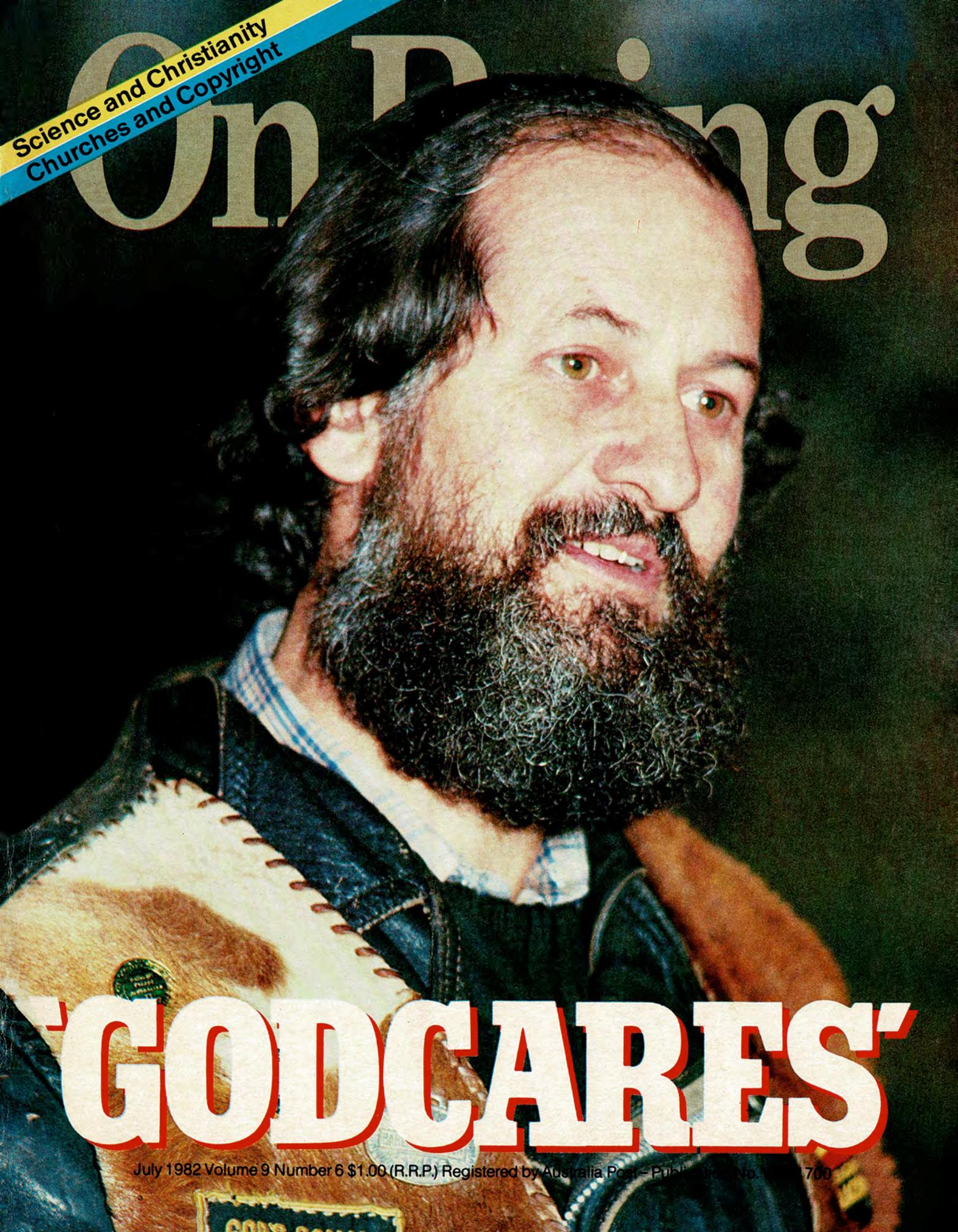


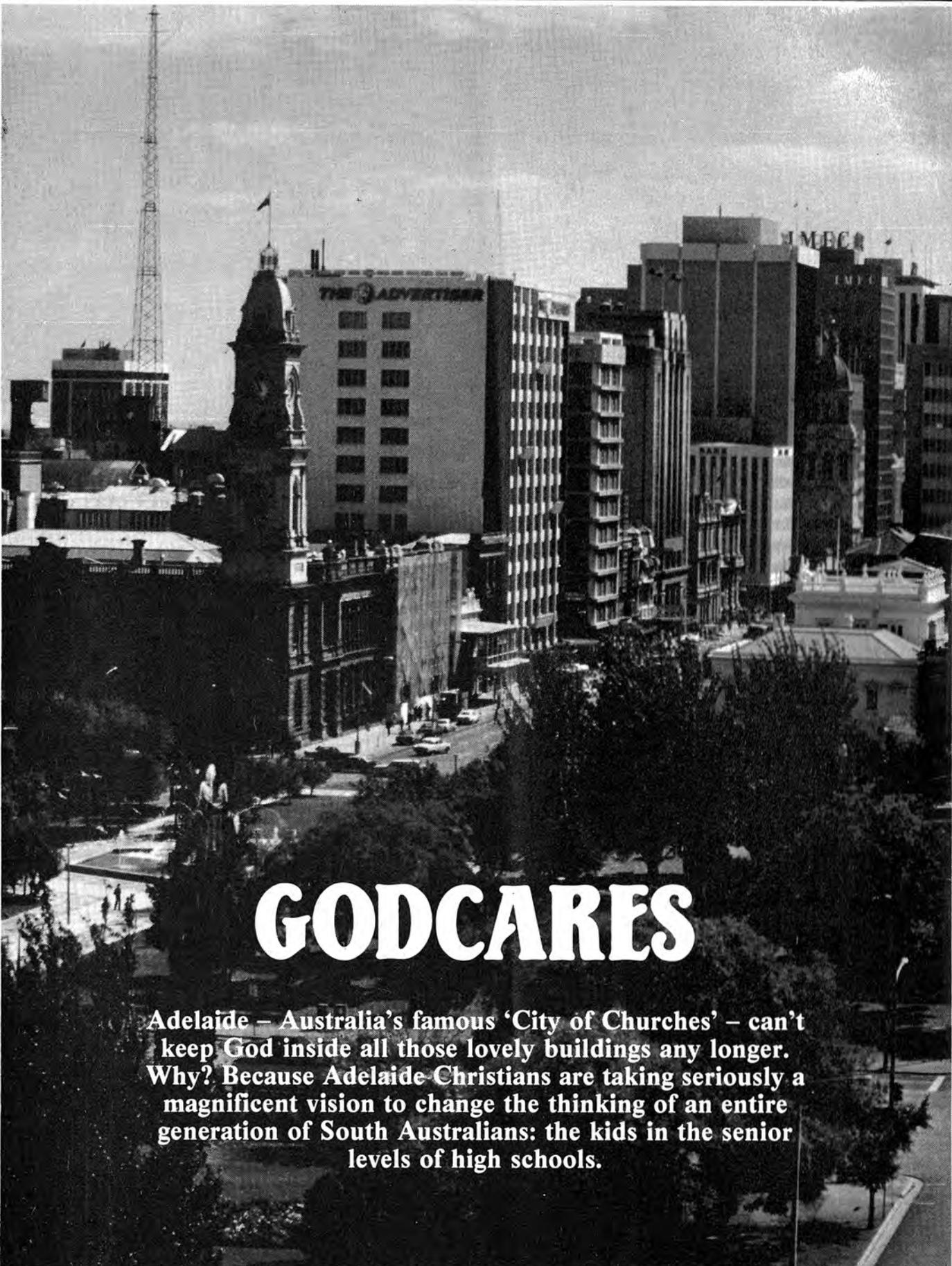
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# On D...ing



