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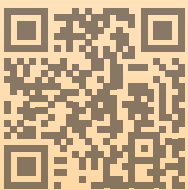
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Editorial

Welcome to the May 2023 issue of *InterSections*.

One of the underlying issues troubling our society is the question of authority. Where do we go for authoritative answers? Do we look to science and experts? Or to charismatic teachers and influencers? Perhaps we look to ourselves? All these different sources of authority can make it difficult to resolve the issues that we face together, or find the answers we seek for a meaningful life.

It's no different in the church. Historically, many contemporary Churches of Christ emerged from what has been called the Stone-Campbell Movement (or Restoration Movement) during the Second Great Awakening in America. Among other things, this movement called for a restoration of the faith and practices of the first Christians. Can this restoration principle be helpful for disciples and churches today?

In our *Feature*, Benny Tabalujan offers some observations about why the call to restoration remains important for followers of Jesus. In *Food for Thought*, Keith Stanglin considers the legacy of Jacobus Arminius, a 16th century theologian whose beliefs in a number of areas were, surprisingly, consistent with ours. David Mowday reflects on what the principle of restoration has meant to the Gosford church over their 50 years, particularly as it relates to leadership. In our *International Letter*, Evert Huffard writes about some lessons he has learned about developing church leaders in different parts of the world. Keith Gant reviews a book that examines the doctrine of the Trinity, and the very real implications this has on our spiritual life. In the *News* we hear about the Victorian Autumn Camp held over the Easter break. And Stuart Penhall shares with us his mother Janie's story, whose life spent 'seeking the light' left a legacy for many.

Enjoy reading.

The *InterSections* Team.

Feature

The Restoration Plea – Confessions of a fan

I first heard of the Restoration Plea in my teens. Among the Churches of Christ in Asia and Australia where I circulated, this plea essentially refers to a call for Christians to forego denominationalism in favour of restoring or replicating in a visibly united way the faith, practices, and ethos of Jesus' earliest disciples.¹

But this call for restoration isn't admired universally. Some complain that it focuses too much on the church instead of Christ. Others say it's naïve because it underestimates difficulties in its application. Not a few simply feel it is anachronistic and should be discarded. Yet, after several decades of striving to be a disciple of Jesus, I must confess that I'm still a fan of the Restoration Plea.² Let me offer three reasons why.

First, I find that the Restoration Plea is, at its core, profoundly biblical. It's clear that the New Testament disapproves of church factions and divisions (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:10–13). If denominationalism is 'the institutionalisation of division' among believers,³ isn't a call to move away from such division in favour of restoring a visibly united church therefore biblical? Similar echoes can also be heard in the Old Testament. The youthful King Josiah's efforts to reinstate true temple worship to God is a restoration of sorts (2 Kings 22–23). Indeed, the entire salvation history described in Scripture can be viewed as one massive effort to restore fellowship between God and his people.

Second, my personal experience is that the Restoration Plea tends to promote authenticity. Like many people, I prefer the original to the counterfeit (and this goes beyond money or love). To me, ensuring that contemporary discipleship follows the faith, practices, and ethos of Jesus' first disciples seems to be a common-sense way to promote authenticity. Those early disciples knew Jesus firsthand. Hence, studying the impact of Jesus on these disciples inevitably entails learning about Jesus himself. If so, then why not follow their footsteps? As the apostle Paul put it, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:1).



Benny Tabalujan



I remember hiking years ago in the mountains of New Zealand with fellow Christians. When we drank from mountain streams, the water seemed purer as we got closer to the summit. That's because water tends to be tainted by detritus as it rushes downstream. Similarly, it's preferable to make photocopies from originals, not from other photocopies. Both analogies make the same point. Seeking the original and going back to the source help us avoid corruption and impurities. That's why learning about Jesus from the earliest disciples – who were closest to the Christ we worship today – makes sense. Proximity spurs authenticity.

