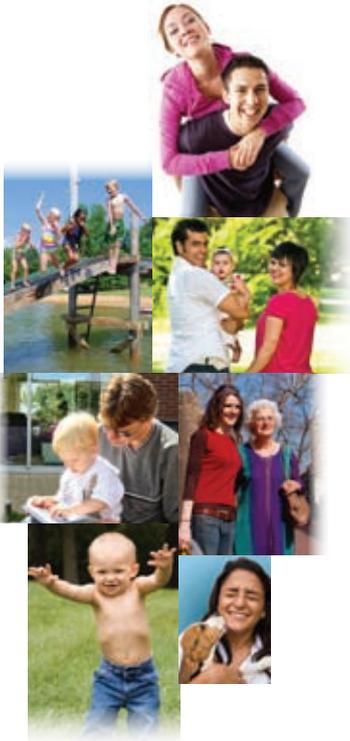


InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement



ChurchScope 2
Heidelberg West Church of Christ



Letter from America 3
Kent Hartman



Food for Thought 4
Restoration Movement



Feature 5
ACCET - A Resource Pool



Book Review 7
Heart of the Resoration Series



Interview 8
John and Joan Stone

Subscriptions

InterSections is available in PDF and printed formats. Subscription for the PDF format is free. Subscription for the printed format is AUD\$22.00 per annum for 4 issues (inclusive of GST).

Past Issues

Past issues of *InterSections* are available at: www.klesisinstitute.com/intersections.html
Front photos gratis from <http://www.sxc.hu>

Editorial

Growth involves change. But not all change is growth. Indeed, some changes amount to decay.

This issue of *InterSections* has, as a loose theme, a focus on change. Our hope is to encourage change that reflects spiritual growth. We're interested to see how churches change over the years. We reflect on how churches from the Restoration Movement have evolved. We raise the possibility of revisiting questions of faith and practice so that we can respond biblically in our own generation. When our culture is changing so rapidly, each church is confronted with decisions about what from our past is really cultural, and therefore negotiable, and what is biblical and must be defended.

As editor, I have offered some *Food for Thought* on the way cultural change is highlighting both strengths and weakness in churches within the Restoration Movement in Australia. Following a similar theme, I review several books in the *Heart of the Restoration Series* that examine our restoration heritage in more detail. Kent Hartman, in his *Letter from America*, also reflects on the changes he has observed from his vantage point as a missionary-in-residence at Oklahoma Christian University.

For our *ChurchScope* article, long-time member Joan Thomas from the Heidelberg West congregation in Melbourne traces the history of her congregation – the oldest *a cappella* Church of Christ in Victoria. We also have an *Interview* with John and Joan Stone, NSW, who have experienced different streams of the Restoration Movement in Australia. Our feature article focuses on the future as David Payne outlines the ACCET initiative.

We hope this issue of *InterSections* will help you constructively reflect on the way you and your church are responding to the changes around us. If you think *InterSections* is worthwhile, please promote it to others in your circle. By so doing, you can enlarge your reflections into conversations – with the goal of mutually encouraging one another towards Christlikeness. □



Don't miss out
on your
Issue!

Subscribe for your
printed copy or visit
www.klesisinstitute.com

Church Scope

Heidelberg West Church of Christ, Victoria

Today the congregation of over 50 members is quite multicultural, including several Christians who have migrated to Australia from India and other countries.

This year the Heidelberg West Church of Christ celebrates 50 years of meeting publicly in a northern suburb of Melbourne. The seeds for the church were sown around 100 years ago, when Ambrose Chaffer left the Associated Church of Christ and started meeting with his family and others in homes. In 1935 Ambrose and Annie Chaffer's daughter, Eleanor, married Ivor Paull, who had been taught and baptised by Ambrose. In 1938 Ivor and Eleanor moved to Fairfield and the Chaffers joined them. Meetings were held in the Paull home, first at Fairfield, then at Heidelberg. Tom Tarbet came from the US in 1955 to work with the West Footscray church, and the Heidelberg brethren were encouraged by visiting this congregation on Sunday evenings.