# 'GOD CARES'

July 1982 Volume 9 Number 6 \$1.00 (R.R.P.) Registered by Australia Post - Publication No. 700



# GODCARES

**Adelaide – Australia’s famous ‘City of Churches’ – can’t keep God inside all those lovely buildings any longer. Why? Because Adelaide Christians are taking seriously a magnificent vision to change the thinking of an entire generation of South Australians: the kids in the senior levels of high schools.**

**T**HE PEOPLE WHO CAME – you could just tell for once it wasn't a normal rally. They were really people way outside the church. I mean, the language!

"I can remember this beautiful blonde chick who came back afterwards, about half past 11, and absolutely *banged* on the Memorial Drive door demanding to be let in. She said to us: 'Listen, my girl friends and I were here tonight, and as soon as we left at half past nine we went straight to the pub. And we talked about all this crap you're going on with, and I just feel like that John Smith poured shit all over me tonight.' And I said: 'Oh, yeah?' But I mean, she became a Christian, because . . . she was . . . it was just beautiful!"

Poor old Paul Wightman. Language just wasn't enough to express the excitement he felt. God had been working and he was overwhelmed.

That was the feeling ON BEING got right across the board as we talked with person after person who had been involved in Adelaide's GODCARES programme during the first school term of 1982. There is a kind of controlled euphoria around the South Australian capital at present, a feeling that at last the famous 'city of churches' is finding it can't confine God in all those beautiful Mt Gambier sandstone edifices. He's out wonderfully walking the streets, surprising all and sundry with His availability and openness, not to mention the very fact that He exists at all.

**S**OUTH AUSTRALIA IS A STATE of paradox as far as Christianity goes. On the one hand there's Adelaide's 'city of churches' label; on the other there's the fact that it has the lowest percentage of church attendance in Australia.

"We could say that because the churches were once stronger here, there may have been more of a reaction to them," said Dean Drayton, Synod Evangelism Re-



**Rod Boucher: "John Smith was fantastic!"**



**Paul Wightman (right): "Setting up the whole thing was incredible."**

source Person for the Uniting Church in S.A.

A group of people wanted to change that. They realized there was a heritage being passed from generation to generation in South Australia that Christianity was just not credible. So they set out to alter the thinking of a whole generation of South Australians – the kids in Years 10, 11 and 12 at school.

They started working on the problem over five years ago, long before GODCARES as such was conceived.

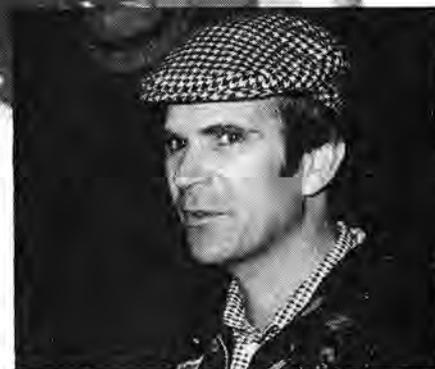
The initial spark came from Wightman, a worker with Campus Life-Youth for Christ. Someone had told him that the Dunstan Government had cut religious education out of schools; but when he looked into it, he found that the Education Department still provided for ministers to enter schools to give one half-day R.E. seminar a term.

The problem was that no one seemed to be prepared, or equipped, to take up the opportunity.

So Wightman got the Youth Directors of various denominations together. Over lunch they listened while he outlined a plan to utilize that half-day a term. His argument was simple: 'Separately we're defeated by the size of this task, but together . . .'

And so the United Christian Forum was formed, a coalition of all but one of the denominations and many of the parachurch groups of Adelaide. And they adopted Wightman's strategy: to invite John Smith of Melbourne's "Truth and Liberation Concern" to visit Adelaide and conduct some school seminars.

"We had to find someone who could communicate Christianity without the kids laughing at him, or becoming uncontrollable," said Wightman. "I'd only met Smithy once, but I thought he'd be a good guy for it."



And a good guy he was, too, as the UCF discovered when, on behalf of two ministers' fraternal, he visited his first 16 schools over two weeks in 1978. The Year 11 and 12 kids responded to everything from the externals of his long hair and motorbike to the incisiveness and passion of his message. He spoke their language, and they listened.

A year later they were listening again, and again in 1980. Each year Smithy and his God's Squad mates would hop on their bikes and travel to Adelaide for a week or two of seminars. By 1981, 50 of the 62 state secondary schools and 15 of the 30 private schools in Adelaide had been visited.

Slowly the thing was snowballing.

Then one day over a cup of coffee with Wightman, Ken Anderson, Uniting Church Synod Consultant for Child, Youth and Adult Ministry, suggested that the UCF ask Smithy to come for a whole term – come with his family and co-workers to *live* in Adelaide – and blitz the city's high schools.

The idea of effecting "a change in a whole generation of people in South Australia" fired the imagination of the UCF. The logistics of setting up the programme were daunting, but the vision was magnificent. And there were plenty of committed people who'd seen the seminars work and who were prepared to make them work even better.