Third, I find the Restoration Plea attractive because of the practicality of its principles. The basic notions seem simple enough. If the first Christians devoted themselves to apostolic teaching, fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread, why can't we do so today? If immersion of believers was a widely practised rite of conversion, shouldn't we do it too? If they shared the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, why can't we? If they had church elders and deacons serving local congregations and if they sang *acappella* in their worship assemblies, are we wrong to follow suit?

Of course, this isn't to say that everything in the Bible is simple and clear. There are parts of Scripture that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). There are doctrinal nuances which take years to appreciate.

However, this doesn't mean that all disciples must be learned scholars. Reflecting on my involvement in churches over the years, I've been blessed to come across theology professors as well as fellow believers with limited education. Yet on key points I marvel how my highly educated and

less educated brothers and sisters can share a common biblical understanding. This suggests that there's enough in Scripture that's practical to allow sincere seekers (learned or not) to know God and unite as his people.⁴ God's kingdom isn't just for scholars.

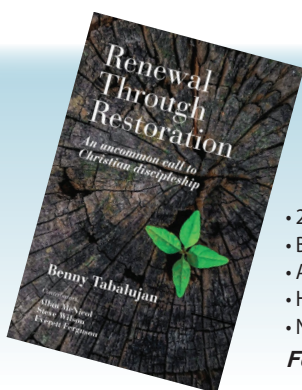
Of course, none of the reasons shared above precludes the possibility that the Restoration Plea can be misconstrued or misapplied. For example, a desire to imitate the practices of the earliest disciples can lead to an extreme patternism which, at its worst, breeds legalism, self-righteousness, and an ungodly sectarianism. Also, an emphasis on the New Testament church can induce an ahistorical approach to reading Scripture, ignoring valuable lessons from both the Old Testament and two millennia of church history. Avoiding these pitfalls requires large doses of humility, openness, and grace – as well as an abiding love for God and neighbour.

A final observation: when I look around today, I see that denominationalism is ebbing in many places. One cause may be a tendency of some churches to uphold a form of godliness while denying its true power (cf. 2 Timothy 3:5). In contrast, fellowships which focus on being biblical (instead of being denominational) appear to thrive. From this, I surmise that today there's a deep yearning for biblically authentic worship, leadership, discipline, and community.

If I'm right, then my hunch is that – potential pitfalls notwithstanding – the Restoration Plea still has plenty to offer. Restoring the faith, practices, and ethos of the earliest disciples of Jesus is appealing because it opens us up to the Holy Spirit's work in biblical, original, and practical ways – all to the Father's glory. That's why I'm still a fan. ◇

- 1 While Churches of Christ and others in the Stone-Campbell Movement have been prominent in advocating for the Restoration Plea, the restoration ideal isn't unique to these fellowships. Historically, other groups (e.g. the Anabaptists) have also sought to restore the substance and spirit of the primitive church: Benny Tabalujan *et al*, *Renewal Through Restoration: An Uncommon Call to Christian Discipleship* (Klesis Press, 2021) 10-13.
- 2 For a longer defence of this plea by one of the outstanding church historians of his generation, see: Everett Ferguson, 'Churches of Christ: Who We Are and What We Ought to Be,' in *Renewal Through Restoration*, 135-146.
- 3 As per the Reformed scholar, Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Brazos Press, 2016) 5.
- 4 This seems consistent with the famous saying (variously attributed to Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great): 'The Bible is shallow enough for a child not to drown, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim.'

Benny Tabalujan is an elder serving Belmore Road Church of Christ in suburban Melbourne. He's also editor of InterSections. b.tabalujan@gmail.com



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Church Scene *The Gosford Church and Biblical Leadership*

David Mowday

On 31 July 2022, Gosford Church of Christ celebrated 50 years of worshipping and serving on the Central Coast of NSW. As a congregation, we see ourselves as part of the global Restoration Movement. Being part of this movement, one of the key principles we uphold is an absolute commitment to the Bible as the inerrant word of God. This makes God's word authoritative for our worship, service, and lives generally.

Since the Gosford church began, we have endeavoured consistently to submit to the authority of Scripture. But it hasn't always been easy. In particular, over the last three decades our traditional beliefs and practices have been challenged through repeated and thorough examinations of Scripture. If the conclusions we reach differ from our practice, we must be willing to change that practice.

