in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Paul here states that it is through not simply outward declaration of Jesus being 'way cool' which saves, but the declaration of Jesus as Lord, that is, master, the one under whose authority we place our lives.

Indeed Paul states that salvation comes not

simply as one admires Jesus as 'way cool' but through trusting in his death and resurrection for us. As he goes on to say in verse 11: "Anyone who trusts (has faith) in him will never be put to shame".

So then, if admiration does not save, what does? Only faith in the cross of Christ, faith which takes hold of the promises of God in Christ and accepts them with inward trust and outward declaration. A faith, or trust, which is, of itself a complete gift of grace from God. As Paul states in Ephesians 2:8: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God".

Faith is not simply admiration of a God who is 'way cool' but a trust in the God who saves in the death of his Son, and who offers to us the gift of this faith that we need. That really is 'way cool'. 

# Spectacular Transformation

Alison Blake



Alison Blake finds inspiration beyond the Thesaurus.

**L**OVE WORDS. AS A TEN YEAR OLD, I remember being introduced to Roget's Thesaurus—an Aladdin's cave of fresh words, exciting synonyms, and new ways of expressing myself. I love the way words can capture human emotions, paint pictures, fire up my imagination and generate a response.

More than human words, I love the way God's word can impact us. Let me share with you my recent experience of the impact of God's word on me as our read the book of Acts in Bible study. It wasn't a moment of obvious drama—just God, by his Spirit, going about his quietly spectacular work of transforming me by renewing my mind.

In Acts 18 Paul has, not for the first time, been reviled and opposed by the Jews of Corinth as he seeks to persuade them that the Christ was Jesus. By this stage in his evangel-

istic efforts, Paul has been jailed and stoned; some hearers have plotted to kill him whilst others have welcomed and believed his message of salvation in Christ and some have asked to hear more. He's defended his ministry before the Jewish believers and had a "sharp disagreement" with his mission partner Barnabas. It would appear he has every reason to be discouraged!

But take a moment now to open your Bible and read God's wonderful encouragement to Paul and us, in verses 9-11. God reassures Paul that there are many people


he stayed in Corinth teaching the word of God for a further 18 months! Does knowing God is at work successfully calling his chosen ones to himself impact you, renewing your enthusiasm to be making disciples? Are these words of God an encouragement to you, as they are to me, to not be afraid or silent or grow weary in sharing Christ?

Let's pray that God's word would not only inform, but also transform us, not only challenge but change us. Could you start praying each Saturday evening, with your spouse, with your children, maybe at bedtime, or after

## Does knowing God is at work successfully calling his chosen ones to himself impact you ...?

whom God has predestined for salvation. Having chosen these "not-yet-saved" ones, God will certainly call them to turn and trust him, through the work of the Spirit and perhaps through Paul's preaching Christ. The reality that God will indeed call to himself those he has chosen implies that sharing Christ is never a fruitless venture.

God's word seem to have impacted Paul—

dinner, that each of you, (and your entire church family!) would be rebuked, reminded, refreshed and renewed by God's word as it is preached, read and sung on Sunday? In your small group or one-to-one Bible study, why not offer to lead in prayer, before reading, that God's word would not only interest and inform the group, but impact each of you, for your eternal good and for God's glory? 

**T**HE NEXT ARCHBISHOP'S ELECTION HAS THE potential to mark a turning-point in the story of Sydney Anglicanism. Will the Synod choose to take the risk and make the turn?

The world now hovers on the brink of something genuinely new. Whether it will be better remains to be seen. With 1 January 2011 is the day the first Baby Boomers officially begin to retire, the next two decades will complete the process of releasing the stranglehold that they have exercised on society. And when a stranglehold is released, those previously being choked by it at last begin to breathe.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that between 1999 and 2031 the population aged 60 years and over will double, increasing from less than three million to more than six million as baby boomers move into retirement. It is also interesting to notice that another baby boom has begun, driven by 30-something women whose fertility rate is the highest since 1961 and for those in their late 30s it is the highest since 1948. Last year, they helped deliver the largest number of registered births in our history. Women in their 20s are also having babies sooner.

These two baby booms are creating a 'sandwich generation' who, caught between caring for the health of the elderly boomers and the education and upbringing of the next population bubble, will continue to ask the question why the world seemed to pass them by—twice! Generation X and Y, some have called 'the silent generation with a social conscience', but sometime soon they will need to come out of their silence to exercise that social conscience and pick up the broken pieces left in the wake of the Baby Boomers' scourge. One thing has surely been proved by the Baby Boomers: Perpetual revolution is not healthy for a society. With revolution practically the only catch-cry since 1968, the next Generation will need to work out how to re-establish stability, morality, human identity, relational wholesomeness, genuine community, a new way of politics, education, work, leisure—and the list goes on.

