

The Briefing

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The God of Word

Evangelicals seem to spend a lot of time talking about 'the Word of God'. It is one of our catchcries. Are we mistaken in having this emphasis? What is the place of experience and the Spirit? Does the 'word of God' equal 'the Bible'? In this stimulating series of three articles, JOHN WOODHOUSE offers some fresh insights into what 'God's Word' is, and what it means for the modern Christian.

You may have heard the complaint that for some Christianity has become a religion of the mind only. The problem, it is said, comes from the exclusive emphasis on the Word of God. Words are rational, and by themselves words produce rationalists with a truncated view of Christianity, a limited God, a lack of openness to the fullness of God's blessings, and a religion that is discussed more than it is lived.

It is an objection that is not without substance. There is enough truth in the description for it to be deeply disturbing to many of us.

Have we been guilty of putting undue emphasis on words? Let us look at both the Old and New Testaments to gain some perspectives on the question.

1. God and his Word in the Old Testament

There can be no argument that in the Bible the phenomenon of God's *Word* is very important. We think of the psalmist, for whom the instruction ('torah') of the Lord is more to be desired than much fine gold and sweeter than drippings of honeycomb (Ps. 19:10); we hear the voice of the prophet who declares that "the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Is. 40:8); or we remember that most profound description of the incarnation in the fourth gospel—"the word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (Jn. 1:14). Wherever we turn in the Bible we find this extraordinary phenomenon: the word of God.

GENESIS 1

Perhaps we are too familiar with Genesis 1 to notice that the Bible's description of creation is striking because of this very point: God created the world by *speaking*. There were many other ways in which the ancient world thought of the gods bringing the cosmos into being. Some saw it as an emanation from the thought of the deity; others saw it as an outcome of the activity of the deity, often in battle with opponents.

But the Bible says that God spoke:

God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Gen. 1:3)

Could it be that, at the very moment of the world's inception, God was indicating what kind of relationship he would have with us? As he brings the world into being, God's point of contact with his creation is his WORD. God is not found in creation itself. Neither is God so removed from creation that there is no link. His word is the link, the point of contact. The far-reaching implications of this for man's knowledge of God become clear in the course of Biblical history.

Let us turn to a very clear statement still at a relatively early stage of the Bible's story.

DEUTERONOMY 4

A reminder of the context. Moses is in the plains of Moab on the south-east border of Canaan after the 40 years in the wilderness. The rebellious generation of Israelites he led out of Egypt is now dead and he is addressing their children, who are poised to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

In chapters 1-3 Moses has reviewed their

history since Sinai and in 4:1-8 he exhorts them to a life of obedience to God. Taking it up at v 9 we should notice three things:

1. *Moses addresses the new generation as if they had been at Sinai.*

This is a major aspect of Deuteronomy. "God dealt with you at Sinai", says Moses to those who had not even been born at the time.

Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which *your eyes have seen*, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—how on the day that *you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb*, the Lord said to me, "Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children so." And *you came near* and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. Then *the Lord spoke to you* out of the midst of the fire; *you heard* the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. (vv 9-12)

This manner of speaking is exactly parallel to the New Testament statements: "You died with Christ" and "I have been crucified with Christ". The Israelites were *there* at Sinai in the same sense that we were *there* at the cross.

2. *The Israelites' response to God was to be fully determined by the manner in which God had dealt with them.*

Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. (vv 15-18)

God had spoken and the only valid response was to hear and heed.

This is the problem with idolatry. It is not that God is invisible and so cannot be represented visibly. The Greek Orthodox have rightly pointed out that this would deny the in-

...the nature or 'shape' of our relationship with God is determined by... God's revelation.

carnation ("If you have seen me you have seen the Father", said Jesus). The basic problem with idolatry, and this Greek Orthodoxy does not see, is that God has SPOKEN. Making an idol is not only stupid (as the prophets delight in saying) it is corrupt, because it disregards the manner of God's dealing with us.

3. *The consequences of this are radically exclusive.* And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the Lord has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own possession, as at this day. (vv 19-20)

We do not meet God in the sun, the moon and the stars because these things are available to everyone everywhere. It is wrong to think that you meet God through the things he has created. This is why mysticism is also corrupt. God is met by those to whom he speaks.

The point is hammered out in the rest of the chapter. Looking forward to the time when the people will fall under God's judgement, and then return and obey him, Moses poses the Israelites a question.

