

A U S T R A L I A N

# Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

november 2011

## Economics for **life**

IAN HARPER | POLITICS: NO ENTRY | PICTURE OF MISERY

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# PTC

## **INDUCTION OF REV PETER HASTIE AS NEW COLLEGE PRINCIPAL**

PTC invites you to the Induction of Rev Peter Hastie as Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College.

**DATE** Friday 10th February 2012 at 7.30pm

**PLACE** Hawthorn Presbyterian Church, 580 Glenferrie Road Hawthorn

**SPEAKER** Rt Rev David Jones, Moderator General

## **COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT SERVICE**

**DATE** Monday February 13th 2012 at 7.30pm

**PLACE** Canterbury Presbyterian Church 146 Canterbury Road Canterbury

**SPEAKER** Rev Peter Hastie, PTC Principal



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**E D I T O R I A L**

**I**n this issue of *AP* we explore the place and use of money in our lives. Ever since the spectacular collapse of world markets throughout 2008-2009 and the financial aftershocks that continue to reverberate around the globe, we have been forced to contemplate the meaning of life, the place of money and what really matters.

For the past 30 years the Wall Street maxims that “greed is good” and “money is the measure of everything” have been the unspoken and unacknowledged assumptions of many within the ruling elites. Added to these dangerous ideas has been the equally mistaken belief – espoused so eloquently by Ronald Reagan prior to the ’87 Crash – that our fundamental problem is government.

These notions, when combined with the strident advocacy of a libertarian, free market form of capitalism, have laid the groundwork for the present economic crisis. We simply cannot live in a world without responsible controls. To propose that we can, like the libertarian philosopher Ayn Rand, means that we will only continue to reap a bitter harvest. Until we see that the deeper roots of economic decision-making lie in spiritual and moral values, we are destined for more misery and job loss.

Perhaps this is where we as Christians have an opportunity in the present. In times of great uncertainty created by human folly, it is sometimes easier for people to understand that our troubles are linked in some way to our abandonment of God. Our unwillingness to accept absolutes of any kind, whether metaphysical or moral, has left us drowning in a sea of relativism. If we can’t tell the difference between right and wrong, then it’s no wonder that our financial systems are in a state of crisis. Christians should be alert during these uncertain times to reminding people of where our true hope lies – in Christ. We should also be ready to comfort those who face terrible loss.

On an altogether different note, this issue will be the second last of *Australian Presbyterian* in its current form. I am stepping down as the editor and Dr Peter Barnes will be taking my place. The magazine will remain a high-quality journal. However, from February 2012 it will be in full colour, free and issued quarterly.

Peter Hastie 

Wall Street

# True Wealth

ECONOMICS IS A GOOD SERVANT, BUT A BAD MASTER

**P**rofessor Emeritus Ian Harper is one of Australia's best known economists. He has worked closely with governments, banks, corporates and leading professional services firms at the highest level. As a member of the celebrated Wallis Inquiry, he was at the forefront of financial market reform in Australia.

In 2008, following a 25-year academic career – including 16 years in various roles at Melbourne Business School – Ian left academic life to become a director of Access Economics. More recently, he joined Deloitte Access Economics as a partner.

From December 2005 to July 2009, Ian served as inaugural chairman of the Australian Fair Pay Commission, an independent statutory body whose role was to set and adjust minimum wages in Australia. In January 2011, he was appointed by the Baillieu Government of Victoria as one of three panellists to the Independent Review of State Finances.

In more recent times, Ian has published a book, *Economics for Life* (Acorn Press), that has won the 2011 Australian Christian Book of the Year award. He explains how economics can serve Christian ends and informs us about important economic episodes in Australian public life. He weaves them all together with a story of his own conversion to Christ. Peter Hastie interviewed Ian recently in Melbourne.

**Ian, you've just won the prize for the best Christian book of the year, a book on economics. What led you to write it?**



**Ian Harper**  
talks to  
**Peter Hastie**

I wrote it at the urging of a dear friend, Bishop John Wilson, who served in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne until his recent death. John had asked me over a period of time to write it, but I never got started. Then he became very ill and it was obvious he was going to die. So I thought, "I need to do this." I guess the quick answer to your question is that a dying friend urged me to do it.

Why this book? It was really born of my attempt to make sense of my profession in the light of my Christian faith. I wanted to reflect on the relationship between Christianity and economics. They don't always fit hand in glove, and I'd like to be honest about that. So the book is an attempt to explain how I can be both an economist and a Christian. I also wrote it with two different groups of people in mind: professional economists, many of whom tend to see economics as a philosophy of life. With them, I wanted to consider the proposition that "economics is a good servant but a bad master". While economics may deal with a particular sphere of life, it is not a philosophy of life and was never intended to be.

The other group I had in mind were my Christian friends, some of whom were a little dubious about how an interest in money and material things could be squared with a sincere Christian faith.

**Were you surprised that the award went to a book about improving the material condition of mankind?**

Yes, I was surprised. I thought that John Wilson's book about Islam and Christianity was definitely the front-runner because it was erudite and timely in helping Christians to dialogue sensibly about Islam. Personally, I thought it was a no-brainer that he would get the prize. However, John's book received the second prize. At the awards ceremony, although he had passed away, it was as though he was given two prizes because his fingerprints were well and truly all over my work. I would not have received the prize had it not been for him.

**Do you see any inherent contradiction in a book that talks about the goodness of the material world in a Christian book award?**

No, I don't see any contradiction at all. Jesus spoke a lot about our attitudes to money and possessions, so I can't see any real contradiction. Clearly, it was an important subject to our Lord.

The Bible makes it clear that the creation is good and that it was a good and godly thing for Adam to "work the garden" and improve his material circumstances. Christians throughout the ages have affirmed the goodness of creation and have shown us that it is right to be interested in our physical circumstances.

For instance, it was evangelical Christians associated with the Clapham sect who led the movement to abolish the slave trade. They did so because they believed that God is concerned about our physical welfare. Other Christians have

led the way in founding hospitals and schools for similar reasons. The idea that Christians simply say, "Forget the world! It's going to hell and we should focus on saving souls", is short-sighted. It is true that Jesus has given us the Great Commission, but one aspect of that commission is to "observe everything I have commanded you". If I am not mistaken, I think that includes whatever Jesus taught about money, possessions and the physical care of others. It is easy, as most people would immediately recognise, to see how material deprivation, poverty and want are undesirable. So doing what one can to alleviate these things, whether designing economic policies or assisting institutions to deliver those outcomes, seems to be an important task for a Christian economist.

**Some Christians may think that it's surprising that a professional economist would also be a believer. Were you born into a Christian family?**

No I wasn't born into a Christian family. My mother was a Presbyterian. My father had received a fairly rough introduction to Christianity at the hands of an abusive relative so he associated Christianity with cruelty and hypocrisy. He was quite hostile to the Christian faith.

Nevertheless he sent my two brothers and me to an Anglican Church school in Brisbane. As I look back on it, I got a good exposure to Anglican forms of Christian worship but I don't remember that I ever received proper instruction in the faith. I can't recall that the gospel was ever presented to me. Of course, it could have been and I wasn't listening.

**So how did you become a Christian?**

Ultimately it was my wife, Roslyn, who brought me to Christ. We had been married for about 10 years and we were at Princeton University in the United States. I was a visiting academic in the Economics Department. On a Sunday, mainly to get our two young boys out of the apartment, we would go up to the chapel at Princeton. I'd always been a great admirer of pipe organs and there was a fine instrument in that building. So I liked to listen to it. So did Roslyn, but she was more affected by what was said than by the organ music. Anyway, within a year she had bought herself a Bible and begun to attend a Bible Study group. Then she wanted us to attend

church regularly.

**How did you react to her request that you go to church?**

I thought, "Where on earth did this come from? Are you saying that I'm not a good husband or a good father? Is there somebody else here?" And we had quite a difficult time. She tried to explain to me that she felt that there was something missing from our lives. As a male, my immediate thought was, "Am I not providing for you? Loving you enough? What is this?"

Anyway, it was very difficult. Finally, in exasperation about the changes that



**JESUS SPOKE A LOT ABOUT OUR ATTITUDES TO MONEY AND POSSESSIONS. CLEARLY, IT WAS AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT TO OUR LORD.**

were taking place between us I said, "I know enough about Christianity to be able to tell you that you should do what your husband says. So I'm telling you not to go to church."

Actually, it was a very bad card to play and I'm deeply ashamed of it. Of course, she's now forgiven me but it's nonetheless a painful memory. As you can imagine, that put her in a very difficult position. She didn't do anything to begin with, but one Sunday morning she said to me, "I'm going to church and I'm taking the boys with me and you can do what you like." That sounded pretty much like an ultimatum to me. So I thought, "Ian, you'd better back off quickly. This is serious." So I said, "All right. I'll go. But I'm very uncomfortable about where you're going."

**Did anyone else speak to you about Christ?**

Interestingly, at that time God started working on my case at the university. There was a visitor from Oxford in the UK. I got to know him and admired him tremendously. He was my age. I saw him in the corridor one day at

work and I said to him, "Andrew, I've been meaning to invite you and Catherine to dinner at our place and I'm sorry that I haven't. I really want to but things are a bit difficult at home at the moment." He then looked at me and said, "I'm very sorry to hear that. Is there anything I could do?" I said, "Well, not unless you can explain to me what becoming a Christian means." I said that as a throwaway line and he said, "Well, as a matter of fact I can, because I happen to be a believer."

Here was a man whom I admired. He was my age and an eminent Oxford scholar. Today he is the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. So I said, "Do you have time now?" And he said, "Any amount of time you want. Come into my office." So I did and we spent an hour talking and I asked him, "What on earth is all this? What has happened?" He was very helpful in answering my questions. Then he said to me, "Would you go to church?" And I said, "Well, yes, but I'd feel more at home in an Anglican one." And he said, "Well, we go to an Anglican Church, St Jude's in Carlton. Why don't you bring your wife along? My wife and I will sit on either side of you and protect you from the excesses of the Anglican church!"

I thought, "That's a great idea and very helpful. Thank you for that." When I spoke to my wife, she became a little tearful. So as a compromise we settled on another Anglican church not far from where we lived. When we went there I met the vicar who had once been an economist too. One day he challenged me: "You don't believe a word of what I am saying, do you?" And I said, "No, I don't." And he said, "How long do you propose to continue coming to this church while you don't believe a word of what's said?" And I thought, "That's a fair question." So I said to him, "Listen, economist to economist, if you can explain any of this to me in a way that I can believe, then I'll believe it." And he said, "Do you mean that?" And I said, "Of course I do." And he said, "You're on. Do you have a Bible?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you prepared to meet and discuss it?" I said, "Well, yes." So he said, "Then I'll be there Tuesday night at 7:30. Look the Bible up, find a book called Mark, and read the first three chapters."

**So what happened in the Bible study?**

So away I went, and we met over the next 10 weeks and read through the

Gospel of Mark together. He gave me the opportunity to ask him all sorts of questions and our discussions ranged far and wide. And the thing that impressed me more than his answers was when he said, "I don't know the answer to that. That's a good question." And I would say, "You don't know the answer and yet you believe? How can you do that?" "Well," he said, "There are lots of things I don't fully understand, yet I believe them to be true. I'm sure that's true of you too. We don't have to understand something exhaustively before we believe it."

Then one day he took me to the Ridley College bookshop and said, "Oh, have a look at this – here's a section that might interest you." It was the apologetics section. He pulled a book off the shelf and said, "Here, look at this." It was a book that listed many of my objections to Christianity and some excellent answers to them. Anyway, Peter, I felt deeply ashamed of myself. I was a scholar and a university professor and I thought of myself as a highly educated man. Yet here I discovered an entire dimension of human experience and writing about which I was completely ignorant. This shop was filled with books that were very impressive in their scholarship. And I thought to myself, "Ian, you've seriously underestimated the Christian faith."

Anyway, on Christmas Day in 1989 I went to church and the vicar preached about Christ's birth and the gifts of the magi that testified to Him being a prophet, priest and king. Afterwards we celebrated communion and I watched everybody else going up and I thought to myself, "Ian, you know it's true." So I got up and went forward to the communion rail. He saw me there, and gave me communion. Then afterwards he came to me and said, "Ian, you took communion today." And I said, "Yes, that's right." He said, "Why?" and I said, "Because the Gospel of Jesus is true." Then he hugged me and I was in the Kingdom.

**What were the major prejudices that you had about Christianity that switched you off?**

I think the major one was that it was mindless. I thought Christianity was nothing more than ritual, genuflection and mumbo jumbo. No one ever explained any of it to me. I thought it was pointless.

**How has it changed your life?**

I'm not going to say it turned my life

upside down immediately because that wouldn't be right. However, it did repair our marriage very quickly. My wife had actually bought a book on the recommendation of a friend called, *How to Be the Happy Wife of an Unsaved Husband*. But, after I became a Christian, she brought this book out and said, "See this." I looked at it, and she just threw it in the bin. She said, "I have never read it and now I don't need to." And I thought, "Praise God." Then our sons came to Christ independently of us and so we became more unified as a family.

Professionally, it put me on the



**THE REMARKABLE THING ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS, AS ADAM SMITH SO POIGNANTLY REMARKED, IS THAT IT'S PART OF OUR NATURE TO TRUCK AND TRADE. EVEN CHILDREN DO IT.**

knife's edge. I thought, "Do I need to give this up? Do I need to become a minister of the gospel?" However, one of my friends who is a minister said to me, "Ian, you don't need to do that to serve God. Maybe He is calling you to do it, but you don't need to think it's essential. God may be calling you to be a Christian economist."

**Why are you so interested in economics?**

I am interested in economics as a calling because it allows us to analyse and understand how wealth is created and distributed in ways that enable everyone in a society to benefit from increased material prosperity, especially in terms of their health and education. I think questions like: "Why is this society wealthy and another one poor?" are important because so much turns on the answers. So I started on a path that would lead to answering some of those questions.

Economics was also appealing to me because it was largely evidence-based

and grounded in logical thinking. It also provides some very useful tools for resolving many of the difficult questions that confront us in relation to resourcing our material needs. As a result of my studies I have become convinced of the importance of well-conceived policies and the need for efficient institutions. These are important in ensuring that sufficient resources are distributed to people in ways that are fair and just.

For instance, on television the other night we saw some commentators trying to explain why some North Korean children were hungry and in poverty. It's got nothing to do with the 38th parallel. Some of these children have relatives only ten miles to the south who are clearly healthier and better nourished. I think most people realise that the reason why the children in North Korea are impoverished and sick has to do with the political and economic values of their leaders and institutions. Understanding why those children are so poor and trying to think of ways to improve their condition is part of the work of economists. That's what grabs me; it's such an interesting and important issue.