On this point, please note what Stuart Penhall, my fellow elder at Gosford, wrote recently:

'There is a tendency to confuse practices with principles. One of the main convictions of the original Restoration Movement was that the authority of Scripture (the principle) must be what determines our beliefs and actions (our practices). This necessarily means that they are not the same thing and confusing them is one of the main reasons for disunity among believers. If you regard your particular practice as being authoritative, then it becomes the standard by which you judge others, and its authority is never questioned. As others do the same thing there can be no progress. The practice must not be seen as the same as the principle.' (Stuart Penhall, *Gosford Beacon*, 29 January 2023).

The point Stuart stresses is that where people have differing traditions or practices which each believes to be exclusively authoritative, there can be no progress towards unity of believers. Submission to the authority of Scripture demands a thorough examination of these practices against the teachings of Scripture. This involves examining Scripture in all of its contexts, including the literary, historical, and canonical contexts. If a practice is supported by the examination of Scripture, then there's no issue. If it's not supported, then the practice should be abandoned or brought into line with Scripture. This necessitates consideration on our part that we may be wrong. If we aren't willing to consider that possibility even when presented with correction from Scripture, can we really claim that we accept the authority of Scripture?



Looking back over the 50 years of our congregation's history, perhaps the most valuable thing to emerge from our commitment to the authority of Scripture is our pursuit of biblical leadership. On 24 May 2022, the Gosford church marked 25 years since the appointment of our first elders. The church initially appointed three elders in 1997. This was after years of study on the topic. Our study was complemented by lessons taught by Bob Abney, a visiting teacher.

Bob was (and remains) passionate about God's plan for biblical leadership. His passion was contagious. Through his help and our own study of Scripture, we began to realise that we often held elders to a standard so high that it was viewed as unattainable. I suspect this thinking still exists among some non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia; it's probably a key reason why so few congregations have elderships.

Yet there's a strong biblical argument against the view that men must reach an almost unattainable standard of maturity and godliness before they can become an elder. Consider Paul's instructions to Titus. Paul and Titus had previously visited Crete. It was only a short time later that Paul was required to be elsewhere. So he told Titus to stay behind and finish the work they had started, *'that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you'* (Titus 1:5).

In other words, the churches in Crete had not long been established before Titus was tasked with appointing elders in every town. A necessary part of that task would have been to teach various men to be *'beyond reproach'* (Titus 1:6) in order that they could be appointed as elders.

Whichever way you read the text, it's only a matter of months (or at most a few years) between the moment when Paul left Crete and the moment that Titus began appointing elders. Clearly, Titus was looking at those who were obviously demonstrating these qualities in their lives. He wasn't looking for those who had no room for improvement in these areas. After all, even Paul admits to being less than perfect (1 Timothy 1:15, Philipians 3:10–14).

What about non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia today? Only a handful of them have an eldership. Could it be that many congregations aren't appointing elders because they're still evaluating men against elder qualities not supported by Scripture? Are we unconsciously looking for perfection when Scripture doesn't require it?

If we claim to be a part of the Restoration Movement, then we should uphold God's word as authoritative. This implies a willingness to change our views and practices if God's word reveals something different. For the church at Gosford, this was especially pertinent in the area of biblical leadership and the appointment of elders.

May our journey be helpful for all. ◇

David Mowday is an elder serving Gosford Church of Christ in NSW. He and his wife, Joy, have been part of the Gosford congregation for 47 years. [dmowday@gmail.com](mailto:dowday@gmail.com)

Arminius and Churches of Christ



Jacob Harmenszoon (1559–1609), or Jacobus Arminius, was a Dutch theologian who was active in the early part of the post-Reformation period. He was educated in Reformed theology at Leiden, Marburg, Basel, and Geneva, where he was a student of John Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza. After his theological training, he was a minister at the *Oude Kerk* (Old Church) in Amsterdam for 15 years. He then spent the final six years of his life as a full professor at the theological college at Leiden University.