**T**HE PROPOSAL WAS PUT TO John Smith. With his family and three other families from 'Truth and Lib.' he agreed to come. The planning machine

leapt into top gear.

"The setting up of the whole thing was incredible," said Wightman, who became the overall coordinator. "Firstly we had to get the unanimous approval of 20 ministers' fraternal in the areas we wanted to work in. One minister saying 'no' would have meant we couldn't go in."

Despite initial hesitations, youth leaders who visited the ministers managed to allay suspicions and got the 'okay' from every fraternal.

Two hundred small groups were established. These formed the GODCARES Prayer Machine – and among other things, they began praying for a flow of donations to cover the \$2,500 a week costs of the programme. (GODCARES made a de-

liberate point of not making any public appeals for money.)

Next the schools were individually approached – first by letter and then by an interview with the Principal. Ninety six per cent of schools agreed to have seminars, although some staff were reticent.

"About two weeks beforehand we had John talk to the staff," said Peter Jackson, Principal of West Lakes High School. "He spoke about his whole approach and the staff were impressed. It wasn't a Bible-bashing exercise; it was simply a group of people saying: 'Here's a Christian alternative; here are the values associated with this alternative way of life. You can buy this idea, or you can buy something else – but at least consider the

alternatives'."

Having gained the necessary permission, a GODCARES coordinator was appointed in each area. This person became responsible for arranging meetings and publicity and drawing together a local team of up to 20 people.

Many team members took a week off and travelled around the schools in their area with the main team. John focussed on Years 11 and 12 each morning, and each afternoon the local team presented a programme for Year 10.

The thrust of the seminars was to impress kids with the credibility of Christianity as a viable world view. With music, comedy, mime, testimonies and John speaking, they tried to break down misconceptions about who God is and let people see that Christianity makes great sense of reality (see box "GODCARES in schools").

## BUT HOW DID THE KIDS RESPOND?

Peter Jackson: "We work in a depressed area of Adelaide. Our kids' attention span is not very long and if they don't like something they make a lot of noise. But I've never seen them so engrossed for so long!

"We have a deportment course being run by a modelling agency for some of the girls, which of course is very attractive. The girls had to be hauled fighting and kicking out of the GODCARES programme to attend the course . . .

"Every kid I spoke to was impressed. A lot were not all that convinced – but they all said, 'Well, we don't know whether it's true or not, but by hell! it's made us think!'"

According to 'Fuzz' Kitto, a Uniting Church youth worker who compered the seminars, there was a difference in the response of kids in different types of schools.

"In schools in lower socio-economic areas, the response was more guarded, but if we succeeded in establishing a



'M.C.' Fuzz Kitto: "... the 'God-credibility' ministry."



## GODCARES IN SCHOOLS

What did the GODCARES team do in schools?

Their approach was to have a basic framework which gave structure to the seminars but which allowed for modification and creativity.

The programme began with the 'M.C.' Fuzz Kitto. "I'd introduce the kids to the people on the team and try to build up expectations – particularly that this was *not* going to be what they expected," said Fuzz.

Then a time of fun and entertainment would follow with singers Rob Timbs and Glynn Nicholls, from time to time supported by two female vocalists, Sue Oliver and Kathy Pike. Glynn, one of Adelaide's best known buskers, did a comedy routine – "to show that being a Christian doesn't mean you have to be some kind of straight-laced holy-roller, that you can be silly and still have a love for God."

Watching what the kids responded to in the 'warm-up' section gave the team a clue to their specific concerns and interests. Then John Smith would come and speak about the alienation of the fallen world, and show how it was reflected in the kids' experience. His aim was to "raise the God question", as Neville De Boar put it.

Next someone would give a testimony, and the kids would be asked to respond to what they'd heard. "But not," said Neville, "in the normal way.

"We'd ask, 'How have you felt about today?' then hand out cards so people could write a question or statement down. Then we'd quickly correlate these while someone was singing and John or others would try to

answer them in the last segment."

Finally, more cards were handed out – React Cards, in which kids were invited to give their name, address, age and church affiliation if they wanted someone from the local team to contact them and talk through the issues further.

Follow-up was carried out immediately. The names of those wanting further contact were given to the local team member from the denomination indicated on the card. If none was indicated, they were referred to the nearest local church.

Follow-up has been often difficult. "We've asked kids to come to our groups," said De Boar, "and the ones really wanting to get themselves together have come. But there's those kids in the middle, who've never had any church contact. It's been difficult to get them into church groups."

But the 'contact with church groups' is there now – in De Boar's area, as in others, seminar programmes will be run in the future by local teams, building on the fact that GODCARES has made local church personalities 'known'.

And Christian kids in the schools have also found that GODCARES has "stimulated a sense of real urgency to share the Gospel in more concrete, practical, Aussie terms."

Was GODCARES worth it all? There may have been disappointing numbers at the rallies. The "South Oz to God" week at Adelaide University may not have attracted the desired audience. But the programme in the schools was unanimously declared a success.

OB

credibility with them they'd really open up. Whereas in the more 'middle-class' areas, they responded more readily but wouldn't get in as deep."

There were however similar concerns expressed by kids in all schools.

"Employment is an incredible factor in determining what kids will and won't do. And fear, particularly fear of failure. In all the schools there was a split between those who'd already decided they were failures and those who felt they were going to give it a go."

At the end of each week, a series of weekend activities would be arranged to climax the seminar programme. At these, the emphasis was on the need to make a definite response to the material that had been presented (see box "GODCARES at the weekend", page 8).

**F**OR 12 WEEKS, JOHN SMITH and the GODCARES team travelled around Adelaide schools. John spoke over 450 times – up to three times a day – and 20,000 teenagers listened. In addition he spoke at every university and tertiary institution in the city, some as many as three times. Many people came into life-changing relationships with God.

But the work in the schools and unis needed some kind of climax, something to wrap the programme up with a bit of a bang. So the GODCARES committee planned "South Oz to God Week" – five days of meetings at Adelaide university culminating in three evening rallies in the centre of Adelaide at Memorial Drive Tennis Courts.

The Uni meetings were aimed at those who'd made commitments to God as a result of the seminars, but in the end it was mostly established Christians who came. "We expect this was because it was too big a jump culturally for most school kids," said Deane Meatheringham of New Creation Ministries, who shared the teaching responsibilities of the week with John.