Incidentally, the 18th century economist, Adam Smith became famous for seeking the answer to these questions. He set out to inquire into how wealth was amassed and distributed in the nations, that is, what we nowadays call, prosperity. However, for Smith, prosperity was not the be all and end all. He is quite clear about that. He writes his book on the basis of an earlier work on the theory of moral sentiments. Smith wrote out of a moral framework because he was concerned for human flourishing. I think it is interesting that nowhere in the Bible is it stated that material poverty is a desirable thing.

**Should Christians be suspicious of the use of economics in the formation of public policy?**

No, I don't think Christians should necessarily be suspicious of the use of economics as a discipline. I think they should be critical of it; but, on the other hand, it is not wrong for them to be suspicious of economists. Economists, like any human being, can be self-serving and abuse their position. Since economists often have access to power, they can be seduced by it. Further, while few professional economists will stand for public office, they often think they have better answers to issues than politicians. So they take the comfortable position of

“getting in the king’s ear” but never wanting to sit on the throne. I’m critical of that attitude.

**What spiritual and moral assumptions should you have to be a really good economist?**

I think you need a strong moral and spiritual foundation that reminds you that there’s more to life than economics. Economics is, as I have said, a good servant but a bad master. We also need to remember that it is focused on a single issue: material prosperity. And further, while economic welfare is important, it’s not the whole story. The problem is that economics in the modern university has been shorn of many of its moral and spiritual foundations and students are often no longer required to study economic history at an undergraduate level.

The trend in modern economics is toward a narrow, quasi-scientific enquiry with a very limited remit. The problem today is that many people want to formulate policy settings relying solely on economic data devoid of any moral context. But no responsible leader can make good decisions on such a limited base.

**We hear a lot about markets and “free markets” these days. What is meant by the term and why is it important?**

At one level a market is just a physical space. It’s a set of arrangements whereby people can meet for commercial exchange. When economists use the term “market” they apply all of those institutional features. So sometimes it might be a fish market, or a stock market, or whatever, depending on its physical manifestations. However, the common factor is that the people involved have the sole purpose of seeking a commercial exchange; that is, they want something more fervently than what they bring in exchange, and they also want to find somebody who has the opposite configuration.

And the remarkable thing about human beings, as Adam Smith so poignantly remarked, is that it’s part of our nature to truck and trade. Even children do it – they swap cards, lollies and marbles, and other things that take their fancy. Markets are probably the most powerful instruments that human beings have discovered to solve this question of material prosperity.

**Are all markets good?**

Well, this is where economics has some limitations. At one level we can look at transactions in a market in a purely commercial sense and agree that both parties to the transaction are satisfied with it. But if we look at the transaction from a broader moral point of view, we might see some serious problems.

For example, most people would agree with the notion that there’s more to people’s welfare than just commercial exchange. Then there’s a related question, “Does the commercial transaction have any undesirable social consequences?” For instance, is a drug trade or a sex exchange a good thing for both par-



**IN ONE SENSE, ALL THESE RUPTIONS IN FINANCIAL MARKETS ARE SOME OF THE AFTERSHOCKS OF THE RAPID RELOCATION OF ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE FROM THE WEST TO THE EAST.**

ties? Is the young woman involved the best judge of her own welfare? Even though the money enables her to feed her child, what about the man who paid for sex? Is this in his best interests? He knows what he’s getting, but is it good? These moral questions are the right questions to ask and economics tends to go off the rails when we shut them down. So the market is a wonderful institution for solving society’s material problems, but we must not forget that there are moral dimensions to markets as well.

**We’ve just entered the second phase of possibly the greatest financial crisis of the century. Why didn’t some of the leading economists like Alan Greenspan see it coming?**

While hard sciences like aerodynamics can predict with a very high degree of accuracy whether an aircraft will take off and land safely, economics is not quite that advanced.

Economists are still at the stage

where we feel more comfortable in explaining economic events ex post facto than we are in making predictions. The problem with economics is that there are human variables that come into play, such as greed and fear, and this makes the task of prediction more challenging. So economics is a science in the sense that it proceeds using the scientific method. We work with models and have a high regard for data and measurement, but economics is not a hard science like physics or chemistry.

**What laid the groundwork for this economic storm?**

Well, economic historians will tell us that we are experiencing in a very concentrated way what happened during the industrial revolution in Western Europe in the 19th century. It took Western Europe about a century to go from the beginning of the industrial revolution to the end, but the Chinese will probably experience that in around 30-40 years. It will happen on an unprecedented scale and will also be driven by the Indian economy. So you’ve got a third of humanity rising up in economic development, which is, of course, a very good thing. However, this is the equivalent in economic terms of a shift in tectonic plates between the East and the West. In one sense, all these ructions that we see in financial markets are some of the aftershocks of the rapid relocation of economic advantage from the West to the East.

**Why was the damage to markets in the West so great? Could anything have been done to limit it?**

To pursue my analogy of an earthquake, if we’d built structures that were designed to withstand such tremors, then we wouldn’t have had such a massive collapse when some of the markets failed. The problem was that the rapid growth of China produced a stockpile of financial savings that flowed into Western financial markets. It drove asset prices up, such as stocks and real estate, and forced interest rates down. There was a huge amount of money washing around everywhere. In those conditions the groundwork was set for a credit explosion and a massive asset price boom. Once those things got under way, it was really like a stampede of cattle. Of course, you can stand in front of the herd firing guns, but once the cattle are on the move, it’s very hard to stop them.

However, we can do a lot to stop a stampede. We can put up some sturdy fences and electrify them so that if a stampede starts, they're not going to trample all the crops down. Had that been done? Well, evidently not. Why not? Partly because a surge of that size had never been seen before. But, it's also true that some of the biggest financial houses on Wall Street effectively undermined efforts to regulate markets properly. In some cases it was the governments themselves. For instance, the Clinton administration pushed financial markets to make loans to people who were credit risks through the Community Reinvestment Act.

### **Like Ninja (no income, no job or asset) loans?**

Exactly. In some cases these loans were mandated. The banks had to fulfil quotas in the interest allegedly of promoting financial advantage among people who couldn't ordinarily get credit. "Well, sir, I'm offering you this 'ninja' loan, although you have no income, job or assets, because the government is backing me and in some respects is underwriting this loan."

When you look below the surface you discover that fault is spread around everywhere. Some of the big financial institutions were greedy, but the government was responsible for its misguided social policies. The regulators failed as well because they hadn't put sufficient economic restraints and safeguards in place. Could these things have been done better? Yes!

### **How did Australia manage to avoid the debacle in America?**

There are a number of reasons. I guess one of the main ones concerns China's role in our economy. We have very strong ties to China's growth through commodities, so throughout the global recession our iron ore and mineral resources have been in heavy demand from China. China, in turn, stimulated its economy to avoid the world downturn and their demand kept our resources sector operating at peak capacity. So we have benefited in significant ways from China's growth as an industrial power.

The second reason has more to do with good management than luck. In the early 1990s Australia had a serious financial crisis that caused us to rejig our own financial regulations. In the 1990-91 recession, "the recession we had to

have", the State Bank of Victoria, the fifth largest bank in the country, failed. We nearly lost Westpac too. Then, of course, a little further into the 1990s, we lost the insurance company HIH, which was the largest financial failure in our history. All that happened in the 1990s. They were all largely self-inflicted wounds. But they taught us some valuable lessons.

Australian regulators responded by tightening our regulatory arrangements considerably. This protected us in large



**THE BIGGEST SPIRITUAL LESSON WE NEED TO LEARN IS THAT GREED IS VERY DESTRUCTIVE. TOO MANY PEOPLE HAVE COME TO BELIEVE IN THE WALL STREET DICTUM, 'GREED IS GOOD'.**

measure from the Asian financial crisis in 1998. When the global financial crisis of 2007-08 broke, we had a strong trading arrangement with China and excellent domestic regulatory management. All our banks survived the storm.

In terms of public policy we were also in excellent shape. On the fiscal side, the government had run a long series of surpluses. So the government could spend money and not put us into financial difficulty like the European Union. It was also able to lower interest rates. So the government was in good shape financially, we had sound banks and an underlying economic advantage coming through China. It was a mix of good management and good luck (or rather providence).

**Some people have said that the whole thing could have been avoided if economists and political leaders had a more reasonable approach to regulation. Do you agree? In the late 1990s, Alan Greenspan, Larry Summers (Clinton's chief economic adviser) and President Clinton himself dismissed concerns by**

### **financial regulators over credit default swaps that helped to bring about the crisis.**

As I have already mentioned, Australia's regulatory arrangements were basically in excellent shape. The architects of those changes had done a good job and the former government had the foresight and courage to introduce them. It is widely acknowledged that Australia had the right set of institutional settings, *ex post facto*.

However, in Europe and in the United States, it is clear that they were under or inappropriately regulated. This was one element of a number of factors that led to the crisis.

We now face a new and challenging situation. International forums are imposing new regulations on everyone regardless of how they weathered the economic storm. Although Australia sailed through the crisis safely, we've still had to sign up to further changes. If we don't, we go from being the top of the class to non-compliant.

Our problem is that because we are dependent on international capital flows we cannot afford to be known as non-compliant. Unfortunately, we don't need a lot of the new regulations but we're in detention along with the rest of the class.

### **Do any of the rating agencies share some blame for the crisis? They were giving countries and banks Triple A ratings that they clearly didn't deserve.**

I think there are a number of issues involved here. The first, and the most obvious one, concerns how the rating agencies earn their money. They obviously don't do it for free. So, who pays them? The problem, as I see it, is that they are paid fees by the party who is purchasing the rating rather than by parties who are relying upon that rating. Economists are now giving a lot of thought to how that must change, but it is certainly an issue.

The second issue is that the ratings agencies only ever focus on debt. They are not looking at other aspects of a business. They are only interested in how debt is going to be repaid. When you look at the problem from this perspective you can see how some of the securities they rated as Triple A were in fact paying nothing.

The response of the ratings agencies to their critics is to say, "Well, we made certain assumptions that governments

would come to the aid of parties and we assumed that there wouldn't be a wholesale collapse of the world financial system. Further, we don't give an absolute guarantee that a bank won't fail – it's just an opinion."

The important thing to understand is what a rating agency provides. A Triple A rating does not guarantee a government or bank won't get into trouble. All it is saying is that there is a certain level of probability that its debt will be repaid. That's a different matter.

All in all, I think it's obvious that certain reforms need to be made in the area of rating institutional risk.

**What are some of the abiding lessons that Christians should be learning from the traumatising events at the moment – the dislocation of financial systems, job loss, and business failure? Are there spiritual lessons to be learnt here?**

I think the biggest spiritual lesson we need to learn is that greed is a very destructive force. Too many people have come to believe in the Wall Street dictum, "greed is good". The ancient church has rightly classified greed as one of the "seven deadly sins". The apostle Paul is quite clear that greed is idolatry.

The problem is that idolatry is endemic and even Christians are not immune to it. As soon as we set our hearts on money, or the things that money can buy, we have opened the door to greed. Then we are slowly consumed by it. So we must be watchful of greed in our own lives.

However, we are also our brother's keeper. We need to be critical of greed and idolatry when it is magnified on the gigantic scale that it was during the global financial crisis. The problem there was that individual greed spilled over and affected the commonwealth. It's one thing to blow yourself up with greed; it's another thing to blow everybody else up as well.

As Christians, I think we need to act individually as we expect others to act at a collective level. We must look critically at our own motives when we are making financial decisions. We should not be making the kind of personal decisions that at aggregate levels are bad. If, as Christians, we demand every last cent in our business transactions and every last basis point in our interest rate investments, then we are really no different to the rest of the world. We ought to be aware that when this kind of behaviour

is aggregated up to the boardrooms of big business, what they hear is, "More, more; I demand more". We need to realise that we are as much to blame as anyone else if we maintain these attitudes.

**As an economist, what do you think of Paul's statement that, "Godliness plus contentment equals great gain"?**

As a Christian, I think Paul rightly points out that financial profit is not the be all and end all. "Great gain" can't be defined in economic terms. There are other things that are more important.



**AS CHRISTIANS, WE NEED TO ACT INDIVIDUALLY AS WE EXPECT OTHERS TO ACT AT A COLLECTIVE LEVEL. WE MUST LOOK CRITICALLY AT OUR OWN MOTIVES IN MAKING FINANCIAL DECISIONS.**

Recently, I heard a very helpful sermon on Psalm 73. It reminded me that I live in a world where I can't escape comparing myself to other people. These other people enjoy the good life. They have plenty of money, drive expensive cars and enjoy all the trappings of the fast lane. Yet here am I, giving money to the church, trying to deny myself, serving others in a voluntary capacity – what am I? Just a mug? You know how the psalm goes on. I think Christians find it a struggle when they compare themselves to others who are doing well in the world.

I simply make two comments. First, being a Christian and living in the world is a struggle. In a sense, I can't help comparing myself to other people. I have exactly the same feelings as the Psalmist. He is telling me how I'll feel and what I will experience if I live long enough in this world. He is reminding me that I will be confronted with an alternative view of life that suggests that ultimate contentment is to be found in

earthly health, wealth and happiness. Every Christian will go through this struggle. All of us have to face the question, what is true contentment?

My second comment is that although I am drawn to the pleasures and ease of worldly prosperity, I've got a bigger picture and a better paradigm of the good life. The good life, as far as the Bible is concerned, is to be found in God. As the Psalmist says, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth... As for me, it is good to be near God" (Psalm 73:25,28).

For me, the good life is grounded in a promise that God will never forsake me, that He shall never leave me, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord. That's the starting point, but I am also looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth that is the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13). That's my ultimate hope. 

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# A royal return

A RELATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL APPROACH TO RICHES

*Gordon Preece*

**A**nxious middle-class readers like myself face a dilemma as globally rich Christians. We live in a society feeling under pressure economically to keep up with the richer Jones' and under pressure ethically from the poor, locally and globally. How can we help each other bridge this ethical gap to which we are often over-exposed through global communications?

Christ's radical norm of total generosity and hospitality, nonetheless allows for liberty of expression in different forms or vocational and relational settings. Some disciples are called away from regular relational responsibilities and riches (Jn 1:35-42, Mk 1:16-20), and some are called to stay and repent on the job (Lk 3:10-14). Wealth can easily get in the way of relationships and availability to worship God 24/7, through caring for others and creation. So I will argue for a relational, vocational and hospitable view of wealth set in a biblical relational framework of God, humanity and earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

First, our vertical self or primary relationship is to God as Creator and Father, whom we image or represent to the world. The security of knowing that God knows us as we are inoculates us to the idolatry and insecurity of identity that image-moulding consumerism exploits in offering to assuage our anxieties, at a price.

Second, Christian community addresses our insecure individualism that Putnam's *Bowling Alone* depicts.

Third, our management of earth, land, home and car takes practical shape around a steward's sense of God's good creation on loan, to be passed on to our children's children.