Arminius is best known for his opposition to some aspects of Reformed theology, especially the Reformed or Calvinist doctrines of unconditional predestination and irresistible grace. Against this view, Arminius taught that God gives everyone grace that we can each choose to resist, and that God elects believers, that is, people who don't refuse God's saving grace and faith. Although Arminius' thought and writings were prolific and wide-ranging, he's best remembered for his teachings on these controversial matters related to predestination and grace.

Arminius' thought has been profoundly influential among non- and anti-Calvinist Protestants, from Dutch Remonstrants to Wesleyan Methodists to the Second Great Awakening and global Pentecostalism. Several pioneers of the American Restoration Movement, such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton W Stone, although they were once devout Presbyterians, must be included among those who resisted Calvinist interpretations of predestination and grace.

As is well known, Alexander Campbell resisted theological labels. He didn't want to be known as a Calvinist, but he equally vehemently denied being Arminian. He had little or nothing positive to say about Arminius and his thought. Campbell's understanding of Arminianism, however, was neither deep nor accurate. He considered Arminianism to be speculative, calling it a 'theory full of sophistry.' For this and other reasons, most people in the Restoration Movement have never heard of Arminianism.

Since Campbell dismissed an Arminianism that wasn't genuine Arminianism, it's worth pointing out some actual similarities between Campbell's views and what historians would recognise as Arminianism. Below are seven points that Arminius himself and his earliest sympathisers taught which were not widely accepted in the Reformed circles of that period, but with which Campbell agreed.

1. When Arminius felt that the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were beginning to take the place of Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Church, he taught the priority of Scripture and called for a revision of the Confession on the basis of Scripture. So did Campbell, whose most proximate confessional documents (from the Westminster Assembly) were also Reformed orthodox.
2. Already at the turn of the 17th century, Arminius was dismayed by divisions in Christianity. He urged Christian love and toleration. His desire was for Christian unity, which he felt was hindered by certain Reformed doctrines of predestination. Campbell also sought to end Christian division and his movement had the unity of Christians as its goal.
3. Like the Reformers before him who resisted the so-called enthusiasts and spiritualists, Arminius emphasised both God's word and the Holy Spirit working together. He taught that the Spirit ordinarily works through God's word to effect faith and conversion. In light of Campbell's criticisms of what he considered Arminianism, this is perhaps the most important parallel that apparently escaped Campbell.
4. Arminius believed in the necessity of prevenient grace¹ for conversion – again, mediated through God's word. It's appropriate to observe that Campbell seems to agree with Arminius. In a discussion of 'Calvinism and Arminianism,' Campbell writes, 'No man has either the *will* or the *can* to please God without the grace of God.'² We're enabled by God's grace only when we admit that we're unable without his grace.
5. Arminius emphasised the need for good works as evidence of saving faith. So did Campbell.
6. Arminius affirmed human free choice in order to maintain responsibility for sin and to leave room for genuine relationship in the process of redemption. Campbell explicitly contended for human free agency and responsibility.
7. Arminius sought not only to reconcile human free choice with divine grace, but also to reconcile them both with divine omniscience, which included foreknowledge. Not only did Campbell think that human freedom and divine grace are compatible with divine foreknowledge, but he also (without using or knowing the terminology) described God's omniscience in terms consistent with middle knowledge,³ a theory to which Arminius earlier appealed.

The list of significant parallels could go on. On these and other points, Campbell agrees with historic Arminianism, though one wouldn't know it when searching through his references to Arminianism. The Arminianism that Campbell combats – what becomes the bogeyman – isn't Arminianism proper and has very little to do with the historical Arminius.

This isn't surprising given that traditional restorationist theology tends to have an ahistorical bias. Wherever there's agreement with a figure from the past, direct engagement with that historical figure is often seen as unnecessary because only the Bible is needed. Where there's disagreement, the historical figure or 'ism' is simply named and rejected. That's why I've noticed that, in traditional Restoration Movement preaching and teaching, we tend to name from the pulpit the historical figures with whom we disagree, but we often don't bother naming those with whom we agree – 'for we follow Scripture and not men'. Thus, I grew up hearing about Calvin (how bad he was) but nothing about Arminius. Generations of restorationists have missed the opportunity for positive interaction with beneficial Arminian resources.



