United in the Witness of Truth
A humble truth

Truth is. That is the nature of truth.

Nothing we can say about it, write about it, think about it or do about it will impact on truth. Amid the best and worst of human reasoning, theorising, disregard or ignorance, truth is.

The challenge of being “united in the witness of truth” is to work out what that means. For many Christian voices, “the witness of truth” means taking up arms—too often, almost literally—to tackle the perceived challenges to truth, most notably science, postmodernism and moral decline. If we can just correct the beliefs of these various elements—we are told—the world will accept our truth. And so these various Christian contenders join the battle and the offensive defence of truth marches on.

The most popular of these targets in recent years has been the alleged denial of truth in postmodern philosophy in its varied expressions. However—to employ a broad generalisation—postmodernist thought is not a critique of truth so much as it is a critique of knowledge. It is a key distinction. While it is logical that, in the absence of perfect knowledge, we cannot sustain assertions of our absolute knowledge of truth, by the same argument we are unable to deny the possibility of truth. The discussion becomes one of faith.

While this may be a challenge to some of our traditional formulations, it resonates with those believers more comfortable with the admission of the limits of their knowledge of God—those recognising, as Paul puts it, that “for now we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is a humble truth. The Bible says God looks especially to the person “who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at [God’s] word” (Isaiah 66:2). And without necessarily diminishing significant beliefs/truths we have been given, such humility opens the believer to a greater appreciation of truth.

We can be more open to learning from the understandings and glimpses gained by other seekers for truth. As Adventist theologian Fritz Guy suggests, “It would be just arrogant to disregard completely the thinking of others, supposing that we have nothing to learn from anyone else past or present. Given the immensity of the challenge and the meagreness of our own intellectual resources, we need all the help we can get, wherever we can find it” (Thinking Theologically). When we engage with others in exploring and enjoying truth, truth becomes a source of commonality, rather than a ground of distinction.

When we appreciate the magnitude of truth, we can be more related about truth, knowing that it will be always bigger than us and that truth is not dependent on our grim-faced vigilance. Truth is—with or without us—for us to share, bask in, celebrate and endlessly discover.

A humble truth will also be open to expression in a variety of ways. Too often, we have tried to shrink-wrap truth within a series of neat theological statements. Such statements are significant and form a common basis of understanding within a community of faith. Without a common belief and purpose, there is no organisation with others in exploring and enjoying truth, truth becomes a source of commonality, rather than a ground of distinction.

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PNG teachers begin upgrade program

Lae, Papua New Guinea

Some 170 certificate-trained Adventist primary school teachers began a three-year diploma-upgrading course over the year-end in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The course will go for four weeks each year, upgrading the teachers' qualifications. "It will also in-service Adventist teachers on important aspects of Papua New Guinea's education reform and provide strategies for integrating Christian values and the Adventist faith within the reform curriculum," says Stephen Piez, education director for Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM).

The first of these four-week blocks was taught simultaneously at Sonoma College, Kabiufa and Mount Diamond Secondary Schools, and was a combined effort of the PNGUM Education Department and the Sonoma Primary Teacher Training Departments. "Sonoma lecturers have taken up the challenge and under the direction of Gideon Wut agreed to sacrifice their year-end holidays for the next few years so that the church's primary teachers are better qualified and equipped for their important work," says Mr Piez.

"This study program is the culmination of a dream that the PNGUM Education Department has had for the past 10 years, and it was largely made possible by the AusAID-funded Church Partnership Program," says Mr Piez. "Mission teachers responded enthusiastically. They came from every corner of the country and arrived excited and eager to learn. All of these teachers have demonstrated a commitment to Christian education that goes way beyond the call of duty."

He tells the story of Gideon Yauo, a teacher who works for no pay, who walked for more than six days from the village in the remote Eastern Highlands where he teaches, braving steep mountain passes and deep river crossings to get to a spot where he could catch the bus to get to Kabiufa to do the course.

"The Adventist school system is doing an important work in PNG. Church teachers take their responsibility seriously and are doing their best, despite huge challenges, to do the work that has been entrusted to them," says Mr Piez. "However, there is so much more that could be done, but there are so few funds to do it with."—Chris Winzenried

"Operation medic" team helps Vanuatu needy

Vanua Lava Island, Vanuatu

Pacific Yacht Ministry (PYM) recently conducted a tour of the islands of Vanuatu, providing health care, dental work, and glasses to some of the different villages on the islands. The two yachts, the Windango, and the Lavinia, carried five doctors, two dentists, six nurses and two other professionals around Vanuatu, from June to late October 2004, on "Operation medic."

The two yachts visited many islands during their time in Vanuatu. "We arrived in Avaras Bay in the south-west of Vanua Lava island, late in the afternoon. There were close on 30 yachts in the anchorage when we arrived. There was a festival being held on the beach at the time," says James Ward, chief executive officer of PYM. "Dr Bruce Hands [from Brisbane] and I went ashore and spoke to village elders, who led us to Hannington Clinic up on the hill above the bay." From this spot the expedition was able to see and treat 1029 adults and 257 children, which included several evacuations and referrals. The dental team was able to provide dental examinations for 718 adults and 107 children, with around half of these people requiring a total of 1025 tooth extractions.