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god every attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other beside him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you; and on earth he let you see his great fire and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. (vv 32-36)

What is the point of all this? *That the nature or 'shape' of our relationship with God is determined by the nature of God's revelation.* If God ▷

has approached us by speaking, then our response must have the character of hearing and heeding.

The Biblical life of faith must be 'word shaped'. This will not mean that it should be academic or unemotional or dull—absolutely on the contrary. It will mean that Christian life becomes less Christian the less it is lived out from God's word.

2. God's Word and Human Faith

There is another angle from which we should explore this. We have seen that God approaches us with words and that this determines the kind of relationship we will have with God. What will it be like to be in a right relationship with a speaking God?

To be more specific: If God's word turns out to be a PROMISE, how then should we relate to him? Will it not be by believing the promise? So it is that in both Old and New Testaments, God's word and human faith in God constitute true religion.

This is the meaning of the famous statement in Genesis 15:6, quoted by Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. After Abraham had expressed his difficulty in believing God's word of promise, God forcefully reiterates it:

And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (Gn. 15:5)

Then we read:

And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. (v 6)

This statement is taken by some as suggesting that God is involved in some kind of play acting. Abraham had faith but was a bit short on righteousness. Since he didn't have any righteousness to speak of, God pretended that his faith was righteousness. God had nothing to

So it is that in both Old and New Testaments, God's word and human faith in God constitute true religion.

put in the righteousness column of his 'Abraham' ledger, so he put down his faith instead!

This view misses the point of both Gen. 15:6 and Paul's argument in Romans and Galatians. At a turning point in the history of the world, God had spoken his word of promise to Abraham. And Abraham believed God. In God's estimate, that *is* righteousness. That *is* man and God rightly related. God is not a dodgy book-keeper—if God reckons it is righteousness, it is righteousness.

Now read the story of Abraham again, and notice what creates this faith in God. It is not any virtue in Abraham for which he is rewarded with a promise. Abraham's faith is created by God, by the word of his promise. God's promise calls forth a response of trust from Abraham.

This is precisely the point that is being made in Deuteronomy 4. In that instance, the language of obedience is used, but Biblical obedience is not an antithesis to faith, any more than God's commands are in contradiction to his promises. Both are expressions of his will. God's words of command are in fact an expression of his words of promise (a point which is clear in Deuteronomy). Likewise, human obedience to the word of God is the expression of faith in the word of God.

What does this tell us? Since God has spoken, right relationship with God consists in this: *his word, and our faith in him, created by his word*. Take away his word, and you have nothing. You may have superstition that pretends to be faith. You may have traditions that pretend to be Christianity. You may have religious feelings. You may have wise counselling. You may have a diary filled with good works, but without the word of God there will be no faith in God, no right relationship with God.

3. God and his Word in the New Testament

Is this any different when we come to the New Testament? Now that the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us and God has poured out his Spirit on all mankind, has the place and character of God's word changed?

The New Testament gives an emphatic NO. Whatever else is overturned by the incarnation of the Son of God, whatever else can never be the same again, the manner of God's dealing with

us by word is confirmed and sharpened:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach...to proclaim ... (Lk. 4:18-19)

The people pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God (Lk. 5:1)

Repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations. (Lk. 24:47)

With the coming of Jesus the content of God's word to mankind is radically sharpened and clarified, and the boundaries of those addressed by God's word explode from Israel to all the nations on earth. But it does not cease to be a word.

Yes, for a brief time while Jesus was on earth there seems to have been something *more* than a word. Jesus did say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). Seeing Jesus is an important theme in John's Gospel, reaching its climax in chapter 20 with Thomas, for whom faith requires sight.

Unless I see...I will not believe (Jn 20:25).

He saw, and he believed, but Jesus' response was:

Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. (Jn. 20:29)

And the writer of the gospel adds:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but *these are written* that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30-31).

And as you move from the gospels to the book of acts, to the epistles and into the book of Revelation it is as clear as crystal that the word of the gospel, the word of the cross, the word of God is on centre stage. And the intended effect of that word is to bring about faith in God. Notice the note on which Acts concludes:

And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered. (Acts 28:30-31).

That is Christianity!

Notice the statement with which Romans begins:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through

whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ... (Rom. 1:1-6).