We may not endorse some of the things that Arminius assumed given his Reformed context (e.g. paedobaptism), but his emphasis on grace that cooperates with human free will, his doctrine of providence, his insistence on God's holy love for all creation, and his desire to return to the basics of mere Christianity as a foundation for Christian unity – these are all messages that we still need to hear today. ◇

- 1 *Editorial note:* Prevenient grace refers to God's grace which helps prepare a person to turn to God and obey the Gospel.
- 2 *Millennial Harbinger* [1846] 326.
- 3 *Editorial note:* Middle knowledge is a theological stance which upholds both human free will and God's sovereignty. It's sometimes known as Molinism, after the 16th century Roman Catholic theologian and Jesuit priest, Luis de Molina. Many Calvinist and Reformed scholars would object to middle knowledge, preferring to emphasise God's total sovereignty in human decision-making.

Keith Stanglin directs the Center for Christian Studies (christian-studies.org). His books include: *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*, co-author (Oxford University Press, 2012); and *After Arminius: A Historical Introduction to Arminian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2020). Keith, his wife, Amanda, and their three children are members of Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin, Texas. stanglin@christian-studies.org

News Victorian Autumn Camp

The Victorian Autumn camp was held for the second year at the Charnwood forest camp – between Benalla and Mansfield in Victoria over the Easter weekend. The camp is a favourite for many who attend due to its relaxed atmosphere combined with biblical teaching, singing, and fellowship. This year was record breaking having the youngest camper at 2 ½ months old and the oldest camper at 82 years old (and part of 4 generations from the same family at camp).

In total there were 70 people in attendance (including day visitors) from 13 congregations from Victoria, ACT, South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland. Six speakers taught from the prophets Daniel, Jonah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. On Saturday a large group attended the local antique shop to enjoy the luxury of a 'real' coffee, scones, and for some wi-fi. Although it was a colder than usual camp, it didn't deter anyone's spirits because the cabins were warm, the food was lovingly cooked and served by brothers and sisters, the campfire was lit, games were played, and new and old friendships formed and renewed. ◇

Barb Poynton, Bairnsdale Church of Christ, VIC.



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Developing Church Leaders

Evertt Huffard with a group of teachers at Heritage Bible Institute in Accra, Ghana.

The apostle Paul had a contextual advantage in Macedonia, Achaia, Crete, and Asia Minor when teaching about church leadership and the appointment of elders (e.g. Titus 1:5–11, 1 Timothy 3:1–7). In New Testament times, there were mature Jewish believers who became church leaders based on their prior experiences in synagogues. However, often this isn't the case in contemporary churches – especially new church plants.



Seldom do we see a new congregation develop mature leaders quickly. It may take 20–35 years. (One exception is urban churches that benefit from transfer growth of mature Christians from rural to urban areas.) It's also difficult to find church leaders who are intentional in developing other leaders. On this topic, I find that very little is being done with intentionality, although everyone acknowledges that much more needs to happen. Globally, it seems that developing church leaders is acknowledged as an important – but not urgent – task. It should be both.

Aside from the intentionality and length of time needed to develop mature leaders, there is the issue of local culture. Culture can bless the development of leaders but it can also be a curse. Every culture has a way of corrupting what it means to lead and to follow in the kingdom of God. Yet we cannot lead and follow outside of our culture. Responding to this conundrum requires a high regard for the Word of God along with a dependence on the guidance of the Spirit and the collective wisdom of local leaders.

Through Mission Resource Network (mmet.org), my ministry to equip emerging church leaders has blessed me with cultural insights from around the world. In Europe, I was with a church that has existed for decades without elders. They were satisfied with the participatory nature of their leadership team of 10 men. They valued the sense of egalitarianism and mutual involvement shared by the team. This church asked me why they needed elders when their leadership team has worked so well.

