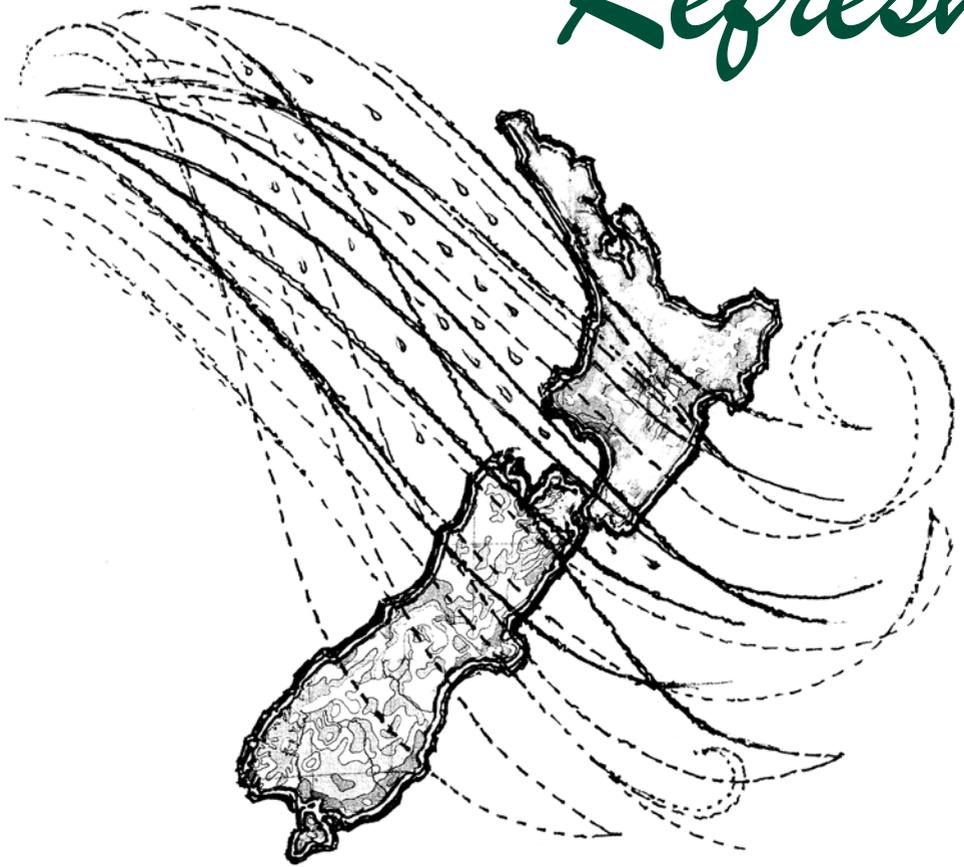


Refresh



Recession

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COMMENT

Andrew Dunn

When Queen Elizabeth, visiting the London School of Economics earlier this year, asked why no one foresaw the looming recession and the extent of the devastation, a “group of eminent economists” prepared a three page document for her. It spoke of the “psychology of denial” that had infested the financial and political world in the years and months before the credit crisis struck.

The letter went on to discuss why so many “financial wizards” who had been doing their jobs well within their own horizons had failed to see the whole picture developing around the world. “It is difficult to recall a greater example of wishful thinking combined with hubris”, they wrote to the Queen.

“In summary, Your Majesty,” they conclude, “the failure to foresee the timing, extent and severity of the crisis and to head it off, while it had many causes, was particularly a failure of the collective imagination of many bright people, both in this country and internationally, to understand the risks to the system as a whole”.

The letter added, “There was a very complicated, interconnected set of issues, rather than one particular person or particular institution.” (*Observer* London)

I can’t help asking myself what lies below or behind this “failure of the collective imagination” of so many bright people? And when I do that theologically and biblically, it doesn’t take me long to arrive at some fundamental weaknesses and

failings in our humanity and, therefore, in our human systems. What part does human pride, avarice, and the desire to accumulate wealth and power play in all this? Where do the “seven deadly sins” come into it: lust, gluttony, avarice, sloth, wrath, envy and pride? Where can we see some of the biblical images of sin coming into play: falling short of the mark, overshooting the mark, sliding across to another way, breaking or ignoring God’s law, failure to love as God loves, disobedience, yielding to temptation?

What then does the good news in Jesus Christ have to offer - in his life, his incarnation, his dying for the sins of the whole world, his rising to new life, and life in his kingdom? And not only to individuals, but to our communities, ethics and morality, our politics and economies?

In this issue of *Refresh* we have gathered a wide variety of articles to help understand and respond to the crisis every person in our nation and around the world is experiencing in one way or another. In New Zealand alone we have lost billions of dollars of savings and investments and this loss has wiped out, virtually overnight, the savings of many, many people. So it is no slight thing that is happening around us. Add to that an equally large amount lost in the fallen value in our houses, businesses, land and farms and we get a picture of what is happening to us.

Looking at the articles and other material we include in this issue we are asking two basic questions without actually asking them!

1. In the diagnosis of all that has happened, what human and spiritual values have gone astray and led to this situation?

2. As we think it through, reflect on it biblically and theologically, can we see ways ahead that are necessary, encouraging and hope-full?

See what you make of all this and the invitations for what lies ahead. I'm encouraged with a word from Psalm 146:

“Happy are those whose help is the God
of Jacob,

whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever”.

WHAT HAPPENED

A Crisp Overview

Sub-Prime losses

The outbreak of the current financial crisis can be officially fixed as August 2007. That was when the central banks had to intervene to provide liquidity to the banking system. As the BBC reported:

- On August 6, American Home Mortgage, one of the largest U.S. Independent home loan providers, filed for bankruptcy after laying off the majority of its staff. The company said it was a victim of the slump in the U.S. housing market that had caught out many sub-prime borrowers and lenders.
- On August 9, short-term credit markets froze up after a large French bank, BNP Paribas, suspended three of its investment funds worth 2 billion euros, citing problems in the U.S. sub-prime mortgage sector. BNP said it could not value the assets in the funds because the market had disappeared.

The European Central Bank pumped 95 million euros into the eurozone banking system to ease the sub-prime credit crunch. The U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of Japan took similar steps.

- On August 10, the European Central Bank provided an extra 61 billion euros of funds for banks. The U.S. Federal Reserve said it would provide as much overnight money as would be needed to combat the credit crunch.
- On August 13, the European Central Bank pumped 47.7 billion euros into the money markets, its third cash injection in as many working days. Central banks in the United States and Japan also topped up earlier injections. Goldman Sachs said it would pump 3 billion dollars into a hedge fund hit by the credit crunch to shore up its value.
- On August 16, Countrywide Financial, the largest U.S. mortgage originator, drew down its entire 11.5 billion dollar credit line. Australian mortgage lender Rams also admitted liquidity problems.
- On August 17, the U.S. Federal Reserve cut the discount rate (the interest rate at which it lends to banks) by half a percentage point to help banks deal with credit problems. (But it did not help. Subsequently the central banks of the developed world ended up injecting funds on a larger scale for longer periods and accepting a wider range of securities as collateral than ever before in history).
- On September 13, it was disclosed that Northern Rock (the largest British mortgage banker) was bordering on insolvency (which triggered an old-fashioned bank run – for the first time in Britain in a hundred years).

BBC News, "Timeline: Sub-Prime losses: How Did the Sub-Prime Crisis Unfold?" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7096845.stm>

In George Soros. *The Crash of 2008 and what it means*. 2008. p.1.

Lehman Brothers Bank, New York

A year ago, 15th September 2008 to be precise, the huge US investment bank Lehman Brothers collapsed in the biggest bankruptcy in US history. That event sent shockwaves around the world more profound and far-reaching than 11th September 2001. The world's financial systems had developed mortgage lending methods (e.g. sub-prime), investment methods and structures, and debt obligations between banks and finance institutions to the point where few could cover what was owed. Not even the huge loans from the Federal Govt could save the likes of Lehmans and the authorities let them go bankrupt. This began a domino effect despite the Federal Reserve sinking trillions of dollars to prevent total collapse.

In New Zealand

We don't know how much wealth is being destroyed in New Zealand because we don't know how deep and long the recession will be, or how weak the recovery will be. But so far investors have lost some \$6 billion of real money in finance companies plus billions more from house and farm sales. These unrealised losses will run into scores of billions of dollars, creating a drag on enterprise and investment for years to come. ... As a nation, our net international liabilities are now 100% of GDP. Only Hungary and

Iceland among developed countries are deeper in hock. ...

In 2007 the cracks began to appear in the massively over-indebted economy here and around the world. By late 2007, the rot had spread to the entire finance sector in the US and Europe, and by March of last year it was a full-blown global crisis. Between July and October the global financial system repeatedly came close to complete collapse.

*There is one
overwhelming message
for deficit households
and deficit economies like
ours: we have to borrow
and spend less, invest and
earn more.*

But, against the odds, thanks to desperate measures by central banks and governments, a very rudimentary stability has begun to appear. So many people believe, here and abroad, we're back to a "normal" recession and that

recovery is coming soon. That's a very big mistake to make for two reasons. First, the world's recovery from the surge and subsequent collapse of debt will take years. Second, as a result, the global economy is changing massively ... Every individual, community, company and economy will have to find a way through. But there is one overwhelming message for deficit households and deficit economies like ours: we have to borrow and spend less, invest and earn more.

Rod Oram. *Sunday Star Times*. 12.7.09.

The Beatitudes – two resources

1. Chris Marshall's article in Refresh Summer 2007-08 p16ff. Also on SGM website www.sgm.org.nz.
2. Monty Williams' talk notes and lecture audios from the ACSD Conference 2009: www.acsd.org.nz

JESUS AND HIS SERMON

Kathleen Rushton RSM

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction.”

Benedict XVI. Homily. Inaugural Mass, 2005

These words of Benedict’s have echoed in my ears since I first heard them telecast during his inauguration. The image of the external deserts was evoked in the context of the environmental crisis which is linked inextricably to the external deserts of the current economic and financial recession. The external deserts and the internal deserts open a way to explore what Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount might offer Christian spirituality in the current economic and financial crisis.

The Crowd

When I consider the Sermon on the Mount, and the beatitudes in particular, I imagine that “great crowd” there in the background (Mt.4:24; 7:28)¹ who had followed Jesus from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan. Jesus was reviled for the company he kept: beggars, tax collectors, prostitutes, peasants, lepers, the sick, those with disabilities and the demon possessed. There, too, would have

been small farmers, labourers, widows, women, children and some well-to-do. That great crowd was Jews living under various systems of the Roman occupation which included the collaboration of a local king and the upper priestly classes. That great crowd was mostly poor, earning their living on land, sea or by trade. In the foreground are the disciples of Jesus (5:1)².

All those gathered had a collective history of exile and deportation, of being ruled by nations not their own, of working day and night and of paying huge taxes in society from which they did not benefit. They relied on learned rabbis to teach them how to apply the Scriptures to their daily lives. What did it mean for them to be religious people? Zealots called for insurrection against the Romans. Pharisees advocated a staunch return to legal requirements. Ascetics retreated to desert caves. Greek religious thinking was in the region. Jesus understood then, as he does now, that so many were unmoored from the faith of their ancestors.

Jesus’ Language

So the language Jesus spoke on that mountain side, and to us today, was not entirely new. He gathered it from the prophets, the psalmists, scribes and rabbis who

had gone before him. For example, each of Matthew’s beatitudes begins with *makarios* which is the very first word of the Book of Psalms in the Greek Scriptures (Septuagint) of Jesus’ time. Psalm 1 lays out human “happiness” or “blessedness” according to the Psalms. The blessed are those who delight in the law of God and meditate on it day and night. As the

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.”

¹ The crowds, mentioned 50 times, in Matthew contrast with the elites.

² Here is the first use of “disciples” to describe the followers of Jesus. Who are these? Four are called in 4:18-22 and distinguished from the crowds (4:23-25 and 5:1).

Psalms progress, the blessed are “the poor,” “the suffering,” “the little ones” who take “refuge” or “shelter” in God who is their “rock” and “hiding place.” These are the ones who trust in God. They live among “the scoffers,” or “the wicked.” In the world of the Psalms, these are not wicked in a sense we might understand but are those who do not put their trust in God. In fact, the wicked could be we “good people” who do not trust in God. In the world of the Psalms, God reigns and desires justice for all. God’s relationship is characterised through two pivotal concepts of *hesed* (NRSV translates as “steadfast love”) and *rahum* (“compassion” or “mercy” - from the word for womb). The Psalms are clear that this steadfast love and mercy shelters those who trust in God. However, the Psalms also attest to God’s wrath when the people depart from their trust in God and seek happiness in ways that are not of God.

Those for whom Matthew wrote, some fifty years after Jesus, may have been a cross section of urban society, yet a minority, living possibly in Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria and home to three or four Roman legions.³ This city and its elites, as in Roman practice elsewhere, were a key unit for maintaining control over a larger area. The wishes of local elites were carried out by retainers such as bailiffs, tax collectors, administrators or clerks, educators, judges and soldiers. Matthew’s audience probably found work among these and are assumed to be familiar with the wealth of

³ The word “city” is used 26 times (compare Mark’s eight). For social and political overview of Matthew’s audience, see Warren Carter. *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*. Maryknoll:

such a society. Matthew’s disciples are not to take upmarket “gold, silver or copper coin” (10:9) with them. Jesus, in Matthew’s parable, speaks of talents (25:14-30) which are each worth fifty times as much as one of Luke’s “minas.” Joseph of Arimathea is “a rich man.”⁴ It does not mean, of course, we can conclude that Matthew’s audience were wealthy themselves.

The Jesus Alternative

Jesus lived and preached God’s *basileia*, a word which is translated as “reign” or “kingdom” and is also used of the “empire” or *basileia* of Rome. The scenes of Mt 4:17-25 point to God’s empire which is lived in a world dominated by the empire of Rome. The focus of Jesus’ sermon is an alternative - the disciples

leave their boats and follow Jesus (vv.18-22) - which concerns the “good news of God’s empire/reign.”⁵ In 5:1-2 while the crowds are present, it seems that Jesus distinguishes and favours the disciples. The sermon is not a step-by-step “how to do it” book or rule manual. Rather it offers pointers, “for examples,” visions of identity and the way of life that flows from entering into God’s present and future reign. Beatitudes involve not just personal qualities, not just emotions (“happy are”) but first and foremost, concern God’s favour for certain human situations and actions (Ps 1:1-2).⁶ The

Jesus’ sermon is not a step-by-step “how to do it” book or rule manual. Rather it offers pointers, “for examples” ...

⁴ See “the copper coin” of Mk 6:8. Luke version of the parable has low valued “minas” (19:11-27). In Mk 15:43 and Lk 23:50-5, Joseph is a member of the council. Matthew refers to “silver,” “gold” and “talent: 28 times compared with Mark’s sole and Luke’s fourfold reference to “silver.” See, Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 25.

⁵ 4:17, 23; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21.

⁶ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 128.

sermon, and indeed, this whole gospel, then inform and form disciples further in the existence to which they have committed themselves.⁷ It shapes and confirms their identity as a minority and marginal community of disciples. The crowds remain, they overhear the sermon and react favourably to it (7:28-29).

Gerard O'Collins sees the beatitudes as a self-description of Jesus. They sum up the message of the reign of God. They provide a precise portrait of Jesus. They are the programme he set himself and the way he acted.⁸ For Benedict XVI, the beatitudes are "the transposition of the Cross and Resurrection into discipleship". They apply to the disciple because these were first lived paradigmatically by Jesus himself. He continues that they are a sort of veiled interior biography of Jesus. Because of their hidden Christological character the beatitudes are a road map for the Church which sees in them the model of what the Church is called to be.⁹ These directions for discipleship apply to every individual who responds in different ways according to their calling.

Structures of Sin

We, present disciples of Jesus, approach the Sermon on the Mount in the external deserts of this economic recession. The present situation can be described in many ways and attributed to many factors. Here

I name it theologically and spiritually as structures of sin which "are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked *concrete* acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove."¹⁰ Such increase, grow stronger and become the source of other sins and so influence people's behaviour. In these situations the real responsibility lies with individuals who cause or support evil or exploit it; who could in some way eliminate or limit harm but do not do so through fear, laziness or the silence of complicity or indifference; or who shelter under the supposed impossibility of changing the world or who side-step the effort and sacrifice required.