This normative threefold pattern of relationships takes different forms, allowing for different callings and gifts from God and liberty of conscience. A limitless and impossible love of all humanity can now be focused through

SCRIPTURE SUPPORTS REASONABLE, FAIRLY GAINED COMMERCIAL PROFITS, RENTAL CONTRACTS, TRADE AND SHARED RISK-TAKING.

our embodied finitude of time, space and awareness. We first love our nearest neighbours (family, friends, fellow workers, local church) and then global church and non-church connections (Gal. 6:10). Those "called to stay" in home and job should do so, not for personal comfort, but as a base for hospitality to siblings near, and sometimes strangers from afar, discovering Christ's incognito presence there (Mt 25:31-46).

A rightful biblical stress on hospitality within our three primary relationships reframes concrete questions like housing for inter-generational hospitality, use of public transport where possible as part of being hospitable members of the public and city, and being good, tidy guests on God's good earth.

This involves individual and communal discernment (Rom. 12:1, 2) in facing concrete issues as a radical middle way between lawless individualism – "it's the Lord and me, that's as far as I can see" – and pharisaical, legalistic prescriptions amounting to "be like me and mine, that's what's divine".

Questions of personal vocation like which job and home to choose are not private but set within the overarching vocation of God's people to care for the poor and vulnerable, or "the least, last and lost" (Salvation Army). The great Reformed intellectual Jacques Ellul argued for "shifting focus from the technical function of work to its global human relationships. This global human relation requires us to take seriously the situation of the Third World".

As D. J. Fasching summarises Ellul: "What should concern us are the

impulses toward generosity, solidarity, and fraternity that the West feels toward the Third World. If we want to avoid having a Third World without a future, engaging in mere revolt, it is necessary to consider a total reconversion of the West's economic and technical system ... to put it at the further service of the under-developed world."

Given that we share not only a global economy, but a global ecology, this is also in the West's long-term self-interest.

**S**imilarly, Bonhoeffer called this "taking the view from below", that is, from the perspective of the Jews in Hitler's Germany at that time. We too should take the view of those who suffer, as Kevin Rudd urged in taking up Bonhoeffer's challenge as a paradigm for Christian politics in Australia in relation to Aborigines, refugees and climate change. Though for various reasons, notoriously on climate change – "the great moral challenge of our time" – Rudd was not able to deliver on all these, the power of Bonhoeffer's view from below remains.

We can further focus this larger global vocational and ecological stewardship question around ethical investing or putting wealth to work, according to kingdom values. Being wealthy is not the main problem any more than being relatively powerful in world or everyday terms is. Neither money nor power is intrinsically evil, but *love of money* (1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5) and *love of power*. It tempts people to an invulnerable sense of independence from God (and neighbour) and tempts others to envy. The challenge is how to use whatever wealth and power we have positively, to facilitate reconciled relationships with God, humanity and the earth.

Superannuation, for all its recent fluctuations, is a legitimate and wise way of providing for ourselves and our families in old age. Australia's compulsory super scheme was a commendable piece of

foresight by the Keating government, though not fully implemented in line with the original vision of 15% employer and employee contributions. But being part of the world's greatest share-holding nation gives us an important responsibility to track how ethically our super shares are invested.

**T**he Jubilee Centre's Paul Mills provides a radically biblical and relational set of investment principles and options. Mills upholds the biblical and traditional Christian prohibition of interest, stating that "the Bible *does* prohibit all interest on loans within the domestic economy, not just 'usury' or 'excessive interest'" (Dt. 23:19).

In the 16th century, Calvin's more Reformed literal rather than medieval allegorical reading of the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30) led to a more positive view of interest. Calvin used the New Testament law of love to modify the Old Testament prohibition of interest, concluding that about 5% maximum interest was chargeable and charitable. Beyond that was usury.

While Mills' view is challenging, the Old Testament theocratic context, and its allowing of interest charges to Gentiles (Dt. 23:20), supports Calvin's argument for moderate interest charges, to non-Christians at least. However, Mills is right that personal interest and shared risk in loans are important relational principles, particularly with Christians, and given the Jubilee forgiveness of debt Jesus expected of disciples (Mt. 6:12-15) and extended to Gentiles (Lk. 4:19-30). This is not always possible in national and global business contexts, but it is preferable and possible, as Jubilee 2000 and the Gleneagles agreement to cancel much Third World debt showed in the context of unjust levels of interest.

Given the riskiness of profit-making, the positive side of Mills' negative view of interest is the approval of partnerships and equity shares, because Scripture supports reasonable, fair commercial profits, rental contracts, trade and shared risk-taking. Bank deposits, on the other hand, leave investors with a problematic lack of control over bank processes and where their money is invested. Government debt and private speculation are largely unproductive.

Surprisingly, having company shares is in principle OK, according to Mills' stringent biblical standards. Their dividends based on profitability reward the

supply of risk capital and enable accumulation of capital into bigger corporations. Shareholders can challenge company policy and unethical practices, as recent legislation reinforcing shareholder regulation of corporate salaries shows. Finally, shares can always be sold if an investor is dissatisfied.

However, Mills concludes that in practice, volatile markets of the kind we're seeing in the global financial crisis, are a moral hazard, encouraging casino capitalism. The separation of ownership



**VOLATILE MARKETS OF THE KIND WE'RE SEEING IN THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS ARE A MORAL HAZARD, ENCOURAGING CASINO CAPITALISM.**

from management under limited liability also contradicts the principle of taking responsibility for one's debts and it encourages reckless management.

Some problems of individual shareholding may be minimised in principle through institutional mediation of super funds whose diversified portfolios have lower risk and dealer costs. Their market dominance should enable them to collectively discipline companies to be ethical and long-term in focus. But again, in practice, diversifying risk leads to individual fund managers not monitoring any one company long-term. Selling shares is easier than changing company policy.

The sorry state that Mills describes can be balanced by the rise of individual ethical and green investment funds and coalitions. One such coalition, worth \$US 13 trillion, demanded major cuts to greenhouse gas emissions both before and after the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in late 2009. Even Christian Super, a small \$A500 million fund, has, along with other ethical funds, been able to convince major Australian businesses to develop more ethical and ecological investment products.

Mills rightly notes that ethical funds

are no panacea. Nonetheless, they are a definite improvement "and offer a more principled alternative for those without time or expertise to engage in the stewardship of specific shares", that is, most of us.

Given Mills' perhaps pessimistic conclusion, the biblical relational and ethical framework I developed with Christian Super, recognised as one of Australia's best ethical funds, shows ways Christian ethical investment principles can work. Rather than just using biblical negative criteria against investing in pornography, gambling, abortion, alcohol, nuclear weapons, among other things, Christian Super's investments promote positive relationships with God, humanity and the earth.

This relational framework connects with a comprehensive biblical/philosophical framework of commands, character and consequences, in light of a biblical view of human nature and destiny. These provide a grid of guidelines for investing in God's kingdom of right relationships based on principles like relative equality, relational stability and environmental stewardship.

For example, in relation to environmental stewardship, Christian Super invests in Scandinavian electric car maker THINK, one of the world's most carbon-efficient car companies. Christian Super also invests in sustainable builder Project Frog. Its technology overcomes energy inefficiencies and poor health effects of traditional construction. These are just two examples of ways in which Christians can invest ethically and ecologically. Others include careful examination of and exclusion of child labour practices while seeking through micro-enterprise investment to make affordable small-scale loans available to the majority world. Christian Super is not the only ethical or Christian fund out there. I use it as an example because it's the one I'm most familiar with and to make concrete some of the principles by which we can, as good stewards, invest in God's Kingdom. 



**Rev. Dr Gordon Preece** is Director of Ethos: Evangelical Alliance Centre for Christianity & Society. This is an adapted extract of his forthcoming book *Moth & Rust Consume: Christ, Wealth and our Continual Financial Crises*, Acorn, 2012. [www.acornpress.net.au](http://www.acornpress.net.au)

# Hitting the wall

WALL STREET'S COLLAPSE REINFORCES WHERE OUR HOPES SHOULD BE.

*Peter Hastie*

**L**ate in the afternoon on Thursday September 18, 2008, the secretary of the United States' Treasury, Hank Paulson, and the chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, arrived at a special emergency meeting held in the office of Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Congress. They had come to address a select meeting of senior legislators from the both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Since early March – some seven months previously – these two officials had been actively engaged in saving one investment bank (Bear Stearns), allowing another to fail (Lehman Brothers), and nationalising three of the United States' largest corporations – Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the American Insurance Group (AIG). Now, acting out of a sense of desperate urgency, they came to the Congress to avoid a financial catastrophe of global proportions.

Christopher Dodd, the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, who attended the meeting, was taken by surprise at their presence. He commented, "Obviously it was a big meeting. Frankly, I had no idea that I was going to hear what I heard. They told us that they needed \$700 billion immediately to unfreeze credit markets, or we would face a systemic global financial crisis."

As the meeting got under way, Hank Paulson, with measured words devoid of hyperbole, came straight to the point. "Unless you act, the financial system of this country and the world will melt down in a couple of days."

Bernanke followed with a knockout punch, "If we don't do this tomorrow, we won't have an economy on Monday." It was the tactics of economic shock and awe. The legislators were stunned. Dodd said, "There was a pause in the room where the oxygen just left it." The scene was one of crisis.

Paulson and Bernanke were right. A week or so later, after prolonged



THEY WERE REQUESTING  
HIM TO GUARD THEM  
AGAINST THE EXCESSES OF  
THEIR OWN GREED.  
BUT THEIR ENTREATIES FELL  
ON DEAF EARS.

Congressional and Senate debates, the markets delivered a brutal and bare-knuckled verdict. On 29 September when the New York Stock Exchange opened, the Dow fell off a cliff, plunging 777 points for its largest recorded drop in history. Share prices continued to tumble over the ensuing months. By the end of 2010 foreclosures on US mortgages reached six million with another projected nine million over next few years. The US national debt almost doubled.

Unfortunately the sense of crisis did not dissipate over the following months. As more corporate dominoes fell, iconic names in the business world signalled financial distress. General Motors and Chrysler both filed for bankruptcy and investment banks like Morgan Stanley looked for merger partners. US unemployment spiralled, blowing out by an additional 7.5 million people since 2007.

But that was not the end of it. The global cost of this debacle led to the default of Iceland, panic throughout the Eurozone, a bank sell-off in the UK, a massive slowdown in China, the collapse of hundreds of financial institutions around the world, trillions of dollars of investment losses, at least 30 million workers laid off in different countries

(including 10 million migrant workers in China) and, according to Nouriel Roubini, a reputed US economist, 15 million people were pushed below the poverty line. As Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former head of the IMF, put it, "The poorest always pay the most."

**W**hat were the causes of this tragedy? While it would be overly simplistic to assign the blame to any one particular factor, nevertheless there are a range of explanations that trace the roots to political, economic and, ultimately, moral causes. While many of the analyses of the crisis are averse to the notion of moral culpability, it's certainly not a stretch to suggest that one of the main triggers for the financial implosion on Wall Street and other business centres around the world was moral failure.

The sub-prime mortgage industry that flourished in the US in the 10 years leading up to the crash was a classic case of smoke and mirrors. Money men, sensing the prospect of easy and massive profits, bundled up mortgages and bonds of dubious worth, and flogged them to gullible and equally greedy investors. Real estate companies sold properties to people who had no hope of paying for them because they knew that other investors, with an appetite for this kind of risky mortgage debt, were willing to gamble their money for quick gains.

As Jeffrey Lane, the CEO of Bear Stearns Asset Management, said of sub-prime mortgages: "It was a formula for disaster. It was like the traditional game of 'hot-potato, hot-potato', where no one wants to be left with it. As it turned out, everyone ended up with a potato." The problem was that all the parties to the transaction saw it as a way of making a killing. In that sense, they were driven by greed. However, when the housing market came off the boil and property values nose-dived, the sub-prime mortgage market collapsed too. Trillions of dollars were wiped out in the debacle.

But there was another significant moral failure as well. Since the early 1980s successive US administrations had followed a policy of financial deregulation that led to some spectacular failures along the way. The collapse of Long Term Capital Management in the decade before global financial crisis was a \$3.5 billion warning that the reckless greed on Wall Street needed to be reined in by stricter government controls on the derivatives market. Sin can't regulate itself, so the notion of self-regulating markets is an unbiblical myth.

Again, when Proctor and Gamble took Bankers' Trust to court over an alleged derivatives scam, another alarm bell was sounded about the very real danger of fraud and deception in this market. Regulators were on notice, but they sat on their hands (or rather washed them of all blame) and did nothing. As one of the most senior legislators, Barney Frank, the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee said, "I don't do confessions."

Dominique Strauss-Kahn tells of a dinner party he attended in the aftermath of the crash where a group of bankers were arguing with the then secretary of the Treasury, Hank Paulson. They were requesting him to introduce better regulation to guard them against the excesses of their own greed. But their entreaties fell on deaf ears. It's a pity, because the crash has provided the most comprehensive proof imaginable of the need to protect the weak and unsuspecting against the strong and the manipulative by better regulation.

**A**re there any enduring lessons from the global financial crisis? A rout of such enormous proportions surely carries its own message. When the hush of silence fell over Wall Street when Bear Stearns collapsed, the pale and solemn faces of its employees revealed the sense of shock they experienced when their company, which had been trading earlier at \$171, was sold to JP Morgan for \$2 per share. Jeffrey Lane said, "Many of our people cried." A former chairman of Bear Stearns, Alan Greenberg, spoke of his utter disbelief: "People thought it must have been a misprint; somebody had obviously left off a couple of zeroes."

Only two weeks before Bear Stearns had been trading successfully and had \$18 billion in reserves. The furthest thing from anyone's mind was that the company would go belly-up. But it did, and thus Bear's demise bore eloquent

testimony to the uncertainty of riches and the unpredictability of life. In the unparalleled prosperity of the previous five years, many people had been lulled into the belief that life was like a choice wine: it gets better with age. The sub-prime collapse in the United States destroyed that illusion.

They say money talks. Well, the market delivered a heart-stopping sermon that froze everyone dead in his tracks. And what was the message? It was short and to the point: "You're a fool if your hopes and dreams are built on wealth." Why? Because it can be lost, stolen, or as happened in the global crisis, written down to ridiculous levels. Witness the



**THE SPIRITUALLY DISCERNING WILL SEE THE CRASH FOR WHAT IT IS: A MEMO FROM HEAVEN REMINDING US THAT OUR HOPES MUST REST ON SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT CHANGE.**

collapse of the Australian stock market – down from over 6000 to 3100 in a matter of months.

The simple truth is that nothing in this world is secure. We talk of *terra firma* as if there could be such a thing as solid earth; but if ever an adjective was grossly abused, this is a case in point. Jesus tells us that the world is passing away, and that the search for value, security and certainty must take us far beyond cash, bonds and precious metals.