In the post-revolution reconstruction, the Christian gospel ought to have a lot to say. If only we can separate what is truly 'gospel' and truly Christian Truth from the Baby Boomer rhetoric with which it has so often been clothed for more than half a century.

Why is it, for example, that we are still hearing about the need for 'entrepreneurial thinking' when the entrepreneur has been firmly laid to rest? At this point our Christian Baby Boomers are just speaking the same rhetoric as the major parties, which both continue to see deregulated Australia as entrepre-

neurial Australia, even though the proportion of self-employed has been plummeting since the nineties and is now at its lowest level since 1975. What people now want from employment is stability—as indeed, they do in other areas of life.


Why is it, to take another example, that in the church-planting rhetoric, as well as that beginning to emerge in regard to the next Archbishop, we are still hearing strong echoes of the 'Great Man' theory of history and change? The 'charismatic personality' that entranced the Baby Boomers will take a long time to die, without a concerted effort to avoid such human messianism. But the next generation doesn't need another hero—there have been too many already; too many rock stars in every domain of life, even in the church.

The *Charter of Budget Honesty Act 1998* now dictates that the Australian Government must issue regular 'Intergenerational Reports' to assess the long-term sustainability of current Government policies over the following 40 years. The first IGR appeared in the Budget for 2002–2003, the second in 2007, and the third was released in February 2010. The Government recognizes the enormous shift that is about to take place and that it must be planned for. Those formulating ministry strategy in Sydney Diocese ought to have a similar concern. This Generational change is the next big challenge that must be faced.

At the present time, the ever-optimistic of our early baby boomer brethren can still be heard to say that this is a time of unprecedented change, as if what is going on still fits within the boomer rhetoric that any change is a good change. But what we are looking at right now is not change at all. It is collapse.

What we are witnessing is the death of a failed dream. What will come is a whole new world. As it rises from the ashes of the sixties 'revolution against everything', the gospel needs to be a part of the reconstruction.

It will take the next two decades for the revolution to grind to its final halt. The question becomes, at what point on that decline will the Christian Churches jettison the revolution, and begin the reconstruction? When will they decide to step forward and seize the future for Christ, so it can be not just new, but better?

January 1, 2011, the clock starts ticking for the End of the Revolution. Our next Archbishop will be elected soon after. This is the issue that ought to focus the election. Will our baby-boomers be able to let go? Will our 'silent generation' find their voice? As the whole new world emerges, will we be ready? Or overtaken? Or instrumental in its emergence? 

**The Australian Church Record**

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# Shopping List for the Next Archbishop: Part 3

Peter Bolt



**S**OW HOW IS THE SHOPPING LIST GOING? Rumour has it that groups of interested parties have begun gathering to discuss the next Archbishop, and shopping lists are being compiled. This can only be good. Good thought well before the event. In the same spirit, the ACR list will continue to slowly grow across future issues.

But for now, a couple of items previously mooted are worth reiterating.

- # 3. He must be a local, already here with us in the Diocese;
- #II. He must be aware of the generational change that is happening right now.

Strangely, these two are related. The debate relating to the revision of the Election and Retirement Ordinances at the October Synod touched upon the age of the next Archbishop. This was a very significant debate. However, what lies behind the issue of age is the far

more significant issue of the Generational shift that is occurring as we speak. (see Editorial of this issue). Whatever age the new archbishop might be when elected (and, recall that the ACR has suggested the upper limit should be 57, and a stretch-downwards towards the Mowll age of 44), this generational change must be taken into consideration. From now on, the Baby Boomers will be rapidly departing our company.

cast a vote of no confidence in the trajectory the Diocese has taken over the last 30 years, and especially in the training and recruiting to ministry that has gone on across that period. The promotion of an outsider would effectively be saying that there has been no leadership in the Diocese from the Baby Boomer years. If the leadership of the last 30 years has failed to train someone who can act as Archbishop for the next generation, then

**If the leadership of the last 30 years has failed to train someone who can act as Archbishop for the next generation, then that 'leadership' has failed abysmally.**

But they won't find it easy to leave. Letting go is not a natural Baby Boomer characteristic. This is probably a big factor in Sydney's continuing 'prophet without honour' syndrome, which leads some to look outside the Diocese for the next Archbishop. It is probably therefore worth saying that the promotion of an outsider will not only deliver a slap on the face to all the clergy of this Diocese who have been written off in one fell swoop, but will also

that 'leadership' has failed abysmally—in any sense of the word.