In January 1960 those who had been meeting in the Paull home in Heidelberg moved to the RSL Hall of Memories in Bell Street. Then in April 1964 they moved into the current building at 420 Waterdale Road. This building was purchased from the Anglican Church with generous assistance from some in the congregation.

Fletcher Cauthen, with his wife Peggy and family, arrived to work with the church at Heidelberg West a few days before the first meeting in the Hall of Memories. They stayed until May 1962 and had a great impact. Brother Cauthen was known for his friendliness and vitality and was a very enthusiastic preacher. By the time the Cauthens returned to the US, the church had more than doubled in number to 37.

In 1960 -1961 Isaac Goldstein and his family were baptised and for some time Isaac and his sons were very active in the work. In 1965 Isaac was appointed an elder, along with Ivor Paull and Arthur Arnott. However, with the passing of Arthur Arnott's wife and later Ivor Paull (1970), the eldership lapsed. Isaac lived well into his 90s and served the church in whatever way he could until he fell victim to dementia.

In the mid 1960s Felix Tarbet came from the US to work with the church for a couple of years. Then in the 1960s Jack Hardcastle arrived but was only with Heidelberg West for a short time before he and Peter Shea, who was also working with the church, began a new congregation in Box Hill (now the Belmore Road church). Since then no American preacher has come specifically to work with



Vacation Bible School in the 1960's

the Heidelberg West church. However, Bill Hall and Roy Diestelkamp based themselves there for a time while they traveled and worked with churches all over Australia.

Philip Dow worked with the church in the early to mid 1980s after returning from studying in the US. In more recent years Jarrod Thomas and then Graham Wall have been employed as evangelists. Graham is currently working with Heidelberg on a part-time basis and his zeal for evangelism has been of great benefit to the church.

In the early days Vacation Bible Schools were held with large numbers of local children attending. Several campaigns and missions have been conducted over the years, the largest being a two-week Campaign for Christ in 1967.

Sister Eleanor Paull, a fine Christian lady, eventually passed on and most of the Paull family moved to other parts of the country – Ted and Eleanor Jnr to Sydney and Dorothy to Albury (now in Mornington Peninsula). Some who might be considered the mainstays of the church at various times since the Paulls and others moved on would include: the Dow, Moroney, Wickham, Holyoak, Thomas, Makris, Davison, Chapman and Woods families.



June and Don Chapman set up a tape ministry which has been a great help to many over the years. In the late 1970s to early 1980s the church was blessed to have some young Asian Christians who had come to Australia to study. Steven Chan was of particular assistance in preaching, teaching and song leading.

Today the congregation of over 50 members is quite multicultural, including several Christians who have migrated to Australia from India and other countries. There are a number of men able to preach and teach and serve in other ways. Six people have been baptised since the beginning of 2009. There are a few deaf brethren in the congregation

and the work of Gwenda Thomas in interpreting for them is invaluable.

A feature of the church since 1993 has been the *Saving Light Series* held each November. It aims to encourage brethren from the Melbourne area, as well as reach out to people in the community. This year's series will have a 50th anniversary theme, with lessons on the topic of the church and speakers who have been members at Heidelberg West in the past. □

Letter from America

Kent Hartman



... I believe God wants us all to have a renewed interest in learning the Word of God and in teaching the message of Jesus Christ ...



'G'day', 'Good on ya', 'You little beauty', 'She'll be right mate', etc.... When I came to Australia the first time in 1974 and heard these phrases, I knew I wasn't in Oklahoma! Those who came in the group that I was blessed to be part of noticed some subtle and not so subtle differences in the culture and the church as we moved about from Sydney, to Melbourne and to Brisbane and then back to Sydney.

Now, after having spent almost 18 years in mission work in Sydney and having moved back to the US ten years ago, I'd like to share some thoughts on the subtle and not so subtle changes that we have noticed in the church in America over the past years. You can decide if these changes also are occurring or have occurred in Australia over the past few years.