Every now and then, in order to enforce this unpalatable truth, God gives the world an unnerving shake. Sometimes He targets financial markets, as he did on May 11, 1866, October 28, 1929, October 19, 1987, and September 29, 2008. It is a disciplinary measure to jerk us out of our complacency and a warning not to place our confidence in things that can be destroyed.

The spiritually discerning will see the stock market crash for what it is: a spectacular instance of how raw human

nature exacts its own wealth tax, and a memo from heaven reminding us that our hopes must rest on Someone who does not change. Indeed, when we realise that the engine of modern commerce is fuelled chiefly by greed and fear, the wonder is that there are not many more disasters in financial circles.

The memories of the most recent crash should not be forgotten. But how should we interpret them? From a Christian perspective, we must see the crash as heaven's reminder that it is futile to build our lives around the accumulation of wealth. This shakeout has blasted the hopes and dreams of millions around the world. Not only have the young hotshots of the business world been rendered penniless, but many hard-working people have witnessed hundreds of thousands of dollars slashed from their superannuation entitlements. We must all ask the question, "What is the purpose of life? For what are we striving?" If it is only for money, then our lives can be rendered meaningless overnight.

The lesson is clear: Trust in God, not in money. Jesus warned us that our quality of life is not guaranteed by an up-market home, an imported European car or a credit card with a \$50,000 limit. The apostle Paul gets it right when he says, "godliness with contentment is great gain." Obviously, money isn't everything. But the psalmist knew this all along for he says, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with You I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 75:25). ap



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# In Christ

WE MUST CHERISH OUR COMMUNION WITH OUR SAVIOUR ABOVE ALL.

**Maurice Roberts**

**I**n John 15 the Lord Jesus Christ explains that Christians are united to him in a spiritual union. Our Lord uses the illustration of a vine and its branches and tells us that He supplies to all believers the grace of his Holy Spirit. This, like the sap, is the source of all the “fruit” that is in the believer’s life.

By “fruit” our Lord refers to godliness, love and profitable service in the church and in the promotion of the gospel. As the vine cannot produce fruit without the sap, so we who profess to be Christians cannot do anything spiritually profitable without Christ’s Spirit.

Just as the expert gardener prunes the vine so as to increase its fruitfulness, so God the Father prunes and cuts back the unfruitful branches in the believer’s life. This is painful but also profitable. It is a procedure that involves us in being chastened and afflicted, yet enlarged in our usefulness so as to bring forth more fruit (v.2).

The branches that bear no fruit at all are removed and burned in the fire (v.6). These ominous words warn us all that an unholy Christian is a Christian in name only. Judas Iscariot, and all who are merely nominal Christians, will be removed sooner or later from the church and cast into hell. It is a most needful reminder to us in our own day that godliness, love and humble devotion to Christ are the genuine evidences of our being real Christians.

The history of all churches shows that many who profess to be Christ’s people are sadly deceived. Christ’s claim to be “the true vine” reminds us that as Head of the church He alone can supply grace to every believer and to every congregation. A man may have knowledge, gifts and church-office; but he is no more than a dead stick if he is not spiritually united to Jesus Christ.

We refer to the union that believers have with Christ as “mystical union”. Christ and His church are mystically



**OUR ‘FELT SENSE’ OF CHRIST’S LOVE TO US NOW IN THIS LIFE WAXES AND WANES. THIS IS LARGELY OWING TO OUR CARELESSNESS AS BELIEVERS.**

united (Eph. 5:30-32). The sweet truth of the mystical union” is that every believer, who is a true believer, can say: “Christ is in me, the hope of glory.”

However, there is a difference between our union with Christ as believers and our communion with Him. Union is permanent and unchangeable. It begins as soon as we are united to Him in the new birth. It will have no end. Hence heaven will be, for every believer, a world of love – Christ’s love for us as those for whom He shed His precious blood.

**H**owever, while our union with Christ is eternally unchangeable, our communion with Him in this life is liable to fluctuation. In other words, our “felt sense” of Christ’s love to us now in this life waxes and wanes. This is largely owing to our carelessness as believers. We may lose the sweetness of Christ’s presence through carelessness, prayerlessness or disobedience. So, when David had sinned, he cried to God, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psa. 51:12).

Hence, we say that our communion with Christ in this life is liable to fluctuation. It is our great loss when we learn, as Christians, to live with only small

awareness of the love of Christ. Churches decline visibly when their members labour and work, yet are unaware that they have lost their “first love” for Jesus (Rev. 2:4).

In the light of the above truths, we must not as Christians make a god of earthly happiness or peace. The greatest Christians have sometimes lived in times of affliction, trial and suffering. Sanctified afflictions drive us closer to Christ. Our fallen natures need to be sanctified.

But sanctification often involves painful pruning at the hand of God. No wonder therefore Samuel Rutherford could say, “Our pride needs winter weather to rot it”. Again, he says: “O what owe I to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord Jesus!” Great saints, much like Daniel’s three friends, have to walk with Jesus in the furnace and in the fiery flame. God loves us too much to leave us to go to sleep in the lap of worldly pleasures. Those whom He leaves alone in their carnal hypocrisy are not His true children. We are not in union with Christ if we have no fruit of holiness and love.

Christ makes it clear that if we abide in Him we shall enjoy rich blessings in this life. Of greatest importance among the blessings of abiding fruitfully in Christ is this: “Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit” (v.8). So, what matters supremely is that we, as Christians, should study holiness. This emphasis can be easily lost in the thinking of Christians and churches. But we dare not risk losing this as our priority. Churches decline when godliness loses its place. And godliness comes only as we study to maintain our union and communion with Christ. ap

*This is an edited version of an article from the Free Church Witness, October 2011.*



# Curing our addictions

20 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

**O**ur modern society is addicted to many things, addictions that seem to be taking us further and further away from God. We are addicted to work, to making more money than we really need, to material things that we think give us status in the eyes of our neighbours. We are addicted to pleasure, to satisfying our every whim, our every sensual desire. We are addicted to self, to looking after “Number One” with little concern for the effect this might have on others.

Paul’s letter to the Christians at Philippi challenges us about all these things. The church today needs not only to recognise the devastating effect these addictions are having on our society but to face them head on instead of allowing them to infiltrate into our own thinking and behaviour.

Our addiction to materialism becomes a real problem in times of economic uncertainty, such as we are experiencing today. The hardship that comes with this affects everyone – including God’s church. Being a Christian is not about believing theoretical propositions, it is about standing firm and pressing on under adverse conditions. Paul wrote this letter from prison, either in Rome or perhaps earlier in Ephesus, and for him trouble was a very present reality. But his attitude that shines out of every sentence of this letter is both a challenge and an encouragement to all of us today.

We need to learn from him again what it means to be content, and to find our sufficiency in God alone.



**Bruce Christian** is a former Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

DAY 1

*To all the saints*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2**

**THE POINT** Paul not only planted churches on his missionary journeys he followed them up and kept in touch with them by letter. The Holy Spirit has worked in this human process to formulate the words of Scripture to be God's inspired Word to the whole Church for the entire Gospel age. It is addressed to us as well!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul included Timothy as part of his ministry team (Colossians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1:1, Philemon 1:1).
- Paul saw his ministry as being a bond-slave to Christ Jesus (1).

- Paul referred to all believers as saints ("holy ones") in Christ Jesus; not restricting the term to a select few high achievers (1)!
- Of Paul's 13 letters this is the only one where church leaders, overseers/elders or deacons, are singled out in the salutation. This may be because the church at Philippi was one of the first to recognise such "offices", or simply because Paul had a special affinity with these particular leaders through past contacts (1).
- They also all open with seeking God's blessings of "grace" and "peace" for the recipients (and 1 & 2 Timothy add "mercy") (2).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How has God shown His grace and peace to you recently?

DAY 2

*The joy of sharing*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:3-8**

**THE POINT** Gospel work is God's work from start to finish. He calls us to Himself in the first place; He unites us in a partnership; and so His devotion and commitment to us should be reproduced in us.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- In spite of some strong things he will need to say in this letter to the Christians in Philippi, Paul is still able to be all-embracing in his gratitude to God for every one of them. Derivatives of the Greek word for "all" (pan) occur four times just in verses 3 & 4.
- Partnership in the work of the Gospel has brought great joy

to Paul right from Day 1 of the Philippian Church's existence (5).

- The reason we can have full confidence in the continuance of the Church until Jesus comes again is that it is God's work, not man's. He started it, He will finish it. Nothing can stop it (6).
- Heartfelt fellowship with, and concern for, other believers was an important factor in Paul's experience of God's grace in all the circumstances into which his ministry brought him (7).
- Christ's love in us gives us genuine love for one another (8).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do feelings of gratitude and joy play a significant part in your church life and fellowship and work with other Christians?

DAY 3

*Getting the right spin on life*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:9-14**

**THE POINT** One of the greatest needs of the Church is for Christians to become more mature (Christ-like) in their thinking, attitudes to each other, and behaviour. The two basic ingredients that will produce this outcome in us are earnest prayer – and adversity.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Although Paul was very happy with reports of how the Church members at Philippi were going spiritually, his prayer burden was that the true love they were already showing would keep growing so they would know God better, in His ways and in His will for their lives, especially as it related to

their attitude and moral behaviour towards each other (thus ensuring a right frame of mind for them to receive his admonitions!) (9-10).

- In the end, any spiritual growth and harvest is only because of Jesus at work in us so that all the glory is God's alone (11).
- What Paul prays for them is already evident in his own life; it enables him to discern God's hand in bringing a good result for Christ's honour and Gospel outreach even in prison (12-13)!
- Even the local Christians (in Rome or Ephesus?) are inspired by Paul's witness to be more courageous in their own (14).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What aspects of your life are lacking in spiritual maturity?

DAY 4

*Motives matter*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18A**

**THE POINT** It is not always easy to know how best to present the Gospel in a hostile environment. There are 2 errors we can make: being so careful to avoid conflict or disharmony that we compromise the message and the Gospel loses its cutting edge; or presenting our message in such an antagonistic and confrontational way that we turn people away for all the wrong reasons. There is a place for wooing the hearers and a place for martyrdom, but we need to be careful that our motives are pure and not mixed with jealousy, malice, one-up-manship, self-aggrandisement, etc; and for the sake of the Gospel we must be big-hearted enough not to let any differences of opinion we might have get us down!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- It is possible to do the Lord's work with wrong motives. How sad it is when the glorious Gospel of Christ is preached in a way that aims to score points over other Christian workers or even to make things harder for them by attracting opposition.
- Paul sets a good example of a generous spirit (see 3:17 and 4:5).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Read 1 Corinthians 1-4 for a more detailed picture of the sort of issue Paul faced. Is there evidence in your Church fellowship of harmful competition or antagonism? What must we do about it?

DAY 5

*Death a live option*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:18B-26**

**THE POINT** There is something very real/genuine about Paul's attitude to life and death. He was truly happy to endure all the adversity, uncertainty and pressure of his earthly life while ever he could be an encouragement and source of joy to other believers. And, in spite of the unknowns associated with death/dying he was really looking forward to the joy of being with Christ for ever.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Regardless of anything else, Paul was always glad to see Christ preached; it was the one thing that made life worth living (18b).
- Paul was confident that while ever people were praying and

Christ's (Holy) Spirit was at work, he would be kept safe, and Christ's name would be honoured, in Paul's life, or death (19f)!

- Paul trusted God to give him all the courage he ever needed (20).
- Because Christ was the focus of Paul's earthly life, and because the promise of the resurrection meant being united with Christ for ever, life and death were equally desirable options (21).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do you also share Paul's tug-o-war attitude to life and death? When you are enduring really tough times, are you happy to stay here to serve the Lord? If all is well and you're glad to be alive, are you genuinely looking forward to death and heaven?

DAY 6

*Addiction to godly living*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30**

**THE POINT** We tend to see suffering in a negative light, a sign that God has forgotten us or that the forces of evil are somehow getting the upper hand. But God wants us to see it positively, as something He uses actively to carry out His sovereign purposes. Rather than doubt or even question God's providence, we are to concentrate only on living as citizens of heaven whatever the circumstances. In fact, suffering for Christ is really a privilege.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Living in a way that reflects the fact that we are citizens of

heaven and those who adhere to the Gospel of Christ includes:

- being consistent whether anyone is watching or not (27);
- standing firm in unity with fellow believers (27);
- being part of a united fight for the faith of the Gospel (27);
- not being frightened by those working against us (28);
- accepting all suffering as a great Christian blessing (29)!
- Things achieved by such living under persecution include:
  - clear proof that God is in control – and will finally win (28);
  - living proof that our final salvation is assured by God (28).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- How much do you let your circumstances affect your witness?

DAY 7

*Make my day!*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4**

**THE POINT** Paul continues his pleading with the Church at Philippi to make godly living a number one priority, to see this as a natural and essential outcome from their professed faith in Christ. In these verses he is mainly concerned with the way they relate to each other. Sadly, churches are often plagued with dissension and rivalry with their origin in self-interest and self-promotion.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul has a personal investment in the lives of the church people at Philippi; his spiritual welfare is affected by their behaviour.
- Christ-like behaviour will reflect the genuineness of:
  - their being in union with Christ, with all the encourage-

ment such union will inevitably bring (1);

- the support they derive from knowing Christ loves them (1);
- the work of the Holy Spirit both in them and among them (1);
- the fruit of the Spirit producing real, heartfelt concern (1);
- humility that puts the interests and esteem of others first (3).
- Evidence of true unity – unity of understanding (mind), action (love), feeling (spirit) and motivation (purpose) – would really make Paul's day; he is not detached from the lives of the people.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What two mistakes is Paul warning us against in verse 4?

DAY 8

*The mind of Christ my Saviour*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11**

**THE POINT** The Greek of vs 5 is ambiguous: it could mean, "Think the same way Jesus thought" (NIV), or "Think like this (as in vss 1-4) among yourselves (in your fellowship), because it is the way those who are in Christ Jesus would think".

Either way, Jesus' life is the blueprint for His Church. If we are "in Christ" His life must be reflected in ours, personally and in fellowship together.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Trinity. He has existed in the Godhead for all eternity, from before Creation. The downward steps in His humiliation for us were: the decision to relinquish all His rights in the Godhead (6); the actual

giving up of those rights (made Himself nothing – 7); although possessing the "very nature" of God, taking on also the "very nature" of a servant (slave) – both ends of the spectrum in terms of rule and authority (7); becoming truly Man – the Second Adam (7-8); exercising humility and obedience to the point of wilfully dying (as opposed to Adam's just sentence) (8); and allowing that death to be ex-cruc-iatingly painful, physically and morally (8).

- Jesus' unlimited obedience led to His unlimited exaltation. (9ff)

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Which aspects of your life are challenged by Jesus' example?