What is the goal of Paul's apostleship? The obedience of faith among all nations. What is the means? The gospel about Jesus. Notice how Romans concludes:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory for ever more through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27)

Notice the thematic statement of Romans:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to

...in Romans it seems that Paul asserts that the gospel word and faith in God brought about by the gospel word is what Christianity is all about.

the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." (Rom. 1:16-17)

Just as with Abraham, faith is not a sort of 'instrument', a means to some other end. The goal of the gospel in v. 16 is 'for salvation'; in v. 17 the goal is 'for faith'. To risk labouring the point, in Romans it seems that Paul asserts that the gospel word and faith in God brought about by the gospel word is what Christianity is all about.

Let us wander through the rest of the pages of the New Testament and see if this is their story too. Many of these passages will doubtless be familiar, but look at them again. What is place of God's word in their thinking?

Is the New Testament "word-shaped"?

Christ did not send me to baptize, but to *preach the gospel*—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For *the word of the cross* is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:17-18)

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort *the word of God*. On the contrary, by *setting forth the truth plainly* we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 4:1-2)

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the Law, or by *believing what you heard*? (Gal. 3:1-2)

And you also were included in Christ when you *heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit ... (Eph. 1:13)

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance *the gospel* ... Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak *the word of God* more courageously and fearlessly ... The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (Phil. 1:12-18)

We always thank God, the

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, and that you have already heard about in *the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you*. All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. (Col. 1:3-6)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received *the word of God*, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, *the word of God*, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

He called you to this through our *gospel*, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, brothers stand firm and hold to *the traditions we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter* ... Finally, brothers, pray for us that *the word of the Lord* may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. (2 Thess. 2:14-15; 3:1)

Until I come, devote yourself to the public *reading of scripture, to preaching* and to *teaching*. (1 Tim. 4:13)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles *the word of truth*. (2 Tim. 2:15)

[A bishop] must hold firmly to *the trustworthy word* as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound teaching, and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets

at many times and in various ways, but in these last days *he has spoken* to us by a Son ... (Heb. 1:1-2)

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

He chose to give us birth through *the word of truth*, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (Jas. 1:18)

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring *word of God*. For

All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like
the flower of the field;
the grass withers and the
flowers fall,
but *the word of the Lord* stands
forever.

And *this is the word that was preached to you*. (1 Pet. 1:23-25)

We *proclaim* to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Jn. 1:3)

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in *the teaching of Christ* does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. (2 Jn. 9)

It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to *the truth*. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in *the truth*. (3 Jn. 3-4)

He who has an ear let him hear *what the Spirit says* to the churches (Rev. 2:7)

We might crystallize the point of all this in a simple proposition: *Where you have the word of God creating faith in God (and nothing else can create real faith in God) there is all of Biblical Christianity.* Where the word of God is lacking there is no Christianity.

What does this mean for the accusation that Evangelical Christianity with its emphasis on words has become an intellectual's religion? There is, I suspect, some truth in the accusation. However, it is one thing to recognise that our faith and life are less than they ought to be. It is another thing to blame that inadequacy on a particular doctrinal emphasis. Noticing symptoms is one thing; diagnosis is another; and prescription is another again.

If our Christianity has become too cerebral it is not because of an emphasis on words. Words are not the property of intellectuals. To quote Moses:

For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it... (Dt. 30:11-14).

What was true of the word of God then is true of the gospel word. It is not the prerogative of intellectuals. It is near to all of us:

But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom. 10:6-9)

The answer to the error of intellectualizing Christianity is not to change its fundamental word character, but to ensure that we do not obscure or complicate or add to the word of God. We must not seek a level of experience other than faith in God created by the Word of God. We need to preach and teach God's word so that every obstacle to the knowledge of God is destroyed (even the obstacle of anti-intellectualism), and every thought taken captive to obey Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5).

Evangelical ministry must be flexible and

adaptable and imaginative and inventive as far as manner and style goes. But there is simply no liberty for it to be other than ministry of the Word of God:

Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. (Col. 1:28-29).

4. Conclusion

It is this that distinguishes Evangelical Christianity from all other forms of Christianity. It is what makes Evangelical Christianity not one Christian party among many, but authentic Christianity. Giving due emphasis to the Word of God is not only the touchstone for evangelical ministry, it is the point of reference for all our failings.

If our Christianity has become dry and dull and dead it will be because the Word of God does not occupy the place it should. If our churches have become closed cliques with no concern for society and the world around us it will be because the Word of God does not occupy the place it should. If we have become prayerless it will be because the Word of God does not occupy the place it should.