Nancy and I currently teach Bible and Mission-related classes at Oklahoma Christian University. One of the things that we and our colleagues discuss is that the basic Bible knowledge of our students from Churches of Christ has declined in recent years. We will still have a few students who know the Word of God reasonably well, but the average student doesn't have a good basic knowledge of the Bible.

I teach 'Life of Christ', using the Gospel of Matthew as a text. From a short survey I take at the beginning of class, around half of the students in my class have been to church every week for years. Yet when I ask those students how many of them have studied the Gospel of Matthew in a Bible class or in some other setting, usually only around 10 % of the students have done so. My question is: what were they taught during their years of coming to church and Bible class?

Carrying this thought further, I don't hear as many church ministers encouraging Christians to learn or memorise Bible passages. Christians at one time were known for knowing what the Bible said. This subtle change concerning Bible knowledge has far-reaching implications.

A second subtle or not so subtle change that seems apparent to me in Churches of Christ in America is the lack of emphasis to reach those who are not Christians. Some, not all, of our short-term mission trips that youth groups go on are designed for them to build houses, construct buildings, help

the poor, etc... Many of these trips will not engage the local people in trying to share the Gospel of Jesus with them, but will be good humanitarian trips.

In the Gospel of Matthew, there are two passages that some would say are short 'summary' passages of the ministry of Jesus. These passages are Matthew 4:23 - *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people;* and Matthew 9:35 - *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.* As you probably know, the section following Matthew 4:23 is the Sermon on the Mount and chapters 8 and 9 contain half of the miracles that are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

These summary passages of the ministry of Jesus state that Jesus did things to help people (healing every disease and sickness). But he also taught and preached the Good News of the Kingdom. Today we are ministering to the physical needs of people, but sometimes not teaching them the Gospel. Following Jesus' example, I think we should do both.

In America, our worship assemblies have had subtle changes as well. Some of the songs we used to sing encouraged us to think about reaching out to others. These songs have been replaced by songs that put a good emphasis on worshipping and praising God – which I am in favour of – but we have fewer songs encouraging us to reach out to and serve others.

In some churches in America you could worship with a congregation for a long time without being encouraged to think that many of your friends and neighbours are lost and that you might be the person who could help bring them to faith in Jesus. Much of our preaching is designed not to offend anyone. Yet the Gospel is offensive to many who are lost. Jesus Christ offended many people with his teaching. I don't think we should be offensive people, but I think we should realise that many people are lost, need to hear the saving message of the crucified Christ and they may be offended.

In Australia as in America, I believe God wants us all to have a renewed interest in learning the Word of God and in teaching the message of Jesus Christ to people in this world who are lost without Jesus. May God's blessings be with each of you. □

Kent Hartman is a Missionary in Residence at Oklahoma Christian University and is a member of Memorial Road church of Christ in Oklahoma USA. Kent.Hartman@oc.edu

InterSections

InterSections is a quarterly journal designed to inform, inspire and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s).

InterSections is published by Klesis Institute, the ministry division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

Editor: Warren Holyoak

Associate Editors: Christine Payne & Benny Tabalujan

Board of Advisors: Trevor Baker, Dale Hartman, Allan McNicol, David Mowday

Enquiries: Klesis Institute, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150, Australia.

Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox

Publisher: Klesis Institute www.klesisinstitute.com

Email: intersections@klesisinstitute.com

Fax: +61 3 9806 1205

© Klesis Institute, 2010. Copyright permission is given to anyone wishing to reproduce an individual article for non-commercial purposes, as long as due attribution is given to the author(s) and *InterSections*.

To subscribe:

- PDF format: simply email us at intersections@klesisinstitute.com and request to be placed on the *InterSections* mailing list, providing us with your name, mailing address, phone & email.
 - Printed format: write to Klesis Institute, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150, Australia, providing your name and address and cheque payment for AUD\$22 (per year for 4 issues).
- You may also use the *InterSections* subscription form available from www.klesisinstitute.com and pay your subscription by credit card.