**DAY 9**

*Work... because God...*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13**

**THE POINT** Paul is keen that the Church members at Philippi see the need to be serious about Christian living, ie about being Christ-like in all their attitudes and actions. But he doesn't want them to be too discouraged as they try, and perhaps fail, to put his words into practice. Verses 12-13 provide us with one of the clearest statements in Scripture of how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility work in harmony; they will help us avoid two errors: (1) making little effort since God will always carry out His predetermined plan; or (2) getting worn out and discouraged because we think success or failure are entirely in our hands.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul's example of giving encouragement to his readers in all

his letters, even alongside strong exhortations, is noteworthy (12).

- Obedience is most commendable when no one is looking (12)!
- We must keep on making an effort to live out consistently all the implications of being included among those whom God is saving as if everything depended on us – with fear and trembling. (12)!
- It is only worth making this effort because God Himself is hard at work enabling us, not only to do His will, but to want to (13)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Of which of these two verses do you need to be reminded most?

**DAY 10**

*Serve the Lord with gladness*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18**

**THE POINT** It is not easy to live as a follower of Jesus in a world hostile to God. What happened to Him will happen to us. Emulating His example of self-denying, humble, unqualified obedience will be costly, and will require determined effort and sacrifice; but the rewards of communal joy and gladness make it all worthwhile.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- One of the strongest criticisms God had against His people in the desert under Moses was their continual complaining and arguing, exposing their lack of faith and trust (Ex. 17:1-7, Ps. 95:8-11). This can be one of the most destructive forces in Christian fellowship and must be treated very seriously (14).

- We are called to live pure and exemplary lives in a world that is on the wrong track and full of evil (15; cf Matthew 5:13-16).
- An important part of our witness is a clear, open presentation of the Gospel that brings new life to a dead/dying world (16).
- Fruitful Christian lives are a great source of encouragement, joy and satisfaction for all who labour in the Lord (implying that unfruitful lives cause discouragement and frustration) (16-18).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Paul faces the prospect of martyrdom positively, and even with joy (17). How does this add weight to his command in verse 14?

**DAY 11**

*Personal concerns*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30**

**THE POINT** One of the most impressive things about Paul's approach to his ministry was that he didn't allow the heavy burden he carried for all the churches to overshadow his personal, individual concern. His letters, mostly written to address weighty issues arising in the life of the Church, contain these references that help us to reflect on our responsibilities towards each other.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Timothy was obviously a great source of encouragement/help to Paul, and vice versa, so the father-son model to describe their relationship was most appropriate – a real provision from God.
- Sadly, Timothy's expressing his faith in selfless service to the

Lord and to others was the exception rather than the rule (20f).

- Although in prison Paul looked forward confidently to another visit to Philippi; that this almost certainly did not happen gives perspective to our own experience of unanswered prayer (24).
- Epaphroditus had been a model Philippian ambassador to Paul in terms of loyalty, commitment and personal sacrifice (25-30).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Make a list of the people or groups the Lord has provided to be your "Paul" or "Timothy" or "Epaphroditus" or "Philippian Church". How can you encourage/thank them for their efforts?

**DAY 12**

*Nothing in my hand I bring*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 3:1-3**

**THE POINT** Paul's background as a Pharisee put him in an ideal position to understand what it means to be saved by grace alone. As soon as I add anything to the gracious work of Christ on the cross as a contributing factor in my salvation, whether it be a work I do or a ritual I perform, I have failed to understand why Jesus died and what He achieved for me at Calvary; my standing before God is then on shaky ground.

This section in Philippians, and the equivalent ones in Romans 4, Galatians 3 and Ephesians 2, all show the depth of Paul's concern regarding this matter. The subsequent history of the Church, and even the attempted new perspectives in our own day, prove that his fears were valid!

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Rejoicing in the Lord is a good cure for many spiritual ills (1).
- There is a body of truth (the Faith) which remains unaffected by changing ideas/fashions; the Church must guard this (3:15).
- The "dogs" were "Judaizers", Jews who had joined the Church but insisted that, to become true Christians, Gentiles must first become "covenant Jews" through the ritual of circumcision (2).
- Paul insisted true "circumcision" is spiritual, not physical (3).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Do a stocktake: Are you a true "grace-plus-nothing" Christian?

## DAY 13

## From garland to garbage

## THE PASSAGE

## PHILIPPIANS 3:4-9

**THE POINT** The Apostle Paul is the man God used more than anyone else to reveal the mysteries of the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace. Paul's writings enable us to see how the Covenant of Grace is the key to all God's dealings with the human race. The basic element used in Paul's preparation for this vital task was his upbringing, not just as a Jew, but as a Pharisee. If anyone had any grounds for being re-instated as a child of God apart from the Covenant of Grace, it was he; but Paul was brought to see how only the righteousness provided by Christ, and imputed to him by grace, was able to establish for him a place in heaven.

## THE PARTICULARS

- If salvation was based on any human grounds – race, pedigree, religious ritual, commitment, keeping God's law, good works, even religious fanaticism! – Paul was in the box seat for it (4-6).
- Paul came to see that all his human credentials/achievements were not only useless, but a hindrance, for attaining heaven; they all had to be assigned to the waste disposal centre (7-8).
- Paul knew any righteousness able to qualify him for heaven must be what God provided for him in Christ, through faith (9).

## TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your hope of heaven in anything that has its source in you?

## DAY 14

## Pilgrims' progress

## THE PASSAGE

## PHILIPPIANS 3:10-16

**THE POINT** Knowing Christ has more to do with our heart than our head. It is more about dynamic obedience than about passing an exam on facts. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but that is only the start, the qualifying event.

Knowing Christ is about growing in Christ. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a good commentary on what Paul is saying here.

Safe arrival at the Celestial City was always assured (cf 1:6 & 2:13), but the road there was about obedience, and struggle, and perseverance, and suffering, and trusting, ... and sometimes even doubting (cf 2:12)!

## THE PARTICULARS

- Paul emphasises the close link between Jesus' resurrection and His death on the cross, and so by inference, between the power we experience because of His resurrected life and the suffering we also undergo because of our identification with Him. Often Christians focus on the "signs & wonders" power, and treat the humiliation of cross-bearing as if it has no place in their lives.
- Perfection (12) is yet to be realised, but our present progress ought to be marked by the achievement of stage targets. Paul uses the same word in v.15 ("mature") as in v.12 ("perfect").

## TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Has Christ has taken hold of you? Is your eye on the prize?

## DAY 15

## Living as citizens of heaven

## THE PASSAGE

## PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

**THE POINT** A helpful way to understand all that the Bible says about our salvation is to see it as three distinct but inter-dependent stages: justification, sanctification and glorification. Justification is an instantaneous event; it is what God does when we turn to Jesus in repentance-and-faith. He covers over my sin with the robe of Christ's righteousness and sees me "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. The effects of sin still remain, but God sees Christ in my place and forgives me completely. The last stage, glorification, also an instantaneous event, occurs when I die (unless Jesus returns first) and by it God transforms me inside the robe to be perfect and therefore

fit for heaven. In between these two amazing acts of God's grace is my earthly pilgrimage, a life-long process of sanctification by which God works on me to make me more like Jesus, and therefore fit for heaven. Paul reminds the Philippians in these verses that because stage 3 is going to happen anyway they might as well be working on stage 2 now!

## THE PARTICULARS

- Paul is confident he has set a good example of Christian living.
- The attractions of the world will destroy us if left unchecked.

## TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your life consistently portray you as a citizen of heaven?

## DAY 16

## Unity in diversity

## THE PASSAGE

## PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

**THE POINT** The secret of successful church life is not in all members of the congregation being homogeneous in personality or gifts (which seems to be the aim of "niche market" church-planting efforts!), but rather in resolving to become like-minded in the Lord.

## THE PARTICULARS

- Paul had a genuine, heartfelt love and concern for the believers at Philippi and wasn't ashamed to tell them so in an open letter.
- A worthy Christian life doesn't happen automatically; it comes from "standing firm" in obedience to the example of Scripture.

- Paul saw the people who believed as a result of his ministry as affirmation of his apostleship, his "victor's crown" (cf 2:16).
- God has made us all different and uses our differences for the good of His Church (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). But we must not let these useful differences cause dissension among us as the 2 otherwise unknown women, Euodia and Syntyche had done.

- Paul doesn't identify his appointed mediator in the dispute (unless his personal name is "Yokefellow", ie "Syzygus").
- Believers' names are already recorded in the Book of Life.

## TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- When strife arises, are you part of the problem or the solution?

DAY 17

*The peace of God*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7**

**THE POINT** There is a real inner peace that has only God as its source, that defies all explanation in terms of human psychology, and that protects our whole being from the attacks of the hostile world around us. Paul gives us very sound, practical advice as to what some of the main ingredients are in this recipe for peace.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Paul's formula for peace:
  - a double measure of continuous rejoicing because you belong to the Lord and so are kept safe by His grace (cf 1:6, 28, 4:3);
  - relating with other people in such a way that it is obvious

to everyone that you make allowances for people in whom the process of sanctification isn't very advanced, by dealing with them in terms of love rather than being "right" (ie gentleness) – just as you would like Jesus to find/treat you when He comes;

- not getting anxious when everything starts falling apart;
- bringing all problems and requests to the Lord in prayer;
- always remembering to thank God for all that He has done.

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Which of the above ingredients in Paul's recipe for peace are in short supply in your life at the moment? (Perhaps ask a trusted friend/relative to help with the stocktake!) What will you do?

DAY 18

*The God of peace*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9**

**THE POINT** Paul is in prison, facing the possibility of death. He knows his place in heaven is secure because it depends on what Christ has done for him and not on his own efforts (3:7-11). Nevertheless, he is also confident that he has done well (cf 2 Timothy 4:6-8), and that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his life has enabled him to recommend his example as a model for others to follow. This is not out of conceit, but out of his experience that all God's promises in Christ really work in practice (see 4:13). There are many things competing for our attention today, even more so than was the case in Paul's day. Under this pressure, how can we maintain a godly perspective? Paul gives us a check list to test what ought to

occupy our minds so that we will not only know the peace of God, but the God of peace.

**THE PARTICULARS**

- Our society might re-write verse 8: Whatever is true works, whatever is noble will sell more papers, whatever is right politically correct, whatever is pure what everyone else is doing, whatever is lovely will stir up lust, whatever is admirable a bit smutty, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy can be got away with or will put people/events in the worst light, etc!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- Would verse 8 act as a good control on your TV "OFF" button?

DAY 19

*The secret of being content*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13**

**THE POINT** It is very easy for us today to let ourselves become the victim of circumstances. Things go well and we forget God; things go badly and we become discouraged and turn against God – we let bitterness or envy rob us of our peace. This was a constant pattern of Israel's life under Moses in the desert. But Paul had discovered the secret of trusting God with everything, knowing that whatever happened he was safe in God's hands, knowing daily the practical truth of Romans 8:28 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18. In God's hands, nothing would ever be beyond him!

from the Philippians in their practical giving, but when it did resume it made his joy all the greater, making the delay worthwhile. We all need to remember this in hard times (cf Ps. 30:5).

- Paul was prepared to give others the benefit of the doubt (10b).
- Discontent is one of the most crippling sins to plague us and rob us of the ability to enjoy life. Paul had discovered the liberating secret of not letting his circumstances get the better of him (11f).
- Christ can empower ("en-dynam-ite") us to do all things (13).

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What is the common factor in contentment and empowerment?

DAY 20

*Wallets and pens*

**THE PASSAGE**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:14-23**

**THE POINT** Paul's relationship with the Church at Philippi is both a model and a challenge to us of what Gospel ministry and fellowship are all about. Their mutual concern is expressed in simple, practical things like financial support, expressing gratitude, giving praise and encouragement, sharing greetings, writing letters, sending representatives, etc. These are all matters to which we could all possibly give more close attention!

from the very beginning, not waiting till they could afford it (14-16).

- Generous, sacrificial giving to others is an important part of growing in spiritual maturity (17), and in strengthening the bonds of fellowship in the work of the Gospel (18).
- Paul is confident that God is no man's debtor (19 – cf Psalm 23).
- Letter writing is an excellent way for God's people to grow up together in Christ. We all need each other's support (20-23)!

**TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY**

- What are some practical ways in which you can support others in your Congregation? ... in other churches? ... missionaries?



## NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS FLEE

Residents have begun to flee a north-east Nigerian city where a radical Muslim sect launched attacks that killed more than 100 people. **Rev. Idi Garba** told *Associated Press* that nearly all the Christians and non-natives of Yobe state had fled their homes in Damaruru, the state capital. Garba said streets remained deserted, without soldiers or police protection.

More than 100 people died in bombings and gunfights in a single night Damaruru last month, an attack claimed by a radical Muslim sect known as **Boko Haram**.

Boko Haram has been carrying out a string of targeted assassinations for more than a year by gunmen on motorcycles and carrying out bombings in north-east Nigeria. At least 360 people have been killed in those attacks this year alone, according to an *Associated Press* count.

AP

## EGYPT: TRUST IN ARMY GONE

The Egyptian army's killing of 27 people – including at least 23 Christians – who were protesting the burning of a church building has removed any respect most Egyptians had for the transitional military government, according to Christian human rights activists in the country.

The activists, along with members of Egyptian churches, said that the attack and the subsequent denial of any wrongdoing by the **Supreme Council of the Armed Forces** has taken away any credibility the army had among Christians, moderate Muslims and “secularists.” Instead of assuming any responsibility for the killings, the military instead blamed unidentified “enemies of the nation”.

The army has flatly denied shooting at the protestors. Forensic pathologist **Dr Magda Adly** released a report stating that, of the 23 victims that doctors were able to examine post mortem, two had died of lacerations, 13 had been crushed by vehicles and two had been shot. Adly added that the doctors thought the caliber of the rounds found

in the bodies of the victims were commonly used in the ammunition in Egyptian army sidearms.

*Compass Direct*

## SUDAN: MUSLIMS ATTACK

Emboldened by government calls for a Sudan based on Islamic law since the secession of South Sudan, Muslims long opposed to a church near Khartoum have attacked Christians trying to finish constructing their building, sources said. The **Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC)** congregation in Omdurman West has continued to meet for Sunday worship in a building without a roof in spite of opposition from local Muslims.

Claiming that Christianity was no longer an accepted religion in the country, Muslims attacked SCOC members who were constructing the church building, the sources said. Muslims in the north, where an estimated 1 million Christians still live following the secession of South Sudan on July 9, fear the potential influence of the church, they said.

“They want to reduce or restrict the number of churches, so that they can put more pressure on believers,” said a church leader on condition of anonymity.

*Compass Direct*

## PAPUA: POLICE KILL SEVEN

At least seven people are feared dead after Indonesian police opened fire on hundreds of West Papuans at an independence rally close to the province's capital, says **Survival International**, the NGO which works for the rights of tribal people.

Representatives from tribes all over West Papua were meeting to choose a new leadership and to discuss the political future of the region. West Papua has been ruled by Indonesia since 1963.