The truth of the Sermon on the Mount contrasts a culture of affluence with a culture of inner freedom to create conditions for social justice.

The external deserts arise from internal deserts, hence the vital importance of a religious reawakening of the interior dimension of individuals and peoples in order to build structures of grace and solidarity. The truth of the Sermon of the Mount contrasts a culture of affluence with a culture of inner freedom to create conditions for social justice.

The Sermon of the Mount is not a social programme per se, to be sure. But it is only when the inspiration it gives us vitally influences our thought and action, only when the faith generates the strength of renunciation and responsibility for our neighbour and for the whole of society – only then can social justice grow, too.¹¹

⁷ Jesus' subsequent discourses (chs 10, 13, 18, 24-25) develop this vision of life in God's reign.

⁸ Gerald O'Collins SJ. *Jesus: A Portrait*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008, 137.

⁹ Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger). *Jesus of Nazareth*. Translated by Adrian J. Walker. New York: Doubleday, 2007, 74.

¹⁰ This quotation and paragraph is taken from John Paul II. *On Social Concerns*. Homebush NSW: St. Paul Publication, 1988, 76. It has the best description of structural sin I know. The document critiques equally liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 77.

It is not possible here to discuss the Sermon on the Mount in any detail except to offer some pointers or “for examples” from the first and third beatitudes.

Two Beatitudes

Luke’s first beatitude begins, “blessed are you poor,” and Matthew inserts, “blessed are the poor *in spirit*” (5:3). Arguably Matthew makes this beatitude applicable to all believers - to all who let the Spirit open themselves to Jesus and the reign of God without spiritualising it or denying its primary reference to all who are economically and socially poor.¹² Biblically the latter are the original referent of this beatitude.¹³ We may feel an inner resistance to this. Nevertheless, the Sermon on the Mount poses the question of the fundamental Christian option to the implications of this beatitude; it demands conversion and a U-turn. To be poor in spirit is to so shelter in God. As Monty Williams reminds us, we as spiritual pilgrims hand our lives over to mystery we call God “not in some abstract way, but here and now, concretely ...” in the situation of our lives and immediate communities.¹⁴ He continues that this being poor in spirit “allows us to discover community, which is the kingdom of God in our midst.” It enables us to imagine and form structures of grace in the midst of structures of sin.

The third beatitude links with the first in that paradoxically, in apparent weakness, there is biblical strength. Biblically, the English word “meek” in Mt 5:5 does not

mean “wimp”, “gentle”, “doormat”, “mild”, or “passive.” Jesus is among the meek (Mt 11:29; 21:5 cf. Zech 9:9-10) as is Moses (Num 12:3). This beatitude draws on Ps 37:11: “The meek shall possess the land.” The word *praus* in the Greek Bible translates the Hebrew *anawin*. In Ps 37 “meek” names the powerless and humiliated who are to trust in God to save them from the wicked.¹⁵ To be “meek” is to renounce retribution and to live faithfully and with expectancy. For Williams, this beatitude enables us to see “in the cracks and the terrors of this world, the promise of paradise.” We are invited “to co-operate with the powers of good by being present, humbly and gratefully, at precisely those places, so that through our simple presence, the mystery we call God can enter the world.”¹⁶

¹⁵ vv.1, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28, 32, 34, 35, 38, 40.

¹⁶ Williams, *Gift of Spiritual Intimacy*, 74.

Capitalisms’ dependence on indefinite exponential growth is incompatible with life; in a living organism we would call it “cancer”. Our economy has reached (and, in some cases, exceeded) many of the earth’s natural limits to growth, so a “no-growth” economy must be developed. This will require vast changes in corporate structure and the financial system. Fortunately, models for these changes are also in place. It is possible to have “development” (improvement in levels of well-being) without growth (increased use of natural resources) if all resources are recycled and sustainability becomes a primary corporate goal. The changes required are profound. They will only happen if citizens work together for our common good – which is what government is for.

David Hilfiker – *Sojourners Reviews*.
16.9.2009

¹² O’Collins, *Jesus*, 131.

¹³ See Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 131-132; and Benedict XVI, *Jesus*, 74-75, at the time of the Babylonian conquest 90% of Judeans would have counted among the poor.

¹⁴ Monty Williams SJ, *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy: Following the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Toronto: Novalis, 2009, 67.

JESUS' WORDS OF BLESSING

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that – count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – give a cheer, even! – for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Matthew's Gospel 5:3-12. *The Message*

RELIGIOUS DRUGGERY

We have turned the teachings of Jesus
Into a religion,
living words into opium.
We have turned a blasphemous prophet
into a harmless sacrament
that comforts and confirms:
we are druggists,
who have made Jesus safe.

We have taken a table,
a love feast spread
so that zealot and harlot,
leper and lunatic
could be welcomed and fed,
and turned it into
unearthly symbol
of wafer and thimble
for the righteous instead.

We have taken a cross,
clotted rack of brutality
(electric chair built
to burn heretic and radical)
and crafted it into
pop fashion accessory.

We are publicists and anaesthetists
who have turned this Jesus
into someone respectable:
a pillar of the community,
a seal of approval.

We are druggists and alchemists
who have turned his blood into water
(thin and insipid and easy to swallow)

*we have taken the food of the prophets,
the poets, the revolutionaries,
we have taken living bread,
words that burned with holy rage,*

and turned them into
pap for the pious,
pills for the nervous,
and homilies for the dead.

Kristin Jack 2009

THEOLOGY AND THE CURRENT RECESSION

Andrew Bradstock

Can our 'theology' help us think in new ways about the current recession?

While the Bible says little about sub-prime mortgages or the regulation of global financial institutions, it *is* rich in wisdom on issues like wealth and poverty and how societies can practise economic justice. There is actually much more in Scripture about money and possessions than the issues upon which churches often seem to focus, like sexuality and abortion. As the theologian Walter Brueggemann rightly says, 'while the specifics of the current market collapse are peculiarly modern, biblical perspectives are pertinent because the fundamental issues of economics are constant from ancient to contemporary time, constants such as credit and debt, loans and interest, and the endless tension between the haves and have-nots.'

In the early books we discover a God who creates all people with equal status and provides for their needs, while placing boundaries on their consumption. We find a mandate to steward the planet as its tenants and not its owners, and an account of the Fall suggesting that our context and behaviour will always be imperfect, broken and contingent. We see God's concern for justice manifest in innovations like the Jubilee and Sabbath - which were designed to ensure the welfare of the community over against individual accumulation - and the provision of manna in the wilderness, which worked on the principle of supplying the needs of all rather than the greed of some.

Prophets are raised up to 'speak truth to power' and remind rulers to ensure that all, especially the weak, the alien and the disadvantaged, have their basic needs met. God's concern is that no one will be in need (Deuteronomy 15:4).

Similarly, in the New Testament we find Jesus dealing with both the symptoms and causes of poverty: challenging individuals who have cheated others to repent and change; symbolically overthrowing institutional expressions of exploitation and injustice; preaching a kingdom in which all - especially the least regarded - will sit at the banqueting table; and telling stories of how, in God's economy, the right of an employer to a profit is subsumed to the needs of their workers to the extent that all will be hired so that all can be paid. Perhaps the ultimate symbol of the 'new economics' of the kingdom is the 'last supper' which the church still enacts - a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in which all partake equally while affirming their interdependence as members of 'the one body'.

Scripture also provides powerful visions of communities where all enjoy an abundance of life and, all having a stake in society, live together in peace and harmony. The challenge is how we draw upon these resources with respect to our contemporary situation. Clearly, we cannot take economic principles emanating from ancient nomadic communities and just apply them, but we can draw broad principles from Scripture, for example, that governments should act in the common interest and economies serve *all* in a community.

*God's concern is that
no one will be in need
(Deuteronomy 15:4)*

The recession is devastating the lives of millions through the loss of a job, savings, pension or property. As usual, it is the people already at the bottom who are suffering the most. The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services has reported steep rises this year in benefit claims, demand for food parcels, evictions due to unpaid rent and requests for budgeting advice, and it's hard not to link this to the recession. Māori and Pacific people are being hit harder than most. The World Bank's forecast that an extra 53 million people in developing countries will be trapped in poverty this year alone, many of them children who will not live to see adulthood, makes truly horrific reading.

In the light of this it is not surprising that many are calling for wholesale change to the global economic system. What might this mean? I suggest any change must start with a reformation in our own behaviour and attitudes. Much anger has been directed at 'greedy bankers' in this episode, but all of us who have benefited from the way the system has operated must also share some responsibility for what has happened. One word so far missing from discourse around this crisis is 'sorry'; and while the Christian term 'metanoia' may be useful here, incorporating a radical change of heart rooted in a spirit of repentance, it is a requirement of all of us. Massive, unprecedented borrowing was also a driver in the crisis - and, again, it was just as much our passion to own what we could not afford that was to blame as the behaviour of those facilitating that borrowing.

Another factor is the spirit of 'autonomy' that has pervaded Western culture, the attitude, as Walter Brueggemann puts it,

that 'understands the market as a place for self-advancement at the expense of others who are perceived either as rivals and competitors or as usable commodities.' Where such 'individualism' obtains, any sense of 'communitarian connectedness' disappears. At the heart of the crisis was a breakdown in relationships, particularly those based on trust between banks and customers, lenders and borrowers.

So how might 'theology' contribute to a debate about the sort of economy we should have the other side of this crisis? It is clear that fresh thinking is needed, and theology can help take us beyond the superficial and prompt deeper questions about values, human nature and the purpose of market activity.

First, we might draw attention to research linking wealth and happiness and ask whether 'economic growth', without any obvious overarching social purpose, is the best index of market success. Surveys show that, while for people in poverty happiness improves with higher income, once basic needs are met, getting richer increases quality of life hardly at all.

It is clear that fresh thinking is needed, and theology can help take us beyond the superficial and prompt deeper questions.

Accumulating money and goods actually decreases happiness and increases anxiety - something Scripture also tells us with its affirmation that we cannot live on bread alone, exhortation not to lay up

treasure on earth, and admonition not to spend money on that which cannot satisfy.

So by framing the debate in terms of how our economy could further 'human flourishing', we could focus less on what we 'lack' and more on what we can share. Malcolm Irwin of the Salvation Army has recently spoken about a 'theology of enough', highlighting how, while all

around we hear the despairing language of loss and scarcity, we should recover the biblical emphasis on discovering what we already have and how we can share it. Irwin describes the economic plea in Jesus' prayer, 'give us each day our daily bread', as 'a confession of confidence in the 'enough' of the gift-giving economy of God and our connection to and (inter) dependency on others. It is not only my bread that I'm praying to get; it is intentionally our bread that we seek together.' This passage also recalls the provision of manna in the wilderness, and lies behind the contrast Jesus draws elsewhere between serving 'mammon' - being focused entirely on accumulating material goods - and serving the God who supplies our daily needs.

Then we could look at debt, which today is simply a fact of life - most of us have mortgages and credit cards, countries have national debts. In some contexts debt can have a positive dimension - for example, micro-enterprise in developing countries or credit unions - but the Bible generally views it as something to be avoided. As we sadly observe the lives of many in our communities collapse under the weight of unsustainable debts and mortgages we might consider the value of a fresh debate around this question.

We must also consider the wellbeing of our children in today's consumer-driven society. A UNICEF survey in 2007 found children in many developed countries to be in poor health, unable to maintain loving relationships and suffering from feelings of insecurity. The environmental consequences of our economic behaviour are also important. Instead of constantly worrying about devouring ever more of the earth's resources, we need to focus

on how to live *sustainably*. We know that the planet cannot sustain growth at the current rate, yet we are not cutting back on our own consumption, nor taking seriously exciting new ideas like 'biomimicry', which explore changes to technology so that our resource-use can *replenish* rather than deplete the ecosystem.

To achieve change will require a transformation of hearts and minds, which is why we should see our crisis as spiritual as much as economic.

We need a fresh vision capable of inspiring us to create a better society, one in which all can know 'life in all its fulness'. We need to rediscover how the economy can work for all, not just a few. In Scripture the whole point of economic arrangements is to build up and sustain communities - hence the Jubilee sought to prevent the rich benefiting permanently from the misfortunes of the poor, and slaves becoming locked into their position. Elsewhere in Scripture it is when they confront economic activity that threatens the welfare of the community that the prophets rail against those who cheat their customers and sell the needy for a pair of shoes. It is not that God is perceived to be against market activity or the need to make profit, but that profit be made justly and with sensitivity to the wider needs of the community.

To achieve change will require a transformation of hearts and minds, which is why we should see our crisis as spiritual as much as economic. Yet our gospel is one of hope - we believe despite the evidence then watch the evidence change, as Jim Wallis paraphrases Hebrews 11. The key to change is always 'political will', and for that to operate popular opinion must shift. And that can happen: for example, in the early 1990s few understood the connection between the debts poor countries were servicing and their poverty, yet within ten years

a movement based on the Jubilee idea had brought the issue to the attention of millions, including G8 leaders.

Finally, what practical measures can we take in response to the crisis? In addition to giving to those in need can our churches provide space for people to come together to tell their stories and meet with others in similar situations? Can we provide training or re-training for work and help people seeking work to link up with those able to offer jobs? Can we find voluntary work as a stop-gap measure to help people regain their dignity lost through redundancy or unemployment? Can we set up a credit union or other facility to help people and families cope with the worst effects of the crisis? Can we offer advice and counselling to people

weighed down with debt? Can we host 'poverty hearings', where people can tell their stories to those who have the power to make a difference? Can we organise prayer events to remember and support people affected in any way by the crisis? And can our churches become examples of where the radical economics of the kingdom actually operate?

I like Brueggemann's suggestion that this crisis is a moment ripe for a new 'exodus' from the rapacious, anxiety-producing system of Pharaoh, grounded in acquisitiveness, to the covenant of Sinai where God's ultimate commandment is, 'Thou shalt not covet'. The journey, I guess, will be no easier - or shorter - than the original exodus, but it is certainly no less urgent.



Eden Gardens marble sculpture - Life is Hope
(Photo: Andrew Dunn)

RECESSION AND SPIRITUAL REALITIES

Digby Wilkinson

Is there a recession? I haven't noticed. I'm still being paid. Petrol prices have gone down, interest rates are wonderfully low for a change, food prices aren't going up, it's been a great ski season and we've been beating the Wallabies. What recession?

I can still remember listening to reports from America about the demise of Fanny May and the apparent implications such a failure would have on the US economy. Yet, as with most news from that part of the world, it didn't feel as though it had any relevance to our own economic security being so far away from the land of the brave and free. However, over the coming months I watched with surprise as one finance company after another simply evaporated from New Zealand's financial landscape; taking with it a great deal of individual savings and security.

It's very easy to be an armchair observer and blame banks, personal greed, the government, capitalism or the evils of a global economy. Yet it's much more complex than that. Every country stricken with the recession has been so for different reasons. The outcomes might be the same, but the triggers are quite diverse. However it's been interesting to observe and attempt to understand what goes on in the psycho-spiritual experience of the ordinary New Zealander that leads us to live the way we do. Through my study of moral philosophy over a number of years now I have decided that the following statement holds true, "As we live, so we believe". I'll return to this later.

I have a friend who is a monetary legal consultant. I was discussing with her the psychology of New Zealand investors and why so many people place their money and hopes in high-risk ventures. Among her many interesting observations, the one that stood out was a cultural ideology that is based in our very short history as a nation. The fact is we're not very mature. Certainly we like to make a splash on the global stage (and we do) but as individuals and communities we are still growing up. And, like most children, we have a very short view of time; everything must happen quickly, including making money and appearing to be successful. This is seen most clearly in attitudes toward Superannuation funds and the low interest they provide. Yet in most cases Superannuation funds are managed carefully and conservatively over a very long period of time. The rewards are

It's one thing to believe in God, but it's quite another to trust God.

not immediate but appear after the long years of surviving the inevitable rises and falls of national economies.