Food for thought

The Restoration Movement: the good, the bad and the ugly

No human initiative like the Restoration Movement can escape the influence of its culture. Just as the 16th century Reformation struggled to separate church and state in a premodern culture in which they were intertwined, the 19th century Restoration Movement was a modern movement, a product of the age of reason that valued rational argument.

The Restoration Movement (RM) sought to restore New Testament Christianity. In reality, it interpreted what New Testament Christianity looked like through the culture of its founders and their followers. The RM was particularly influenced by Scottish rationalism - Alexander Campbell, a key figure in the RM, was said to carry the Bible in one saddlebag and John Locke's writings in the other. There was a good side to this and a bad.

The good side was the application of objective reason to interpret Scripture. The premodern approach to biblical interpretation centred around traditional, allegorical and subjective methods. (Interestingly, these methods are now being revisited by postmoderns.) Associated with these methods was an almost mystical view of Scripture and the notion that only the clergy were qualified to interpret it.

As the West moved toward modernity, confidence grew that ordinary people could read and understand Scripture for themselves. By the beginning of the 19th century Bibles were readily available. However, differing interpretations had led to a proliferation of denominations. In this milieu, the RM optimistically sought Christian unity by means of a disciplined, systematic and logical approach to interpretation and application of Scripture. As Scripture itself refers to the possibility of correct (2 Timothy 2:15) and incorrect (2 Peter 3:16) ways to interpret it, the quest for unity based on correct interpretation and application was admirable.

The bad side was that this noble quest proved too optimistic. Human reason proved incapable of reaching agreement on how to interpret Scripture or its valid application. The founders of the RM had sought to solve this problem by using a rubric taken from Thomas Campbell's 1809 *Declaration and Address*: 'In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion liberty; in all things, charity.'

In reality, practice was more difficult than principle. Many from generations that followed struggled to distinguish between matters of faith and opinion. Too confident of their own reasoned opinions, they set about defining doctrine and practice, binding their conclusions as the arbiter of unity and excluding those who did not agree.

Inevitably, things got ugly. Rather than the desired unity, the RM became divided. Debates proliferated, too often characterised by bad attitudes. In some quarters a spirit of

fear developed because of prevailing judgmentalism and the idea that salvation depended on getting everything right.

Over time, there were formal divisions over the use of instrumental music in worship assemblies, missionary societies and the uses of a church's treasury. There were also informal lines being drawn over issues like eschatology and divorce and remarriage. There were even debates on what constitutes drunkenness!

The causes of these formal and informal divisions are complex. Some are biblically justifiable, others less so. These experiences highlight the perennial tension within the RM between the quest for unity and the search for truth. With hindsight, some of the sectarian behaviour within the RM could be viewed as a modern response to shun any unity that is not based on complete agreement about right doctrine and practice.

Today, our culture is moving towards the postmodern era characterised by relativism, pluralism, subjectivism and syncretism. (If you're unsure about these 'isms', please check them out - every contemporary Christian should be aware of them because they are now powerful cultural influences!) In a postmodern era, any movement born during the modern era is going to be challenged. This is now happening within churches that have the RM as their heritage. Once again, there are good, bad and ugly sides to this challenge.

The good side is that we now have a better perspective of the RM's strengths, weaknesses and the cultural influences upon it. This gives us an opportunity to re-evaluate just how biblical are the doctrines and practices that we have inherited. In particular, greater emphasis on 'orthopraxy' - right living - is a much-needed corrective to the nastiness and hypocrisy that too often accompanied the past emphasis on 'orthodoxy' - right doctrine.

The bad side is that this process of re-evaluation will itself be influenced by the new postmodern perspectives of our generation. Some of these perspectives are as spiritually unhealthy as some of those associated with modernity. Indeed, as is the way of human nature, on some issues the pendulum will tend to swing from one extreme to another.