The ministry is continuing, and they still take old pairs of glasses out into the Pacific for the vision impaired. They have many stories of success in delivering the glasses they receive, through donation, to the people of Vanuatu who are vision impaired. "The last morning we were there, the local Anglican minister came looking for a pair. He needed help for both distance vision and reading. By this time all that was left were mostly glasses with thick, heavy lenses. However he tried, and to his delight, found a pair that suited him perfectly," says Mr Ward.

The two yachts returned from their mission in Vanuatu shortly before the commencement of the cyclone season, in late October.—Chris Winzenried

For more information concerning Pacific Yacht Ministries, contact James Ward: james@pacificyachtministries.org
Phone (07) 4127 1778 or 0427 711 424
Address: 6 Gloucester Street, Biggenden Qld 4621
ADRA leads literacy initiatives in PNG

Lae, Papua New Guinea

ADRA is putting in place initiatives to help raise the low literacy levels of the people in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In PNG, 42 per cent of males and 50 per cent of females over five have not attended any type of formal education, and only 56 per cent of women over 15 are literate. With statistics like this in mind, ADRA has set up some literacy initiatives. Currently, ADRA-PNG has programs in the Morobe, Central, Manus and Bougainville provinces of PNG.

One such program is a competition that ADRA-PNG has set up with another agency, Soroptimist International, in order to motivate Papua New Guineans to achieve success with learning to read. Its inaugural competition, held in Morobe early this year, was remarkably successful. The competition was split into two categories, one for the level-3 learners and one for the level-4 and level-5 learners. There were 83 entrants to the competition, whose theme was “Kisim Save, Sensim Laip” (gain knowledge, change life).

Another ADRA initiative involves students from Pacific Adventist University (PAU) going into communities to teach both Pidgin and English to the local villagers, with the idea that some will go on to teach others to read and write. “Here I was, part of an ADRA literacy initiative, bringing my primary teaching students from PAU to help eager learners to read,” says Veronika Chester, staff member from PAU. “Twice a week my students gathered their learners in small groups under the mango trees to teach Pidgin while I collected a group of students who wanted to improve their English.”

ADRA is looking to improve the literacy rate in PNG. Using these and various other methods, they are slowly achieving that objective.—Chris Winzenried

Tweed Valley College takes drama to Victoria

Murwillumbah, New South Wales

The Victorian Conference Youth Department invited a team of students from the Year 9/10 drama class at Tweed Valley College, under the direction of Andrew Matthes, principal and drama teacher, to perform drama for both junior and teen summer camps at Howqua over the holiday break.

“Twelve students spent much time in preparation and planning the five-part production, which focused on the theme of the great controversy, and over the two weeks performed to more than 160 campers,” says Mr Matthes.

The team put on a great production, and managed to have a lot of fun at the same time. “They came to know and relate to God in a whole new way and great friendships were established and strengthened among each other and with the campers,” says Mr Matthes. Some of the different activities they participated in included shopping in Melbourne, King’s Commando Course, river rapids, theme parties, horse riding, go-carts and water slides.—Chris Winzenried
Helping hands
David Pennington, NSW

“Being Adventist and poor” (Viewpoint, February 19) is both confronting and challenging. The causes of apathy and even antagonism to the poor are probably numerous, but I agree that a lack of true Christian love is probably at its core.

Are church handouts the answer? In an emergency, yes. But just as in Third World countries, giving a man a fish feeds him for a day, but teaching him to fish feeds him for life. The greatest help we can give the poor is to lift them out of poverty. Each church has members needing services, such as child-minding, house-minding, gardening and other tasks around the home. Each church probably has, even among its retirees, those with wise financial skills to help those with less to learn budgeting.

This does leave behind some who are unable to assist themselves, and here a wise use of church funding is justified. The original job of the deacons (see Acts 4:32-35) was to match the needy with those who could help. The congregation can help by identifying the truly needy and volunteering wherever they can to assist.

And let us not neglect prayer—the power of God is still greater than any other to change lives.

By the time we realise Christianity has become irrelevant... it will be too late to turn back.

Trevor Kerr, Vic

The average Australian Adventist may not care about postmodernism (“Mission in postmodernity,” Feature, February 19). In fact, we are probably comfortable with the prevailing political and cultural environment. We tag along with current fads, such as prayer-fests, and agitations about the “moral concerns” on the agenda of religious conservatives.

By the time we realise Christianity has become irrelevant to the West, it will be too late to turn back. We continue to retreat into our cocoon. We prefer to remain undisturbed by AIDS-ridden Africa and the poverty in Asia. We take it easy in the pews. We won’t hear about the rapes and sundry atrocities; our ears are muffled by mainstream media. All that’s needed for a well-earned rest is a big fluffy doona of ritualised, introspective and self-congratulatory prayer.

I also wish to express disappointment at the proposed sale of the “Woodburn” flats at Manly (“Support for Manly,” Letters, February 19). This asset was bequeathed to the church as a whole, for the benefit of church employees. It should not be sold without the consent of the wider church community. Many of these assets are irreplaceable.

