



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

A sham gospel shabbily presented



The shallowness to which evangelical organisations and groups do sink, as they seek to present what they term the gospel, in a contemporary fashion, continues to reach new depths. The contents of the Feb 19th edition of the Salvation Army's magazine, *The War Cry*, illustrates the degeneration of language and content and the brash effrontery of the holiness of God that is embodied in any attempt to adopt the world's terminology in presenting the gospel. The gospel is not of this world. It presents a message that can be understood only as the Holy Spirit enlightens

the mind and understanding. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*, Psalm 119:18.

It was because of the blindness of his understanding to the things of God that Nicodemus responded to the Saviour's declaration of the necessity of the new birth with an exasperated: *How can these things be?* (John 3:9) Paul explains how it is that men do not understand the gospel message. *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor 2:7-14.

Any attempt to render the gospel in such a fashion as to give it a meaning to those whose hearts and minds are of this earth will rob it of its true meaning and therefore of its power to save. That is precisely what *The War Cry* does! In its Feb 19th edition, its lead article centres upon the BBC soap opera, "East Enders." Even the references in the article are sufficient to make clear that the programme revolves around drinking and immorality with the usual diet of adultery and deceit, that typifies television entertainment, abounding. Despite this, the writer attempts to equate the scriptwriter's ability to change the direction of the life of a character in the programme to the change that Christ initiates in the repentant sinner. Such a parallel is offensive and utterly misleading. Such fictional 'clean starts' as script writers give to characters in a soap opera do not illustrate the saving power of Christ



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

and the change He brings into the life of the sinner who believes the gospel. Changes in the lives of fictional characters are portrayed as the result of the character's self-effort and determination. It is a self-made change. Conversion to Christ is not a self-made change. Rather it is the result of the sovereign power of God making that person a 'new creature.' It has been rightly said that Christ does not give us a new start in life but rather a new life to start with! Such parallels as that used in *The War Cry* article, couched as they are in the slang terms of the world, do no service to the cause of Christ nor, indeed, to a sinful world. It is a prostituting of the gospel whereby it is robbed not only of its sanctity, but of its saving power. When the story of Paul's conversion is told in the fashion it is in *The War Cry*, nothing of the fear of God that the awe-inspiring encounter on the road to Damascus produced in the heart of Paul is conveyed. Just consider a brief portion of the article. "Before he met Jesus, Paul's day job was to persecute Christians. Bang them up. Bump them off. Jesus decided to get things sorted. He confronted Paul. Told him up front he was bang out of order. Paul was well gutted. Banged to rights. He came clean. Jesus forgave him. Wiped the slate clean. Even though he didn't deserve it. That episode changed Paul for ever. He was a new character. He was well sorted. Nice one!"

How differently the Holy Spirit tells the story! *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

It is heart-breaking to think that the many thousands who are handed copies of *The War Cry* are being told that its contents is the gospel. It is clear that the chief weapon of the devil today is not atheism but the corrupted organisations and churches which peddle a shoddy imitation of the gospel, which doubtless has its appeal for sinners, but which can be attended only with heaven's disapprobation. The slang and street jargon and the rock music that *The War Cry* advocates do nothing for sinners and never can. Let Paul tell us in his own words of his conversion and let us learn how the things of God should be spoken of, whether it be the first or the twenty-first century. *At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts*



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles , Acts 26: 14-23.

That is both the substance and the language of the gospel as set down by divine inspiration. Upon it alone will come the power of God.