Yet what drives us toward investment in the first place? This is where we make a departure from money alone. Despite the media's obsession with the stock market, we have other investments that seem to fly under the radar. Financial recession often has the unintended effect of facing us up to the invisible yet more damaging investments we have been making. As we believe, so we live.

Throughout my own somewhat turbulent life I have come to realise that much of what I believe is largely irrelevant. I say this not because those beliefs are unimportant, but rather they often make little difference to my daily life or future hopes. It's one thing to believe in God, but it's quite another to trust God. There is a

long chasm between believing in prayer and praying.

About seven years ago I was found out. My internal and external world separated so far that my sins eventually crushed me - and did so very publicly. Over and again well-meaning people would comfortingly say, "we're all sinners" and I think they genuinely believed it. However, the statement is only a doctrine when it hasn't been tested. On one especially frustrating occasion I responded by saying, "That's true. You know mine, now tell me about yours". There was only silence. Theological sinners are no more aware of the power of sin than they are of the power of forgiveness and grace. They are good beliefs, but they can be entirely powerless without experiencing them first hand.

In the same way, trust in God is little more than a platitude when it is not our lived reality. To get around this personally I simply apply a modest amount of existential altruism to the term "trust" making it little more than an unobservable depth that flows through everything I do. However, I don't buy that anymore.

I think faith is the engine room of belief. In certain circumstances I am confronted by my beliefs. What will I do with them? It's also in these times that I discover my conflicting beliefs.

If we remove God from the recession equation then we might say that it's not our beliefs that come under scrutiny but rather our values. What we think we value in times of security and provision are often turned on their head when trouble strikes. The question is, why?

The philosopher Aristotle was probably the most famous student of Plato in the

4th century BCE. Aristotle, like many after him, considered what the deepest human need might be. At the risk of over simplifying him, he claimed that it was essentially happiness. However, by happiness he meant more than a mere 30 second feeling of euphoria or laughter or lightness. To give the meaning more depth he referred to "Eudemonia" which he took to mean, "flourishing".¹ That is, in all areas of life people are growing and developing, not shrinking or devolving. It is a life in full grip of reality and not swayed by untruths or artificiality. Of course this led him to claim that the flourishing life could only be achieved by developing a character that was formed by living certain virtues: Courage, Temperance, Generosity, Friendship and Magnanimity.

What we think we value in times of security and provision are often turned on their head when trouble strikes.

Aristotle submitted that we couldn't learn or live these virtues on our own. We need a guide, a kind of moral example, a person whom we can emulate in order to

achieve the flourishing we want to experience.² So you can see how philosophical thought hinted at the same human need that Jesus taught throughout the Gospels.

Many years ago I learned Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount by heart. In Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus lists what have become known as the Beatitudes. The description has its roots in early catholic tradition. The Latin root means "happy", but as with "Eudemonia" its meaning is essentially the "blessed" or "flourishing"

¹ Pojman, Louis P. *Ethical Theory : Classical and Contemporary Readings*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co, 2002. Pg. 333ff

² Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terrance Erwin. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985.

life. Blessedness is a state, not a goal. It's not something to be achieved but is rather a symptom; it's a place that we find ourselves as a result of something else. Certainly all eight beatitudes are worth reflection, but the two that sit with me most as I reflect on my own responses to social and financial difficulty, are the first and third.

Over the years I have struggled to understand what "poor in spirit" means. I think Eugene Petersen's Message interpretation is pretty good, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your

rope. With less of you, there is more of God and his rule." I'm not very good at being at the end of my rope or out of control. It means relinquishing personal power and exercising my belief that God is trustworthy despite his intangibility. I have been through unemployment, financial chaos and personal disaster. In those times God has been a trustworthy anchor. Likewise, I have experienced great encouragement, financial security and personal well being, in those times I have rarely needed to acknowledge my need of God as central to life. So the question remains, "How do we remain in need of God in all circumstances and find ourselves blessed?"

I guess I have discovered the need for two things. First, unlearning old habits and ways of seeing the world. This has meant coming to terms with the idea that what I think I know about life and the world is probably more damaging than what I don't know. Second, I need time for contemplation. I need God space to understand who I can be rather than settling for what I have become. Abram was asked by God to let of his identity in order to discover who he could be in

the hands of God. In doing so he became Abraham. Likewise, Abram's wife, Sarai, was asked to let go of her limited understanding to discover a new identity full of potential called, Sarah.

Unlearning only happens through contemplation, its symptom is a kind of ongoing spiritual rebirth that Jesus described to Nicodemus in John 3. Contemplation in this sense is not introspection that seeks to discover our true selves, but rather we discover God in our time.³ In doing so we see our reality anew - we get God's angle in an ever-changing environment.

I need time for contemplation. I need God space to understand who I can be rather than settling for what I have become.

It follows then, that the practice of unlearning through regular contemplation alters our view of recession. It by no means devalues the struggle that financial depression brings, but it does provide the gift of a new perspective on the world and our place in it. Any kind of recession forces the Christian to face their belief "to seek first the Kingdom of heaven"⁴ because our God knows our needs and will provide for them. We need God.

The third beatitude always worried me, "Blessed are the meek". Again, Petersen puts it well, "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are - no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought."

Meekness is a strange word. It conjures an image of a spineless body that flops around, or a doormat over which everyone walks. We know it means none

³ Wicks, Robert. Touching the Holy. Note Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992.

⁴ Matt 6:33

of these things, but there must be a more helpful word. I like Clarence Jordan's, "tamed".⁵ Blessed are those who are "tamed". It means that my will, which is powerful and strong, subverts itself to the will of God. It means that I am wild and not spineless. It means that I have energy and power. I am not coerced into God's blessedness - I am a willing participant. Meekness is not rubbery and compliant; it is the end of great courage.

Yet to be tamed requires understanding what aspects of our lives need the transforming initiative of God. Again it cycles back to contemplation that in turn revisits our need of God or "poverty of spirit".

All forms of recession can be both gift and curse. It would be trite to suggest that anyone likes them. As a curse, recession applies pressure to vulnerable aspects of our lives. As a gift, recession offers the opportunity to realign ourselves with God as provider and sustainer. Yet it needs to be remembered that recession comes in many forms, not just financial. Physical, emotional, spiritual and relational decline can be equally devastating, though not so global in their effect.

Furthermore, recession doesn't just realign our need for God; it also has the capacity to invigorate our own growth as individuals. In his book "Riding the Dragon" Robert Wicks portrays all challenges in life as dragons. As a Clinical Psychologist he makes the observation that most clients want only one thing: to slay their dragons and have their lives return to normality. However this rarely happens. Wicks

provides a counterintuitive approach to life's challenges as a spiritual directive. We're not called to slay our dragons, but rather learn to ride them.⁶ It sounds simple and enticing, yet a fundamental shift in imagining needs to occur. We need to put away the sword and embrace prayer and friends on a new and unpredictable journey of new learning.

I believe many things about life and God. Most of them are incomplete and some of them are quite irrelevant. However the ones that matter most are the ones I need to return to constantly without the motivation of a recession: my need for God and my desire to submit to God. As I live, so I believe.

Recession doesn't just realign our need for God; it also has the capacity to invigorate our own growth as individuals.

The Apostle Paul said, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:12-13) I haven't quite made it to that kind of certainty yet, but I'm further along that road. If anything, the recessions in my life have driven me closer to Christ and in doing so have made me more sensitive to God's presence and provision, for myself and others.

Attachments

Does my happiness depend on ... (the presence of another person, a particular event or circumstance or achievement) and is this starting to dominate my consciousness and sap all my energy? Am I starting to arrange my life around it?

Margaret Silf

⁵ Jordan, Clarence. Sermon on the Mount. Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1974.

ECONOMIC ELEPHANTS

Notes on a practical theology of enough

Malcolm Irwin

Elephants

The global economic crisis has hijacked our imaginations. It has filled our lounges and places of study and work with imagery of bankruptcy, bailouts, credit-defaults, credit-card debt, national debt, deflation, foreclosures, dropping indexes, investment fraud, toxic assets, evaporating retirement savings, fiscal responsibilities, liquidations, and redundancy, images that speak of what we don't have and of what we have to control, grasp, keep, protect and save if we hope to make it through the recession.¹

Walter Brueggemann captures the depressing mood and speak of our times:

"... the dominant text of our culture is despair... there are no new gifts to be given, and there is no Giver who might give new gifts. There is nothing more than management and distribution and redistribution, wars about distribution of land and oil and water, nor more gifts. Everything is limited and scarce, to be guarded and kept, to be confiscated and seized. It is so in the public domain of economics, not less so in the intimate world of human transactions and emotional need - not enough of love, a shortage of forgiveness, and finally a deprivation of grace in this age and in the age to come."²

¹ "Jobs and holding onto them is what everyone is talking about...", a byline from *Sunday*, 8.3.2009, TVNZ.

² Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes our World*.

It seems that everyone, everywhere is listening to and speaking this despairing language of crisis management, this language of grasping, loss and scarcity. There is less talk today of what we already have, less talk of *gratitude*, and even lesser talk of what we could redistribute or share. The future is finite, limited, and closed to surprise. Is there a large elephant at our dinner tables that we're ignoring?

Shane Claiborne comments: "I am convinced that God did not mess up and make too many people and not enough stuff. Poverty was not created by God but by you and me, because we have not learned to love our neighbors as ourselves. Gandhi put it well when he said, 'There is enough for everyone's need, but there is not enough for everyone's greed.' So I would suggest we need... a theology of enough."³

See the elephant? The elephant is that there is "enough", and if this economic crisis fuels a shift of our energies/interests from the over-consumption and over-production of desire to the meeting and sharing of need, then there is going to be "enough" in the future. It's the elephant that no one seems to be mentioning, or, for that matter, even seeing. Who has the courage to defy the depressing-speak of the economic crisis and talk of the "enough" we already have? What difference could the concept of "enough" make to the cyclic nature of our global/local/national financial markets? What difference could a practical theology of "enough" make to how we practise our faith? Is there a Scriptural mandate for living within and practising a story of "enough"?

³ Shane Claiborne, 2006, *The Irresistible Revolution*.

Elephants in Scripture

The concept of “enough” is a major thread of Scripture. We have only space for engaging with some of the images from the Creation and Exodus narratives.

The chronicles of Genesis start with God creating existence to be a “good gift that keeps on giving.” There is “enough” goodness for everyone and everything. The chronological flow of Genesis is then disrupted with the image of God deliberately interrupting His own cycle of creative labour and production with the practice of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is to be a corrective discipline that enables the fair distribution and just redistribution of “enough” goods for every living organism. It ensures that creation can continue to be “enough”, that creation can continue to be equally “good” everywhere. John Dominic Crossan comments on the divine intentions of the Sabbath:

“The seventh day was not a rest for worship but rest as worship. It was a day of equal rest for all – animals, slaves, children, and adults – a pause that reduced all to equality both symbolically and regularly. The Sabbath Day was about the just distribution of basic-rest-from-labour as symbol and reality of God’s own distributive justice... the Sabbath was about the justice of equality as the crown and climax of creation itself.”⁴

There is of course a danger in claiming that there is “enough” because “...it seems to let us off the hook about human responsibility and human work. If there

is “enough” and “God will solve all these issues, we need not work so hard at it. But that is the unavoidable risk of a faith grounded in radical grace.” (Brueggemann. *Using God’s Resources Wisely*).

And, then there is the danger that we could simply excuse (and with that, continue) our excessive consumption and destructive production with the same

*The concept of “enough”
is a major thread of
Scripture*

confidence that there is always going to be “enough.” The “enough” of God is a consequence of practising a mutual responsibility of redistributing and sharing resources, not the thought

that we have infinite or limitless resources. See the difference? Brian McLaren notes: “... the insanity of believing that growth – the consumption of ‘ever-more’ – is the solution to all problems must eventually become obvious even to those who currently defend it as orthodoxy.” He goes on to cite Herman Daly (1997, *Beyond Growth*): ‘One only need try to imagine 1.2 billion Chinese with automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines, and so on, to get a picture of the ecological consequences of generalizing advanced Northern resource consumption levels across the globe...’ (Brian McLaren, 2007, *Everything Must Change*). The concept and practice of “enough” is only possible if everyone shares some of the responsibility of evenly/equally redistributing resources, which is exactly what I think the Scriptures stress.

A little later in these chronicles of our Genesis, this same God is in the Garden of Eden giving the man gardening tips when He issues the solemn command of ‘thou shalt not eat:’

“The LORD GOD took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and

⁴ John Dominic Crossan, 2007, *God and Empire*; see too Ched Myers, 2002, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*. See Genesis 2.; Deut 5.14; Exodus 23.12.

to take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

(Genesis 2.15-16).

The command "you must not eat" curbs the excessive consumptive capacity of humanity. It curtails our greed. It is the image of God intentionally limiting our destruction and exploitation of His creation, our "indiscriminate devouring of the earth"⁵, and, in a graver echo of the Sabbath, it is God ensuring that there is a continuum of "enough" to sustain the life of everyone and everything, everywhere. It is the image of humanity caring for creation in/through "eating" and living from within the God-given limits of what is necessity and self-restraint.

Somewhat later in the Genesis chronicles, when decay, death, dis-ease and disorder have entered creation, there is a famine in the land,⁶ and a fearful Pharaoh, frightened that there is not going to be "enough" starts to control, "hoard", "manage the crisis", and monopolise what is a threatened food supply. The "enough" of the creation seems to be only a distant legend, a fanciful memory of the past. Anxiety and the fears of loss and scarcity now dominate the landscape and the narratives of people. The future looks contracted, closed. The Pharaoh anxiously embraces excessive cycles of over-consumption/over-production, greedy hoarding, and

hardnosed exploitation to "manage the crisis".⁷

He dictates to the Israelites: "Get back to your work!" and then drives them to produce without allowing them the materials to do their work well. (Exodus 5. 4-18).⁸

The empire of Egypt is on a downward spiral. Walter Brueggemann describes its final moments:

"By the end of Exodus, Pharaoh has been as mean, brutal and ugly as he knows how to be - and as the myth of scarcity tends to be. Finally he becomes so exasperated by his inability to control the people of Israel that he calls Moses and Aaron to come to him. Pharaoh tells them, 'Take your people and leave. Take your flocks and herds and just get out of here!' And then the great king of Egypt, who presides over a monopoly of the region's resources, asks Moses and Aaron to bless him.

The powers of scarcity admit to this little community of abundance, 'It is clear that you are the wave of the future. So before you leave, lay your powerful hands upon us and give us energy.' The text shows that the power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolise the world's resources; it

... *the myth of scarcity* ...

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes the World*.

⁶ Genesis 47.1-31.

⁷ I have to confess in the face of these texts I'm thinking that history has duplicated itself. Somewhat fascinatingly, though largely scary, the former Presidency of the United States encouraged its citizens to counter the terrorism of 9/11 by "shopping". See the similarities?

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes our World*. See too Eugene Peterson, 2005, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, for a good descriptive interpretation of the encounter between Pharaoh and Moses.

is in the hands of those who trust God's abundance."⁹

The Israelites exit Egypt. The narratives of the Exodus contest the exploitative excesses of Pharaoh with imagery of a gift-giving God who gifts Israel with a new freedom and with alternative liberating economic practices that continue to re-imagine the possibility of "enough". The Israelites were only days from Egypt when they were faced with a food crisis in the desert; they looked nostalgically at Egypt and started to long for the food chains and market supplies of the empire. There is a complaint, and the magical image of a gift-giving God who tirelessly listens. A miracle fell from the sky - more than "enough" manna for everyone:

"Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as they need...' The Israelites did what they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it... the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered just as much as they needed."

(Exodus 16. 15-17).

Walter Brueggemann comments:

"In that odd moment, (the Israelites) learned that when there is escape from Pharaoh's kingdom of scarcity into YHWH's generous zone of abundance, there is plenty for all - no famine, no scarcity, no rationing, no acquisitiveness, no anxiety, enough and more than enough. *Never mind that it was the wilderness; it was wilderness taken under the aegis of the creator God who gave plenty.* And all of

the contempt from Egypt is lifted in this moment of generous mercy (c.f. Ps.123.3-4). The contrast of scarce, anxious Egypt, and abundant wilderness could not be sharper. It is an elemental contrast for Israel as an experimental social revolution founded on a miracle."¹⁰

The gift of manna signalled the start of a new experimental community that would commit itself to the practice of "enough". The ensuing self-defining codes, commandments, laws, poverty relief and social policies of Israel inscribed in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy¹¹ were in essence something of a national experiment in countering the consumptive coveting, the excessive over-consumption and the fearful greedy over-production of Egypt.