I offered a handful of scenarios. Who would shepherd brothers or sisters struggling with their faith, a marriage in crisis, or a person with behaviours that are disruptive to the peace of the church? In short, who cares about the spiritual lives of everyone within the church? Their answer: not the leadership team of 10 – for they only managed business aspects of the church, not spiritual challenges faced by members.

Interestingly, within a year this congregation appointed two elders, men who were the most spiritually mature within the church. The following year they appointed deacons. My latest visit with them focused on mentoring emerging leaders to add a few more elders and deacons.

Lesson learnt: the egalitarian values of European or Western culture may have to be challenged if we're to address the spiritual needs of the church. Biblically, this is done by appointing elders to be guardians of the flock and having members submit to them out of reverence for Christ as the chief shepherd (1 Peter 5:1–5).

A very different cultural challenge surfaced in Africa. I was leading a seminar for church leaders in a place where less than five percent of Churches of Christ had elders (and these were not all new church plants). One of the local leaders observed that they had men who were very qualified to lead a congregation but these men declined multiple requests from the church to serve as elders. The reason the men gave: they didn't have enough money.

That was a new one for me! I usually hear potential shepherds who decline to be appointed an elder because they don't have adequate time, or still have children at home, or have too many demands at work. But lack of money? What does money have to do with it?

Further investigation revealed the realities of the patron-client relationships deeply rooted in many honour-shame cultures in Africa. In some of these places, government administration doesn't function well, unemployment is extremely high, and not a few church members have irregular incomes. The weekly church giving might not reach \$300 a week for a church of 200 people. In this setting, an elder becomes a patron: when needs emerge, it's the shepherd who's expected to provide assistance. That's why potential shepherds feel they need extra money to function well as elders.

Of course, I've met African elders who have done well financially. They willingly serve their churches as shepherds, stewarding the resources God has given them to meet the needs of the church. Yet, the gift of generosity shouldn't be the primary or only gift that shepherds must have to serve the church (cf. Romans 12:8). Can our African brothers and sisters challenge local cultural norms in view of the biblical principles outlined in Scripture?

For readers of this article in Australia, what would be a cultural norm which can prevent the appointment of elders in your churches? Could it be the 'tall poppy syndrome'?

Ultimately, I believe that the universal call to discipleship in Christ includes an obligation to shepherd God's people in every culture. Doing this often generates points of tension with local norms. But culture has to be transformed by the power of Christ. ◇

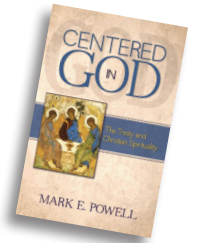


Teaching emerging leaders among Churches of Christ in Ghana.

Evertt Huffard taught missions and leadership for many years and is now professor emeritus at Harding School of Theology, Memphis, USA. ehuffard@harding.edu

Centered in God: The Trinity and Christian Spirituality

by Mark E. Powell (Abilene Christian University Press, 2014)



I had the privilege of being in Mark Powell's Systematic Theology courses at Harding School of Theology in 2008–2009. At that time his passion for the doctrine of the Trinity and his conviction that the Trinity is central to the Christian faith were clear to see. So it was no surprise to me when he later produced a 208-page book concerning this subject.

I quickly realised that Chapter 1 is not for speed reading; it seems like each sentence invites contemplation. But the investment is worth it. Powell starts by observing that contemporary views of spirituality are often divorced from any specific set of beliefs. They often see God as beyond comprehension. Such a spirituality with no intellectual foundation can lead to taking up 'narrow social and political agendas' – a phenomenon that's perhaps even more true now than when the book was written!

Instead, Powell asserts that true spirituality and religious experience must be anchored in a core set of Christian beliefs. He defines that core as the Trinity. This includes the full biblical doctrines of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the very nature of God. According to Powell, this has become increasingly important in light of the emergence of global Christianity and growing religious pluralism. Chapter 1 also provides some attempts at explaining the Trinity in an understandable way.