It is not that Evangelicals emphasize the Word of God while Catholics emphasize sacraments, and Charismatics emphasize the Holy Spirit, and Liberals emphasize good works, and Anglicans keep it all in balance! The Word of God is not just the evangelical party flag, some arbitrary element that is our particular hobby horse.

Our whole practice and experience of Christianity flows from this reality: that GOD HAS SPOKEN. Everything—and I mean everything—is a consequence of that reality.

In the following two articles, John Woodhouse will deal with two objections to his thesis that seem to be urgent at the present time.

- Is this narrow emphasis on the Word at the expense of the Spirit?
- Should the Word of God be identified as no more and no less than the Bible? Is God speaking new words today?

COMMENTARY COMMENT COMMENT

Edited by
David Peterson (NT) and John Woodhouse (OT)

Ephesians

The epistle to the Ephesians confronts the reader with a number of issues relating to the church and the Christian life that are not fully developed in other Pauline letters.

F.F. Bruce has written a careful and up-to-date study of Ephesians together with a commentary on Colossians and Philemon in the New International Commentary series (Eerdmans, 1984). As with other volumes in this series, most of the technicalities are restricted to footnotes so the general reader is not confused by too much detail.

The Tyndale commentary by F. Foulkes (new paperback edition, 1983) is very brief and does not put readers in touch with contemporary scholarship as Bruce does.

J. Stott's *God's New Society* (Bible Speaks Today, IVP, 1979) is one of his best works. It expounds the text of Ephesians in some detail but seeks to move extensively in the area of application.

The most thorough and detailed study is by Markus Barth in the Anchor Bible series (Double Day, 1974). A special feature of this publication is the extended notes on important terms and theological ideas in Ephesians. It is far too detailed for the average reader but is a must for serious students of the epistle.

The Books of Chronicles

In the Hebrew Bible the Books of Chronicles come last. There may be no real reason for this (after all, *something* had to come last!). However, just as there seems an obvious appropriateness in the New Testament (indeed the whole Bible) concluding with Revelation, many see an appropriateness in 1 & 2 Chronicles standing at the end of the Old Testament. These

books tell the Old Testament story over again, starting with Adam, and provide a particular understanding of the purposes of God revealed in this story. These neglected Old Testament books deserve more attention from Bible students and teachers.

Michael Wilcock has written a relatively brief expository treatment in the Bible Speaks Today series (*The Message of Chronicles: One Church, One Faith, One Lord* [IVP, 1987]). It gives less attention to details of the text than you expect from a 'commentary', but more attention to what we call 'application'. It is a handy book alongside a more detailed commentary.

Such a commentary is H.G.M. Williamson's *1 & 2 Chronicles*, New Century Bible Commentary (Eerdmans, 1982). This is an excellent commentary in one volume; concise, but providing the kind of information most readers would be after.

The 2 volume Anchor Bible commentary by Jacob M. Myers (*1 & 2 Chronicles* [Doubleday, 1965]) despite its many pages is, I think, less valuable than Williamson.

For more detailed work consult the two volumes in the Word Biblical Commentary (R. Braun, *1 Chronicles* [Word, 1986]; R.B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* [Word, 1987]). These are very thorough works with discussion of technical details of the Hebrew text as well as careful attention to theological questions. Dillard's volume gives much more attention to New Testament connections.

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Lead Balls

The letter reprinted below was passed onto us by a Sydney Curate, who alleges it was written by a high-ranking Australian denominational official. While entertaining some doubts as to the document's authenticity, we thought it worth publishing as a cri de cœur...

...And to your question about how we should train our denominational ministers. It is not an easy question and no system can hope to be perfect. However, there is one system that has stood the test of time and that we have found to work admirably: the "Training by Alienation" model.

Now that is not its official name, merely an apt description. "Alienation", as dear old Karl Marx defined it is: "estrangement from or powerlessness in society and the depersonalisation of the individual in large and bureaucratic institutions". Plainly, this is the kind of thing we should be seeking to achieve in training our future leaders.

This is how it works.