The lessons were simple:

- There is "enough" when there is no coveted excessiveness.
- There is "enough" when we give up the place of control and place ourselves in a place of surprise, in the place where the "gift giving" of God is trusted.
- There is enough when consumption is not at the expense of others.
- There is "enough" when there is hospitality, when there is a generous making of space for others, when there is a mutual neighborliness.
- There is "enough" when people get prioritised prior to profit.
- There is "enough" when there is no objectification of people, when there

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ See Exodus 20.17; 21.1-36; 22.1-31; 23.1-13; Leviticus 25.1-54; Deuteronomy 5.1-32; 6.1-25; 7.11-26; 8.1-18; 15.1-18; 31.20.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, 1999, *The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity*, Christian Century, March 24-31, emphasis mine.

is no “reduction of relationships to market transactions.”¹²

- There is “enough” when everyone is imagined to be equal and no one is seen or treated like a thing that can be got, sold, traded or used.

The contrast with the economy of the empire of Pharaoh is stark:

“Pharaoh will have no Jubilee, no year of release, no debt cancellation, no Sabbath, only a process whereby the privileged work their privilege. But YHWH has defeated Pharaoh and Israel is YHWH’s social experiment to see if the economy can serve the community. The claim is clear and its implications for material practices of the community are clear enough. And so the Torah of Moses develops what is nearly a mantra of ‘widow, orphan, alien’, the marginalized and vulnerable, now valued, noticed, protected, entitled. Outside of this stringent costly provision, there is nothing but Pharaoh, nothing but anxiety, scarcity, and eventually fresh waves of bondage.”¹³

Enabling Enough.

There is within these Scriptural images of “enough” fuel and fodder that can help communities of faith champion that “there is enough” and that “there will be enough” for a “shared” future. We have to counter the despairing speak of “crisis management”, the current economic hype that is focusing only on *what* is with a championing of a public discourse on *what could be*. We have to engage in celebrating what we already have

(where is the evidence of grace and peace interrupting?), and in the same breath, we have to courageously point to how and where from within our own resources there could be a fairer distribution or redistribution of “goods” to ensure that everyone, everywhere has “enough” of the economic pie. We have to engage deliberately in a prophetic modeling and voicing of “enough”, in a practice of public re-visioning. What could this re-visioning look like where you’re at?

SOUL FOOD

Jane Hansen

The Prophets of Doom and Merchants of Gloom are
Preparing us for the worst;
Talking up the Global Credit Crisis and
Financial Disaster;
Taking us all down into
Recession and Depression;
Preying on our lack of faith and trust,
Stirring up old anxieties and
Feeding our fears.

And offering us what?
A counterfeit salvation in the guise of
Financial solutions, government assistance
and Bank bail-outs.

This is not a battle for jobs and wage packets,
For what ails us is not material deprivation.
In a land overflowing with milk and honey
We are suffering from spiritual starvation;
Hungry for that which will
Feed our souls, not our appetites.

Our nation is hurting.
No amount of money will heal it.
It is the repentance, forgiveness and
reconciliation
Jesus is offering that we crave –
Bread and wine,
Food for our souls.

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *ibid*.

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *ibid*. It is interesting to compare and contrast this “good” governance of the gift-giving God with the flawed management of the Kings of Israel (see 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings): God gifts “enough”; the Kings grasped and took “too much.”

THE CREED

Ian Christie

We believe in one Market, the Almighty,
Maker of heaven on Earth,
Of all that is, priced and branded,
True growth from true growth,
Of one being with the Economy,
From this, all value is added.

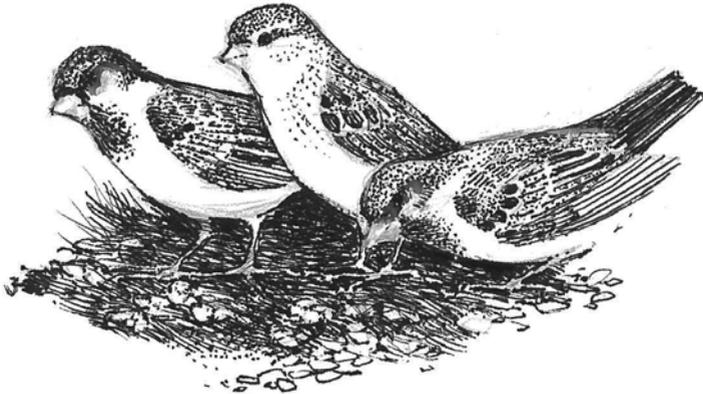
We believe in Deregulation, once and for
all,
The only way to prosperity.
For us and our salvation,
Reagan and Thatcher were elected
And were made gods.
In their decade they legislated
To take away our economic sins,
They were crucified by the Liberal Media,
But rose again, in accordance with their
manifestos.
They ascended in the polls
And are seated on the right hand of Milton
Friedman.

We believe in the Invisible Hand,
The giver of economic life.
It has spoken through our profits,
It proceeds from the Law of the
Deregulated Market,
And with the Market is worshipped and
glorified.

We believe in one Globalised Economy.
We believe in one key business driver
For the increase in Gross Domestic
Product.
We acknowledge one bottom line
For the measurement of wealth.
We look for the resurgence of executive
compensation packages
And the life of the financial years to come.

Amen

(Cited by Andrew Bradstock in his
Auckland University Lecture, July 2009)



Look at the birds of the air ...
Matthew 6:26



*I will pull down my barns and build larger ones ...
and say to my soul ... relax, eat, drink, be merry.
Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool, Luke 12:13-21.*

A Blessing

Let everything within you that can dance be danced;

Let everything within you that can sing be sung;

Let everything that can heal be healed;

Everything that can love be loved in return

So may it be for you

So may it be for me

So may it be for all of us

In Christ's name Amen

(ACSD Conference devotional - 2009)

THE SOCIAL FACTOR

Laurence Freeman OSB

Identity does not only depend on biochemistry. Through our work in and hopefully for the world, we form an identity over time that we call our role or “contribution”. Too often this becomes so demanding of our time and energy that we identify with it to the exclusion of all other sources of identity. We become our job, our status, what others see us as.

This exposes us to extraordinary spiritual danger. When the wheel of life and fortune spins and we lose this identity we can feel we have lost everything. Such a crisis, like all experience of loss, may indeed be an opportunity for recovering a better proximity to our “true self”. But this will depend on many factors, not least the love and support of others who, at the time of the crisis, know us better than we know ourselves. Otherwise the loss of this socio-economic ego identity can be so devastating that we never really recover from the sudden immersion in the feeling of uselessness and anonymity. We drown in a sense of failure and disappointment.

The present economic crisis has exposed many false things about defective identities like these that are constructed, most often, by the prosperous or deluded in the most successful parts of the western world. Not least among these exposures has been the difference between credit and wealth and the ineluctable connection between money and illusion. The consumer fantasy has been peddled above all to the poor proffering them false identities as prosperous, powerful, independent and capable of fulfilling their desires and whims. Like all fantasies, it had eventually to explode. Nevertheless, work and our service in the world is a meaningful aspect of our identity. Unemployment or

retirement can destabilise the harmony we need to maintain between the different spheres of our identity. Even mundane work which, for so many today, lacks nobility or grandeur, can nevertheless be a means of interacting with others in ways that benefit them.

Someone serving Big Macs or cleaning toilets in an airport all day may find this hard to believe. But the manner in which the job is done, and if the sense of personal dignity has not been eroded, may indeed make the world a better place if only for a while. In a world where so many experience their work as only a “job” and one for which they have no respect, the importance of personal spiritual work is even greater. A widespread perception exists that in a modern secular society “spirituality” is primarily a leisure interest of the middle class. In fact, as I visit meditators in our community in deprived parts of the world, I see the opposite. Many of those who are struggling economically or socially understand meditation more seriously than those who cannot “find time” to meditate because of their job-dominated lifestyle.

(WCCM Newsletter Vol. 33. No. 2. 2-3. Used with permission)

LEARNINGS IN CRISIS

Val Chapman

My child had been seriously ill for three years, my husband on an invalid’s benefit, two mortgages for a home in a low-income area, and a family of four to support. In prayer, I knew to pursue alternative treatments for my daughter, at half the cost of our benefit. Many, many times I was faced with whether to pay for food, power for the life-giving machine my daughter needed to be on, or the phone which we needed for the ambulance.

Where was God? In it, of course. I came off the benefit, worked seventy hours a week, cleaning, but coming home several times a day to take my child to the bathroom, doing pamphlet runs at 4am, anything to earn a living, but we still struggled financially despite living frugally. I had much pain from arthritis throughout my body, and was exhausted.

Recession. Yes, I know hard economic times, and God was faithful. He promises to provide, and does. In surrender, I let go into God. Did it matter that my daughter might die, that we might lose our home, or that I might be hungry, and that my days were often filled with tears from the physical pain of arthritis? In one sense, yes, but in another, does not God say He will take care of us? Is He not our loving Father? Could I trust when the odds were against me? Yes, of course I could.

After anguish, came letting go, came peace, then wordless trust. Sometimes though, I was still hungry, sometimes I thought my power would be cut off. Then, on occasion, food would turn up on my doorstep, or money left anonymously and there would be tears of gratitude to the Faithful One.

Just wordlessly, quietly learning to “be”, leaving everything in God’s hands. To contemplate in those small lonely hours of the morning the God of infinite love and compassion, was joy. What more did I need?

Do you know what, I got through – God carried me, and I would not have missed that special time. Gethsemane, the Cross, the resurrection. What an opportunity to live in relationship with God.

Let us learn from the recession, and not rant against it.



Jesus said, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ... Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

John 15:1-2

SHOPPING, DESIRE AND OUR DEEPEST SELVES

Paul Fromont

The Church is still struggling to express a vision for Christian desire and vocation that naturally integrates love for God within and through the raw, erotic earthiness of human longing...¹

“Advertising does not aim to reach our better selves, but our inner idiot.”²

Liquid Church and Shopping.

Andrew Butcher in a review³ of the Jamieson, McIntosh and Thompson co-authored book *Five Years On*, notes that:

“In New Zealand, Kevin Ward advocates the possibility of a “liquid church”, by which he means, a way of existence as followers of Christ which allows for flow and flexibility, which enables the construction of Christian identity outside of formal structures, which gives reign to spiritual desire rather than manufacturing need, and which invites participation instead of policing boundaries.”

This got me wondering about the place of desire, the activity of the Spirit, and how we might work better with both in the life of the church. Indeed, it seems particularly important in the midst of these challenging economic times, where the easy option is

to stay on the surface of things⁴ and thus to miss the deeper questions that are asked of us around desire and consumption. It seems important too, to think about the significance of desire in our work as spiritual directors and as churches.

Kevin Ward’s advocacy for a “liquid church”, if indeed that is what he is advocating, is drawn from Mike Riddell’s very useful essay, *Beyond Ground Zero: Resourcing Faith in a Postmodern Era* (2003)⁵, an essay that includes mention of another “Ward”; this time Pete Ward, who in agreeing with sociologist Zygmunt Bauman – “that shopping is the fundamental metaphor of identity formation in the present world” – suggests that churches should likewise be shaped around the metaphor and practice of shopping.⁶

“Liquid Church would reshape itself around worshippers as consumers. Spiritual life would recognise that shopping is the natural way of interaction with all aspects of life including the spiritual.”⁷

Welcoming and working with Desire

In this brief reflection then I’d like to attempt two things. Firstly, I’d like to encourage the rehabilitation of the importance of desire in our formation as Jesus-followers. And, secondly, I’m interested in encouraging churches to learn how to nourish and nurture the intrinsic human desire for identity, freedom,

¹ David Runcorn, *Choice, Desire and the Will of God*, London: SPCK, 2003, p. 99.

² Kathleen Norris in *The Secret Ingredient, in A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century: Where Do We Go From Here?* Edited by Patrick Hart. Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2006, p.44.

³ *Stimulus*, Nov. 2006.

⁴ And so for example, following 9/11, former President George Bush could advise American’s to recover from 9/11 by going shopping, and by taking vacations.

⁵ *Beyond Ground Zero: Resourcing Faith in a Post-Christian Era*, pp. 215-230 in *The Future of Christianity*, ed. J. Stenhouse, B. Knowles & A. Wood, Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004.

⁶ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church*, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

⁷ *Ibid.*

meaning, wholeness, community, and God.⁸

While recognizing that not all desire is life-giving or humanising⁹, churches have much to do if they are to be in a position to help people in this essential human quest. In rightly calling for new forms and ways of being church Pete Ward has implicitly highlighted the importance of desire, but runs a risk in having it partnered *uncritically* with consumption.¹⁰

In giving too much ground to consumption and consumerism we are easily distanced from our own inward realities and the deeper dimensions of freedom, hope and longing that reside there¹¹. It is these deeper places, more

than any other, that need our attention if we are to become more fully human, more whole, and increasingly alive and *free* after the example of Jesus.

James Joyce has written of one of his characters, that “Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body.” This provides a useful image by which we might begin to imagine what it is that contemporary consumerism encourages. It can and does encourage us to live at a distance not only from our deepest selves and others, but also at a distance from God who creates us for relationship. I think this point is underscored by a line of dialogue from the Wim Wenders film, *On the Wings of Desire*. One of the characters, a woman, is heard to say, “That’s what makes me clumsy, lack of desire.” One gets the sense that somehow a lack of desire, or perhaps better, the inability to recognise and name the deep desires in her life, means that she is less than who she should be or wants to be – she’s unbalanced and not fully present.

Sadly too, many churches seem clumsy in the ways they engage desire, and as a consequence end up simply feeding addiction, dysfunction, individualism and compulsion through their programmes and their approaches to worship¹². Churches which implicitly and thus uncritically embrace the practice of shopping as their organizing principle give too much to culture. They become sellers and distributors of ‘spirituality-lite’ goods and services, goods and services that largely leave untouched the deeper reaches of people’s lives – the places that are really crucial if “gospel” is to be

⁸ St. Augustine, “our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”

⁹ “Running through Ignatius of Loyola’s spirituality of desire is the quest for [holistic human] freedom from misplaced or superficial desires that imprison us (what he called ‘disordered attachments’) and an ever greater ability to centre authentic desire on God. Authentic desires arise from the essential self rather than immediate reactions to situations and experiences...” Philip Sheldrake, *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, pp. 231-233.

¹⁰ Since the publication of Ward’s *Liquid Church* he has now published *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (2008) which engages with gospel and its relationship to culture.

¹¹ Anne Wilson Schaefer in her book *When Society Becomes an Addict* notes (rather direly some might think), “when you are fully alive you are constantly saying “No” to many of the processes of society, the racism, the polluted environment, [materialism, violence etc]... Thus it is in the interests of society [to keep us “numb” by promoting] those things that take the edge off, keep us busy with our fixes, and keep us slightly numbed out... In this way our modern consumer society itself functions as an addict.” In reinforcing notions of human beings as “consumers” churches, in my view, only extend and reinforce what Schaefer calls human “numbness.”

¹² I’d recommend David E. Fitch’s book *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism and other Modern Maladies*.

**Enough - A Pataka, Maori food store at
Hamilton Gardens**
(Photo: Andrew Dunn)





received as “good news”, particularly in affluent Western contexts.

A church that simply sees “shoppers” sitting in its pews, or upon its chairs, runs the very real risk of dispensing a gospel that is no gospel at all, for none are freed, none receive new sight, none are healed, and none are raised to life (Lk. 4:18-19).

“In a culture of consumption, [churches too easily fall into the trap of presenting] the gospel [and spirituality as] ... consumer products to acquire...