Chapter 2 recounts how views concerning the Trinity developed in the early church. This culminated in statements found in the Nicene Creed (325 AD). Since then, the Nicene statements have rightly been taken by a large majority of Christian believers as an accurate and biblical description of the nature and relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The chapter also discusses three other competing proposals for the nature of God considered by the early church: Tritheism, Modalism, and Arianism. Since Nicea, all three have been largely rejected. Lastly, this chapter addresses another major issue discussed by the early church – the relationship between the divine Son of God and the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Chapter 3 offers a scriptural study in support of the full divinity of the man Jesus, the full humanity of Jesus the Son of God, and the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Biblically, these doctrines appear consistent with the statements articulated in the Nicene Creed. Powell states his conviction - with which I agree - that for each of these critical doctrines (as with the process of deciding the exact books of the New Testament canon), the Holy Spirit 'led the church to get it right.' Powell also adds an important observation: we can accept this view of the Spirit's activity in the doctrinal development process without having to affirm the infallibility of early church councils or the pope.

The longest section of the book, Chapters 4–17, is about application. These chapters cover much ground across 14 areas of daily life. A listing of the chapter titles will give an idea of the topics: Embracing Creation, Knowing God, New Life, Community, Worship, Ministry, Unity, Holiness, Love, Downward Mobility, Submission, Discernment, Suffering, and Mystery.

You may at first wonder what the Trinity has to do with these 14 areas. Well, for each one, Powell offers a key connection. Perhaps more significantly, I discover many helpful insights in these chapters. I find them worth reading and often personally convicting. These chapters demonstrate that Powell has a keen awareness of secular culture as well as contemporary life in the church and the world. Space will not allow me to discuss the 14 chapters individually, but here are two examples. In Chapter 10 on 'Unity,' Powell bases a unity plea on the doctrine of the Trinity. He quotes John 17:20–23 and observes, 'Twice Jesus points to the unity he enjoys with the Father as an illustration of and basis for the unity he desires for the church.'

A second example is from Chapter 13 on 'Downward Mobility.' Powell notes that some contemporary ideologies and spiritualities encourage the pursuit of upward mobility. But, arguing from the doctrine of the incarnation and the humanity of the Son of God as seen in Philippians 2:3–8 where Jesus 'emptied himself' (or 'made himself nothing' – NIV), Powell calls us to choose a life that's the opposite of what dominates the modern world. Instead of pursuing upward mobility, we're to be open to downward mobility. He concludes the chapter thus: '...what exactly makes for a good and meaningful life anyway? The goals we accomplish and the possessions we attain? Or the faith we live and the people we love?'

In my Systematic Theology classes 15 years ago, I remember Mark Powell would often remark that his goal was for us students to develop the ability to 'think theologically.' Reading his book and seeing how doctrine and theology (Chapters 1–3) connect to real life issues and God's overall plan (Chapters 4–17) will help you on that path. ◇

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Janie Penhall - Light Seeker

Janie's commitment also went far beyond the church. She served the community for decades as a Pink Lady volunteer at Blacktown Hospital. She became a Justice of the Peace. As a JP she volunteered as a juvenile advocate to represent minors in and out of court at odd hours of the day.

All this Janie did until she began to lose her mobility around 2015. She spent her final years with the Gosford congregation supported by family. Then in October 2022 God called her home. Janie's remarkable journey of light seeking came to an end.

As I close my mother's story, I pause and wonder. What are the chances of a single lady from Birmingham who sought God would find him through carrying a heavy suitcase to a train station in Sydney? There are few better examples of God fulfilling his promise: that those who seek him will find him (Matthew 7:7). For Janie, that finding came through the most unexpected circumstances! ◇

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In Memoriam *Janie Penhall – Light Seeker*



'Light seeking' is an appropriate term to describe someone's journey of seeking salvation. It's a journey which most readers of this article will have undertaken. It's one which often has unexpected twists and turns. Janie Penhall was my mother. Her light seeking brought her halfway around the world and, in the process, touched the lives of many other seekers.

Janie's journey began as a teenager in a Birmingham suburb during Second World War Britain. It ended 80 years later at age 97, in a nursing home in a Gosford suburb where she finally reached the light that she had sought all her life.