This may bring strife to churches that span generations brought up under different worldviews. Older Christians, brought up with a modern perspective, may be inclined to resist any change and retreat into traditionalism and even

A Home Grown Resource Pool

The Australian church of Christ Evangelist Trust, or ACCET (pronounced 'asset') as the Trustees like to call it, was launched in May 2005 with an initial deposit of \$2. Over the last five years the balance of the ACCET has reached \$300,000 and grants totalling \$50,000 have been provided for workers in Australia.

The idea for ACCET originated from the elders and brethren of the Gosford church who were inspired by the large US-based trusts, like the Bell Trust, which have supported workers in Australia for many years. The brethren at Gosford also saw the need to have Australian-based resources to support evangelists. They also saw that they had the God-given skills and ability to establish a Trust for the church in Australia.

John Stone, one of the elders at Gosford and founding Trustee said, 'ACCET is a gift to the churches of Christ throughout Australia. ACCET had to start somewhere and six years back Gosford was in a position to get it established. ACCET taps into the generosity of Christians all over Australia for the express purpose of supporting evangelism in our country. Just like the New Testament church, resources are being provided to help support workers preaching the Gospel.'

ACCET is designed to provide a local resource pool from which churches in Australia can seek help to pay for evangelists, workers, Bible students and for other evangelistic needs.

ACCET was established as a trust and the way it works is quite simple. Gifts are given to ACCET. This money is sensibly invested and each year some of the investment earnings are set aside to provide monetary grants to churches of Christ. ACCET is governed by its Trust Deed, established at the trust's inception in 2005. It is overseen by a group of Trustees from churches around Australia who ensure that ACCET is run in keeping with the founding principles of the Trust Deed.

A donation to ACCET generates investment earnings in perpetuity. In principle, grants are only paid out of the investment earnings so that the amount of the investment pool (the sum of donations made) never declines.

Grants are only provided to congregations, Bible schools or defined ministry works. Grants are not made to individuals. Each grant is treated as a gift by the Trustees and once the grant is made, it is up to the leadership of the local congregation who received it to administer that money. The Trustees don't get involved in the employment, deployment or control of workers as this is the responsibility of each congregation's leadership.

To date, ACCET has provided gifts to churches at Blacktown, Hunter Valley, Macquarie, The Point, Heidelberg West and to STAMP. In turn, these congregations have used the money to support various individuals including David Carr, Peter Tickner, Les Totman, Graham Wall, Sam White and Nick LaSpina.

ACCET needs donations to grow the investment pool. Each year ACCET is in a position to grant about 7% of the capital balance. This represents the typical investment earnings for a year. With a current capital pool of \$300,000, the grant total each year is about \$20,000. That is \$20,000 of support that can go to help workers in Australia year in, year out!

Now imagine if ACCET had a capital balance of \$500,000 or \$1,000,000. Then the annual grants would be \$35,000 or \$70,000, respectively! That is a lot of money to help assist evangelism in Australia and reduce the past heavy reliance on churches and trusts in the US.

Some may ask if these figures are realistic. If ACCET maintains its growth rate over the last five years, then the capital balance in 2015 will be \$600,000. Assuming typical investment earnings, this can mean a possible \$40,000 per annum being gifted for evangelism.



ACCET
Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust

Reflections

The Word

In the beginning was the Word...
and the Word was with God...

and the Word was God.

All things that were made,
came into being

through the Word

and by the Word.

and God said, "."

thus life and time and all that is,
came into being.

The divine and the human
entities that surely cannot be
compared;

so also, with the Word.

The human word -

spoken, sung or penned;

expressing -

and in turn,

evoking passions emotions

and actions;

known only to mankind.

The divine Word -

created - upholds - sustains.

brings truth, belief, faith

and hope in hearts open

to the source and power

from whence it came.