Too many people come to church desiring comfortable and prosperous lives, and too many congregations respond with a gospel of [happiness] health and wealth that does not probe how those consumerist desires should be challenged and transformed by the Christian faith.¹³

Many too, within churches, struggle with the place of desire in Christian spirituality¹⁴, even though I would argue that our ability to discern, focus and work with desire lies near the heart of missiology and our formation as Jesus-followers. When we take desire seriously and work transformatively with it, we begin to touch and work with what is so often neglected and left untouched – the deepest self, the addicted, the dysfunctional, the compulsive, the broken, the creative, the life-giving, and the passionate within both our own lives and the lives of others. We would do well to learn how to work with and *nourish* what’s already

We are on dangerous ground when our self-image and our self-worth become dependent upon what we can afford to buy, what we own ...

happening beneath the surface of people’s lives, taking seriously the already present activity of God.

So, What Is Desire?

Desire, Philip Sheldrake observes, “is at the heart of all spirituality. It is an *energy* that powers spirituality”, a spirituality that *is* concerned with *how* people discern God’s invitations within desire and longing. Christian spirituality, he argues, embodies the sense that fundamental to what it means to be human is a deep restlessness that can only be satisfied in God¹⁵. Desire is a central reality in what Sheldrake calls “the human search for God, and God’s search for humanity.” Christian spirituality doesn’t just have a passing interest in desire, it *centers* on desire.

Sheldrake tells us “desire is best understood as our most honest experience of ourselves, in all our complexity and depth as we relate to people and things around us.” *Authentic* desire arises from

what Thomas Merton called our “true selves” rather than as hyper-stimulated responses to the “wants” encouraged by marketing and advertising. This kind of “shallow-consumption” most often only encourages our continuing dislocation from the authentic, the deep and the *real*.

Importantly for those working as spiritual directors and/or pastors, and thus intentionally with human desire, longing, and hope, Sheldrake puts his finger on the truth that “desire implies **incompleteness** because it speaks of what we are not, or do not have” (don’t marketers know that

¹³ Bryan Hollon, *St Benedict in the City*. © The Centre for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, 2006.

¹⁴ And to that degree we remain at the level of the superficial, or what Ignatius of Loyola calls ‘disordered attachments’.

¹⁵ Philip Sheldrake, *Desire in The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* edited by Philip Sheldrake, London: SCM, 2005, p. 231.

well?).¹⁶ It speaks to our sense of being broken but repairable. It speaks to our sense of being incomplete.

So when a church (and this is a wonderful opportunity for new, transitioning or emerging expressions of Church) works at deeper and more fundamental levels with human need, restlessness and longing, it creates the kinds of spaces where gospel and desire can be brought into life-giving conversation.

A Role for Spiritual Directors...?

I feel strongly that the help of spiritual directors and a more widespread practice of spiritual direction within church communities (whether individually or as group work) will help churches learn how to more fruitfully accompany and encourage people as they stretch and explore. It will help them nurture *in* people the confidence they need to look more deeply into their lives, their false-selves, their passions, fears, loves and anxieties; all the while trusting that when they do face these dimensions of their humanity they will find God inviting them onwards toward the perfection and full expression of all that is most deeply human about them.

Spiritual directors and direction will help churches learn how to honor the deeper places, the unspoken or unnoticed questions and absences that so many are seeking to answer and fill.¹⁷

¹⁶ Indeed, we are on dangerous ground when our self-image and our self-worth become dependent upon what we can afford to buy, what we own, the size of our house, the type of car we drive etc.

¹⁷ Isn't it interesting that a song like U2's *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For* still resonates so strongly with many people of a certain generation in the West?

“...Searching beneath anxiety, one will find fear. And beneath fear hurt will be discovered. Beneath the hurt will be guilt. Beneath the guilt lie rage and hatred. **But do not stop with this**, for beneath the rage lies frustrated desire. And, finally, beneath and beyond desire is love. In every feeling, look deeply. Explore without ceasing. At the bottom, love is...”¹⁸

The practices of Spiritual direction can help resource and encourage the use of the kinds of practices of discernment that will be required in churches that take seriously the place of desire and longing, and the work of the Spirit amongst them and beyond them. It will help us ask God, with St. Ignatius of Loyola, “for what we individually and communally long for and desire.”

Further exploration...?

How about trying Diarmuid O’Murchu’s recent book, *Transformation of Desire: How Desire Became Corrupted - and How We Can Reclaim It*.¹⁹

Also worth reading and reflecting on is William Cavanaugh’s excellent 2008 published book, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. And, *Blubberland: The Dangers of Happiness* by Australian-based Elizabeth Farrelly, published in 2007.

¹⁸ Gerald May.

¹⁹ Orbis Books, 2007, pp. 200.

“So now there remains
faith, hope and love, these three.”

And the central one is hope!

1 Cor. 13:13. Nicholas King translation)

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS, ECONOMICS, ETHICS, SPIRITUALITY

Robert Howell

There are two strands in my life that I bring together for this article. The first deals with the attempts with others from the Council for Socially Responsible Investment (CSRI) to bring socially responsible and environmentally sustainable investment to New Zealand. The second is the involvement as a co-author with a group of Quakers in the writing of the book *Right Relationship Building a Whole Earth Economy*. The conclusion: the ecological degradation that is facing the world is a result of a financial and economic system that is founded on unscientific and unethical principles. If we are to avoid the catastrophic impacts of environmental collapse, we need to substantially change not only the way we invest, but also our ethical and spiritual relationship with the planet.

CSRI

The modern SRI activities came out of the Vietnam War and the anti-apartheid and environmental movements of the 1970's and 1980's. The basic approach of SRI funds is to identify the social and environmental impacts of one's investment, and then get out of that investment (disinvest) or try and change the behaviour of the companies (engage). The most notable successful example is where USA funds dried up the money to South Africa, and this was a significant part in bringing an end to apartheid.

The Council for Socially Responsible Investment (CSRI) was established in 2003, and came out of a working group of the

Conference of Churches in New Zealand. At its 2005 conference it showed that the Crown Financial Institutions (CFIs) were investing in tobacco companies, and companies with unacceptable or questionable human rights behaviour or environmental impacts, such as Nike, Walmart, BJ Services (operating in Myanmar) and Exxon Mobil. There was no disinvestment and only very minimal engagement.

There have been some changes in the investment patterns of the CFIs since then. Some of the CFIs have divested from companies involved with cluster munitions, whale meat, tobacco, and the nuclear weapons industry. The Government in 2007, as part of its Kiwisaver scheme, encouraged SRI options to be developed. But to date the percentage of Kiwisaver funds in SRI funds, has been insignificant – estimated at less than 0.2%. Apart from the Kiwisaver SRI funds, the commercial sector, including banks, have minimal SRI activity. Some churches and some community trusts have SRI policies, but SRI activity in New Zealand is more notable by its absence.

In 2006 the CSRI Board set a goal of aiming to have SRI mainstream in New Zealand within five years. The Board has recognised now that this goal is unattainable. Even in Europe and the USA where SRI advocates have been working much longer (and with much greater resources), SRI investment has not advanced beyond 17% with the widest and most liberal definition of SRI (example: investors who ask that tobacco companies only be excluded from their investments and have no engagement, are counted as SRI). A more robust definition which addresses the need for a comprehensive understanding of ecological threats would probably lower

We need to substantially change not only the way we invest, but also our ethical and spiritual relationship with the planet.

this percentage to at least less than 5%. It is now clear that SRI will not be able to significantly contribute to a safe world within the necessary time span to avoid collapse of human society as we currently know it. The evidence indicates that under the Business-As-Usual (BAU) model, economic returns will always dominate so that even the very mainstream SRI goals will not be met.

The Economic Downturn and a Flawed and Corrupt Financial System

Part of the difficulty with the model that we have been advocating (with some success) is that it is based on an assumption that the way the financial sector works is fundamentally satisfactory and that all that is required is using a social and environmental impact assessment to avoid investment in certain types of economic activity, to engage with companies to encourage them to change their behaviour, and to invest in companies that have positive social and environmental impacts. We now believe that this model is inadequate.

Over the past few years or so, the international financial sector has been shown to have an overwhelmingly short-term focus based on economic returns. It is a complex, interdependent system prone to conflicts of interest, and fraud has been rampant in the sale of subprime mortgages. The pay system is geared to short-term gains. Bankers and fund managers stand accused of pocketing bonuses with no thought for the longer-term consequences of what they were doing. Although banks in New Zealand have been more robust than many overseas banks, other parts of the New Zealand financial sector have lost the confidence of many New Zealand investors for

similar reasons to those felt by investors in offshore securities. The key point from the CSRI viewpoint is that a large part of the financial sector (internationally and in New Zealand) has shown itself to be profoundly irresponsible in its core services to investors and society.

One response for CSRI is to support the calls for better regulation, in the belief that the current downturn is part of the usual business cycle of ups and downs, and that with improved regulation confidence with BAU can be restored in a year or so. While we believe that improved regulation is needed, we do not believe that it is sufficient. We believe a better risk and strategic analysis needs to be carried out to identify those factors that increase risk (which have been either ignored or poorly assessed by the financial sector), and to take steps to mitigate these for investors.

However, we now believe that our response should go much deeper than this. Part of our strategic review has involved working with *Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand* (SANZ) on scenarios for New Zealand that have involved identifying the major drivers of change that are an inevitable part of the world's future. This analysis shows that the usual business cycles are being overtaken by a complex sequence of global changes that will take human civilisation outside the range of prior experience in terms of the speed, the magnitude and irreversibility of change. The cyclic ups and downs of the market economy will be overtaken by abrupt and radical shifts with profound implications for people's investments and livelihoods.

Right Relationship - Building a Whole Earth Economy

While some aspects of these changes are very sobering, there are steps that can

We cannot assume that a growth economy will continue in the future.

be taken by investors to mitigate new and emerging risks, to assess new kinds of opportunity and to show a greater responsibility to a shared future. When this analysis is carried out, new strategies need to consider not just the social and environmental impact, but the way in which investors develop relationships with the companies they invest in. This is likely to mean a smaller number of companies; larger stakes; closer contact between the investor and the management; longer time commitments; a more regional or local, rather than a global view; and an adaptive rather than just a mitigative perspective. If the risk to investors is to increase through these complex global changes that will come, then the current role of banks and financial advisors, and the basic assumptions of pension schemes (and hence care for older people), will need to change. We can no longer assume that there will be enough profitable companies that can provide adequate returns for pensions in the new few decades and beyond. We cannot assume that a growth economy will continue in the future. Lord Stern has recently said that developed countries cannot have both a growth economy and a solution to climate change. Civil society should develop active strategies for the use of their money that is consistent with these factors and their organisational goals.

If we are to change our investments to save rather than destroy the planet, we need to more fundamentally change our ethics and our relationship with Earth. The current dominant ethics of global and New Zealand society are fundamentally opposed to the concept that human activity must lie within the constraints of the biosphere. The current financial and economic system relies on utilitarian and social contract principles, and need to be

replaced with such notions as ecological integrity, intrinsic value, equity, and community values.

There needs to be greater importance on non-material sources of happiness. The perceived linkage between economic growth, material possessions, and success, should be removed. Affirmation should be given to the deep interdependence of all people. The associated community values include a robust sense of mutual respect, fairness, cooperation, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, humility, courage, mutual aid, charity, confidence, trust, courtesy, integrity, loyalty, and respectful use of resources. The value of local community, with associated benefits of reduced environmental footprints and increased cooperation between people needs to be supported. Finally, nature should be valued intrinsically through knowing that human society and its political economy are integral and interdependent components of nature and the biosphere. Humans have reverence for nature and know that they are responsible for their impact on the integrity of all ecosystems in the biosphere. Ultimately these changes are spiritual in nature.

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FAITH-BASED INVESTING: DOING WELL AND DOING GOOD

Rodger Spiller

Just as our faith influences the way we raise our children, treat our neighbours, or select a career path, our faith can also influence the financial decisions we make – including the types of investments we choose. This is an issue for all New Zealanders with KiwiSaver or other investments, as well as churches.

Ethical investment grew naturally out of the desire to integrate the management of financial assets with beliefs. As early as 1760, John Wesley argued this link in a sermon *The Use of Money*. Wesley was a Christian and social reformer, and one of the first figures to speak out against the slave trade. He saw the role of the investor ‘not as a proprietor, but as a steward’ and went on to say:

“We may not engage or continue to engage in any sinful trade ... Therefore we may not sell anything which tends to impair health ... We may not gain by hurting our neighbour, by ministering either directly or indirectly, to intemperance.”

These principles are as relevant today as they were 250 years ago. In fact, when the UK Pensions Minister, Stephen Timms, outlined the British Socially Responsible (SRI) Investment regulations in 1999, he made reference to Wesley’s sermon on stewardship.

In the 1960s, when public opinion was ignited over the Vietnam War, the first SRI shareholder resolutions were filed by church groups and student bodies to Dow Chemical’s AGM, questioning their

involvement in the production of Agent Orange. And in the 1970s, the US Episcopal Church filed a shareholder resolution at General Motors’ AGM, calling for the company to withdraw from South Africa. This proposal led to coordinated efforts by religious groups and other investors concerned about social justice to use their combined resources to end apartheid.

More recently, in 2008, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a group of 300 religious institutional investors representing US\$100 billion, raised a successful resolution for the Ford Motor Company to commit to a 30% cut in emissions from new cars by 2020. There are many examples in Australia, New Zealand and around the world where religious investors have used their combined resources to bring about positive social change.

In 2006 the Christian Investors Forum (CIF) joined the Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA) – the peak body for responsible investment in Australia and New Zealand. Through the auspices of RIAA, CIF set about to establish a coordinated network of like-minded Christian organisations in the area of finance and investment. The Christian Investors Forum believe that good stewardship of financial resources includes the protection of the natural environment, achieving equality and social justice, and encouraging responsible business practices. In short, they believe their Christian values need to be reflected in their investments.

Environmental aspects of responsible investment

How can we protect the natural systems of our earth and provide for the basic needs of all God’s creatures? Corporations can have a positive impact in the environments in which they operate,

creating sustainable communities, opportunities for human development, health and prosperity, while working in harmony with God's creation. They also have the capacity to damage the natural world, deplete natural resources, exploit human rights, and produce harmful and destructive products. From global climate change to destruction of habitat and loss of biodiversity, every major ecosystem is under unprecedented stress from unsustainable human activity. The first people affected will be those with the least resources - the poor and the marginalised. Through our investments, we are connected to corporate activity and investors with a faith perspective can be seen as having a responsibility to manage all aspects of the financial resources with which they have been entrusted in accordance with God's call for faithful stewardship.

Social aspects of responsible investment

How can investors live out a mission of human dignity for all? In order to reduce labour costs and seek higher profits, some manufacturers and retailers produce the majority of their products - such as clothing, footwear, and toys - using suppliers based in developing countries. Responsible investment addresses concerns about

basic human rights, challenging wages that fall well below the poverty line, unhealthy working conditions, child labour, and forced overtime.

God calls us to live in harmony with creation, to work to achieve justice for all, and to be a voice for the voiceless. Investors can seek to fulfil their stewardship responsibilities by ensuring that the resources they manage reflect their faith and God's desires for their lives and our world.

Being Christian stewards implies that faith influences all aspects of one's life - including investment choices. In this pursuit, investors have the dual responsibility to seek justice and work for the benefit of the poor and oppressed, while providing for the economic needs of our families, churches and charitable institutions, so that we can all enjoy the benefits of God's gifts.

Governance aspects of responsible investment

How can we ensure that our money is supporting companies which share our values? Corporate governance is the system by which organisations are directed and controlled. It is the process by which a company's objectives are established, achieved and monitored. It is also about relationships and responsibilities between a company, the environment and society. The global financial crisis has demonstrated the extent to which greed and failures in corporate governance can affect everyone, playing out in widespread job losses, loan foreclosures, and business failures. When you invest your money in a corporation, you are providing the direct support that is needed for that company to carry out its activities and be profitable.

In turn, their profits become your profits. Making sure your investments are hand in glove with your mission is central to the principles of responsible investment, and critical for your reputation and operational integrity of your organisation.

Shareholder advocacy

Shareholder advocacy combines our voices as investors to leverage a call for responsible corporate policies and practices. Shareholders, as the owners of corporations, have a number of options

How can we ensure that our money is supporting companies which share our values?

