



# Church of Perth Intercessory Team

*"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." 2 CHRONICLES 7:14*

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HEART TO HEART

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## A CALL FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH

*Our message this month is an abridged version of an address given at the 1999 Governor's Prayer Breakfast by His Excellency, Major-General Michael Jeffery AC MC, Governor of Western Australia. Printed with permission.*

As we approach the end of the second millennium since the birth of Christ, it would be nice to think that most of us would see the true meaning of this occasion as celebrating 2000 years of Christianity rather than a computer bug event or some other secular spectacular. However, a British survey has shown that fewer than one person in six recognises that the millennium marks the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christ's birth. Christianity in its traditional form appears to many to be less relevant to life and living than the information highway which in some ways has eroded the confidence that once underpinned simple, clear and traditional Christian understanding and practice of life. Yet Christianity in many ways can be seen as the linchpin on which modern civilization and democracy are based, and if we lose our Christian faith and principles we may well place both in jeopardy through erosion of the institutions on which they are established.

The Old Testament lays down the Ten Commandments in Exodus, the injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves in Leviticus, and generally the importance of observing a code of law designed to bring about lasting social cohesion of family, city and state. The New Testament is a record of the Incarnation, the teachings of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Again, its primary emphasis is on loving our neighbour as ourselves. And, of course, the promise of resurrection and eternal life hereafter for those who truly believe. If we take these key elements from the Old and New Testaments we can establish a perspective of the universe and our place in it, and the principles to shape economic, social and spiritual life in such a way to engender global order, harmony, trust and peace.

The human effort to achieve genuine freedom began with the acceptance of Christianity. It abolished the corruptions of Rome, liberated the human mind from pagan or heathen darkness and introduced a new religion based on the promise of love, forgiveness and resurrection to eternal life. The acceptance of the gospel by the British nation was the major event in the birth of democracy and individual rights. Even before the time of Augustine in Britain around AD 600 the groundwork had been laid. During the time of King Alfred the Great in about AD 878 the Ten Commandments became the law of the land. Then in 1215 we had that gigantic step forward for democracy and individual freedom when King John was forced to sign the Magna Carta, limiting the monarch's power and transferring it in 1265 to what became the world's first parliament. Christ's words on having our masters serve us was beginning to set us free.

As the centuries passed we saw further strengthening of people power; by law, kings were controlled by parliaments and by the freedom of the individual's right to vote, all underpinned by the moral authority of the Church headed by the monarch. Today the monarch has no real governing authority but, nevertheless, is the final protector of the Constitution (and by that the people) in the event of a prime minister attempting to govern through unconstitutional means.

The Christian religion – which, of course, embodies many of the great spiritual and moral truths of Judaism – is the fundamental core of our national heritage. It is quite impossible to understand our history, our literature or our system of government without grasping the spiritual philosophy upon which they are based. That in itself is

powerful reason for ensuring that children at school receive adequate instruction on the important part which the Judaic-Christian tradition has played in moulding our society. But further than this its truths are infinitely precious because they provide the moral and ethical impulse which alone can lead to that peace, that freedom, that certainty of life for which, deep in our hearts, we all yearn.

However, the twentieth century has brought forth unparalleled challenges to our historic Christian faith. During this century its relevance and ultimate validity have been questioned as never before; indeed, we see this in practical and rather unpleasant ways in everyday life. For example, we see it in the drug problem where we issue over 4500 free needles a day in WA; in a lack of understanding of basic courtesies; in an increasing uncouthness in everyday language; in the lessening contact between neighbours; and in a 1-in-2 divorce rate involving, often tragically, some 500,000 Australians each year. But these are simply indicators of a much deeper seated malaise that I define as our loss of a sense of spirituality, our loss of contact and belief in Him who made all things.

Why has this all come about? I think the four key institutions of family, media, school and church hold some answers. Essentially, the family has to reclaim the high moral ground and take responsibility for the religious and ethical upbringing of its children, a responsibility it has abrogated over the last 15 years or so. The media, too, in all its forms has a critical responsibility. That is not to advocate censorship of any kind but rather a plea to editors, producers and media boards of directors to closely analyse the impact of what they are presenting on the moral and spiritual psyche of the nation. The importance of schools in the development of a moral/spiritual base is paramount. It is for this reason that I am delighted to see the inclusion of ethics in a new state curriculum. I hope this now firmly establishes that religious education will be taught in all schools and that there will be adequate teaching expertise in the system to meet this criterion. Every high school should have a full-time chaplain and every primary school access to one. The cost of a chaplain is around \$40,000 per annum, the cost of locking up a youngster is about \$165,000 per annum. If for no other reason employing a chaplain makes sound economic/social sense. And what of the churches? For young people to be consistently attracted to the church will require it to stand up more vigorously for the core values of the Christian faith and to get these across in a way that relates to the changing conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Might I summarise by suggesting that it is the faith of men and women in Christ which inspires hope and vision and the determination to bring a better way of life with justice, peace and security for all God's people. Our spiritual faith revolves simply around our capacity to love God and our fellow man: that the human spirit is supremely precious and unique, above the birds and trees and animals. It is a certainty that the spirit of man has not derived as a result of the Big Bang or through evolution but is essentially divine in nature. It is given to us specially and specifically by God and our time on earth – a paltry 80 years in the mega light year age of our universe – is but a short stepping stone, a test place if you like, for our spirituality to be nurtured, like a well tended rose cutting, and to then blossom into a fulfilled life with the promise of an eternal dimension.

The Christian faith provides such succour and hope. Though being a Christian demands time, resource and commitment and especially parental, school and church direction in the childhood years, the rewards are great. I believe all children deserve the opportunity to realise their own spirituality so that as young adults they can make their own judgments on spiritual values and religious faith based on a personal knowledge of the core tenets involved. For it is the belief and practice of these tenets of Christianity that define, protect and nurture our civilisation, our democracy and our fundamental freedom.

Let me conclude with these wise words of the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy: "One of the most vulgar of all prejudices is that of the clever, who believe that one can live without faith. If you feel that you no longer have faith, you should know that you are in the most dangerous situation in which a man can find himself on earth."

**C.O.P.I.T. Led by our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to glorify the Fatherhood of God with the Brotherhood of Man, in love and faithfulness to bring glory to our Eternal Father in Jesus' Name, Amen and Glory.**