Let us not go in that direction. The Baby Boomers need to learn to Look Below. The next Generations need to Look Around. The candidates for the next election are not elsewhere, they are in our midst already. We all need to lift up our eyes and see who might take the Diocese into the next stage of Christ's harvest. ●

## Atheism in Australia

**W**HETHER OR NOT ATHEISM IS ON the rise in Australia, it is certainly shouting louder.

The 2006 Census figures show that those who took the opportunity to declare that they have 'no religion' now represent one fifth of Australia's population (18.7%). Even if all of these are 'atheists' (they are not), this is a clear minority, it is still a substantial one—although not as large as that in our nearest neighbour, New Zealand, where 32.2 per cent chose the same option in their 2006 census.

2010 has been a year in which the International Atheist voice has grown louder and angrier—and even reached our own shores. At the beginning of the year, Melbourne hosted the 2010 Global Atheist Convention. 'New Atheists' Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens both visited

Australia. Both continue to gain airplay. Dawkins' press included his link with the Atheist 'No God' publicity campaign on London Buses in October. Hitchens launched his *Hitch-22* and then cancelled promotional tours in July after the sad news that he is dying of oesophageal cancer.

The Atheist voice has also entered Australian politics. The Atheism of our new Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, created a splash earlier in the year. The Atheist Foundation of Australia has added its voice to NSW Labor's proposal to introduce Ethics Classes as an alternative to Special Religious Education. Although apparently the 'no god' voice should still be heard in politics, the call to banish the Christian voice from the public sphere seems to be re-issued, and with increasing regularity with an appeal to a 'sep-

aration of Church and State'.

But, despite the noise from elsewhere, not all Australian atheists are attracted to the 'militant atheism' of the Dawkins-Hitchens variety, which takes no prisoners, declares religion an evil virus to be eradicated, and calls for its voice to be silenced. In the lead-up to the Melbourne Global Atheist Convention, for example, Dick Gross issued his semi-humorous Ten Atheistic Commandments (SMH.com.au, 12/3/2010), which basically called for a little more humility. The New Atheists may have created some noise, and 'Atheism appears resurgent, but beware, looks can be deceiving. Hitherto, atheism has been a bit of a fizzer'. Despite the Australian 'no religion' figures, Gross reminded his compatriots that 'we are so small in number. On many estimates, [CONTINUED OVER PAGE]

# Atheism in Australia [CONT. FROM PAGE 4]

85% of the world is still entranced by faith. Of the rest, only 2.3% are card carrying, badge wearing self proclaimed atheists. That makes us numerically an irrelevant splinter group. Humanity is still deeply religious and atheism is a marginal pursuit 300 years after its reincarnation in the Enlightenment.

Gross's atheistic sanity speaks more in line with our Australian history than our International visitors and their disciples. Our first white arrivals in 1788 came from an

England that was deeply affected from two directions: the Enlightenment and the Evangelical Revival. This ensured that, as White Australia came into existence, this country has grown up with a peculiar blending of Enlightenment thought and Christianity. We have developed political, educational and social systems that operate on co-existence, not obliteration. In recent years our Multi-cultural policies have taken this spirit of toleration into a new day, and these

policies now proclaim that Australia is a country in which four fifths can freely practice their own religion, and one fifth can freely choose not to do so. In Australia, everyone has a right to speak in the public sphere as much as anyone else. That is the beauty of this unique country we call Australia.

In the end, the Militant Atheism that comes to us from elsewhere must be declared to have a serious and fatal flaw: it is simply not Australian. ●

## A new Initiative of Moore College

Jane Tooher



Jane Tooher is the Director of The Priscilla and Aquila Centre

**T**HE PRISCILLA AND AQUILA CENTRE is a new initiative of Moore College, made possible because of part funding from the Anglican Diaconess Institution. It is a Centre that has been established to encourage and promote further thinking about the practice of Christian ministry by women, in

partnership with men. The Centre aims to: improve how College can better train and equip women for ministry; encourage women in post-graduate study at Moore; and encourage women in writing projects at both a popular and academic level. One of the official Values of Moore College is that it is a Complementarian College. Considering this is a value of Moore, the Centre aims to think through much more seriously and creatively the application end of Complementarianism in a very positive way. It is seeking to teach and model Complementarianism throughout College. One example of this, is that over the last year we have been experimenting to some degree with male-female team teaching. Some has worked well, some has not been so great, and that is fine. It is all part of the learning process to think through how men and women can minister better together.