The rider -

Faithful and True,

Whose name is the Word -

Of God

Regi Nald



To keep growing, ACCET needs the help of generous Christians to keep donating to the Trust. ACCET is exempt from paying income tax so all its earnings can go towards providing grants and funding the minimal expense of running the Trust each year. You can support ACCET in different ways:

- 1. Provide a regular donation to ACCET.** ACCET receives regular donations each month. These donations are often just \$10, \$20 or \$30 per month but they make a big difference. If 100 Christians give \$30 per month to ACCET (which is just \$1 per day) then the capital balance will grow by \$36,000 per annum! Many of us could afford \$1 per day. To make this happen just deposit your donation to: *Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust, Westpac Wyoming NSW BSB 032-669 Account No. 18-6499.*
- 2. Make a one-off donation to ACCET.** Many Christians and congregations send ACCET a quarterly or an annual donation. Some of these donations have been very substantial. Like many small donations, they help grow the capital balance. Donations can be deposited into the account mentioned above or by cheque payable to: 'Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust' and mailed to PO Box 552, Gosford, NSW 2250, attention David Payne.
- 3. Change your will.** Several people have informed the Trustees that they have modified their will to provide a gift to ACCET out of their estate. This is a loving and generous thing to do, as their gift will keep helping evangelism in Australia in perpetuity. To include ACCET in your will, simply change your will to provide for a percentage of your estate to be bequeathed to the *Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust ABN 18 064 594 371*. It is important to include the ABN as this will help the executor of the will.

Of course ACCET's main reason for existing is to provide grants. The funds available for grants and the grant application process are announced in September each year. Grant applications close at the end of each November. Grants are issued from the following January. If a grant is approved, the money is distributed quarterly. Watch out for the 2011 grant application guidelines distributed in September this year.

If you wish to know more about ACCET please contact David Payne on 0468 719 025 or at paynedt@bigpond.com. □

*David Payne is an elder of the Gosford church and secretary of ACCET.
paynedt@bigpond.com*

Food for thought cont.

legalism. Younger Christians, less certain of their doctrinal heritage and wanting a more experiential and inclusive form of church, may demand changes, ignoring the consciences of others and their insistence for biblical authority.

Some have wondered if a modern movement like the RM can survive our cultural shift to postmodernity. In particular, as churches come to terms with the changing times, each will encounter unique problems because of the individual personalities in their midst, their worldviews and the particular issues they raise. My hope is that the broader perspective presented here – viewing the RM through premodern, modern and postmodern lenses – can help generate better outcomes through an understanding that our perspectives are influenced by the cultural changes we are all experiencing. In the midst of all this, the challenge will be to promote biblical rather than cultural outcomes. □

*Warren Holyoak is an elder for The Point Church in Brisbane and editor of InterSections.
warren@klesisinstitute.com*

Book Review

The Heart of the Restoration Series

Douglas A Foster, series editor, ACU Press, 2002-2005



Douglas A. Foster

This series serves as a commentary on Churches of Christ in the USA around 200 years after the Restoration Movement began. It is also a challenge to critically evaluate the way churches from that heritage have evolved and to reflect on their future direction. Each volume in the series has two or three authors with nine authors over the series so far. The authors are all faculty members of the College of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University (ACU), Texas.

ACU has been influential among Churches of Christ for over 100 years through its contributions to our theology and the ministry of thousands of its graduates. These days some regard ACU as too liberal. However, agree with them or not, the series is a unique and influential review of how the Restoration Movement is moving along. As such, it should stimulate healthy conversations within congregations about their future direction.

This series sets out to make a continuing contribution at a time of 'crisis' and 'transition' among Churches of Christ in the US. The context is most thoroughly canvassed in the first volume. It identifies the American Restoration Movement as one shaped by modernity, but now having to come to terms with postmodernity. The changing culture is apparently impacting our American brethren in several ways: declining numbers; growing diversity; less certainty about doctrine and identity; a more inclusive attitude toward other believers. In varying degrees, these trends are also being experienced by Churches of Christ in Australia.

So far four volumes in the series have been published. *The Crux of the Matter* (2002) reflects on the American Restoration Movement heritage of Churches of Christ. *God's Holy Fire* (2002) focuses on how we read Scripture. *Unveiling Glory* (2003) examines the identity and transforming nature of Christ. *Seeking a Lasting City* (2005) dwells on the story of the church. The final volume on worship is still to be published. Each volume includes a Study Guide with discussion questions, congregational scenarios, biblical case studies, teaching notes, and recommended reading.