"Our main thrust was to challenge the

deterministic attitudes that have infiltrated society," said Meatheringham, "and to a large extent have infiltrated Christian thinking as well." The time was significant, even if the numbers – around 100 – were smaller than hoped.

The rallies too attracted a smaller number than anticipated, despite extensive radio and TV advertizing. Cold and (on one night) rainy weather helped keep people away.

But even so, an average of 2,000 came each night (the rallies were held on Wednesday 19 May, Friday 21 May and Saturday 22 May). "On the Friday night, I think a lot of church youth groups came along," said Meatheringham. "But on the

Wednesday,

I was thrilled to see so many people who were obviously not churchy sorts."

Intriguingly, cigarettes give the most graphic indication of just who came.

"Standing on the platform preaching was stunning," said John. "All you could see across the stands was cigarettes glowing. I've never seen anything like it!" According to Paul Wightman, cleaning up afterwards yielded a drum three feet high and 18 inches in diameter "just stuffed with cigarette butts. Christians don't smoke that much!"

Dean Drayton assesses the final rallies in this way: "It's the first time that anybody has had a group of people together where at least 50 per cent had nothing to do with the church. It was one



(Above): A member of the Memorial Drive audience, on centre court during rain: "So many people were obviously not churchy types."



Singer Rob Timms

(Below) Seminar group during "South Oz to God Week", Adelaide University.



Singer/comedian Nicholas: "You can be silly and still love God."

of the major examples of real evangelism occurring."

The rallies were the same blend of comedy, song, good-time/deep-time as the seminars. "They were very Australian," said Rod Boucher, who entertained on the first two nights. "Sort of casual and funny and friendly, and people joined in and laughed and whistled and all sorts of stuff."

"John was fantastic. He was deep and very personal, he spoke about things that all of us believed, but he did it so clearly! Everything he brought up – you could understand everything he said, which meant people didn't have to overcome a communication barrier. They had to decide whether they agreed with him or not!

"It had a profound effect. A lot of people came forward. Invitations are pretty tricky; John talked in terms of 'Why don't you come down and give God a chance to experiment with you? But you know, when you come down here, this is just the beginning, not the end'."

Those who 'came forward' – about 135, with more who refused to give their names – were met by a counsellor, one of 100 hand-picked Christians who had drummed into them their personal responsibility for the people they contacted. "But we were very cautious about leading people to Christ," said Wightman. "What we did was ask them if we could pray with them that they'd continue to allow God to work in their lives." It was reoriented

lives, not names on cards, that counted (though names were recorded).

**S**CORES OF PEOPLE BECAME Christians during GODCARES, but that wasn't the end of the phenomenon. The much more wide-reaching effect is that Adelaide is buzzing with the news that maybe, after all, God is alive!

Neville De Boar, Youth Pastor at Unley Park Baptist Church, put it like this.

"The God-consciousness of this town, among both kids and older people, has been raised to such an extent that pastors are finding in counselling situations that adults are talking about GODCARES because their kids still are. The whole town's an open door. Everyone is aware that 'God cares' – whatever else they know, they know *that* – and everyone knows who John Smith is."

Fuzz Kitto is even more enthusiastic. "I've never been involved in an outreach to non-Christians with such power and effect – never *heard* of anything like it! In some places we asked kids: 'How many of you reckon this is the first understandable Christian input you've ever had?' At one school about 270 of the 300 put up their hands! Now, the effect of *that* is long-term. It's what I call the 'God credibility' ministry – and its impact will be felt five or 10 years from now.

John Smith is staying on in Adelaide for a while. Some more schools will be visited. Christian Television Association ads currently running show him declaring his belief that the things he's been saying in schools are relevant to mums and dads too, and he feels he needs to stay around to develop that claim further.

Geoff Boyce, a former Senior Science Master, has taken second term off to help ministers who are fired by the school seminar concept to use their enthusiasm creatively. And as the euphoria begins to abate there are a number of other people committed to preserving the depth of what's been achieved for on-going outreach.

But wherever GODCARES goes in the future in Adelaide, one thing seems certain: it has been one of the most significant innovations in Australian evangelism in our 200 year history. Says Dean Drayton:

"For those who are responsible for reaching the ordinary Australian, it needs to be looked at very carefully. It's broken new ground in reaching outside churches. From a strategic point of view, what's happened through John Smith is a great gift to the church – *if* we hear what it's saying to us."

**OB**

Special thanks to Stephen Partington, Carolyn Knowles and GAP magazine for additional information.



## GODCARES AT THE WEEKENDS

Yeh . . .

*We know how to handle the dole cheque  
And cops we can run off the street*

*We're kings of the street  
That's the one place we don't feel defeat.*

The voice of 'Macho' booms out over hundreds of heads. Down in the audience, feet are tapping, ears ringing. Some clown pinches his girlfriend and she giggles. A sceptic looks bored and mumbles something about 'religious creeps' to his mate, who promptly tells him to shut up.

Macho, Chick, Tiny, Gary, Jan – the characters are real and the music is often loud and gutsy, but the kids appreciate it that way. Some of them have been to see this home-grown Aussie rock musical before – a few as many as half a dozen times. But for most it's their first viewing, and they're loving it – even if it's being staged by Christians.

*Kings of the Street* was performed every Saturday night for 12 weeks as part of GODCARES. Written by Mike Head and Ian Snow and produced by Rod Boucher, it told the story of a group of five unemployed kids, their relationships with one another and with people outside their group.

Each week, as GODCARES focussed on a different area of Adelaide, a weekend of evening activities would be planned to culminate the round of seminars in schools.

On Friday night a rally would be held when John Smith would speak more directly than he had at the seminars about the need for a relationship with God.

Saturday nights were "Bush Nights". First the musical would be presented, then a bush dance would be held with a Christian bush-band called "Three Cornered Jack".

Then on Sunday evening a combined service, run by churches in the particular area, would be held with John preaching.