Although the Centre has already been involved in projects within the day-to-day life of the College, on February 7, 2011, the Centre will have its public launch in the form of a conference. This conference is called 'Male and Female He Created Them' with the main talks coming from Genesis 1-3 and given by Peter Jensen. Other speakers are: John Woodhouse, Stewart and Helen Binns, Mark Thompson, Joshua Ng, Keith Condie, Tracey Gowing, Tara Thornley, Kara Gilbert, Philip Wheeler, Rick Smith, Caroline Spencer, Paul Dale, Hayley Neal, and Jane Tooher. It is hoped that this conference is the first in an annual series of conferences discussing Biblical teaching and wider issues related to men and women working together in Christian ministry. The conference is aimed at clergy, ministry workers, and any Christian interested in thinking more seriously and creatively about how men and women can work better together in ministry. It would be an ideal conference for your ministry team to go to together. For more information and registration details, go to [www.moore.edu.au](http://www.moore.edu.au) and follow The Priscilla and Aquila Centre links. Pre-registration is required and numbers are limited. ●



### Male and Female He Created Them

**THE PRISCILLA AND AQUILA CENTRE LAUNCH CONFERENCE**

Monday 7th February, 2011

MOORE COLLEGE  
Knox Lecture Theatre  
15 King Street, NEWTOWN NSW 2042

# SUMMER READING

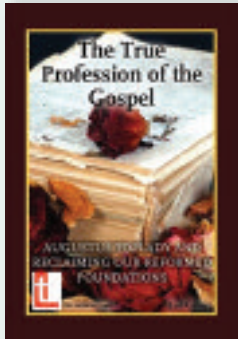
## Five more titles from Latimer Trust

### THREE ON OUR HERITAGE



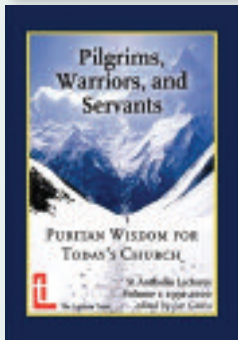
*Translating the Bible. From William Tyndale to King James*

In preparation for the 500th Anniversary of the publication of the King James Version, Gerald Bray introduces and republishes Cranmer's Homily on Scripture and eleven prefaces to English Translations leading up to the KJV in 1611. This Reformation pedigree to the KJV provides a rich reminder of and refreshment from the doctrine of Scripture.



*The True Profession of the Gospel. Augustus Toplady and Reclaiming our Reformed Foundations*

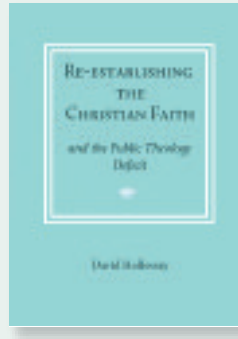
Although Augustus Toplady might be better known to many as a hymn writer, Lee Gattiss examines his theology, arguing that his Reformed doctrine of 'grace alone' are foundations to be recovered and reinvigorated in the present time for a new generation.



*Pilgrims, Warriors, and Servants. Puritan Wisdom for Today's Church. St Antholin Lectures Volume 1: 1991-2000*

Lee Gattiss edits and introduces ten of the St Antholin's lectures, including those by Australians Peter Jensen, Bruce Winter and Peter Adam; joined by others including J.I. Packer, Alistair McGrath, and Ashley Null.

### TWO ON OUR PRESENT CHALLENGES



*Re-establishing the Christian Faith and the Public Theology Deficit*

Explaining that Public Theology 'considers men and women in the context of all their social relationships', David Holloway asks how Christian churches can re-establish Christian faith in the public sphere.



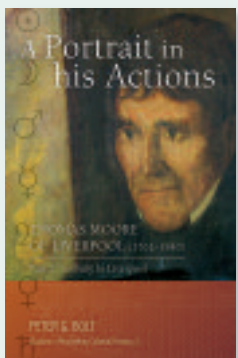
*Shadow Gospel. Rowan Williams and the Anglican Communion Crisis*

Charles Raven traces the theology of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the direction it has taken him in his influence on the Anglican Communion and its present crisis.