- and the responsibility - to influence the behaviour of the companies in which they hold shares, and encourage more responsible levels of corporate citizenship. All investors have the opportunity to speak out on the issues which affect them, including through proxy voting and shareholder resolutions which can be brought to the company's annual general meeting. Working together, the Christian Investors Forum enables faith-based investors to play a greater role in active corporate engagement.

Supporting community investment

Community investment provides financial capital for economic development in communities that are often overlooked or excluded by traditional financial structures. Community banks, credit unions, and loan funds, along with other community-based businesses, build opportunities by helping to provide market-based jobs, housing and local services. Supporting community investing encourages the building of sustainable economies in communities where it is needed most.

Next Steps

You are encouraged to contemplate how you might use the strategies above to integrate your faith with your investments in order to do well and do good and then to take the next steps of ensuring alignment through responsible investment. Further information is available from RIAA www.responsibleinvestment.org, including how you can join RIAA and CIF as an individual or a religious organization and share this information with others so they too can make money and make a difference.

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LETTING GO AND THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY?

Sue Pickering

Gentle greens and freshness of blossoms are a welcome sign of spring, but I love autumn and the deep reds, the purest of yellows, and russet browns colouring the leaves waiting to let go their place on branch and stem.

As the leaves fall to the ground I wonder at the gentleness of this separation - instead of a direct fast fall and a heavy solid 'thunk' on landing, there is spiralling, wafting in the breeze, sideways floating lower and lower until the simple settling onto the earth. There is no evidence of reluctance to make this journey, no sign of resistance or clutching hold or gritted teeth clinging; instead there is responsiveness and release.

It's taken me years to begin to let go like these leaves. I don't know about you, but I like to hang on to things, to the familiar, to habits of behaviour, to people, to clothes, to food preferences, to ways of doing things including praying, to favourite ways of seeing God even if God is inviting me to discover 'more' of who God can be and what God can do.

If leaves let go so gently, why have I struggled and moaned and delayed - when I knew somewhere deep down that letting go was the best way, perhaps the only way, to settle into the Ground of all Being, to grow into the mind of Christ, into the love of the Father, into the wisdom and creativity of the Spirit?

Why? Because, to put it bluntly, I needed to 'hang on', to stay in control because then I felt less anxious about life.

- Just take a few minutes to consider your own attitude to 'letting go' or 'hanging on'.

What do you find easy to relinquish/release? What do you clutch tightly to yourself?

What are you anxious about/afraid of?

Being anxious and being Christian at the same time seems a contradiction. After all Scripture clearly says, 'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' [Philippians 4: 6]. In this verse, Paul was reminding us of the *ideal* way to respond to the 'downs' of life, but many of us find that, whether because of upbringing, life's circumstances, personality traits or habit, our response to the 'downs' of life is often to worry.

Jesus recognised how hard it is for human beings to live fully without fear or anxiety. He addressed this common struggle in Matthew Ch. 6:

²⁷ ... can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ...

³¹ ... do not worry, saying 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Instead of dwelling on all the difficulties of life - and at the time of writing that would include both the 'global' issues of fiscal

restraint, climate change and the risk of a swine flu pandemic, and the 'personal' issues such as keeping our children safe and our relationships alive, of keeping our jobs and our sense of humour and our health - Jesus clearly tells us that we are to 'strive first for the kingdom of God' - to live as he would live: knowing he was beloved of God and sharing that love with those he met, bringing hope and healing, challenging injustice, speaking against life-denying religion.

How do we get closer to the kingdom of God, that state and attitude of heart which sees the wonder and grace of God brought to life in the midst of our daily existence? It all starts with learning to let go *in the ordinary ups and downs of our lives*, as these two examples illustrate:

Fifteen years ago, when I was on retreat before being ordained, God revealed that I needed to repent of my habit of trying to make my mother happy. Her life had been difficult, her emotional needs high, her responses not always helpful to those around her, and for years I had been shaping my life according to what would please her. Now I was about to become, willingly, a priest in the Anglican church, and God knew that, in order to do this freely, I had to let go of my unhealthy pre-occupation with my mother's wellbeing. I had to let God fill her need instead of trying to do that myself. In the year that followed my ordination, I saw my mother being ministered to by her Brethren neighbour, and, through the love of a network of friends, coming to some peace within herself before she died. I had let go, got out of God's way and God had worked wonders in her life.

The second example is more recent. Because we live in a small provincial city without a

Jesus recognised how hard it is for human beings to live fully without fear or anxiety.

university, young people have to leave home in order to further their education. While our son, an only child, was excitedly getting ready for this adventure, I was agonising over what might go wrong, what trouble he might get into, who his friends might be and so on. I even wrote a poem about it, part of which included parents' 'worst nightmare' scenarios:

- What if this is the final letting go
- into the drunk driver's car
 - into the drug dealer's snare
 - into the terrorist's bomb
 - into the tidal wave's rush... ?

You can see the state I was in. Anyway, a week after we'd delivered him to the university hall of residence [with a broken leg - but that's another story] I was praying, pouring out all the fears that were festering in my mind and destroying my peace. Once I'd stopped talking to God and was still enough to listen, I heard the quiet words, 'All shall be well.' I knew these words - they were from the writings of Mother Julian of Norwich, a woman who, in the Middle Ages, listened daily to the cares of those who passed by her window; a woman who left us a written account of her meditations on visions which God gave to her over the course of twenty years. These particular words were like balm to my spirit. I let them wrap around my anxious mother's heart and felt at peace.

Was it just 'coincidence' that my son's next text message began, uncharacteristically, with the words, 'All is well...'? I don't think so. I think it was God's way of assuring me that my son was in good hands, God's hands. And so my trust in God was nurtured and I began to let go a little more.

- Reflect on your own circle of relationships, those which you can

celebrate and those which cause you anxiety. Bring both to prayer, particularly asking God to give you the grace to step back, to let go and trust that God is more than capable of meeting the needs of those you care about and your needs too.

Trusting God and letting go are two sides of the same coin. As we gain confidence in God, as we see the effects of our often small efforts at letting go, as we experience more of the love that God shows us in the life and person of Jesus, we come to know that we can bring anything - no matter

how silly or shameful - to God and that God will still love us. Although it may take a lifetime to come close to the saintly state of 'holding everything lightly', if we ask God to help us to

let go of whatever gets between us and God, then gradually:

- we will discover that we are becoming less attached to things, or to particular outcomes or ways of doing tasks;
- we will bring our anxious thoughts to God *as soon as we think* them, rather than 'entertaining' them or giving them space to magnify and undermine our faith;
- we will trust God more to work things out God's way, to sort out difficult priorities and timing;
- we will know deeply that God holds us in times of uncertainty, and
- we will truly believe that all whom we love are similarly held, always.

When we look at Jesus, we find a life lived in obedience to the Father, a life which demonstrated 'letting go' to its highest level. Think for example of the

Trusting God and letting go are two sides of the same coin.

temptation in the wilderness, in which Jesus lets go both of his human needs and his divine power, using the Word of God to counteract the accuser's subtle attacks.[Luke 4]. And in Gethsemane, Jesus chooses not to draw on the power available to him to escape inevitable death, saying to his disciples, ⁵³ "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled which say it must happen in this way?" [Matthew 26].

In Philippians 2, Paul holds out the goal of Christian living, inviting us to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" and in the next line describes what that looks like - the 'kenosis' or self-emptying love of Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

On that cross, Jesus, after an eternity of intimacy, let go of that most precious sense of communion with his Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [Mark 15: 34]

We are all called to be like Christ, but none of us is called to that ultimate level of relinquishment. We are simply called, day by day, faithfully, to let go of the little things that cause us worry or anxiety, to build up our trust in God who will not let us down and *will not let us go*.

(First published in *ALIVE*, Sydney: MediaInc. June/July edition 2009)

Luke 12:24 *Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count for much more.*

We can all spell recession
the new headline in many a paper
the newcomer in many a
conversation
hotly debated
fearfully considered
it looms large
in our world today

On our screens
we have new talking heads
speaking with such certainty
pontificating with such authority
you'd think they'd just come down
from the mountain with
figures and prophecies
from you, God

People panicked
as markets plummeted
and millions and trillions of
dollars, pounds, euros, yen
were wiped out
gone
finitoed

Heart ache for those
managing economies
of companies
or countries

Heart break for those
whose nest eggs
disappeared into thin air
leaving fear
ravaging their lives

ON SHOPPING MALLS

Andrew Dunn

We can go all of a twitter
scared we'll sink
further and further
into the bad old days
or we can look to you, God
the one who holds our days

What an opportunity
to choose to believe your word
to dare to dust off your promises
to climb from the morass
of shaky speculation
to the solidity
of your rock-likeness

You talk about ravens, Jesus
but lambs too come to mind
the picture of innocence
frolicking in the field
their mums quietly preparing
the next milkshakes

You long to see us
with the same spirit of trusting
of belief in your good intentions
your faithful loving
your total commitment
to our care
our future

You never change, God
You offer us a hand
to climb from
the awful pit of fear

To live instead
carefree in the care of God

Anna Johnstone

News that a new shopping mall was to be built in Albany raised my interest and some concerns a few years ago. The interest centred around the size of it and the number of shops to be provided. The concerns were practical. What would happen to our Post Office and the private boxes which were serving us well in the nearby Mega Centre? How could so many new businesses survive in such concentrated competition? What would happen to the nearby shops and food outlets? Would the tenants be well treated or dumped at the end of their lease with mortgages still to be paid off for the furnishings of their shops, as we saw happen to a young couple in a Christchurch mall at the end of their lease?

There were going to be outlets for goods not yet available near us so that was of interest. The promised movie theatres (8 of them) caught my interest too, as did the book shops (*Borders* with coffee while you browse!), the \$2.00 shops, and of course the anticipation of people watching! But nothing prepared me for the huge size of the mall, and the vast car parking. In one wing alone we counted 14 clothing shops when it opened!

Jim Eagles, *NZ Herald* Travel writer and editor, has a humorous take on shopping malls when he wrote recently (August 18, 2009) about being "trapped in the land of the giant shopping mall" in Hong Kong:

I still have nightmares when I think about it. I'm walking down an endless tunnel of brand-name shops and they all have sales on. There's no way out, nowhere to sit and passers-by are all looking at me warily because I seem to be the only person not carrying several shopping bags. Or maybe it's because they are cool,

poised and elegant while I am scruffy, sweaty, wild-eyed.

It's Harbour City, the biggest shopping mall in Hong Kong, covering 20ha and with 50 restaurants and 700 shops. Yes 700.

Before that there was the vast Times Square complex and the huge IFC Mall, and City Gate, a giant factory outlet, out on Lantau Island near Hong Kong Airport. Not to mention the antique stores of Hollywood Rd, the myriad boutiques of Causeway Bay, the countless small shops in Noho and Soho – linked by a 1km long outdoor elevator – and the madness of downtown Kowloon.

That represents at least 10 hours of walking air-conditioned marble halls lined with enticing display windows, or steamy narrow streets full of quaint little boutiques, all offering the latest fashions and all promising amazing bargains ... is it any wonder I have nightmares?

Well we haven't reached that point anywhere in New Zealand but the signs are here that bigger has to be better.

The cathedral-like architecture was another surprise.

So, was it designed to be a religious centre, a place of worship, devotion or prayer in a secular way? There's no doubt the cafes and food outlets, particularly the quiet ones tucked away from the noise of the crowds, do offer some quiet meditative pause, some fellowship with friend or family, some meeting with oneself in the pressured days. Perhaps the noisy "food hall" is a place of celebration and worship, or is everyone shouting just to be heard?

Yet, I often come away from there with a feeling that I've been in a temple of gloom and wonder why. Is it that it's such a lonely place with everyone going about their business with no verbal

or eye contact? Perhaps it's due to the manipulation of my basic imagery and symbolism that unsettles. The highly polished walls, the glaring lights and all the signage is far removed from the cathedrals of the bush where I'm most at home. So I went hunting on the Net to see how others see the current spate of malls. I've found two terms describing malls in religious language.

Modern malls, writes William Kowinski, are "Cathedrals of Consumption", deliberately designed with secular representations of religious symbolism. It's as if the architects know the power of transcendence (hence the cathedral likenesses), the winsomeness of warm atmosphere, the enticements of multi choice and new shopping experiences, the attraction of classier shopping than one is used to, and, of course, the attractions of crowds and busyness while doing the business of shopping or wandering through as so many seem to do.

The other sees malls as "Temples of Consumption – Shopping malls as secular cathedrals" (www.trinity.edu/mkearl/temples.html).

"... our argument is that the growth of the materialist ethos has changed the metaphor for the shopping place from the bazaar to the temple", write the authors. This shift now has to be housed in "new architectural space" that symbolically dramatizes this new meaning and fosters the focus on the ritual of consumption. This is as true here in New Zealand now as it has been in America and Asia for a long time.

The questions raised for me go something like this:

- In what ways does the spirituality of the malls actually nourish the

inhabitants and visitors, or diminish it by selling short on its enticements and apparent realities?

- How refreshing is the imagery and created atmosphere and what does it fulfil or replace?
- What does the displays of goods and the enticements to buy do to those who wander the corridors without the money to participate?
- In promoting the development of people as *homo consumericus*, people as rampant consumers, where will that take us; what will that make us into?

Finally, here are three quotes to aid reflection:

- “Consumerism is the equation of personal happiness with consumption and the purchase of material possessions.” *Wikipedia*.
- “‘Enoughism’ is the theory that there is a point where consumers possess everything they need, and by buying more it actually makes their life worse off. *Enoughism* emphasises less spending and more restraint in buying behaviour of consumers.” (*Wikipedia*). The term was first used by John Naish in his book *Enough: Breaking free from the world of more*. Hodder. 2008
- “The myth of unending consumption has taken the place of belief in life everlasting”. If Ivan Illich is correct in this assessment of western economic systems what can we do to challenge the myth and return to an adequate spiritual base for the future?

WHERE IS OUR HOPE?

Andrew Butcher

As the dark clouds of the economic recession have become all the more brooding and menacing, I’ve become increasingly aware of the impact on people I know. When the recession first began in the USA, I’d read about the rising unemployment in that country and the profoundly disabling effect it was having on Americans who were not only losing their jobs, but also their livelihoods, their homes and their marriages.

Now my friends, here in Aotearoa New Zealand, are facing those same disabling experiences. Without work, my friends are finding that putting food on the table is no longer something to be taken for granted. They are relying on the kindnesses of friend and stranger alike.

This uncertainty challenges the very things in which we hold our hope. The security we had once placed in a stable job, or a larger house, or even basically providing food for our families, has been found to be wanting. For many, what we thought was solid ground is instead a very rocky path. Where, then, is our hope?

Christian confession wants to say that our hope is in God. Propositionally, we may readily attest to that. But we can go beyond a propositional claim to a confession of faith. We read of God’s hope revealed to God’s people through Scripture: God giving a promise to Abram that he shall be the father of many nations, even though that promise took years to come to fruition; God leading the increasingly reluctant Israelites on their four-decade journey to the Promised Land; God ministering into Elijah’s despair: “speak through the earthquake, wind or fire, oh still small voice of calm”; God carrying David

through his orientation, disorientation and reorientation experiences of life where he comes to find a God is – and has always been – “a very present help in times of trouble”; God beside Paul imprisoned in Philippi so that Paul could invite his readers to rejoice in suffering, because suffering produces character and character, hope.

The hope that Scripture tells us about was a hope that was cruciform-shaped, formed in the heat of the fire, “the valley of the shadow”, the dark night of the soul. In these stories, hope is the light in a darkened room. The plaintive cry of the Lamentor expresses this darkness – and the light that’s revealed at its darkest point:

*I’ll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness,
the taste of ashes, the poison I’ve swallowed.
I remember it all – oh, how well I remember –
the feeling of hitting the bottom.
But there’s one other thing I remember,
and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:
God’s loyal love couldn’t have run out,
his merciful love couldn’t have dried up.
They’re created new every morning.
How great your faithfulness!
I’m sticking with God (I say it over and over).
He’s all I’ve got left.¹*

God meets us in the truth of our despair. When we have let go, God holds on. The hope of God is one in which God is present with us, alongside us in the darkened room. God promises “I will be with you”, to Abraham (Gen 26:3), Moses (Ex 3:21), Joshua (Josh 1:5), Gideon (Judges 5:17), Isaiah (Is 43:2) and to us, even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, we will not fear evil, he promises, for God is with us.