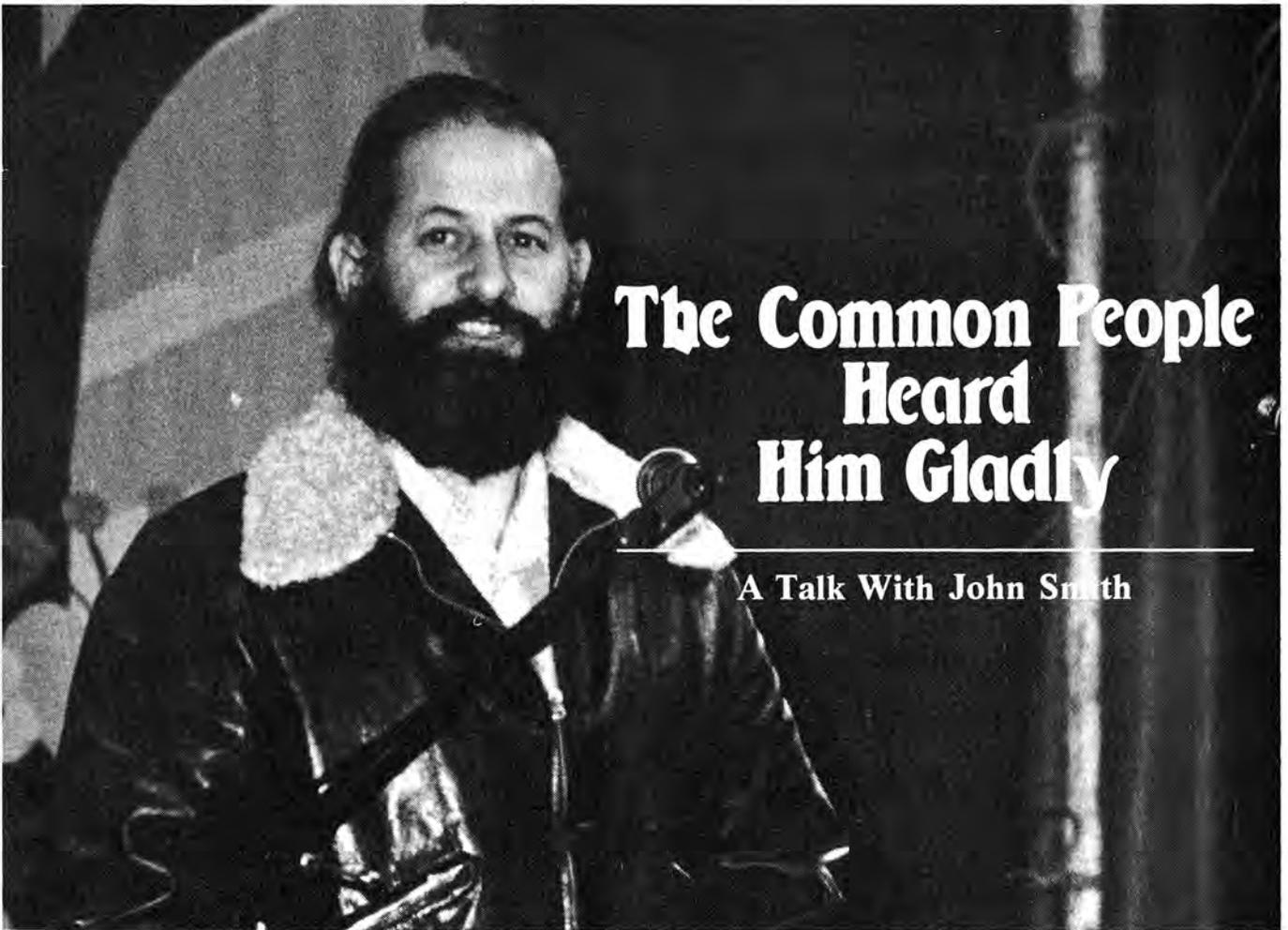
The idea was that Friday and Saturday nights were times when God's call was laid strongly on the line; Saturday nights were a chance for kids to 'ease into the scene' more comfortably. But it was often the Friday and Saturday nights which attracted the largest crowds.

According to Neville De Boar, youth pastor at Unley Park Baptist church, in his area there were "only about 150 to 200 on Saturday night, but between 800 and 900 on the other two nights. And the majority – over 50 per cent – would be non-church kids!" Surprisingly, Neville said, a lot of churches didn't really support this part of the programme; "but I guess that was actually an advantage, because the kids didn't feel threatened," he said.

The message of the musical was fairly 'laid back' – it sought to create the impression (as did the seminars) that Christianity *does* have something to say about unemployment, the generation gap, relationships. The message John preached was more overt: "that the essential gut thing that the kids needed to sort out for themselves was knowing God".

And what with one thing and another, Neville said, quite a few kids were convinced that was the truth.

**OB**



# The Common People Heard Him Gladly

A Talk With John Smith

Two years ago, John, you said in **ON BEING** that “the best evangelism would occur if Christians at every level within our country were to challenge the pre-suppositions about society with which the Australian people have been ‘anti-evangelised’ for so long.” Has **GODCARES** been evangelistic, or pre-evangelistic or both?

It’s certainly been both. There have been many, many classic stories of changed people.

For example, there was a guy who came up to me at a football match before we had the final rallies – a real ocker with a beer in his hand – and he grabbed hold of me and said: “Hey, mate, I know you’re here for a rest to watch the footy, but could I ask you one question?” I said: “Sure you can.” It ended up being about eight questions, and he was deeply moved. Then he said: “I know this sounds terrible, but I – you see – I’m not a Christian. But if it doesn’t rain, I really want to come to the rally Wednesday night. Do you know why?” I said: “Why’s that?” He said: “Cos if it’s good on Wednesday night, then me and me mates might come back Friday night; and if it’s good Friday

night, we might come back Saturday night!”

Well, he turned up all right, and soundly came into an experience of the Lord in a remarkable way. And his girlfriend, who had a Christian background but who’d got away from it, was also soundly brought to the Lord.

So there’s been a lot of really wonderful conversions. But I think the biggest thing is yet to be seen, because out in the street they’re talking and thinking about God.

Take for example after the Saturday night meeting. We went to a Pizza joint, and the moment I walked in the two guys behind the counter nudged one another and said: “That’s Father John!” Then a guy came out of one of the rooms and *grabbed* my hand – he’d had a few drinks – and said: “Father John, isn’t it?” I said: “Yes”. He said: “Look, I haven’t been to the rallies but I’ve seen the TV things. Bloody good! Will you come and meet me mates?” So he took me in and made me shake hands with all his mates around the table. Then he said: “You know, we were just talking about you when you came in.” So we started to chat – but I’d barely sat down when a bunch of younger kids came up, the same way.

I don’t think it was just the ‘public personality’ thing. They all wanted to express the fact that they felt an open invitation to look afresh at the question of God and faith, and somehow it made sense to them in the context of that scene.

**So you’d see **GODCARES** as holistic evangelism?**

Very much so. You know that verse which says: “the common people heard Him gladly”? Sometimes as Christians we think we’re doing our best when the *common* people, in fact, are most antagonized. But biblically, it’s not really the common people who were antagonized by the Gospel; it was men of power and privilege.

So I don’t see this as a lowering of the standard of the Gospel. In fact, I believe it’s been a lifting up of the standard of the Gospel. It shows something of the grace of God, which is what *really* softens men’s hearts.

**John, what is it you try to do when you preach to people in this kind of setting?**

I try to take people on a pilgrimage rather than give them static concepts or

simply bring them to a decision. I want to see a change of attitude rather than just a change of a concept or two. Let me give you an illustration.

I preached in a church the other night, and the message was on the book of Habakkuk, under the heading "A Quest, A Question and a Quotable Quote". The Quest was the quest for justice in the mind of Habakkuk; the Question was: "How can God allow even moderately righteous people to be crushed by totally unrighteous people?"; and the Quotable Quote was: "The just shall live by faith", which is the final answer to all things – the just man shall live by his faith in the faithfulness of God.

Many of the people were very moved by the message. But when they were asked afterwards what I'd spoken about, they couldn't provide a clear statement of what I'd said.

That's because when I preach I'm concerned to *move* people, not just give them data. It troubles me that when we give people data in the particular shape that Western culture has given to the mind, they feel that because they have the data, they've actually experienced the subject. And they haven't!

So I aim to *trouble* people, to cut off their false roots; then out of necessity they will find the data which meets them where they are, rather than simply accepting inappropriate data from me.

If you trouble people – point their eyes towards God – it's almost like John the Baptist saying "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'" It's pointing people to Jesus and saying: "There He is – go get Him!"

**How much of GODCARES has been dependent on your personality?**

I think it's got more to do with my theology than my personality. We've been struggling for 10, 12 years with what it means to live the Incarnation – what it means to feel your way into the world. And now suddenly we find dozens of people who feel that somehow the Old Book is worth having another look at.

For example, the other day I went to get my hair cut. It was quite a ritzy salon, with Vogue's and Cleo's and Playboy's to read rather than Woman's Weekly's. But the moment I sat down the hairdresser wanted to talk. He *begged* me to stay in the city; to do something about broken people. He wasn't a Christian but he said: "You ought to stay – we *need* you."

Then there was the day I went down the street and a guy left his shop – wide open to the public, with no one else to serve – and ran up to me and said: "You're John Smith?" I said: "Yeah." He said: "You know, I've got a few mates



**"We've been struggling for 10 years with what it means to live the Incarnation – what it means to feel your way into the world. And now we find dozens of people who feel that somehow the Old Book is worth having another look at."**

who have had bad experiences of religion, but . . . we know we need God, but we don't know what to do." Then he grabbed me by the shoulders – he was about six foot three, 16 stone – and he looked me straight in the eye, and in his real Aussie accent he said: "I just want to say, 'I love you, John Smith' – for what you're saying to us; what we *need* to hear. But what are we going to do when you go? What's going to happen?"

I'm not saying there's no personality involved; but it's more that we've opened up the possibility for people that the Bible really *does* have something to say about other things than just heaven and being bad.

**John, in that same interview in ON BEING two years ago, you also called yourself a 'post-evangelist'. You said "I'm not content to simply travel round the country siring offspring; I must also have pastoral concern for the new babies." What lies in the future for the kids who've been touched by GODCARES?**

First let me say that Adelaide is an unusual city. At present it has an extraordinary number of quite strategic people, people in a whole range of positions in churches and para-church agencies who have been involved intimately in the GODCARES programme.

It's a city at present where churchmen are able to talk about the possibility of parallel structures within their denominations, sub-cultural churches within larger churches working on different principles to reach a different 'clientele'. People are calling for some kind of follow-up outside the traditional shapes. We don't know where all this is headed at present, but to even *talk* about it would be inconceivable in most states.

Now, against that background, there's a deep concern from all angles for those who've been touched in the GODCARES programme. Many of the converts were from right outside 'churched' circles; but I know of several stunning cases of people who, within a week or so, were deeply entrenched in local churches.

Why? Not because they fitted the culture and suddenly felt at home, but because we insisted that counsellors had to take their contacts as a deadly serious personal obligation. The important thing was not to hand in a card with some kid's details on it to the GODCARES organizers, but to go round and visit the kid, have him or her to tea, take them personally into settings that will be a bridge between the kids and the local church.

The third thing is that I'll be staying on in Adelaide for a while. We've really taken the lid off Pandora's Box! People are crawling out of the woodwork everywhere.

I've had a ministry on and off in Adelaide for years, and there are people who over that time have found their desire to know God is unabated, but who have not yet found a spiritual home. Then there are the people like the Marxist academic, who after an hour and 20 minute address told me that he'd agreed with 99 per cent of what I'd said, but still said "I'm an atheist". There are people in the streets and people in the churches who want to sit down and talk. I've run around and never picked up the pieces before. I feel some moral obligation to do that now.

**John, it's evident that scores of people in South Australia have been changed**

On Being

because of your ministry; but that's obviously been a two-way thing. It seems that the GODCARES programme has changed you too.

Yeah! You know, when you minister the Truth and see it having effect; when you see your dreams being fulfilled; when you *long* to reach the Gentiles and you see that the Gentiles are stirred; then it raises your faith level, and your hope level. I was feeling a bit tired at the end of the last decade; but I'm not stale anymore. I feel so creative! I've never felt so refreshed!

But I also feel slowed down and maybe wiser. I've been an activist for over a decade – and now I feel that if I'm to give the kind of mature, effective help to my brethren that I should be giving, I've got to concentrate a bit more on the 'inward journey'. I've got to look at myself. At my relationships. I've got to look at where the country's going, so I move beyond just reacting to the day's headlines. I want to talk with people. I want to make the next 10 years the *best* service I can to God's people and to this country.

I also want to do some writing. I've given 420-odd addresses of between half an hour and two and a half hours, including question times, over the last three and a half months. That's a mammoth amount of talking! Getting it on paper is vital, for two reasons. First, if you don't, the voice dies. And second, no one can call me to account for the things I'm saying and bring me to a deeper growth and more mature assessment unless I'm in print.

**So something of that pilgrimage attitude you were speaking of before is true of your own life also?**

Definitely.

Just the other day I heard a Catholic theologian comment that when the church marries a particular political ideology in one generation, it inevitably becomes a widow in the next generation. The danger for blokes like me, who are interested in applying the Word of God to economics, politics, social problems, and so on, is that we can settle down in a temporal camp. And even though we may move people towards the Kingdom in *our* generation, the *next* generation will end up tied to a particular political or social shape which will be an albatross around its neck. It's vital to keep the pilgrimage attitude.

**John, GODCARES has been an Adelaide thing, and as you said before, in many ways Adelaide's unique. Do you think the sort of process you've developed can be transplanted to other places in Australia?**

I'm sure there are certain principles that could be transplanted. You have to



**“If we're to do evangelism in the way it's needed, in the urgency of the hour, the church has to be willing to take far more risks. It has to gamble far more with its young men and visionaries – and not wait until they've 'proven' themselves.”**

be realistic – I can't go up to Fred Nurk and say: “Here, I give you my gift; now you go and do it.” But I don't think either that I'm the only person who can effectively do this sort of thing.

It's important to have personalities involved who (a) *can* articulate the Christian view; and (b) can speak several cultural languages. In other words, I can sound like a jolly pub crawler if I want to (much to the horror of some of my finer evangelical friends!). Or I can sound like someone struggling through Fabian Socialism at an undergraduate level. I can sound like someone with a few thoughts under my belt about culture and history, or – as I did on a TV programme that was

all satin and silks and diamond rings – simply talk very gently about lonely and hurt people. That was a very elegant show, but it was probably the most human interview that we did.

The second thing about GODCARES is that we had a fantastic team of people. That meant I was extraordinarily free to do what I was best at. Everything was very well administered, but the administration didn't pre-empt creativity or the principles of the Kingdom.

I feel there are lessons to be learned in that. Traditionally in Australia, you come up first with your administration *shape*, and that controls the evangelism. With GODCARES, administration was strong and clear; but nevertheless it was the hand-maiden of the creative energy.

Thirdly – and this is a risky thing to say – if evangelists are going to have a major impact in mass evangelism, they have to realize that even though the political mood in the Western world is to the right, the masses of common people have the kind of aspirations and frustrations that are slightly to the left. I don't belong to the left and I don't belong to the right; I belong to the Kingdom. But it's clear to me that people do feel they're not getting a fair deal. The whole idea of Australia being a great country is beginning to wear thin.

**So what about evangelism in Australia? After the last three months, are you hopeful about it for the future?**

I am, with one condition. We must have a lot more support from the wider church.

I think we're proving you can come from behind the field and do something. But if we're to do it the way it's needed, in the urgency of the hour, the church has to be willing to take far more risks. It has to gamble far more with its young men and its visionaries, and put its resources behind them – and not wait until they've 'proven' themselves. That will take a lifetime.

I'm hopeful. The day of mass evangelism is not gone. The only thing is that now we must do that evangelism in a society where relationship is minimal. In the days of, say, Billy Sunday and those early evangelists, there was far more a sense of corporate unity within society. Today that's almost gone.

Therefore, in doing evangelism there has to be far longer preparation. There has to be far more exposure of the evangelist to the people. There has to be far more team work.

If we're to do evangelism in this country that is truly effective, the church has to support evangelists, singers and writers who have some biblical content to what they're doing, but who are prepared at the same time to be culturally creative.

OB

# Something's Smouldering in South Oz

GODCARES as a model for Australian evangelism. By Robert Forsyth.



**M**AYBE THE GODCARES programme didn't set Adelaide on fire. But something's still smouldering there.

I don't just mean in the lives of the many people who have been touched and changed by what went on, but rather in the thinking it has caused about how city-wide evangelism should happen. Something may have started here that will have a major impact both on this city and elsewhere in Australia in the coming decade.

**F**OR THE LAST DECADE OR two Christians in Australia have mounted city-wide Crusades every nine or 10 years. The success of the Billy Graham Crusade in 1959 has led to a long series of attempts to repeat that movement of God, using basically the same approach.

The focus is a major 'outside' speaker who visits the city just for the time of the public rallies – a week or two. He is never an Australian but comes with credentials from overseas. Every effort is made to move the Christians to invite their non-Christian friends to come and hear the 'Great One'.

The public rallies are preceded by a long programme to prepare the Christians for them – to train counsellors, to motivate people to pray and invite their friends. Often a representative from the organization of the overseas speaker takes up residence and co-ordinates the planning.

Although local churches have a major say in questions of how people will be referred to different churches and other matters to do with the local scene, the basic shape of the rallies and of the build-up are decided by the organization of the



Robert Forsyth

visiting speaker. After all, they have usually done this kind of thing many times before and come with a wealth of experience, even if it is not of the particular situation and culture they are now working in.

**T**he GODCARES programme raised possibilities of a different model. The principles of GODCARES were as follows.

- *We used an Australian speaker who spent months living and ministering in the city.*

I'm convinced Australians are increasingly suspicious of overseas evangelists. God must have given the gift of evangelism to other than Americans! John Smith's strong Australian identity was an important component in the wide trust he has gained from the non-Christian people of Adelaide.

We did away with the fly-by-night evangelist idea. Smithy has spent time on and off in Adelaide over the last three years working in the High Schools, and a concentrated three month time of ministry

before the final rallies. There are now thousands upon thousands of young South Australians, and many older ones too, who have heard Smithy and in some measure trust him.

After we ran some very expensive television and radio advertising we found that John was not able to move in Adelaide without being recognized. He was engaged in conversation continually, not by Christian 'groupies' but by interested non-Christians.

John's wide acceptance among the non-church going community is due in large measure to his ability to project a very clear, strong image as a Christian who is concerned for some of the issues which are worrying a lot of people in our society. Although the churches may be nervous about some of John's political and social statements, many non-Christians have been attracted just because of them.

As it turned out, the small number of public rallies, the cold weather, and a little confusion in our publicity over who the rallies were for meant we did not really turn the widespread interest and goodwill into people on seats. Even so, the very high proportion of non-Christians attending was greatly encouraging.

- *We developed our own style of ministry – not an imported one.*

One of the problems of the success of Billy Graham in Australia is that it is hard for others to stage public rallies without falling into the pattern he set. GODCARES was different and used local talent and ideas.