By the time most people seek training in the ministry they have become encumbered by too many relationships, especially if they are part of that subset of candidates that have been actively engaged in Christian service. Naturally this is not good, and these relationships have to go. We have found that the most effective way to do this is to keep the trainee on the move. By shunting him (and very occasionally her) from congregation to congregation, he is able to acquire the gift of relating superficially, and he soon learns the art of breaking relationships before they become burdensomely meaningful. Of course, an essential adjunct to this strategy is to keep the candidate as busy as is humanly possible so that idleness may not tempt him back into the world of what he foolishly assumes are 'real people'.

Backing all this up with instruction from fellows already well versed in the model really puts the icing on the cake. We've conducted a number of day seminars on topics such as "The error of intruding personality into ministry", "How to ensure your difference from the Ordinary Christian", "The Congregation cannot minister to the minister" and "God wants you to be loyal to your Denomination".

All this has yielded a pleasing crop of well-alienated ministers. Mind you, one can't leave one's ministers totally alienated. (This could lead to a dangerous loss of control.) Everyone needs something to cling to, and the obvious choice for such a constant is, of course, the Denomination itself. For the thoroughly alienated minister we can provide security and identity (not to mention tenure, career advancement based on seniority, and superannuation). It is the least we can do.

If you're after a loyal Denominational servant there is really no going past our "Training by Alienation" model (if one can be so immodest). The end result is the right kind of minister: one that is not too chummy and comfortable with his congregation, who is happy to maintain the status quo and who doesn't get too het up wanting to convert the world. In other words, a minister who has left behind the rather immature ideals he may have had when he first sought training for the ministry.

Occasionally there is some grumbling in the ranks. A few mavericks slip through the net and carry on about "loyalty to the gospel of Christ" and "the priority of the local congregation" and the "prophetic cutting edge" (sounds nasty, don't you think). One fellow even suggested that the denomination should be "in constant reformation". Who does he think he is? Martin Luther?

He will soon learn that our Lord's words were true: "You cannot serve two masters"...

Briefly Speaking

Contributions from our readers have been coming in at a steady rate. Thank you for taking the time to write to us—we appreciate the feedback and have been encouraged by the positive reception *The Briefing* has received.

The Lead Balloons have occasioned some comment, both in written form and in conversations with subscribers. They are meant to be discussion starters, and it's been good to see how they have got different people thinking. Chris Hayward of Kensington found himself a little puzzled by *The Land of the Big Banana* (Briefing #5):

"... [It] focused more on the availability of luxuries (which dare I care to admit golf is) than the availability of the Gospel to overseas visitors (if they were to be the centre of the problem) or rich tourists. Surely panting after these things (viz the favourite golf course, beach or restaurant) can be little more than coveting in the face of the great riches that God has given us in this beautiful country ..."

It raises an interesting point: Will the Christian mind have anything distinctive to say on economic issues such as the value of tourism? If so, how might these principles be affected by the imperative to preach the gospel?

Peter Williams of Northmead took issue with the idea that church should be "entertaining" in *When Church is like an ABC documentary* (Briefing #7). The point at issue seems to be what is meant by "entertaining". Peter felt that "entertaining" carried with it too much of the idea of shallow, worldly gatherings, which tried to live up to society's requirements, rather than

doing what God wanted of us. He was happier with the word "enjoyable".

Should church be enjoyable?

In what sense? Is there a conflict between running lively, enjoyable meetings that are attractive to all who come, and our purpose in meeting to encourage each other? This seems worth pursuing.

The article on *The Indivisibility of Truth* (Briefing #8) has raised the issue of liberty and error in our fellowship. In what areas are we free to disagree, and in what areas are we bound by the indivisibility of truth? Andrew Dircks from Tambar Springs writes:

"The General Synod office of the Anglican Church of Australia recently circulated a statement concerning church unity and the ordination of women. I suspect this statement moves towards a dangerous view of the nature of truth when it states (clause 6): 'A person is not a disloyal member of this Church if ... he or she continues to be convinced it is an error to admit or not to admit women to Holy Orders.'

"Since truth is indivisible, these two mutually exclusive convictions cannot both be right; one, at least, of the convictions must be wrong, even if sincere. And surely it is ultimately disloyal to be convinced of, and even actively propagating, something that turns out to be untrue. I suspect that the road to agreement may be rockier than clause 6 might suggest."

And finally, going back a few issues, Stephen Lake from Tea Tree Gully in South Australia thought that the review of Sydney Anglicans (Briefing #2) didn't do justice to the complex issues of writing church history from a God-centred viewpoint. □

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