God does not promise us material security, or guarantee our safety from the ravages of a recession or any other trials which may come our way. The rain, Scripture tells us, falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous. Any hope we may want to place on a kind of faith

God meets us in the truth of our despair. When we have let go, God holds on. The hope of God is one in which God is present with us ... in the darkened room.

that claims otherwise, will be hope in a cruel illusion. The Christian hope, the hope revealed to us through Scripture, is a substantive and comprehensive hope: regardless of circumstances, in all situations, God will be with us. God will not be outside the room looking

in, not at a distance plotting a map, not as a General fighting a battle, not as a teacher grading our performance, not as a Judge critiquing us – but as a friend with us, even – especially – when all others have deserted us and we are alone. As New Zealand hymn writer Shirley Murray expresses it, “here is our hope, in the mystery of suffering is the heartbeat of love: love that will not let go”.

CARITAS IN VERITATE

2. Charity is the heart of the Church’s social doctrine. ... For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first [Encyclical Letter](#), “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God’s love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it*. Love is God’s greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope.

Benedict XVI

¹ Lamentations 3:19-24 The Message

GOD IS CONTAGIOUS

Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffman

It seems that the leaves have arrived overnight,
bare branches yielding to triumphant
green flag-waving babies.

I expect they whisper *Spring, Spring*,
across the city
in the dead of night, spreading like
wildfire.

On Earth Day we arm ourselves with
rubber-gloves and huge
garbage bags, and as we stoop and stoop
for the neighbourhood
trash, birds shout encouragement from
the tree-tops and a store-owner
leans admiringly and lazily against his
door jamb.

Can our holy trash-collecting stir him to
action?

Crocuses just know to arrive and who
decided anyway that
Dandelions are undesirable?

Their sunshine yellow rivals that of
buttercups.

Much talk about swine flu in the news;
Poor old Mexico chokes with
embarrassment. Is this God too?

I think so, although my view is probably
not a popular one.

I think God is contagious and we are the
scrub-nurses and doctors.

We have choices about our attitudes to
dandelions, and whether
or not we will celebrate each baby crocus
or leaf that shouts

hallelujah, after the long, dark winter.

We can prepare for the swine flu, and
pick up neighbourhood trash,
and as we walk through our days and our
neighbourhoods

we can spread hope along with the news
that God is contagious.

(SDI *Connections* August 2009 - used
with permission)

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.
They neither toil nor spin; yet even Solomon in
all his glory was not arrayed like these. Matthew
6:28*

Consider the lilies of the field. The real ones.
Jesus indicates that we have as much to learn
from them as from the angels in heaven
But the lilies also have something important
to say, not in words but in sheer presence.
In their naturalness and spontaneity, in their
receptivity to the breath of life, they embody
the heart of spirituality. They find God in
the present moment.

I think that this is what Emily Dickinson
has in mind when she remarked that the
only commandment she ever obeyed was
to consider the lilies. She rightly reminds
us that our deepest calling in life – the
greatest of Jesus' commandments – is not
to make money or become famous or have
a successful career. Rather it is to be open
to God in a distinctively human way, as are
lilies in their distinctively herbal way. It is to
consider and then imitate the lilies.

My subject, then, is lily imitation –
spirituality – in the age of consumerism. By
spirituality I mean *openness to God's breathing,
day by day and moment by moment, relative to
the circumstances at hand*. Understood in
this way, spirituality is not supernatural
or extraordinary, but deeply natural and
wholly ordinary. It can be embodied at
home and in the workplace, while alone and
with others, amid dishwashing and diaper
changing, laughing and crying, living and
dying. Indeed, spirituality can even be
present in boredom, if we are patient with
our boredom and do not think that we
must be excited all the time. Spirituality is
ordinary life itself, as obedient to the call of
the moment, as lived from a deeper Center.

Jay McDaniel. Excerpts from *Living from the
Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism*.
2000. From Grace Cathedral website.



*Entrance Foyer to Albany's Secular Cathedral
(Photo: Andrew Dunn)*

RECESSION ... THE WINTER FOR REFLECTION

Peter Sykes

Crisis? Recession? Poverty? Spirituality? Budgeting; raincoats; poor kids; cost; resilience; sustainability; hospitality; relationships; community; education; engagement; the end of consumer dreams. What in the world is happening around us?

The great thing about the world of the internet is the concept of keywords. Each word has a value and is a key to many doors. They allow us to stop and look at the ideas they connect with and the context; and they allow us to look anew at the connections; and they allow us to wander through a myriad of random connections looking for some insight.

As I sit and reflect on the keywords around us, and the discussions, and the solutions as we face a time of recession and hardship, I wonder whether we are hearing the stories of the people around us ... or we are creating them. In the midst of this I struggle to understand how to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly alongside others and with God.

Recessions allow us to look at the shadow side of our dreams. In the good times we don't usually stop to look at the cost and the sustainability of what we are doing. Sometimes we stop and reflect with a sense of guilt about wealth and the environment. Maybe that's the cycle of life. In most spiritual journeys there is a time and a place for everything. Just as we tend to be more introspective during winter and more expansive during summer, so we need to be more introspective during the cycles of recession.

However we don't always seek reflection ... often we seek a solution rather than looking deeper. Sometimes we seek the solution which removes the problem or issue from our sight, or at least relieves some of the tension. Sometimes we seek causes which allow us to avoid the reality that the present needs something done. With poverty and recession we sometimes end up with cosmetic responses ... I believe such responses as school lunches and raincoats are examples of these shallow solutions which we have recently seen applied to the "poor" children in Mangere, and elsewhere. In these responses we need to ask if we really want to make a difference ... or are we trying to salve our consciences or our sense of powerlessness?

I don't believe that we have addressed the issues of poverty or recession; nor do we confront when we can't cope - where our dreams are not being achieved, or the bubble bursts. The recession becomes an issue for society because it gives more people an opportunity to glimpse poverty. While poverty and recessions are a global and structural issue my focus is in the human face. While some strive for world peace I focus on the peace that comes when ordinary people can stand up and smile in the morning ... to themselves, their neighbours and their God.

As I reflect on the consequences of poverty and the recession my focus is not the hardship caused by it ... for many that is all too real; what concerns me is the lack of resilience to face the hardships. I live and work in a community which shows bright red in the deprivation scales, on all the SES scales of poverty and disadvantage [relatively for NZ anyway] but I have great difficulty in looking out my window

and seeing anyone with a sign on their head. People respond in different ways ... some lose hope and any sense that they can or should influence the community around them. Others put a smile on their face but a solid roof on their dreams. Others seek solace in addictive behaviours, some in 'faith', some in violence against others. Mental health and physical wellbeing are travelling companions with poverty and recession. But at the same time many get on with their lives and change what they can and build relationships with those around them.

While there are some great organisations and coalitions around e.g. Every Child Counts, summits on [anything]... my view is that they are working top down ... while we need them because we need people to make our structures just and real we also need people to walk with people ... to affirm their dreams ... and to be little beacons of hope.

Even though the *Mangere East Family Service Centre*, where I work, is a great place to work and is doing some exciting stuff, I still believe we need to go to another level before we will see real changes for our community. We really need a new paradigm of work. That level is at the footpath, and street, and home where everybody is. Once there, the task is to build resilience and community. And the exciting thing about that is that it is special and different and local. And anyone can do it. Organisations like mine are only there to support and provide a light.

Building resilience is about supporting a learning person. A person who is able - to grow and develop in the midst of whatever is happening; able to build relationships; adaptable; positive. In other words, a

person who can learn from everything around them. From my perspective our 'education' system is one institution [particularly at secondary level] which works against creating a learning person. A focus on curriculum and content misses the value of relationship and passion. Many of our children and young people are being disengaged as learners. They are being distanced from their passions and dreams. They are being labelled as dysfunctional and alienated. Often though, we have not listened to their story and understood the name they are called by.

It seems a long way from the issue of recession and poverty to resilience and community.

As we build the resilience of our people, we also need to build community. This is not stereotyped community but open and honest community; a resilient community where group stories are listened to. As we work towards an Auckland Council it becomes increasingly important that local living communities are gathered and recognised. These communities are the building blocks of society, of local government and our ability to be a nation.

It seems a long way from the issue of recession and poverty to resilience and community. History has shown we go through cycles of wellbeing and struggle - individually, collectively and nationally. But each time the cycle moves on we are reminded that the sun continues to come up, the tide continues to go out and come back, and the small weed continues to push its head up in our gardens.

For me the challenge is to take Micah 6:8 seriously ... so that my own journey is one of acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly alongside others and with God. Recession challenges each of us to reflect on our relationships, our resilience and our sustainable lifestyle.

CASTING THE SOCIALISTS OUT OF THE TEMPLE

Tapu Misa

An organisation called “Conservapedia” plans to rid the *Bible* of what it calls a liberal bias.

The folk at Conservapedia – the “conservative encyclopaedia you can trust” (unlike that apparent hotbed of liberalism Wikipedia) – have made a shocking discovery. The *Bible* is full of liberal bias.

Yes, you read that right: liberal bias.

Well, of course, Conservapedia’s creators appear to have homed in on a truth (though they of course call it “liberal distortion”) that the Marxists never got: the *Bible* is on the side of the poor and oppressed. It’s never been approving of the excesses of the rich and powerful.

Witness the 2000 or so verses in the *Bible* proclaiming concern for the poor and vulnerable: the widow, the stranger, “the least of these”.

The wealthy, on the other hand, have to work out how to get around the sobering message that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”.

Indeed, the *Bible’s* pages are suffused with social justice concerns and other dangerous liberal ideas, like human rights and egalitarianism. (If everyone is made in the image of God, then how can it be right to support economic systems that leave so many without the means to meet basic human needs?)

This is all very well if you’re a non-believer who thinks of the *Bible* as outdated and irrelevant, but somewhat problematic for a particular kind of conservative Christian who needs to believe that the inerrant word of God supports his belief in the free market, tax breaks for the wealthy, small government, big business, the death penalty and every utterance of talk radio and Fox News; but doesn’t believe in such liberal obsessions as universal healthcare for his neighbour (especially if it means putting his own at risk), or global warming.

Think former US President George W Bush, who had no problem with the contradictions between the principles of his faith and his self-interested interpretation of them.

The Conservative Bible would exclude what it calls the “later-inserted liberal passages that are not authentic”. Like the adulteress story... (John 8)

No matter, Conservapedia has a solution. It has launched the Conservative Bible Project to produce a “fully conservative” translation of the *Bible*, expunged of what it calls “liberal wordiness” (because liberals apparently use a “high word-to-substance ratio”), “gender inclusive” language and “socialistic words” like “comrade” and “labourer”. “Government”, it has decided, is a liberal word, whereas “volunteer” is a conservative one.

The Conservative Bible would exclude what it calls the “later-inserted liberal passages that are not authentic”. Like the adulteress story, in which Jesus saves an adulteress from the angry mob, with the words, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”.

The problem? “Liberals cite this passage to oppose the death penalty”, and that’s wrong apparently because the Mosaic laws “clearly stated death as a punishment for sin”.

Apparently, conservatives would have stoned the adulteress.

And, of course, the Conservative Bible would express "Free Market Parables; explaining the numerous economic parables with their full free-market meaning".

Or as American comedian Stephen Colbert quipped recently: "The *Bible* says Jesus fed the poor. It should say he fed the rich and let the loaves and fishes trickle down."

According to the earnest people at Conservapedia, the *Bible* is full of "socialistic terminology", which "improperly encourages the "social justice" movement among Christians".

Improperly? Well, there goes the basis for centuries of Catholic teaching on social justice and the idea of the common good.

Throughout the ages, the *Bible* has been used by the misguided, the insane and downright evil to justify all manner of injustice - including slavery, misogyny, war and racism.

That it should also be enlisted to prop up a right-wing economic agenda that flies in the face of Jesus' teachings on poverty and wealth shouldn't come as any great surprise.

Some commentators have labelled the project hubristic. It's certainly that, but I think Conservapedia has done us a service. By trying to rewrite the *Bible* in their own image, its creators have highlighted exactly what the Bible is not.

In his 2005 book, *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis writes that "when the poor are defended on moral or religious grounds, it is certainly not "class warfare", as the rich often charge, but rather a direct response to the overwhelming focus on the poor in the Scriptures, which claim they are regularly neglected, exploited and oppressed

by wealthy elites, political rulers and indifferent affluent populations".

Wallis says it's precisely because religion takes the problem of evil so seriously that we "must always be suspicious of too much concentrated power - politically and economically - either in totalitarian regimes or in huge multinational corporations that now have more wealth and power than many governments".

"It is indeed our theology of evil that makes us strong proponents of both political and economic democracy - not because people are so good, but because they often are not and need clear safeguards and strong systems of checks and balances to avoid the dangerous accumulation of power and wealth."

As last year's financial meltdown showed, this is as true now as when the *Bible* was first written.

(Article in *NZ Herald* 19 October 2009. Used with permission)

A WONDERFUL CONFERENCE

Margaret Smith

The Occasion:

Biennial Training event for the New Zealand Association of Christian Spiritual Directors.

The Venue:

Christchurch in her best spring behaviour - warm sunshine, blossoms, daffodils, soft green leaves on willows and a family of ducklings.

Bishop Julius halls offered comfortable accommodation, a delightful courtyard, access to Ilam Gardens, good food and helpful staff.

A traditional *Powhiri* and the singing of our conference song, "Maker of Mystery" set the scene for "Sap Rising," the theme that was to challenge and comfort us over the next two days.

"I am the real vine, and My Father is the gardener.

He breaks off every branch that does not bear fruit,

and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit,

so that it will be clean and bear more fruit."

Monty Williams, SJ, our first keynote speaker, teaches at Regis College in Toronto and is acclaimed world wide as a spiritual director and retreat leader.

He helped us explore the word "attention". "God desires us as we desire God," he taught us and led us on an ever deepening journey from longing to testing, glimpsing, finding, commitment and on to finding God and being found by God in all things. The path went on to emptiness, where nothing matters, to source, where everything matters. Finally, there is the sharing - living life from God's love. His second training session opened up the Beatitudes - again a journey. Monty presented them not as axioms but as a spiritual path of travellers, sharing the mission of Christ. Monty is a man of amazing intellect with a rich background of literature and theology, but was extraordinarily "ordinary" - humble and approachable - as, simply "Monty".

Rev Canon John Stewart is an Anglican priest and Director of *The Living Well Spirituality Centre* in Melbourne. He is a superb story-teller. He held us enthralled as he invited us into Harry Potter stories to discover valuable lessons as spiritual directors. His first address focussed on pruning - not only the dead wood of the

vine, dealing drastically, if necessary, with what is unhelpful, but also making clean the branches that will bear fruit. Pruning our practices to the bare essentials before bearing fruit was the last of the training event addresses. John reminded us to draw from the wisdom of our rich history of spiritual directors like Benedict, Ignatius, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. If you are able, do try to access his talks. Perhaps for all of us as spiritual directors - certainly for me - they are full of wise reminders of the do's and don't's of this privileged ministry.

How blessed we were with the graciousness, skills and deep knowledge of two special men of God!

A spontaneous and welcome addition to the programme was a fifteen minute silent space for reflection and prayer after each talk and before the Community Groups. These met to share how the talk had touched them, how truth was highlighted by the collective wisdom of the group and to bring any comments or questions to the "Conversation" with each presenter.

Lively, inclusive and thoughtful worship deepened our sense of community with one another and intimacy with God.

"Finding God at the movies" was enjoyable and provocative and "Creative Reflections" allowed for much nonsense and laughter.

Woven into and through each day - eating, sitting and walking together, relaxing and discussing - we relished the opportunities to connect and re-connect with other spiritual directors.

Gifts of *pounamu* were blessed and presented to Monty and John - the design evocative of the bond of love between us and our guest speakers, along with a safe homecoming for them.

SGM NEWS

As I write this in mid-November it feels anything but summer – hopefully that will have changed by the time you read this!