We don't know much about the early years of Janie's light seeking other than that she took the faith she was born into very seriously. Like most people in Britain then, she was an Anglican. Unlike most people, she saw her faith as much more than going to church worship on Sunday.

Christianity to Janie meant serving others. She found an outlet for this in the St John's Ambulance; she served there for years. Many would've been satisfied with this, but not Janie. She was still seeking although she didn't really know precisely what she was looking for.

In 1952, Janie boarded a ship at Southampton and continued her light seeking. She was headed for Australia. For a young lady brought up in a sheltered environment (she lived like an only child because her brother died shortly after birth), the ship was a magical new world. Yet, as her diary shows, she still found time to worship God whenever church services were offered on board.

Janie had told friends that she was travelling to Australia to find a husband. But God intended for her to find much more than a spouse. Most light seekers can relate remarkable 'coincidences' which brought them to God. Janie was no exception.

In those days a single woman travelling to Australia could only come if she had a sponsor who would provide her with lodgings and a pre-arranged job. The Murrey family, who sponsored her, lived in Herbert Street, Merrylands, in western Sydney. The pre-arranged job didn't work out, but a new job turned up which also happened to be in the city.

Unknown to Janie a family lived just down the street from the Murreys. This family had four sons. As children, all four attended Sunday School at Merrylands Church of Christ. One continued to attend even when his brothers lost interest. That young man was Norman Penhall. He too was a light seeker, one who had obeyed the Gospel some years earlier.

Both Janie and Norman walked to the local train station to get to their jobs. Many people walked to the train station in those days. Janie had seen Norman and had even said hello. But it hadn't progressed beyond that.

Then something happened. One Friday, Janie was carrying a large suitcase to the station; she was going to Wollongong and stay for the weekend. The suitcase was too heavy for her and she had to stop every few metres to rest. Someone unexpectedly came up behind her and offered to carry the case. It was Norman.

Thus Janie found her future husband. But God intended this situation to enable her to find him as well. As the relationship between Janie and Norman developed, she began attending the Merrylands church. Initially, she did this because she felt that she needed to adopt the church of her future husband. Oddly, no effort was made by Norman or anyone else at Merrylands to teach Janie personally about God. Yet exposure to the Gospel was all she needed. It wasn't long before she was baptised. Even though it required Janie to travel halfway around the world, her faith had been awakened and she never looked back!

However, Janie's journey was far from over. God intended to use her to bring other light seekers to him. Over the next almost 70 years that's exactly what God did. Although Norman was also a light seeker, it was Janie who drove the family forward spiritually. It was she who did everything she could to ensure her children also had the chance to find God.

At first Norman and Janie served God together at the Merrylands congregation. Later they served in a ministry at Strathfield and elsewhere while continuing to worship at Merrylands. Then in 1969 the family began attending the new congregation at Macquarie. This was much closer to where they lived. And, importantly for Janie, Macquarie offered a better environment for her and the family to grow spiritually.

The next few years saw two Penhall children, Stuart and Elizabeth, become Christians. Janie's father, Harold – who lived with the family after a serious stroke and the loss of his wife to dementia – was also baptised. The family also became more involved with the Macquarie church. So much so that Norman was preparing to become part of the first eldership in that congregation.

But in 1975, weeks before the eldership appointment was to take place, Norman died of a heart attack. Thereafter, the Birmingham light seeker had to continue her journey deprived of his help.

Far from diminishing her zeal, Norman's sudden death served to make Janie even more committed to God. She attended MSOBS (Macquarie School of Biblical Studies) part time. She participated in Gospel campaigns. She became the church secretary at Macquarie and, later, Blacktown congregations. She had several MSOBS students board with her during their studies. Even though she had relatively little formal education, she studied the Bible with people who were seeking. She supported people who were struggling and encouraged everyone she came in contact with. In fact, since Janie's death last year, I've been amazed by the number of people who have told me how she helped them. More than one attributed their continued faithfulness to her support. (cont'd page 7)