Tension mounted as Papuans held their Third National Congress in the town of Abepura. On Wednesday, 19 October, armed soldiers and police surrounded the venue and, following a declaration of independence from Indonesia, the security forces stormed the stage, firing shots and using tear gas to disperse the crowd.

Sources said 300 participants, including women and children, were arrested – many were savagely beaten as they were taken away.

*Ekklesia*

## IRANIAN PASTOR FIRM

Officials appear to be trying to convince **Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani**, who is awaiting a decision from Iran's supreme leader regarding his death sentence for apostasy, to return to Islam. He has been given Islamic literature to read by secret service officials, who told him that they would be back to discuss the material and hear his opinion.

The move has been interpreted as a bid to convert the church leader or possibly trap him into a blasphemy conviction if he says anything critical about the content.

The book given to Pastor Nadarkhani is a 300-page compilation called *Message of the Two Eras*, referring to the Old and New Testaments. It claims that Christianity is a fabrication and attempts to establish the superiority of Islam.

Pastor Nadarkhani's death sentence for apostasy, which was issued last November, has attracted widespread international condemnation. The court that is reconsidering the verdict made the unusual move of referring the decision to **Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei** in September, after the church leader refused three opportunities to renounce his faith to secure an annulment of the charge.

## MILITANTS BEHEAD CHRISTIAN

Militants from the Islamic extremist **al Shabaab** group beheaded a 17-year-old Somali Christian near Mogadishu last month, a journalist in the Somali capital told *Compass Direct*. The militants, who have vowed to rid Somalia of Christianity, killed **Guled Jama Muktar** on September 25 in his home near Mogadishu.

The Islamic extremist group had been monitoring his family since the Christians arrived in Somalia from Kenya in 2008, said the source in Mogadishu. The Islamic militants, who are fighting the transitional government for control of the country, knew from their observations of the family that they were Christians, the source said.

Al Shabaab members arrived at Muktar's home at 6 a.m., when his parents, whose names are withheld for security reasons, were already at work at their retail space at the **Hamarweyne** market on the outskirts of Mogadishu.

## INDIA: CONVERTS BEATEN

Police in India's Kashmir Valley detained and beat converts from Islam and were expected to arrest Christian workers after Muslim leaders alleged that Muslim youth were being "lured" to Christianity.

Police in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley picked up seven converts who were baptized in August in **All Saints Church** in Srinagar, a local Christian who spoke to the converts after their release on November 2 told *Compass Direct*. Srinagar is the summer capital of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir and the main city of the Kashmir Valley.

The source, who requested anonymity, said police beat the converts and asked if Christians had given them money for their conversion.

*Compass Direct*

## GUARD BEATS MOTHER

A female prison officer assigned to provide security for a Pakistani Christian mother of five who was sentenced to death on "blasphemy" charges beat her, sources said. The sources in Pakistan's **Sheikhupura District Jail** said **Asia Noreen**, also known as **Asia Bibi**, was beaten on October 5 by a prison officer identified only as **Khadeeja**, allegedly because of the Muslim officer's anti-Christian bias, while other staff members deployed for her security looked on in silence.

Khadeeja was later suspended for three months, and jail **Superintendent Sheikh Khalid** began an inquiry into her actions after an intelligence agency reported the matter to the Punjab Province government. A source told *Compass* on condition of anonymity that Noreen had not received any life-threatening injuries, but that jail personnel had apparently pressured the Christian woman and her husband, **Ashiq Masih**, to refrain from telling anyone about the beating.

*Compass Direct*

## SITES PUSH FOR STATUS

Religious sites including the **Church of Nativity** in Bethlehem and **Joseph's Tomb** in Nablus will be among the first to be pushed forward for world heritage status since Palestine has been granted membership of UNESCO, reports the

*Sydney Morning Herald*.

A **Palestinian Authority** spokesman said there were many sites and shrines in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that until now had been unprotected because of a lack of recognition and funding.

"Now we will be able to protect them and make sure they are known around the world," he said. "We believe that becoming a member of the UNESCO is an overdue right for a country that has such a significant amount of heritage sites."

Tourism – particularly religious tourism – is a hotly contested issue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

## DIGITAL BIBLE EXPLOSION

There is a "digital Bible explosion", according to *Publishers Weekly*, after it found that Bible Apps (applications) are more frequently downloaded for smart phones than the popular game **Angry Birds**, said a report on eternity.biz.

The *New Yorker* also reports that "numerous religious publishing and software companies were developing digital platforms well before the advent of the iPad; some have been at it for more than 20 years.

It said some apps are extremely sophisticated: QR codes embedded throughout the Life Essentials Study Bible link to video and audio sermons. The popular Bible App, **YouVersion**, contains more than 150 different Bible translations in 45 languages. It is free and has been downloaded more than 30 million times.

*eternity.biz*

## CHURCH STUBBORNLY MEETS

Members of a church in Bogor, West Java, are determined to continue meeting outside their sealed building each Sunday until they are granted freedom to worship inside it, despite a ban on street meetings issued by the local mayor.

"The church will never give up meeting together," a local source who preferred to remain unnamed said of the **Indonesian Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Indonesia, or GKI)**, in the Yasmin area of Bogor.

Amid the stand-off, religious freedom for groups such as the Yasmin church would be dramatically reduced under a "Religious Tolerance Bill" under consid-

eration by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, critics of the proposal say.

In defiance of a Supreme Court order early this year affirming Yasmin's constitutional right to freedom of worship, Bogor Mayor **Diani Budianto** canceled the church's worship permit, locked and sealed their church building and banned church members from meeting on the street.

## JUDGE FLEES EXTREMISTS

Colleagues of a Pakistani judge who convicted a Muslim extremist of murder say he has fled to Saudi Arabia after getting death threats.

The *BBC* website says **Pervez Ali Shah** gave the death sentence to **Malik Mumtaz Hussein Qadri** for killing **Punjab Governor Salman Taseer**.

Qadri said he believed Taseer was undermining blasphemy laws, which may lead to execution for people convicted of insulting the Prophet Muhammad, according to the *BBC* report.

The Lahore High Court later denied Judge Shah had fled, the *BBC* said.

## MURDERED FOR CRUCIFIX

A Christian student was murdered at an Egyptian school in Mallowi, Minya province last month because he was wearing a crucifix, according to Coptic news website **Copts Without Borders**.

The *Assyrian International News Agency* said local media portrayed the incident as non-sectarian. "We wanted to believe the official version," said activist **Mark Ebeid**, "because the Coptic version was a catastrophe, as it would take persecution of Christians also to schools." He blamed the church in Mallowi for keeping quiet about the incident.

AINA said that the parents of the 17-year-old Christian student, **Ayman Nabil Labib**, broke their silence, confirming that their son was murdered on October 16, in "cold blood because he refused to take off his crucifix as ordered by his Muslim teacher".

## VIETNAMESE PASTOR ATTACKED

Thugs said to be doing the bidding of local authorities attacked a pastor and his family with iron bars and wooden clubs in central Vietnam on October 23, seriously injuring the heads and arms of the church leader's father and other rel-

atives, sources said.

Twice on the same Sunday that local authorities disrupted a house church service in **Phu Quy** village near Tam Ky, Quang Nam Province, a gang of about 20 men attacked the father, brother and other family members of pastor **Thien An**, who was locked in a secure room as his family believed the gang sought to kill him, sources said.

Police had visited his home the week prior to “investigate” the house church, whose application for registration authorities have twice denied, according to the pastor. Church members echoed the sentiment of one Christian that “even a child” could figure out the connection between the gang and the public security police who disrupted their service that morning.

The house church, part of the **Vietnam Baptist Church**, is the larger of two legally registered denominations related to the US **Southern Baptist Church**. Though the denomination is fully and nationally registered, local officials apparently consider the well-established congregation in Phu Quy village to be illegal.

*Compass Direct*



## EGYPTIAN MEDIA ACCUSED

*By Jeremy Reynalds*

**E**gyptian state television has been accused of spreading false information and inciting violence against Christians protesting in front of the TV building in Maspero on October 9. Calls have been made for **Information Minister Osama Heikal** to resign.

According *Mary Abdelmassih* of the *Assyrian International News Agency* (AINA), Egyptian lawyer **Hamdi el-Assuiti** has filed a complaint with the Prosecutor General against the Minister of Information and TV presenter **Rasha Magdi**. He accused them of the “deliberate broadcast of false news, information and rumors, which disturbed public security, causing terror among the public, and harming public interest.”

AINA said while the attack on the Copts was ongoing, news anchors called on Egyptians to come to the aid of their armed forces, which were being attacked by “armed Coptic protesters, killing

three military personnel and wounding many,” said broadcaster Rasha Magdi. It was stated that way for more than three hours.

AINA reported that angry Muslim young men from the neighboring Boulak, Sabtiya and Ezbet el Safih in Ramsis, hurried to help the army. They chanted anti-Christian slogans and intercepted Copts in the streets, assaulting them with stones, clubs, and firearms, before going to Maspero to join the military police attack on the peaceful protesters.

AINA said **Dr Emad Gad**, head of strategic studies at **Al Ahram Organisation**, called on the Minister to resign, saying the State television’s coverage “could have led to wide-scale massacres, or even civil war. I know Copts who did not go to work for two days, afraid to leave their homes.”

“This was devastating to the Muslim-Christian relationship,” said **Nabil Sharaf-eldin**, Muslim liberal and head of *El-Azma* electronic news wire, who attended the Maspero candle vigil before being joined by the 150,000 Christians arriving from Shubra district.

AINA said the Information Minister denied that military armored vehicles were crushing protesters alive. He denied it an interview with Al-Arabiya TV, only to be embarrassed by video footage showing army vehicles indiscriminately driving into crowds of Coptic protesters.

Hundreds of journalists, broadcasters and public media figures marched from Sahafa (Press) Street to the State-run TV building in Maspero to denounce the “sectarianism of the media.” They called for the resignation of the Information Minister and a clean-up of the Egyptian State TV, accusing it of igniting sectarian strife.

AINA said the demonstrators held the military council and the Minister of Information responsible for the bloody clashes, which took place on Sunday night in front of the Maspero. They held Egyptian flags displaying the cross and the crescent (the symbol of Islam), and banners reading “Osama Haikal set Egypt on fire by the television’s coverage.”

*Assist*

## DON'T AID PERSECUTORS: PM

**British Prime Minister David Cameron** says foreign aid should have more strings attached to prevent perse-

cution of people for their faith. Mr Cameron said last month British overseas aid decisions should take into account persecution against Christians.

He told the *BBC* on Sunday that: “British aid should have more strings attached in terms of do you persecute people for their faith or their Christianity or do you persecute people for their sexuality.”

A few days earlier he said in Parliament at Prime Minister’s Questions that “how people are treating” Christians and homosexuals would have an impact on UK aid decisions.

Mr Cameron was responding to a question from an MP who had quoted former Conservative front-bencher **Ann Widdecombe’s** speech at an **Aid to the Church in Need** event where she said “you stand a better chance of earnest representation if you a hedgehog” than if you are a Christian.

**Neville Kyrke-Smith** of Aid to the Church in Need has described Mr Cameron’s comments on the persecution of Christians as “a crucial step forward” in the struggle to combat religious hatred.

“We welcome the Government’s emphasis on the importance of tying human rights into aid,” Mr Kyrke-Smith said. “That the Prime Minister should publicly single out treatment of Christians as a factor in decisions on UK aid is an important step forward.”

Mr Kyrke-Smith added that he believed that when the UK is setting aid budgets religious freedom “should always be highlighted and discussed”.

“ACN agrees that the persecution of homosexuals is totally unacceptable—as is the persecution of Christians and people of other faiths,” he said.

*Scottish Catholic Observer*

## PAKISTANIS IGNORE RAPE

*By Anto Akkara*

**H**uman-rights activists in Pakistan and outside are aghast over the plight of a 12-year-old Christian girl who escaped the clutches of her Muslim abductor nine months later.

According to the **Asian Human Rights Commission** the girl was abducted and gang-raped for eight months. The rapists have not been arrested because of their affiliation with a militant Muslim organisation. The police are also refusing to order a medical check-up. The Judicial Magistrate of the area took her statement but has not

made any orders for her security. One of the rapist claims that he has married the girl but she denies that any marriage took place during her abduction and captivity.

The police have warned the Christian parents that it would be better to hand over the girl to her "legal" husband (the rapist) otherwise a criminal case will be filed against them, the commission reports.

"This shows the vulnerability of the Christians and other religious minorities here [in Pakistan]," **Michele Chaudhry**, a Catholic and spokeswoman of **All Pakistan Minorities Alliance** said last month.

"This is not an isolated incident. Atrocities like this are occurring frequently," pointed out Chaudhry.

The kidnapped girl's travails unfolded even as the Catholic Church cautioned against increasing religious intolerance in Pakistan with its exhaustive compilation of the suffering of religious minorities in Pakistan in its **Human Rights Monitor 2011**.

"Pakistan is fast becoming a state that will be habitable only for extremists," the report claimed. "Religious bigots hold the view that only Muslims (as defined by them) have the right to live in this country and that all non-Muslims

are infidels who deserve to be killed."

Indicating the depth of the religious intolerance, the report cited the treatment meted out to the dead body of a Hindu victim when all 152 passengers died in a plane crash near Islamabad on July 28, 2010.

While the names of the Muslim victims were inscribed on the coffins, the coffin of **Prem Chand**, a Hindu social activist, only had the derogatory inscription **Kafir** (nonbeliever). This took place at the **Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences** in Islamabad, the premier medical centre run by the government."

*National Catholic Register*

### KOREANS READY TO HELP

*By Dan Wooding*

**T**he pastor of one of the largest churches in South Korea says there are Christians in his congregation ready to sacrifice their lives to take the gospel into North Korea.

**Dr Jaerock Lee**, senior pastor of one of the largest churches in South Korea, says that there are Christians in his Seoul church who are ready to go into North Korea "when it opens up" and are "ready to be martyred for the sake of Christ".

Lee, senior pastor of **Manmin**

**Central Church** in Seoul, South Korea, which has 100,000 members and more than 9000 branch churches around the world, spoke about North Korea last month before the start of the 29th anniversary celebrations of his church, which began in 1982 with just 13 members.

Lee said that because of the world economic situation, the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea**, commonly known as North Korea, was now in such a dire state, with much of its population starving, it could soon briefly open up to the world.

"North Korea is suffering from an economic crisis and so many children are dying from poverty, which means that they will have to open the door to the rest of the world as they don't want to see a revolution," he said.

"They will have to open the door to the rest of the world so as to get aid and when they do this, our Christians will cross the border and spread the gospel and countless works of God will take place.

"However, I believe it will only be momentary thing, but during that short time, the power of God will be manifested in North Korea and since the people there have such pure hearts, they will accept it, and will witness amazing works of healing."

