

A word for the final gathering of Australasian Religious Press Association delivered at the opening session on Tuesday 24 September 2024, QT Hotel, Surfers Paradise.

ARPA began in 1974, another year on this earth where there was good and evil and change of course; constant change.

It was, we know now, a significant year for Western journalism with the Watergate Scandal.

Emperor Haile Selassie was removed in Ethiopia.

Isabel Peron of Argentina became the first female President of a country.

Bangladesh joined the United Nations.

Writer and dissenter Alexander Solzhenitsyn was expelled and his Russian citizenship revoked.

Germany was still two countries and West Germany won the world cup (and it was Australia's first time playing).

The Rubik's Cube was developed.

Victoria Adams, better known as Posh Spice, was born.

And sadly New Zealand beat Australia for the first time in test cricket.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand Norman Kirk died in office and in Australia Gough Whitlam continued in office after another election.

Cyclone Tracy destroyed Darwin and the destruction and recovery was photographed by an early ARPA member, Ramon Williams.

There was no internet, phone calls were made from a landline, and many ARPA editors used literal cut and paste to make a publication.

At that stage ARPA members did not know what the future held and perhaps did not even think it would reach 50 years?

And yet as we look back on the last few years, and for many of us we now mark time around the year 2020, we certainly did not think of a global pandemic occurring and the impact this would have on church life and in particular Christian publications.

50 years (and a little more if we take the antecedent as well), and through all these years generations of God's people in the religious press have served in various roles and joined together for conferences, seminars, webinars, AGMS, and times of fellowship and Christmas gatherings.

Many different events and times, and yet one constant has been the foundation of our work and our association:

In the beginning was the Word

The Word of Life, the incarnate word, God made flesh.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Christ our Lord

I have often thought of an almost aside comment near the end of the Gospel of John.
John 20: 30-31 (NIV)

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And at the end of the Gospel of John (*John 21: 25, NIV*)

If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

The purpose of the bible, as the purpose of John was not to record everything. Indeed it was not humanly possible for John to do this.

And as the book of Romans states:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15: 4, NIV)

As the canonical Scriptures, God's word records all that is needed.

And John 20: 31 encapsulates the reason and our foundation.

That you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I have always liked the motto of Ramon Williams:

Telling Others What Others are Doing for the Lord

Through ARPA we have been part of this continuing journey, telling the story of Jesus and His Church so that people may believe.

Now most of what happened in our denominations or our organisations has not been recorded, but we know that:

Stories of people coming to faith were published

Stories of people being nurtured in the faith were published

And thanks were given for the faith of people who as the Salvation Army said in their publications 'were promoted to glory'

Lives have indeed been changed

And I want to suggest that while ARPA is concluding, our own part in God's mission is not concluding; ministry does not end with the conclusion of an organisation (and eventually the legal formalities),

Through God's gracious provision people of faith, and the word of God will continue to minister. As it has happened in the past this will be in different ways, in new ways, and with new opportunities, we will continue telling others what the Lord is doing.

The constant will be that the Lord is with us.

In the words of the writer of *Hebrews 13: 8 (NIV)*

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever."

And a benediction from the letter to the Philippians.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1: 6, NASB)

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