As the title suggests, the first volume urges a greater focus on 'the core' of the Gospel, identified as the cross of Christ. Past division is characterised as the outcome of too little transformation by the cross and too much attention to peripheral matters. Put another way, the Restoration Movement has tended to be more concerned about the form of the church than transformed lives and right behaviour toward each other. But the authors are also concerned that postmodern influences may swing the pendulum of emphasis so much that the distinctive identity of Churches of Christ may be lost through excessive tolerance and inclusion. In the final chapter they nominate five doctrines and practices they believe are at least part of a non-negotiable 'core' that should be

maintained in the midst of change. These core doctrines are: baptism of believers by immersion for the forgiveness of sins; encountering the cross of Christ in baptism leads to changed behaviour in the world; our commitment to be holy and Christlike is expressed in behaviours like worship, study and prayer; the implications of the cross are most visible within the church; weekly participation in the Lord's Supper serves as an ongoing covenant to be people of the cross.

The second volume reconsiders the nature and function of Scripture in the context of a declining biblical literacy within Churches of Christ. In response to the loss of biblical literacy, much of the book is devoted to an overview of the historical background, content, genre and hermeneutics of Scripture. Special emphasis is given to the Old Testament in order to correct past tendencies to discount or neglect it. Bible study is reoriented from trying to answer our own questions to listening 'to the voices in Scripture, making its questions our own'. This involves greater emphasis on textual rather than topical studies. More controversially, their way of dealing with the inerrancy of Scripture is to shift the focus to its total sufficiency for God's purposes rather than its scientific accuracy in every detail.

Unveiling Glory is a Christological study orientated towards the significance of Jesus for faith and life today. It is essentially a detailed explanation of the Gospel. Just as the incarnation was an unveiling of the glory of God, so God's intention was to unveil glory in our own lives as we grow in Christlikeness. This volume is a crucial part of the series because it calls our attention to what will really change our churches for the better: Christians who are being fully transformed into the image of God.

Seeking a Lasting City is an appropriate sequel to *Unveiling Glory* as it traces the journey of God's people in the story of God. The authors' declare this fourth volume to be a 'narrative ecclesiology'. By that they mean that they have approached the subject of what it means to be a church that pleases God from the perspective of the biblical story of God's plan to foster community with people. This expands the usual, more focussed, consideration of the New Testament church, with the goal of steering churches away from self-preserving maintenance toward a sense of mission - from a focus on issues to the kind of lives we are living.

Throughout the series, the authors try not to be prescriptive. They try to stimulate reflection and conversations within churches. If the books are approached with this in mind, those parts that might otherwise trouble you should rather serve to get you thinking and discussing them with fellow Christians. Despite the fact that the authors are from academia, the books are easy to read. They don't assume too much prior knowledge on the part of the reader. This makes them worthwhile reading for every Christian. □



Interview with John & Joan Stone

Describe your Christian background and your early days in the church.

Our families obeyed the Gospel in 1944 in Inverell, northern NSW, when we were both 10 years old. Our families were with what is now sometimes referred to as the Associated or Conference Churches of Christ. The Associated Church in those days was adamant about the need for baptism, making it very unpopular in the town. Instrumental music was used and there was an annual conference, similar to a lectureship.

The conference had no jurisdiction over congregations, which were autonomous with elders and deacons. We individually obeyed the Gospel in 1948-49. It was not unusual for baptism to occur some time after the initial confession, as it was an opportunity for members of the congregation to invite people to witness the baptism in the building.

Worship was similar to today. The evening meeting was evangelistic, featuring a Gospel message, and we were expected to bring visitors along. There were no home Bible studies. Many visitors came on Sunday night and some were eventually baptised.

John went to agricultural college in 1951. We were married in 1956 and in 1957 we moved to Yanco in the Riverina. There was no Associated Church, so we attended the Baptist church. In 1959 we transferred to Glen Innes and we ended up back at the Associated Church in Inverell.