He said his church already had pastors who had decided that they were willing to lay down their lives as martyrs. "Once they decide to stay in North Korea, they will see martyrdom, but there are also Christians that will come out of North Korea as the doors close shut again but, by that time, their system will be in crisis because of the power of God."

*Assist*

### GOSPEL SPREADS IN IRAN

*By Michael Ireland*

**D**espite pressures and threats on one hand and the ban of printing and selling Gospels on the other hand, Christianity is increasingly spreading among the youth and families in Iran.

*Mohabat News*, the Iranian Christian newsagency, reports that according to Article 13 of the **Islamic Republic of Iran's** constitution, "Iranian Christians, Jews and Zoroastrian minorities are the only recognised religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their

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own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.”

Article 14 also states that “the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Muslim citizens are obligated to behave honourably towards non-Muslims and to interact with them with justice and good ethics and that they should honour their human rights.”

However, *Mohabat* says the situation in Iran is not like that in reality. “The freedom and good ethics described in books is replaced by threats, imprisonments, beatings and hangings for these minorities, especially Christians. The government does not tolerate these minorities nor does it give them the right to live without fear.” The agency says: “The rapid growth of the Christian faith in Iran seems to have caused significant concern and even fear in the hearts of the leadership of the Islamic regime, which has sparked increased suppression of Christians especially in the last year.

According to the reports published by the government-run website **Hamsed**, the head of the **Islamic Thoughts and Culture’s Research Centre** acknowledged the penetration of the Torah and Gospel (Pentateuch and New Testament) among Iranians in a ceremony in auditorium of the office of the Islamic propaganda. He said: “Today, the gospel is available in 3000 languages around the world, while the number of translations of the Quran hardly reaches 100.”

Assist

## ABUSE IN BURMA

**T**he Burmese Army is reportedly attacking churches in Kachin State, beating pastors and church members, setting homes alight and raping, torturing and killing civilians, reports **Christian Solidarity Worldwide**.

According to the religious freedom organisation, on October 16 soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 438 seized control of a Roman Catholic Church in Namsan Yang village, Waimaw township, where 23 worshippers, mostly women and elderly people, had gathered for the 8am Sunday service.

Troops fired into the sanctuary where people were hiding, and when the Catholic assistant to the priest, 49 year-old father-of-four **Jangma Awng Li**, spoke to troops he was hit in the head with a rifle butt.

CSW said: “The troops, who were

later joined by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 121, continued to march through the village shooting, and reached the Baptist church compound in the evening. During the march the detainees, including four from other villages who had been with the troops for two weeks, were used as forced labor. The whole northern part of the village was burned and both church properties were destroyed.”

In several other incidents, villagers have been shot or used for forced labour, while on October 18, a 19 year-old girl, **Maran Kawbu**, was detained, tortured and gang-raped by soldiers from the same battalion in Namsan Yang. Her body was left on the river bank.

CSW’s East Asia Team Leader **Benedict Rogers** said, “These brutal attacks on religious communities and peaceful civilians stand in stark contrast to the regime’s recent rhetoric about reform and peace building. CSW has received numerous reports of rape, torture and killing of civilians in Kachin State by the Burma Army this year.

“Rape, forced labor and killing civilians on a widespread and systematic basis constitute crimes against humanity. We urge **President Thein Sein** to call a halt to the military’s attacks on civilians throughout Burma, stop the widespread and systematic violations of human rights, declare a nationwide ceasefire, and enter into a meaningful dialogue process with all the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement led by **Aung San Suu Kyi**, in pursuit of genuine national

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## US CLAMPS DOWN

By Julian Lukins

**H**undreds of Christians fleeing persecution in Iraq have had their bid to resettle in the United States dashed by new security measures.

According to Baltimore-based refugee resettlement agency **World Relief**, 14,000 refugees have been placed “on hold” overseas since June, creating a “massive” backlog. Most of them are Iraqis fleeing troubles in Iraq - and about 40% of them are persecuted Christians, said World Relief’s **Jenny Yang**.

Hundreds of refugees - unable to return home because of fears for their safety - have been denied entry to the US as authorities seek to weed out potential terrorists, Yang said. The clampdown began after two Iraqis were

arrested in Kentucky in May and charged with aiding **al-Qaeda** in Iraq.

Beefed-up background checks have clogged the refugee pipeline, preventing Iraqi Christians and others from receiving clearance to come to the US, said Yang, the agency’s advocacy director.

Refugee admissions into the U.S. have nosedived in recent months since the enhanced US **Department of Homeland Security** checks were introduced, according to **David Mills**, World Relief’s refugee program manager, who said the agency’s caseload was slashed by a third.

US refugee admissions fell drastically following the 9/11 attacks, but picked up in recent years, approaching pre-9/11 levels.

Nearly half of all Iraqi refugees - 47% - were being denied entry to the US because of the new security measures which block anyone with “irregularities” in their case review, Mills said. Irregularities - such as gaps in documentation - are common because many refugees flee their homes at a moment’s notice, often with no official papers. Many Middle Easterners, Iraqis in particular, have similar names and a refugee can be mistakenly confused with a name on a terror watchlist.

“We’ve heard of an 80-year-old grandmother being denied (entry),” Mills said.

The clampdown is especially hurting Iraqi Chaldean Christians, according to **Rafat Ita**, a social worker in the Detroit area where 160,000 Chaldeans live - the largest settlement outside Iraq.

“These (Christian refugees) cannot go back to Iraq because they could be killed,” he said. “Now they are stuck in neighbouring countries where they cannot work, cannot go to school and cannot worship freely. The only hope they have is to come to America and now that hope is in ruins.”

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# Politics: no entry

CHURCH POLITICS DISHONOURS CHRIST, AND HARMS HIS PEOPLE.

*Bruce Winter*

**A** place for politics in the church? There is none, according to God's Word. Yet "church politics" is often used to describe certain forms of activities in sessions, presbyteries and assemblies and even within the congregation itself. The phrase either explains, justifies, endorses or dismisses particular ways some Christians operate in these situations. It is not generally condemned. Many see "church politics" as an inevitable feature of the Christian life. Such have sadly resigned themselves to "the reality".

For some it becomes "if you can't beat 'em, then join them!" This way of thinking is especially so for those who are training for, or just entering the ministry, or are newly-elected elders to meetings of our ecclesiastical gatherings, particularly those with personal plans and agendas to promote.

However, the phrase accurately describes what can happen in Christian circles. This is how things may be done in city council meetings and parliamentary sessions in spite of rules, regulations and laid-down procedures for the honourable gentlemen and ladies concerned. Groups secretly or sometimes openly meet beforehand clustered outside or perhaps inside during meetings. Even texting, emailing or blogging during meetings is now becoming an accept-



**THE PROBLEM OCCURRED BECAUSE THESE CHRISTIANS WERE CALIBRATED BY SECULAR SOCIETY SINCE DIVISIVENESS AND POWER-BROKING WERE ENDEMIC IN MEETINGS IN SECULAR CULTURE.**

able means of doing it!

We are reminded that "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). In Rome, Paul relates how he himself was the recipient of Christians operating politically against him while he was having enormous gospel opportunities even while under house arrest. They were just doing what other Romans did in similar situations. He also records how in Philippi some Christians were playing the game within the church that pagans played in civic, official gatherings.

In Philippians 1 it is extraordinary that Paul can refer to the fact that the gospel had penetrated "Caesar's household". Whoever could have imagined that the first generation of Christians would see the gospel make its way into the very administrative heart of the Roman Empire? He states that "the whole of the Praetorian Guard", the crack regiment of the enormous Roman army had heard the gospel. This was also true of "all the rest", referring to imperial public servants who administered this vast empire. Some had believed. This is

why the letter can close with "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22).

While this was happening, guess what some Christians in Rome were doing? Remember that these were those Paul wrote to in the Epistle to the Romans when he returned to Corinth (Rom. 16:23) and before he was imprisoned in Palestine for over 2 years (Acts 24:27).

These Christians had also been well calibrated by the culture of Rome before their conversion. They clearly needed to be recalibrated because of what some did to Paul when he was there. "Some preach Christ out of envy." The term he used indicated that they were bad-mouthing him, harming his cause.

**I**n order to prejudice the outcome of a trial in Rome, you did this in public to the prisoner as he waited trial – in this case, for Paul's appeal to Caesar to be heard. It is the equivalent today of trial by media before the case ever reaches the courts. In addition, they saw Paul as a "rival". They were convinced if they did this they would "afflict Paul in his imprisonment" (Phil. 1:15-17), which is what was typically done in the judicial context when you disliked a person or saw them as a threat to your agenda.

Now to the problem of politics inside the Philippian church recorded in chapter 2:3. The command was to do nothing from "rivalry and pride", literally "vain glory". Both terms were common-place in this Roman colony. They describe those who were motivated by jealousy or a personal agenda, however well disguised. The latter term was used of those who were seeking personal glory and praise as power brokers in the secular world. In the same sentence Paul continues that they must "in humility count others more significant' than themselves". Politics does not happen when

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you adopt that mindset towards your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Later in the letter Paul strongly exhorts the two women who were his fellow workers, having worked "side by side" with Paul "to agree in the Lord" (Phil. 4:1). It may well be that they were the cause of the difficulty Paul refers to in 2:3.

The problem occurred because these Christians were calibrated by secular society since divisiveness and power-broking were endemic in meetings in secular culture, something that is well documented from ancient sources. How did Paul seek to recalibrate them?

**G**od's solution then is His solution now. What follows immediately is the command that all Christians are to have "the mindset of Christ" (2:5). Jesus was not there to promote Himself – it is well known He was not in the power or pride game. Although the Son of God and equal to the Father, He laid aside the glory that belonged to God, became a menial servant, died the most humiliating death possible, "even death on a cross".

There was nothing in His thinking about position and power but rather the rescue operation that would bring salvation to rebellious and totally undeserving sinners. The Glory of God the Father will be brought about when every knee will bow before Jesus acknowledging He is now the Lord. There was no vain glory with Him.

He did not achieve this by ever playing the political game in Jerusalem as the High Priest and his cronies did. They were so good at doing that. He did not seek glory for Himself but by total self-giving He met the immediate needs, and finally the most pressing need, of all humanity. His example shows what true humility is and all Christians must have this mindset, according to Paul.

In the game of church politics there is no place for biblical humility when moves are taking place to achieve goals at the expense of brotherly relationships. In His Word, God demands that His children are to be recalibrated by the mind of Christ.

Where politics is played on Sundays or in Sessions or prevails in Presbyteries or asserts itself in Assemblies, Christians are behaving like pagans and the outcome is never glorifying to God and His Son. Paul calls upon all the church to work out the consequences of their salvation, and this is done when we

are calibrated by the mindset of Jesus. There is no place for the Christian prima donna or the male equivalent, standing in front of a grand piano, out-performing others and saying, "look at me, look at me, look at me", as sometimes hap-



THERE IS NO PLACE FOR THE CHRISTIAN PRIMA DONNA STANDING IN FRONT OF A GRAND PIANO, OUT-PERFORMING OTHERS AND SAYING, 'LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME'.

pens in political circles. In this great passage in Philippians 2:1-18, it is not sufficient that Christians understand the eternity of the Son, His victory over sin and death and His supreme place as Lord of all. We must see this was written to recalibrate us so that we adopt the same mindset as the Lord Jesus.

While much more could be said, the text says what is needed. It is a stark reminder to us that in our churches, in our denominational meetings, and in our schools and colleges – wherever – when political devices enter in, it is not a facilitator or blessing but a hindrance and a curse.

Church politics ultimately diminishes the work of God, dishonours the Lord Jesus Christ, and harms His people and the proclamation of the wonderful gospel that had worked so well in the household of Caesar and still works throughout the world today. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that it is dumb and devilish and destructive. Furthermore you don't fight fire with fire as some do in response. The Christlike mindset is the only way to do the work of the gospel and ministry. Politics was definitely not the way the Lord Jesus did things, nor must we. <sup>42</sup>



**Rev. Dr Bruce Winter** is principal of the Queensland Theological College.

This article is reprinted from the October/November 2011 issue of *New Directions*. It is an edited version of the second of four biblical expositions he delivered at the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

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## letters

**AP: SPARE A THOUGHT...**

**I**n response to a letter from Robert Herrgott, "Reviewing *AP's* Future" (August *AP*), we have indeed been blessed for many years by the publication of *AP*.

While the suggestion that the journal should be published quarterly instead of monthly is probably both sensible and practical given some of the reasons quoted, ie. our editor's shift to the Theological College of Victoria, plus the extra resources needed to produce a monthly edition compared with quarterly, please remember that not everyone is "computer literate".

When you say that pastors and members also receive state and mission news as well as other journals through the internet, not everyone does. So, please spare a thought for these folk who keenly look forward to regular visits from the mailman to bring them up to

date with the truth of what is happening in God's world as well as the proper Biblical perspective on the many issues confronting us in this 21st century.

*Jim Watson,  
Highfields, Qld*

**INJUSTICE TO WARREN?**

**O**ver the weekend I had some time to catch up on my reading and came across an item on page 21 of the July issue of *AP* relating to "Chrislam". The item is unattributed and makes a very serious charge.

On looking up on Google I came across the following where Warren himself says: "The so-called "Chrislam" rumour is 100% false. If the guy who started this libellous myth, or anyone else who passed it on, had obeyed our Lord's command (Matt. 18:15-20) to come directly to me, and then asked what I actually believed – they would have been embarrassed to learn that I believe the exact opposite. As a 4th generation Christian pastor, my life & ministry is built on the truth that Jesus is the only way, and our inerrant Bible is our only true authority.

"As an evangelist, I spend much of my time speaking to non-Christian groups. You cannot win your enemies to Christ; only your friends, so we must build bridges of friendship and love to those who believe differently so Jesus can walk across that bridge into their hearts. Besides, it is not a sin, but rather *commanded* by Jesus that we love our enemies. In the past 10 years, Saddleback Church has baptized over 22,000 new adult believers – simply because we express love to those who don't know Christ yet.

"It is nonsense to believe that you must compromise your beliefs, or water down your convictions in order to love someone, or even just treat them with dignity."

When checking on Google I found that one source of the Chrislam story says the following about the King James Bible:

"We are proud to stand with and stand on the King James Authorized 1611 Holy Bible as the revealed word of God, as God wrote it, and as God has preserved it. God promised to always have His word here on earth, forever, and available to all those who seek its Truth.

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Further information about ReachAcross may be found on our website: [www.reachacross.net](http://www.reachacross.net)

NTEB is proud to say that, yes, we do have the word of God, each and every word. So for the next 100 days, Dr John McTernan and NTEB will be bringing you awesome and amazing testimony, stories, video and insights in THE Book that God wrote."

Given all that we know about Bible translation and the discoveries of source documents I have grave concerns about the NTEB (Now The End Begins) as a credible source of news or opinion, whatever else they may believe.

