

The Safety Net

National Church Growth Research Center

P. O. Box 368 · Mt. Hood OR 97041 · 541-352-7636 · sishot@aol.com · www.liftedhands.org

Silas Shotwell, Regional Director

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“Focusing on the Eternal”

Dear ones,

The New Year hardly seems “new” after the passing of a whole month. For many of us this has been an eventful month with winter storms and various crises. But my own new year has also been blessed by a daily recall of the fact that we should be focusing on *eternity*.

One of the books I read in the early hours of 2007 was the book Driven by Eternity by John Bevere. It emphasizes living with hope and assurance, and committing our time and energy to eternal things, rather than to things that will be burned up.

In the very beginning of the book Bevere tells the story of Arthur Stace, an Australian born into a life of hopelessness at the turn of the last century. He was a bum, who spent his life as a petty thief and alcoholic during the days between the First World War and the Great Depression.

But in the winter of 1930 Stace became a believer in Christ and his life was never the same again. His direction and habits changed because his heart was changed. He lived in Sydney, Australia.

One day Stace heard his minister give an impassioned sermon that included the statement: *“I wish I could shout ‘ETERNITY’ through all the streets of Sydney!”*

Stace focused on that statement, and wondered what he could do to make it happen. He came up with a simple but remarkable plan. He would follow that plan for the next thirty years.

The plan was this: Stace would rise early each morning, pray for an hour, and then leave his home between 5:00 and 5:30 A.M., to go wherever he felt God wanted him to go. For hours he would write one word, *eternity*, every one hundred feet on the sidewalks of Sydney. For more than twenty years his work was a mystery. But this word that appeared everywhere caused countless thousands to pause and ponder its meaning. Multitudes were affected positively. The power of one word was amazing.

Finally, in 1956, the puzzle was solved. Stace was called “the graffiti preacher.” Hordes of people thanked him for the impact he had had on their lives.

Two years after Stace’s death in 1967, Sydney poet Douglas Stewart published the following words:

*That shy mysterious poet Arthur Stace
Whose work was just one single mighty word
Walked in the utmost depths of time and space
And there his word was spoken and he heard
ETERNITY, ETERNITY, it banged him like a bell
Dulcet from heaven sounding, somber from hell*

A one-word sermon touched a nation. His message was secured for generations by architect Ridley Smith, who put it in copperplate in the Sydney Square. And when 4 billion people worldwide watched the televised Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympics they saw the word “ETERNITY.” And at the beginning of the new millennium, when more than a million gathered in downtown Sydney to welcome in the year 2000, they looked to the Sydney Harbor Bridge for the fireworks letters on the bridge to mark the new year. But instead of the number 2000, they cheered as the fireworks spelled out E T E R N I T Y !

I have begun each day of 2007 with a focus on ETERNITY. It is my waking thought, and my last thought before sleep. My constant prayer, to the God of Eternity, is to make my time and life count toward eternity.

There is so much that is mundane. Things, sports, political correctness. But those things mean so little.

In churches, we often care more about how MANY people we have in our assemblies, and how EXCITING our activities are, than whether we are focusing on ETERNITY.

The story of Arthur Stace not only reminds us of proper focus, it also reminds us of what ONE PERSON can do. An uneducated, pitiful, drunk gave his life to Christ and Christ made him a man of great impact.

Christ can do that.

He can do it with you and me. Because He’s ETERNAL.

Yours in Christ,

Silas Shotwell