If a sale were authorised, have the church administrators considered that a condition of sale for developers of the site could be to build flats in the new building and turn them over to the church as payment for the Woodburn site?

A non-Adventist man in my area, who has been watching Hope channel, commented to me, “The Hope channel is so good. Why aren’t you telling everyone about it?” He is already getting friends to watch it. The sooner the church can sign the contract (Newsfront, February 19), the sooner we can do just that. Why are we so slow to support this venture?

Note: Views in Letters do not necessarily represent those of the editors or the denomination. Letters should be less than 250 words, and writers must include their name, address and phone number. All letters are edited to meet space and literary requirements, but the author’s original meaning will not be changed. Not all letters received are published. See masthead (page 2) for contact details.
Mary Alice Pratt—Blennerhassett. David Platt, son of Winton Pratt (Brighton, Vic) and Angela Platt (North Dandenong), and Tania Blennerhassett, daughter of David and Fay Blennerhassett (Berrinba), were married on 6.02.05 at Moama. Their wedding was attended by many friends and family.

Tomlinson—Klimcke. Edwin Lyle Tomlinson, son of John and Lutine Tomlinson (Chermside, Qld), and Kellie Anne Klimcke, daughter of Peter and Iris Klimcke (Brisbane), were married on 3.10.04 at St Mary’s Catholic Church, Pincon.

Obituaries

Boggo, Barbara May, born 14.3.1936 at Toowoomba, Qld, died 4.2.05 at her daughter’s home in Moonee Ponds. She was predeceased by her husband, Alwin. She is survived by her children and their spouses, Marion and Kevin; Kanli and Jenny (Canberra, ACT), her six grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren. Her funeral service was held at Moonee Valley Memorial Chapel, Sydney, NSW, on 10.2.05.

Hill—Sherratt. Gavin Hill, son of Larry and Freda (Ipsall, Qld), and Lisa Sherratt, daughter of Jack and Margaret Sherratt (Kempsey, NSW), were married on 26.12.04 at Seven Mile Beach Uniting Church, Warnervale, Qld.

Krol—Milenkovic. Andrew Raymond Krol, son of John and Breda Krol (Bever- wah, Qld), and Lisa Ann Milenkovic, daughter of Stevan and Zorica Milenkovic (Pennington, Vic), were married on 6.10.05 in the Twin Waters Novotel Resort, Maroochydore, Qld.

Lieder—Matuszak. Shaun Robert Lieder, son of Peter Lieder (Lake Rotoma, NZ) and Wendy Meret (Thames), and Irina Maria Matuszak, daughter of Taleb and Valentina Matuszak (Brisbane, Qld), were married on 21.05.05 at Addankatarr Gardens, Bondi, Australia.

Parsons—Fulwood. Laird James Parsons, son of Clement Parsons and Susan MacRae (both of South Kolan, Qld), and Clair Anne Fulwood, daughter of Noel and Rosalie Fulwood (Kuranda), were married on 10.10.04 at St Andrews Adventist Church, Bundaberg, Qld.

Plett—Blennerhassett. David Platt, son of Winton Pratt (Brighton, Vic) and Angela Platt (North Dandenong), and Tania Blennerhassett, daughter of David and Fay Blennerhassett (Berrinba), were married on 6.02.05 at Moama. Their wedding was attended by many friends and family.

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Positions vacant

▲ Projects Manager—Sanitarium (Berkeley Vale, NSW) is seeking a self-motivated Projects Manager. The successful applicant will possess tertiary qualifications, preferably in engineering or food science/technology; an ability to lead, motivate and influence a team; an improvement focus with proven project management experience; excellent communication, management and people skills. Applications in writing (including résumé) should be forwarded to Group Human Resources, Sanitarium, Locked Bag 7, Central Coast Mail Centre NSW 2252; fax (02) 4346 7620; or email humanresources@sanitarium.com.au by March 18, 2005.

▲ Student Recruiter/Adviser—Avondale College (Cooranbong, NSW) is seeking to appoint a Student Advisor/Recruiter for one year with a possibility of renewal. Responsibilities include marketing activities within Australia, especially in Adventist and other Christian schools and churches. Essential qualities include ability to relate well to young people, a passion for Adventist and Christian education, driver’s licence, and experience in marketing or sales. For a full job description visit www.avondale.edu.au. Applications in writing (including CV and the names and contact details of at least three referees) should be forwarded to Sonya Mull, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong NSW 2265; email smull@avondale.edu.au; no later than April 6, 2005; phone (02) 4986 2284.

For church related employment opportunities visit the Employment section on the SPD web site—www.adventist.org.au.

Adventist Aviation Association—north NSW. The Annual General Meet- ing of the Adventist Aviation Association will be held on Sabbath, March 19, 2005, at the Avondale Memorial church, Cooranbong, commencing at 6 pm. The program will include reports of current evangelistic outreach, a basket tea and close of Sabbath, to be followed by the election of officers and executive com- mittee members for the following year. All members and those interested in this Committee are very welcome.

Proceeds church building fund. Nunawading, one. Plants.

Make a calendar note now.

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