Books from ... <http://www.latimertrust.org>

## Two titles of Local Concern

### ... OUR LOCAL HERITAGE



*A Portrait in his Actions. Thomas Moore of Liverpool (1762-1840), Part 1: From Lesbury to Liverpool*

Peter Bolt's new biography of the Benefactor of St Andrew's Cathedral, the Diocese of Sydney, and Moore College.

Books from ... <http://www.boltpublishing.com.au>

### ... OUR LOCAL CHALLENGES



*Lord's Supper In Human Hands. Epilogue*

On the eve of Sydney Synod, October 2010, Peter Bolt, Mark Thompson & Robert Tong published an Epilogue to *The Lord's Supper in Human Hands* (2008). Sydney's discussion of lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper has occurred for some forty years. After a related legal question was referred to it, the Appellate Tribunal handed down an opinion in August 2010. This legal opinion needs to be set within its proper context, and the biblical-theological discussion about the issue needs to continue.

Books from ... <http://www.australianchurchrecord.net>

# Optimists, Pessimists, Atheists, Secularists and the Word of God

Mark Thompson



Mark teaches theology at Moore College and is currently President of the Anglican Church League.

FOR SOME OF US, EVERY OBSTACLE IS a new challenge. I have a friend who thrives when people tell him that what he proposes just can't be done. It rouses him to action. He must prove them wrong. Plant a church there? That'll never work! And so he starts door-knocking, shares the gospel, gets on with relationships, preaches up a storm and in God's mercy a new Christian community begins to form in the most unlikely of places.

If I'm honest, I'm one of those who views each obstacle as, well, an obstacle. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, to suspect the gainsayers are just telling it as it is. It won't stop me from gritting my teeth and getting on with it, of course. I can be as determined as my friend from time to time. But I don't always expect to prove them wrong.

I have another friend who always seems to be looking for the silver bullet which will guarantee success in gospel work. Every new approach to reaching this generation lights him up like a Christmas tree. He was listening to Driscoll before he became a superstar. He's read all the latest best-sellers on church and making an impact now. He's been to conferences, done the online quiz, visited the megachurches and grilled their staff teams. He's almost finished his D.Min.! But it's still hard. Sydney's affluence has hardened so many hearts. 'St Botolph's' is growing but only incrementally. The burger never quite

looks like it does in the picture. And yet he keeps going. To my knowledge, he has never even considered giving up.

Sydney just at the moment is a strange mixture of deep religious longing and a strident denial that God, if he or she could ever be shown to exist, is in any way relevant to the needs of men and women in the twenty-first century. The obstacles facing gospel work in this city really do seem immense. Every age has its own challenges, of course. But just at the moment quite a number of them seem to coalesce.

There is an extraordinary hardness of heart in certain quarters. Some hearts have been hardened by the traumas of everyday life. Others have been hardened by the propaganda of the opinion makers and the shrill voices of the new atheists. Still others, as my

Christian voices and legitimising immoral behaviour. Fringe voices have entered the mainstream, cheered on by a mass media which delights in portraying Christians as out of touch and the most bizarre behaviours as cutting edge. Social engineering is taking place without a specific mandate from the majority.

How do you respond to the challenge of evangelising a city like Sydney in all its amazingly rich cultural diversity and yet a tragic fascination with self-destruction? Relish the opportunity? Just grit your teeth and get on with it despite your natural inclination to balk at the obstacles? Search for the hidden key which will transform your feeble attempts to take the gospel to the city into one of the Christian world's great success stories?

What will enable the energetic optimist, the glass half-empty person, and the seeker to

**This world is God's world . . . his word simply will not fail to achieve what he intends for it.**

friend has found, have been hardened by the affluence which we take for granted all around us. Some have been hardened as a defence against the slightest suggestion that their 'lifestyle choices' might be questionable.

This hardness of heart feeds and in turn is fed by an accelerating slide into immorality all around us. Billboards advertise agencies which will organise an affair for you while you holiday in Sydney. Greed is in vogue again. Violence is on the increase. Unborn children are being killed off in their thousands.

Our political situation in this country, certainly not dire by world standards but much more volatile than it has been in recent decades, has provided an opportunity for those who have a vested interest in marginalising

keep going over the long haul is a reminder that this world is God's world, that his word simply will not fail to achieve what he intends for it and that in the messiness and compromise of the present age Christ is building his church and not even the gates of hades will prevail against it. Pick yourself up, mate. Get on with what you know is right. And do it in conscious dependence upon the one whose purpose is never thwarted, not even by a death-sized obstacle. After all, in the face of opposition much more violent than that many of us have to face, the apostle Paul wrote: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.'