Les Burgin decided to go visit congregations where he had taught, expressing concerns which included mixing with other denominations, tolerating and becoming inclusive of other doctrine. He thought it was probably better not to use musical instruments. After prayer and study, thirty of us left and formed another congregation down the street.

In 1961 we were transferred to Batlow, southern NSW, and rarely had the opportunity to meet with other Christians. In 1964 we were transferred to Windsor in Sydney and for the first time in four years we were able to meet with a congregation. We stayed until 1968. We will never forget the help and support we were given during our time in Windsor, especially during the period where our daughter struggled with many health issues.

Worshipping each week with Christians was such a blessing and John became involved in teaching and preaching with other members. This was during the period when the Windsor building was erected. The day after the first meeting in this building, we transferred to Bathurst, NSW. We were isolated again, but this time we traveled every fortnight to worship with the Windsor church. People would come and stay with us, which we found very encouraging.

Transferring to Gosford in 1972, John managed the Department of Agriculture research station in Narara until 1978. At this time we agreed it would be better for John to commute to Sydney, settle in Gosford and try and establish the church here. We met in our home and rented premises and had a large Sunday school. In 1976 we rented a little church building, which we later purchased. We met there until we moved our meetings to the local Gosford community centre where we worship now.

You have both have traveled around considerably over the years. How has this impacted the nature of the type of ministry you have chosen to undertake?

I (John) was the only one of those 30 people who came out of the Associated Church in Inverell who had any teaching skills at all. I had never preached before and someone had to teach. So I took on the preaching role – but I felt like I was only ever one lesson ahead of the rest of the congregation! Moving around and establishing a new congregation meant that we did many things that we may otherwise not have done. We both did whatever was required whether we felt skilled in an area or not.

What have been the highlights of your ministry experience?

We have been delighted to see the Gosford church grow, with many obeying the Gospel and a number of others moving into the area. We often prayed that we would have a full time preacher, elders shepherding the congregation and deacons. God has achieved all those goals in his time.

Getting involved in forming the Australian church of Christ Evangelistic Trust (ACCET) has been a most satisfying task. More recently, working with others to develop an opportunity for young people to study God's word and gain a taste of ministry experience through the STAMP program has been a real highlight.

What do you think has tested you most over the years?

When we were transferred to Batlow, we were very isolated. This was a very difficult time for us. Our daughter was born deaf after Joan had rubella during pregnancy. The local doctor had advised us to terminate, which we could never think of doing. Being isolated from Christians was difficult, so we travelled to Melbourne to talk and pray with those who could offer us Christian advice along with specialist guidance.

It is also heartbreaking to see so many who have obeyed the Gospel fall away. Many people are looking for more than the simplicity of the Gospel. Social activity is not the goal of the church. We certainly need to fellowship and have fun together but our goal is to grow the church, nurture our faith, support and help each other, and worship God. It is often very hard to get people to understand that.

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the church in a postmodern society?

When we were young, there were just the mainstream churches. In recent years there has been an escalation in the number of religious groups, teaching different doctrines. They are very committed and influence a lot of people with entertainment and activities. That is a great challenge for the church. Another challenge will be to revisit the instrumental music question in the near future.

We are also going to have to deal with changing views regarding the role of women in the church. Women have an incredibly important role in the church. They need to get all the training they can get to be better equipped for God's service. However, there are limitations on what men and women can do and we all need to submit to God's boundaries.

Any final thoughts?

God gave his own blood for the church (Acts 20:28). So don't isolate yourself from the church! If you are not involved you are like a piece of coal, away from the fire, which gradually goes out. There are good reasons why God established the church. It wasn't an afterthought. He wants his people involved and committed. The more you are involved with the church, the more you understand God's purposes. And this will help you get to heaven. ☐

*John and Joan Stone are members of the Gosford Church of Christ, where John is an elder.
They were interviewed by Christine Payne. jgstone@idl.net.au*