The passing of responsibility for the Formation Programme from Sue Pickering to Barbara McMillan has been wonderfully smooth. In no small measure this is thanks to good planning and preparatory work from Sue and to Barbara's hard work and great 'fit' for the role. Much of the transition has occurred in my absence during seven weeks holiday and sabbatical overseas. A special thank-you to David Crawley and other Workgroup members who took on extra responsibilities over that time.

As I have been involved in the final preparation of the 2010 Programme, I have again been impressed and am grateful for the breadth and depth of what is offered there. This represents a very significant contribution to Christian life and ministry in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As we see the place of churches, monasteries, retreat centres and other centres of spiritual life wax and wane, it is encouraging to see other means of sharing and nurturing spiritual life being made available.

Of course, behind the breadth and depth of what is offered, stand faithful people, pilgrims on a journey with God, who are able and willing to share something of their experience with others. Thank-you to all of you who contribute in this way.

This is not the time or place to write a travelogue of my time overseas. Suffice to say that it was wonderful! I am very grateful to Workgroup and others for their support in my taking time for holiday and sabbatical. A focus

question that has been with me all year has been, 'What sustains Christian leaders (ministers, monks and mystics) in ministry long term?' As I draw from the well of experience that has filled up during this time away that is a question that will be central to my reflection.

A significant development in the Formation Programme in 2010 is that the second years now have the option of continuing to base the supervised practice component of their work on formal one-to-one spiritual direction or to elect to follow a new, spiritual companioning stream, in which the supervised practice is broadened.

This broader context allows the participant to bring to supervision intentional companioning work that they do in contexts such as group spiritual formation, chaplaincy, community ministry etc. This recognises the established trend, internationally as well as in New Zealand, where a significant proportion of people who complete spiritual director formation do not continue to offer spiritual direction in traditional one-on-one settings.

As I close this edition of SGM News I draw attention to an opportunity being finalised as I write. Planning is underway for Susan Phillips to offer a one-day Workshop on the theme of Spiritual Thriving, in Auckland on March 3rd. Susan is executive director and professor at New College Berkeley and teaches spiritual direction at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Spiritual Directors International has recently published her book *Candlelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Check the website www.sgm.org.nz for the confirmation and details of this event.

Andrew Pritchard
November 2009

BOOKS REVIEWS

JESUS' PLAN FOR A NEW WORLD: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

**Richard Rohr with John Feister,
Cincinnati, Ohio;**

**St Anthony Messenger Press, 1996
175pp**

Reviewed by Sheila Pritchard

In the prologue Rohr says: "The secret to understanding the Sermon on the Mount is to understand what Jesus was about when he preached it. So this book is as much about getting ready to hear the Sermon as it is about the Sermon itself."

In Part One: Getting ready to hear Jesus, Rohr sets the scene by powerfully outlining the truly radical nature of Jesus and his message. I am amazed once again by how easily my own familiarity with the gospels can blunt their shock value and the power of what Jesus was really suggesting.

Rohr does an excellent job of undermining our complacency. He challenges the fact that rather than truly living and sharing the radical message of Jesus, we spend more time "converting or re-converting the people of God." The reason for that, he suggests, is that we don't really believe our own core message. The broad way as Rohr sees it is being conventional, correct, in control, doing it right and proud of it. Sadly this is what many Christians and churches aspire to. The narrow way is the way of humility - being honest in our weakness, forgiven and beloved in the core of our being with nothing to hide or protect. "When you are protecting your self image as a moral, superior or 'saved' person, you always lose the truth." p54

In Part Two: Understanding the Sermon Rohr suggests that the Sermon on the Mount is intended for committed disciples not "the crowds". The Beatitudes (or "Happy Attitudes" as Rohr calls them) are a radical challenge to follow "Jesus' plan for a new world". This is a truly liberated and liberating way to live. The final chapter: Bridges and Boundaries: Liberals and Conservatives covers the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Rohr says: "Here we have the balance Jesus strikes between what we call conservative and liberal. He holds onto the foundation and center of the old, while moving the boundaries out much further than anyone expected." If you'd like to live holding that tension as creatively as Jesus did, read this book prayerfully!

SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS

(2007. pp. 28) and

LONGING FOR THE ETERNAL

(2009. pp. 32)

**John Howell. Published by St Paul's
Union Church, Taupo.**

**Available from the publisher: [www.
stpaulstaupo.org.nz](http://www.stpaulstaupo.org.nz) -**

\$12.00 & \$17.00 respectively, posted.

Reviewed by Warren Deason

Don't let the physical slightness of these volumes fool you - they are deep enough to invite sustained periods of reflection and offer opportunity to linger long over phrases and images. Not surprisingly many of the images in the first of these volumes are crafted within the landscapes of height and depth - Tongariro National Park and Lake Taupo. These are the geographical features that dominate the setting of the parish where John Howell serves as Minister of the St Paul's Union Church.

As you ponder these reflections you become aware that the piety that incubated them is neither escapist nor individualistic, but rather one that is profoundly holistic and longs for a redeemed creation. It's that longing, a "sighing too deep for words", that is at the heart of prayer. Yet John does find words and metaphors - and crafts them with a simplicity and skill that is engaging. These words are companioned by beautiful photographs, both his own and those of local photographer, Albert Aanensen.

John's is a contemplative piety that seeks to discern the presence of the Holy One everywhere: "Signals of transcendence, beckoning, pointing, inviting, grounded in my daily experience." (To see the sacred way, p4)

The subtitle of the second of the two volumes, *Longing for the eternal: Prayers for spirit, community and sustainability*, is revealing. This trio of spirit, community and sustainability are so often neglected in our drive for material prosperity and our rampant consumerism. For John, the pursuit of such at the expense of a nurturing of spirit, is one of our society's besetting sins.

In order to survive as human community, we must pay attention to our inner life, the life of the spirit from which the values of justice, community, compassion and care for the whole creation arise. The inner journey needs to sustain the outer journey but the inner journey alone will lead to an irrelevant wistful terminus and needs the incarnation of our flesh and bones. There is wry humour here too - "Three big piggybanks went to market and found the sub prime house was straw. Those that funded them lived in drugged dreams, and even their golden parachutes twirled in the hot air." (A prayer about piggybanks, p8).

As one who experiences something of Churchill's "black dog", I also appreciated John's short mantras for beginning each day of the week:

"Living God, I know my stone will roll away. Strengthen my hope in new life." (Sunday - Prayers for the black dog).

In an interesting postscript to this review, some weeks ago I attended an evening seminar by John's twin brother, Dr Robert Howell, in a small Quaker meeting house in Mt Eden where he was speaking on, among other things, the Moral Economy project. This is a way of being and living as a society that attempts to evenly and equitably distribute economic wealth and responsibilities and takes account of the planet we live on and its resources and vulnerabilities. The voices of both these brothers are in harmony - as I remember Robert's lecture and mull over John's prayers, I immediately think of the biblical notion of shalom - wholeness, harmony, interconnectedness and the future redemption, not just of the human species, but also as Paul puts it, "of the whole creation groaning in travail awaiting its redemption."

Yes - prayer is a groaning, a longing a sighing... "that sigh is a feeling which invites the Spirit of God to connect with us in outreaching love" (*Sighs Too Deep For Words* - p2).

LEADING OUT OF WHO YOU ARE

Discovering the Secret of Undefended Leadership by Simon Walker.

Piquant Editions. 2007. pp 165

Reviewed by Andrew Dunn

Simon Walker has become a significant voice in the area of leadership and is the

founder of The Leadership Community and Human Ecology in the UK and is teaching faculty member at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University since 2003.

So far he has written three books on his discoveries that the safest and most satisfying form of leadership is what he calls "Undefended Leadership" with its freedoms and ease rather than manipulative and defended power. He cites numerous leaders of the "undefended" sort from Moses to Churchill and Gandhi, Gorbachev to Mandela.

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The inner character of the leader is revealed and written in large letters on the pages of history because unless she has defeated the inner demons, she will never defeat those outside. Her leadership is merely an expression of who she is inside. And that is what gives such leaders their power and their authority: their freedom to be themselves, to be authentic, to choose their own path." (Walker 9).

From a section on how leaders defend themselves and therefore distort their power, Walker, in Part 2, locates the roots of the "defended self" in the architecture of our egos. In Part 3 he begins to explore the secret of the undefended leader, and it makes fascinating reading.

Each aspect of Walker's teaching is illustrated with his drawings and there are study questions with each chapter.

While not specifically "Christian" books he does write from his own formation as a believer and Anglican priest, and I can sense the shadow of Jesus and his leadership style in the background as I read.

Books 2 and 3, "Leading with Nothing to Lose" and "Leading with Everything to Give" look equally valuable.

Simon Walker's books can be viewed and ordered online from www.piquanteditions.com or www.Amazon.com and at his own website - www.theleadershipcommunity.webeden.co.uk

RIBBONWOOD CALENDAR

12 images, 4 poems, a prayer resource and a perfect gift.

The design, images and poems are all done by Trish Harris

Cost: \$13.50 +pp (reduce to \$12.50 each for 5 or more.)

They can be purchased on line www.ribbonwooddesigns.co.nz

Reviewed by Maureen Lamb

We are all unique, spiritual beings and find different resources nourishing and helpful. For Trish Harris, creativity and spirituality are bedfellows and it is out of this intimate relationship that the Ribbonwood calendars were conceived, reverently held and safely delivered.

I first came across Trish's contemplative 'art' several years ago and was immediately attracted to both its simplicity and profundity. I have used them for personal prayer as well as sharing them on retreats and offering them as possible reflections to friends and in spiritual direction.

Art in its many forms holds an enormous appeal and enriches my own journey profoundly. Symbol and metaphor are doorways into the sacred. As such they have the ability to engage us at depth, if we are willing to sit with them and allow them to speak to our souls.

The images that illustrate the Ribbonwood calendars evolved out of Trish's willingness to share, some years ago now, something of her own exploration of the Feminine Faces of God. She had always enjoyed

creating things and playing with colour and form and yet the invitation to trust a blank page and let it express her heart was something new and scary. As a writer, her mind and words were precious treasures, so at first it was hard not to 'think' as she drew. Slowly she began to listen and notice what colour attracted her and to trust that whatever shape evolved, like a dream, it held a gift, however hidden. Sometimes a word or words encapsulated the image, sometimes the image alone was sufficient - words seemed superfluous.

Trish tentatively decided to share some of these images in the form of a small upright calendar. The idea was to give them away as gifts to friends. However, the feedback was such that the following year she decided to take the risk and cast her net wider. She is most excited when the images enable others to connect deeply with their own spiritual journey and possibly be part of a healing process as in spiritual direction.

Trish hopes to complete her Spiritual Director's training this year and offers the 2010 Ribbonwood Calendar as food for the journey. As a prayer 'com - panion' (one who shares bread) I gladly receive the gift of this bread and will seek to share it with other hungry pilgrims.

Bill Talen) and his "Church of Stop Shopping." Despite the terminology, dog collar and robed choir, this is not a church in any religious sense. It is a protest group, made up of performers and singers, with the main aim of confronting the North American obsession with consumerism. Having adopted the persona of an itinerant revivalist preacher, Reverend Billy takes his message and his choir into shopping malls, banks, corporations and even into Disney World. We watch as it dawns slowly on intrigued shoppers that what looks and sounds like a gospel message is in fact a plea to stop consumer madness, to cut up their credit cards and to think about the origins of the goods they buy.

A culture of insatiable materialism is highlighted by the film's focus on Christmas marketing and spending. This is, according to the byline, "The movie Santa doesn't want you to see!" Like the crusade it promotes, WWJB? is creative, zany and at the same time insightful and challenging. There are parallels to producer Morgan Spurlock's treatment of MacDonalds in *Supersize Me*. The excesses portrayed in both movies may be familiar stuff to American audiences, but I found them as disturbing as the film makers no doubt intended.

I first watched WWJB? in February of this year. Ongoing financial failures and the threat of recession were still dominating the news. Viewed in this context the film was doubly prophetic in its protests and warnings. Some of my puzzlement as to how the world's economies could have come so close to collapse was answered. I felt like I was watching the prequel to a more contemporary story: "Shopocalypse Now!"

FILM REVIEW

WHAT WOULD JESUS BUY?

A documentary directed by Rob Van Alkemade and produced by Morgan Spurlock.

2007. 91 minutes.

Reviewed by David Crawley

What Would Jesus Buy? features the self-styled "Reverend Billy" (real name

BOOKS

William T. Cavanaugh. *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. Eerdmans. 2008.

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Edward Dommen. *How Just Is the Market Economy?* Risk Book Series, WCC Pub. Geneva. 2003. pp 101.

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Rod Oram. *Re-inventing Paradise*. How NZ is starting to earn a bigger, sustainable living in the world economy. Penguin. 2007. pp 298.

E. F. Schumacher. *Small is Beautiful - Economics as if people mattered*. 25 years on from first publication, now including commentaries.

Robert G. Simmons. *Competing Gospels - Public Theology and Economic theory*. E. J. Dwyer. 1995. pp 231.

George Soros. *The Crash of 2008 and What it Means*. The new Paradigm for Financial Markets. Public Affairs New York. 2008. pp 258.

Diocese of Waikato, *Turning up the Volume*. A Recession Resource Pack 2009. Available from Waikato Diocese, Box 21, Hamilton 1240. Ph. 07 857-0020.

FILMS

What would Jesus Buy? A documentary directed by Rob Van Alkemade. 2007 91 minutes. (See above review).

Capitalism: a love story. A documentary written and directed by Michael Moore. 2009. 120 minutes. Now showing in cinemas in NZ.

WEBSITES

Caritas in Veritatae at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals

The UK Leadership Community website: www.theleadershipcommunity.org

CONTRIBUTORS

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Malcolm Irwin works for the Salvation Army's Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit, and lives in Auckland. His full paper can be found online at www.salvationarmy/socialpolicy

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Anna Johnstone, who is part of the Albany Presbyterian Church family, is working on her fourth book, *The Psalm Walk*, which she plans to publish in 2010 as an e-Book.

Maureen Lamb lives in Lower Hutt with her husband. she is very involved in Spiritual Direction, Mental Health chaplaincy and promoting the gift of contemplative spirituality.

Tapu Misa is an Auckland writer who contributes a weekly column to the New Zealand Herald's Monday edition.

Sue Pickering is an Anglican priest, spiritual director and writer. She is a long-standing member of the SGM Workgroup, and is a chaplain in a New Plymouth Rest Home.

Sheila Pritchard enjoys a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats, with seminars and some teaching, and enjoys walking.

Kathleen Rushton of Nga Whaea Atawhai Sisters of Mercy lives in Christchurch where she works in Scripture and Theology and has a particular interest in linking these to Spirituality.

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Peter Sykes is CEO of the Mangere East Family Service Centre and Deacon of Selwyn Anglican Church, Mangere East, Auckland.

Digby Wilkinson is senior pastor at Central Baptist Church, Palmerston North.

THE LUST FOR MONEY

These are things I want you to teach and preach. If you have leaders there who teach otherwise, who refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and this godly instruction, tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy, bad-mouthing, suspicious rumours. Eventually there's an epidemic of backstabbing, and truth is but a distant memory. They think religion is a way to make a fast buck.

A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that is enough.

But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.

RUNNING HARD

But you, Timothy, man of God; run for your life from all this. Pursue a righteous life – a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy. Run hard and fast in the faith. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to, the life you so fervently embraced in the presence of so many witnesses.

St Paul's instructions to Timothy,
1 Timothy 6 - *The Message*

Our thanks to all who have contributed to this issue of Refresh.

The theme of the next issue is storytelling and spirituality. We are looking for articles on the theory, practice and theology of storytelling and also stories of spirituality, spiritual growth and experiences of God and grace. Please email to The Editor, dunnzalbany@xtra.co.nz by April 30th for consideration.

*May the God of springtime
clothe us with a cloak of compassion
that we may give shade and warmth to others.
May our far-seeing God rest us
With deep, deep sleep
that we may prepare
for the coming season of fruitfulness
May the God of surprise and invitation
renew us with joy and hope.
Like sap rising, bursting, breaking through
that we may offer new strength and vitality to others.*

Barbara Sampson
Blessing at ACSD Conference 2009