## NSW Liberal-Nationals Promise in Favour of School Scripture

IN A PRESS RELEASE OF 23 NOVEMBER 2010, the NSW Liberals and Nationals expressed 'skepticism of the real reason behind NSW Labor's sudden decision' to introduced ethics classes into NSW public schools. 'Like a range of social issues brought on at the end of the four-year parliamentary term, it appears to be driven by political considerations

and not the beset interest of children'. NSW schools already operate in such a way that 'values underpin every part of school life', and should be congratulated for their efforts. If there is a need to build on the existing teaching of values and ethics then it should be through the curriculum, and offered to all students. Education Department policy

already addresses the issue of alternative activities for those who do not choose SRE. Despite Labor's 'cleverly worded' policy, their proposal will position ethics classes as an alternative to Special Religious Education and, according to the Liberals and Nationals, this should not happen.

## Lessons from the Wheat Field



Christopher Pears occasionally wears and akubra in Hornsby Heights

## Country and City Connection

Christopher Pears

Some things in life are completely counter-intuitive. Like the funeral-to-town ratio. I've presided over a few funerals in my time as a minister, and what I've found is that the likelihood of having a small gathering seems to be inversely proportional to the size of the town. That's right – the smaller the town, the bigger the crowd at the funeral. I spent over three years ministering in Ashford in northern NSW (population 580) and I don't think we ever had a funeral service there with less than 200 in attendance (and our building only held 80 at a squeeze).

I suspect that it's all about community. In a place like Ashford, which is some 60 km away from the nearest main town, people know each other and are involved with each other. The town may be isolated, but it seems it was quite hard to live there and be isolated. On one memorable occasion, the CWA put on a talent quest and I reckon over 300 people turned up. Could you imagine getting over 50% of a typical Sydney suburb turning up for a local community event?

With the mobility of people in Sydney, people often work, shop, socialise and even educate their children outside the area in which they live. So the communities that do exist tend to be communities of common interest (e.g. sporting clubs, schools, service organisations etc) rather than the more general community dictated by geography. There's obviously a need there – a good many people evidently still like to feel that they belong somewhere. But there are also lonely people out there as well, people who haven't managed to find a place.

And a local church is able to offer people a community, though one that offers eternal benefits rather than just a temporal sense of belonging, and a relationship with God as well as the relationships with one another. So I reckon, let's build our church communities, let's be quite intentional about doing that. But let's do so with an open door. We've got so much to offer our disconnected city.

# The Spirit of Christmas ... Oh no! ... Oh yes!

Scott Blackwell



**"T**IS THE SEASON TO BE INUNDATED with secular society's take on the season". I am always curiously amused by the retailer's take on Christmas. Last year, I remember video screens flashing a series of messages: "Can you feel it in the air? Catch the Spirit! Join in the Spirit! Share the Spirit!" I was intrigued. I stopped to watch and sure enough the fifth slide in the progression was one about the fabulous bargains to be had at some super store.

But in this season there are plenty of other failures to really get it—and most of them are based on biblical sound bites: "Joy to the world!" "Peace on earth!" "Good-will towards others!" "Love your fellow man!" "Do unto others!" Although less overt regarding their role in encouraging retail generosity, these taglines attempt to capture something a little more sentimental, something a little more hopeful. They seek to promote a belief in humanity. A dream that we can actually be better than we are, that we can behave better than we do, that we can help each other more than we have. Christmas seems to be the time for such dreams and hopeful beliefs. Apparently this is the *Spirit of Christmas*.

While our culture might declare noble hopes and sentiments at this time of year, they are not what the Bible speaks about

when it speaks about the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour into the world. The simple truth of the Bible is that the true 'Spirit of Christmas' is the Spirit that causes people to honour Jesus Christ as Lord. The wise men bowed down and worshiped him (Matt. 2:10); the shepherds ended up *glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen* (Luke 2:20).

This is the Spirit that transforms lives. It is not soppy sentimentality or vague hopefulness. It is the truth that the apostle John writes about at the beginning of his Gospel: ... *to all those who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.*" (John 1:12) The Spirit of Christmas is the Spirit that makes Sons of God through faith in Christ.

If you want to "Catch the Spirit! Join in the Spirit! Share the Spirit!" this Christmas... for God's sake preach the gospel.



Scott Blackwell goes Christmas shopping