One of the outstanding features of the schools and rallies was the extensive use of humour. I don't think I have laughed as much as when I attended one of the school programmes. Glynn Nicholas, who

has spent a good amount of time in the Rundle Mall busking, and Rob Timbs, a musician and songwriter, had the school kids eating right out of their hands with a whole series of very clever pieces of humour that showed they understood the kind of culture they were working in.

Even if there had been no talk by Smithy, the message that Christ is *for* enjoyment and is relevant to life came across very powerfully. I am not sure if everybody was able to enter fully into the brilliant larrikin style of humour that Rod Boucher provided at the rallies, but it was obvious that others were having the time of their lives.

The rallies and school programmes were deliberately, self-consciously Australian, even down to the lovely kookaburras on the counsellors' badges. Although we probably overdid it a little, it did represent the deep felt desire to keep away from imported models and be happily, Christianly Australian. Obviously as we become more and more at home with this we will develop a more self-confident and therefore low-key local flavour.

● *We used our own resources as far as possible.*

Although Smithy is from Melbourne, GODCARES was a fully South Australian event. John moved in with us and we developed our own style and approach with him. One of the bonuses of GODCARES is the way it has uncovered the considerable gifts God has given many local people.

**I** DON'T KNOW HOW EXPORT-able our programme is, as it is so strongly centred around our history and situation in Adelaide and John Smith's special gifts. Yet I am sure that principles we discovered can be used elsewhere.

Will we run a GODCARES programme again? Of course there will be a need for

much more discipline in the presentation and programme. There will be a need for much broader church support (in a sense GODCARES was run by all the 'second-in-commands' in the church – youth leaders, assistant ministers – rather than by church leaders, which is probably why we had a freedom to do something different). It would be interesting to see what would happen if a city like Adelaide ran something like a GODCARES programme with full support from the highest level in the churches, doing it all themselves and using the many resources that God has already given us here!

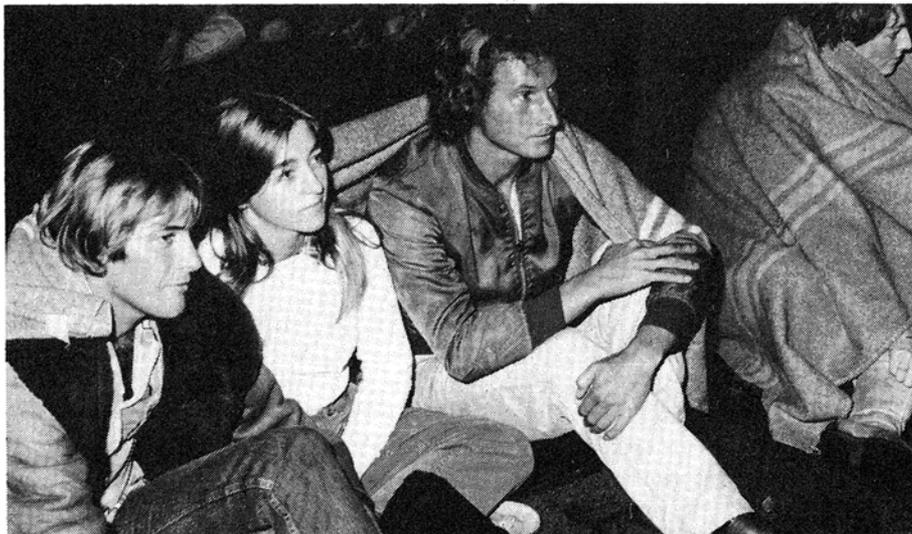
I think that the days of the big overseas speaker/fly-by-night crusade may be coming to an end. As somebody put it in my church parish council meeting recently, "Ever since Billy Graham's 1959 Crusade we have been witnessing the law of diminishing returns". I would like to hope that an Australian 'locally-based-speaker, living-in-the-city' method of Christian evangelism might come to take its place.

I am sure God has given us in Australia a number of men, including John Smith, who can carry the day, and that the time when we need to go overseas for people to do our job for us is ending. It is obvious too that the principles of full local control, and of the speaker at the rallies living in the city and building up broad support among Christians as well as non-Christians, is fundamental.

I hope that something is left smouldering after GODCARES that might some day be fanned into a blaze.

OB

*Robert Forsyth serves as the assistant minister at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Adelaide. His Sunday evening radio show on 5DN is the top-rating programme in its time-slot.*



Part of the crowd at the final rallies: "The days of the big overseas speaker/fly-by-night crusade may be coming to an end."

## WHY WAS GODCARES EFFECTIVE?

*A collection of thoughts from those involved*

"Here was a programme where people were touched *where they were at*, rather than taking them from their area into where *we* wanted to set it up."

Deane Meatheringham,  
New Creation Ministries

"In visiting schools, the programme first managed to get people to *hear* what they were saying. Then in each area people came along to meetings at the end of the week, then to a service on the Sunday. So there were *incremental steps* which gave people a chance to move at their own pace. Then when it came to the final rallies, they weren't just an exercise in getting church members to attend."

Dean Drayton, Uniting Church

"The thing that really excites me about GODCARES is that it was local church orientated. It wasn't a parachurch organization coming and dumping some imposed evangelism on us. *We* were the people who were used. They said: 'Look, here's an open door – in you go!' This meant the kids saw GODCARES as part of the local identity; it wasn't just someone coming in for a fly-by-night scalp hunting trip. They know we're still around."

Neville De Boar, Baptist youth pastor

"I think that I could never do it without the kind of team we've had."

John Smith

"There was a great teamness. People from a lot of churches and organizations had a high respect for each other. We respected one another's organizations, but also each other's talents and gifts, and really tried to push each other into new areas, to continually come up with new stuff."

Fuzz Kitto, compere for school seminars and final rallies

"John has a certain amount of charisma that other people wouldn't have, but it's not just him – it's the whole show. You see, we did it last year: our local United Christian Forum organized a seminar with local people and that went over well with the kids, too. Admittedly not as well as the God Squad, but nonetheless, it went over."

Peter Jackson,  
high school principal.

"One minister said: 'Smithy's preaching to the Gentiles, while the rest of the church is still preaching to the Jews.' People have really been surprised that issues which were talked about quite openly by a guy like Smithy *really do* break down a lot of barriers, because kids see that he's not a phoney and is prepared to talk about real things – like sex and unemployment and things like that."

Glynn Nicholas,  
GODCARES musician and comedian

"John has identified with the outsider."

Dean Drayton