I have not seen anything in subsequent issues of AP and I wonder if you have done any work researching this issue and if what Warren says is correct, whether a retraction can be published.

*Fred van Brussel,  
Woolanang, NT*

## WHAT GEOLOGY SHOWS

While Peter Barnes makes a number of valid points (AP, October), I disagree with some of his conclusions. The evidence for an old earth is not based on carbon 14 dating. It decays rapidly and so while it may be used to date archaeological artefacts, it is useless for ancient rocks. In anything older than 30,000 years the amount of carbon 14 is too small to accurately measure. Dating of rocks is done using radioactive elements trapped in igneous rocks. For example, the half life of Uranium 235 is 704 million years; that is, after 704 million years half of the uranium decays to lead. For this reason lead is said to have the best memory of any element. By measuring the amounts of lead and uranium in a uranium mineral, we can calculate its age. Other radioactive elements decay in different ways but yield the same or similar results. This method gives a figure of around 4500 million years for the age of the earth.

Advocates of uniformitarianism believe that the geological processes that operate in the present operated in the past. As processes in the present are generally slow, this has been taken to mean that changes in the past have also been like-wise slow. While this is generally true, there have been some very notable exceptions. One such is the recent discovery that an asteroid hit the Yucatan Peninsula, on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico and caused the death of many living things and the extinction of many species about 65 million years ago. Irrespective of whether things at a macro-level are changing quickly or

slowly, radioactive elements safely cocooned deep within impervious igneous rocks decay at precisely the same rate. God's laws both in the spiritual and physical sphere are not subject to change and can be relied upon.

While it is true the Big Bang is only a theory, it fits in rather neatly with theistic creation which Mr Barnes devotes much space in his article to defending. Atheists hate the Big Bang and have tried to counter it with the highly speculative multiverse (many universes) theory.

An old earth and macro-evolution are not two aspects of the same thing, the first is established scientific fact, the second is not. The recent emergence of well-funded persuasive advocates of a young earth in the Christian community is an apologetic disaster, and makes it harder for those with any knowledge of geology to accept the Christian message.

*Rev. Dr. Peter Barclay,  
Mordialloc, Vic.*

## WRONG BOOK PUT FIRST

David Palmer's article (AP, October) wrongly puts the "book of nature" over the "written word" in regard to the age of the earth. Scientific study of the "book of nature" observes creation as it is in the present. This has enabled wonderful advances in our use of creation, and glorifies God, as in the Reformed concept of general revelation.

But the Bible is past history. "Nature" is the present world. In trying to work out the past history of creation, scientists can only observe the evidence available in the present world, then try to calculate what might have happened in the distant past. They can't observe the past!

Harder still, a scientist must assume present natural processes have done it all. But creation was a series of supernatural events, often instantaneous. Further, all dating calculations assume that present rates of change have always remained the same - "uniformitarianism". This is highly improbable, over millions of years. In fact the worldwide catastrophe of the Flood about 4500 years ago drastically reset all dating "clocks" in geology and the fossil deposits, but is ignored by long-age theorists.

The only way to know what really happened is the testimony of a reliable eye-witness, God Himself. He has told us. Creation week, plus the chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,

(repeated in the genealogy of Jesus), plus known dating from Abraham on, add up to an age of creation of about 6000 years. This takes priority over all man's calculations. Evidence from the "book of nature", rightly understood, supports this age perfectly.

*Frank Savage,  
Hastings, Vic.*

## GENESIS, A FRAMEWORK

Thank you for the two articles outlining arguments for and against the main alternative ways in which the early chapters of Genesis are understood by Christians today (AP, October). It was refreshing to see such space devoted to opposite points of view and to know that each author accepted wholeheartedly the integrity and authority of the biblical text under discussion. The main differences in the positions relate to how both scientific and biblical information are interpreted, and the more open discussion about these issues the more likely we are to eliminate the problems with each.

Peter Barnes outlined many views against which he argued but he failed to mention the main alternative to his position on Genesis 1, namely, the framework model which is adopted by such theologians as Kidner (*Genesis*), Blocher (*In the Beginning*), Walton (*The Lost World of Genesis 1*). Palmer refers to this model at the end of his contribution and it solves many of the problems raised by Barnes in his article. In particular, it acknowledges that the days are 24 hour periods of time and that Genesis 1 is not Hebrew poetry, while remaining neutral on the question of whether evolution is a viable theory or not.

The framework model encourages us neither to allow the concepts of modern science to determine our understanding of Genesis 1 (concordism) nor to allow our understanding of Genesis 1 to determine the concepts of modern science (young earth creationism). Instead, it focuses our attention on the theological doctrine of creation and the nature of God who brought the world into being.

*Colin Gauld,  
Berry, NSW*

*The opinions published in AP letters are not necessarily endorsed by the editorial committee.*



**NOVEMBER 2011**

- 21** Pray for your own church and leaders. Pray for a spirit of unity that together you may with one voice serve and glorify the Lord in building up the saints, and in reaching those who do not believe.
- 22** Pray for those whose works of service flow from and adorn the gospel message, especially for Church-run hospitals, nursing homes, social services, schools and colleges.
- 23** Pray for those involved in chaplaincy in hospitals, schools, universities, prisons and armed services.
- 24** Pray for wisdom for our local church leaders, Presbyteries, Assemblies and other bodies in discerning how and when to cooperate with other denominational churches for the sake of gospel witness, works of service to the community, or opposition to Government policies or social mores that are evil.
- 25** Pray that we as a church would be neither unbiblically exclusivist (Lk 9:49-50) nor accepting of beliefs and practices that are false or bring the gospel into disrepute (Rev. 2:6-20).
- 26** Pray for all Christians to understand the need to live a holy life, being distinct from the world, particularly in the areas of sexual morality and working hard (1 Thess. 4).
- 27** In ethics, business, government, family, etc., pray that Christians would see God's common grace which is at work in their neighbours to produce

good deeds.

- 28** Pray that believers around the world may be able to live peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and holiness.
- 29** Pray that Christian ministers will faithfully preach the whole counsel of God, and Christian people will be faithful witnesses.
- 30** Pray for governments in balancing censorship and national security with freedom of the press and rights to peaceful protest.

**DECEMBER 2011**

- 1** Thank God that courts continue to consider assisted suicide as a crime. Pray for this to continue, and that we will not in pride abrogate to ourselves the role of God.
- 2** Pray for spiritual renewal of God's people, to have courage to live as witnesses to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.
- 3** Pray that we may avoid the materialism and the spirit of covetousness that pervades our society.
- 4** Pray that people would see the fallacies of the well-orchestrated Gay Lobby's claims that the push for so-called gay marriage is a matter of "equality".
- 5** Pray that thousands of years of societal belief about marriage being between a man and a woman will not be overturned for short-term political gain and to accommodate the aberrant beliefs of one generation.
- 6** Pray for marriages that are strained and tested, for families in which there is conflict, grief and strife.
- 7** Pray for those who are unable to have children, for wisdom for Christian

- couples in knowing what reproductive technologies are legitimate and what we should avoid on biblical grounds, and for those who research infertility.
- 8** Pray that our children will grow up in the knowledge and love of the Lord.
- 9** Praise God and pray for those who serve faithfully in your own congregation.
- 10** Pray for those who give so much to our children and youth.
- 11** Give thanks for the elderly, for their faith and service.
- 12** Ask the Lord for strength and joy as you serve Him, or for His leading into new areas of service.
- 13** Pray for the conversion of many and the building of God's kingdom by His Spirit.
- 14** Pray for protection, courage and faithful endurance for persecuted Christians around the world.
- 15** Pray for peace and justice between Israelis and Palestinians.
- 16** Praise God that His Son made full atonement once for all for every sin of His people and pray that this message will be powerfully proclaimed in churches around the nation.
- 17** Relief and Christian ministry among the millions affected by natural disasters around the world.
- 18** The maintaining of liberty for Christians in Sudan.
- 19** Persecuted Christians in Iraq.
- 20** For God to reveal Christ's grace and truth to many living under the darkness of Islam.



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books

**Seven Days That Divide the World**

John C. Lennox  
Michigan: Zondervan, 2011  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

If there can be an irenic discussion of this topic, this is it. Professor Lennox from Oxford University is an old earth creationist who sees real problems with the evolutionary hypothesis. There are difficulties if one treats the Bible as a science book, and even more difficulties if one separates it from science. The earth is said to be established in 1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalm 93:1; 104:5 and 1 Samuel 2:8, while the sun is said to move in Psalm 19:4-6 and Ecclesiastes 1:5. Lennox cites Augustine's warning against Christians' speaking foolishly on science, but it is easier to issue a warning than to heed it. Embracing the Big Bang theory, Bill Bryson informs us that the universe was created in about the time it takes to make a sandwich. Following Philo, Augustine thought it did not even take that long.

Professor Lennox is surely right in pointing out that the Genesis account is not primarily written as a polemic. Nor is he convinced by Rikki Watts and John Walton who see temple imagery all through Genesis 2. Francis Collins finds theistic evolution "enormously satisfying", but this seems to come from not treating Darwinism with sufficient scepticism. As the biologist, William Provine, points out, "Natural selection does nothing". It is, in many ways, an anti-theory, more akin to fideism than to science.

In a simple style, and with considerable courage, one must add, Professor Lennox has raised many of the issues surrounding the week of Genesis 1. Without being definitive, it will no doubt prove a help to many readers.

*Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.*

**The Heartbeat of Evangelism**

Harold Peasley  
Challenge Literature Fellowship  
*Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington*

Published by the same people who bring us *The Challenge* evangelical newspaper, this large format booklet carries the sub-title "keeping the main thing, the MAIN THING".

Harold Peasley is a South African evangelist. Given its original context, it is not strong on the sovereignty of God (although Jonathan Edwards is mentioned) in the evangelistic task but, that understood, it presents in a simple, heartfelt and direct way a number of evangelistic principles which are well worth reading, considering and putting into practice as far as a different cultural context in Australia permits.

*Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot's Kirk, Fremantle.*

**Commentary on the Psalms**

John Calvin, abridged by David Searle  
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

I am one who is normally distrustful of abridged works, but this is a splendid piece of work. It is attractive in its presentation, and is ideal for anyone who wishes to work through the Psalms in personal Bible study. As is well-known, Calvin called the Psalms "an anatomy of all the parts of the soul" for "there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror."

Calvin writes simply and never fails to stimulate thought and piety. Pointing to Psalm 1:4-6, for example, he says that the ungodly will "discover that they were merely infatuated when they thought themselves to be happy". On Psalm 11:4-5 he notes: "Some would like to think that God is idle in heaven, and they would rather spread a couch for Him on which to sleep than erect for Him a

throne of judgment."

Sometimes he is less than convincing, as when he interprets Psalm 4:4 to be a commendation of calm reflection when it is more a warning against stewing over a slight. He also sees Psalm 10:12 (Arise, O Lord) as addressed more to himself than to God. However, one of Calvin's great strengths is the way he moves quickly to apply the passage to his own times, and, by reflection, to ours.

With regard to some issues in modern Calvin scholarship, one ought to note (contra R. T. Kendall) that Calvin is quite capable of viewing apparent contradictions such as despair and faith as being "united beautifully" in Psalm 13. When the Psalmist refers to "my righteousness" before God, Calvin usually interprets this to mean a specific righteousness over against his enemies (e.g. Ps. 7:8) or an aspiration after righteousness (e.g. Ps. 5:12).

This is a work that deserves to be widely used by struggling Christians.

**Reach Out for Him:  
Knowing the Unknown God**

Gary Benfold  
Leominster: Day One, 2006.  
*Reviewed by Peter Barnes*

This is a 36-page booklet, which is most attractively and appropriately illustrated, based on Paul's speech to the Athenians as recorded in Acts 17:16-34. Each topic is dealt with simply, in two pages. It is designed to be an evangelistic booklet, and succeeds most wonderfully.

It would be an ideal booklet to give away to someone who has shown some interest in the issues of eternity. In addition, I could think of few better booklets for a church to provide at the back of the building for people to take up and read. Keep a stock close at hand, that you may be able to seize opportunities when God sends them your way.

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# Picture of misery

A PAINTING HIGHLIGHTS THE FUTILITY OF REBELLION

*Peter Barnes*

**R**ecently I went to visit the exhibition entitled *The Mad Square: Modernity in German Art 1910-37*, shown at the Art Gallery of NSW. I never expected to enjoy it; I was more interested in it in terms of social history than art.

It must be clear that the decadence of Berlin in the 1920s played a significant role in preparing the way for the amoral brutality of Nazism in the 1930s. While at the gallery, I became particularly fascinated with one painting, *Imaginary Bridge*, by Hannah Höch (1889-1978). It shows two heads, who look rather like mannequins or caricatures of human beings, with a baby between them.

It refers to the time when Höch was involved in a stormy relationship with a fellow artist, and a married man, Raoul Hausmann, from 1915 to about 1922. According to the artist's niece, the meaning of the painting clearly points to Höch's unfulfilled wish to have a child by Hausmann. Everything in the painting speaks of misery, unfulfilled lives, yearning, and distortion. Humanity is longed for, but is missing.

Indeed, art reflected reality. Hausmann was apparently physically abusive, and Höch had two abortions during this time. 1922 proved to be a key point in her life: she could evaluate where she had gone wrong, and repent, or she could lurch on to more disasters.



**HOCH ILLUSTRATED THIS BIBLICAL TRUTH EVERY STEP OF THE WAY – SHE WENT FROM IMMORALITY TO ABORTION TO LESBIANISM TO MORE SADNESS AND REBELLION.**

In the words of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.*

**A**las, Höch reacted with some bitterness, and turned to lesbian relationships to find some comfort and solace. From 1926 to 1929 she was involved with the Dutch writer and linguist Til Brugman. As so often, liberation looks like rationalised misbehaviour and code for bondage.

our and code for bondage.

The Dada group in the Weimar Republic used to celebrate women for breaking traditional gender roles, but this was largely delusion, and still is. During the Third Reich, Höch stayed quiet, and survived, although she married a businessman and painter, Kurt Matthies, in 1938, only to divorce him six years later. Not surprisingly, after the war, Höch continued to be lauded in certain circles for her avant garde approach to life.

All of this is just another heart-breaking illustration of the nature of sin in the human heart. James tells us that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

Höch's life illustrated this biblical truth every step of the way – she went from immorality to abortion to lesbianism to more sadness and rebellion. Truly, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and we cannot understand it (Jer. 17:9). There is always the danger that we may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13).

The gospel gives us what we need, but what, by nature, we do not want. It promises us: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa.12:3). It is refreshing, life-giving, and liberating. It is sin which enslaves (John 8:34) and entangles (Heb.12:1; 2 Peter 2:20); it liberates no one. As Simone Weil put it so insightfully: "Nothing is so beautiful, nothing is so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy, as the good; no desert is so dreary, monotonous and boring as evil." ap

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**Peter Barnes** is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney.