

March 2008

JOURNEY

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Ministry in
the big wet

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An apology
without guilt

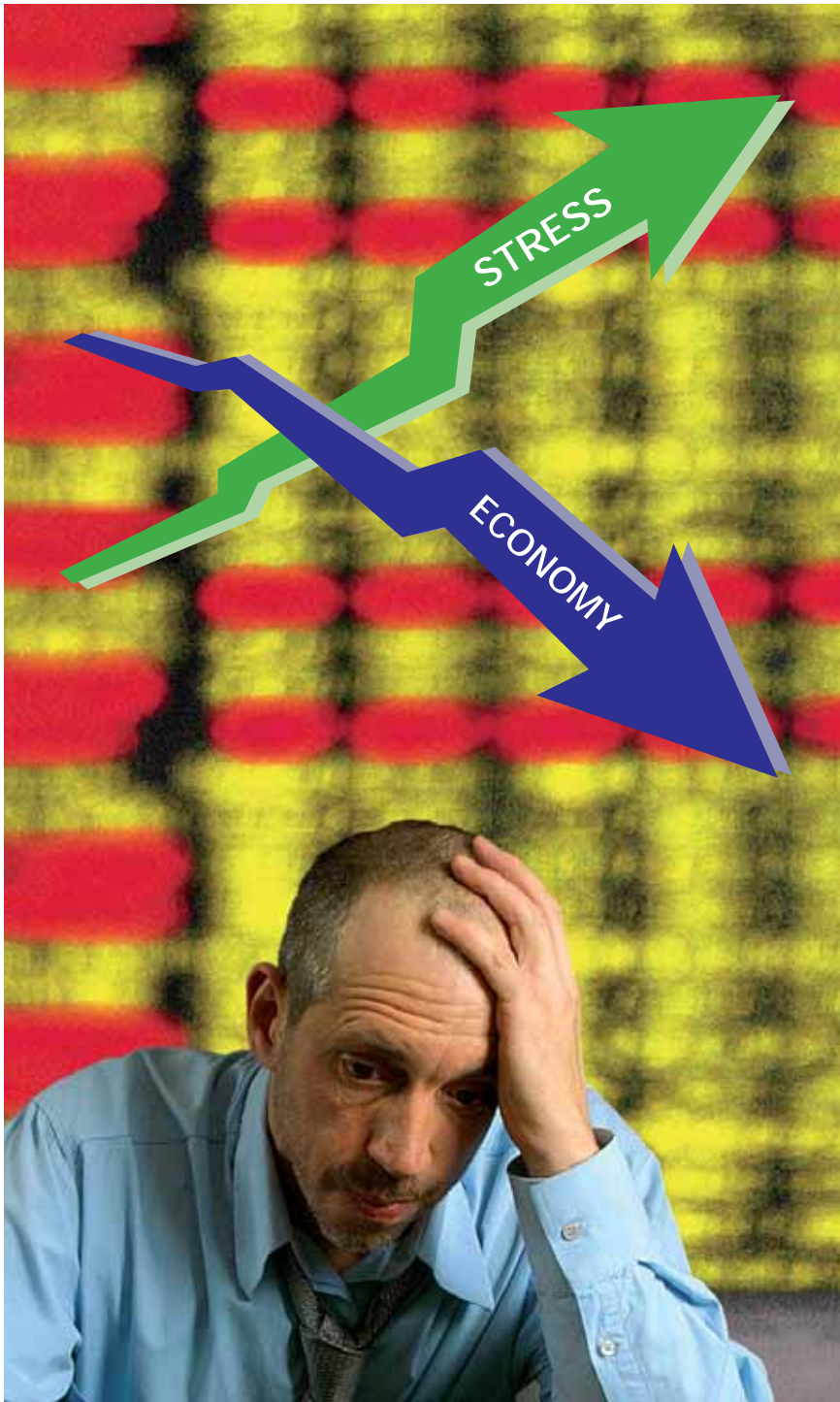
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Activist at
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IS THE ECONOMY STUPID?



By Bruce Mullan

NEWS ABOUT interest rates, exchange rates, gross national product, consumer price index, balance of trade, earnings forecasts, inflation rates, unemployment statistics and stock market prices is a constant presence in modern Australia.

What was once the nightly news, sport and weather report now includes a lengthy financial report.

Newspaper headlines feature front page speculation on fiscal matters with relentless enthusiasm and economic news is now available 24 hours a day thanks to the Sky News Business Channel which delivers Australian-made programming devoted to local and international markets and consumer finance.

On one hand we've never had it so good and on the other, anxiety levels are at an all time high with economic insecurity affecting individual well-being, personal identity and social behaviour.

What is at best incomplete science is shaping our lives and determining our future without much reference to biblical and theological considerations.

In the 1992 US presidential campaign when George Bush Snr was considered unbeatable, Bill Clinton's campaign strategist James Carville hung a sign in the Democrat campaign headquarters which said, "The economy, stupid".

The phrase pointed to the huge power the economy offered in terms of shaping the domestic political agenda and "It's the economy, stupid" has become a stock political catch phrase.

By focusing on the economy Clinton won an unwinable election, and fears about interest rates were hugely important in former Prime Minister John Howard's political success.

Elections are won and lost, fortunes made and forfeited, and stress and anxiety are heightened by the constant barrage of economic statistics from which there is no escape.

This month *Journey* asks, "Is the economy stupid?"

More about the economy

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Indebted to justice
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The economy of Grace

THE PARABLE in Luke 16:1-13 is usually entitled, "The Dishonest Manager".

This title is actually very unhelpful, because it encourages us to focus on the parable as an example of inappropriate human behaviour, rather than as a story that points us to a particular truth about the nature of God and how God acts.

In this story, the Manager is clearly described as unjust and dishonest, but there is no criticism of the Master.

In fact, he acted in a very even-handed and gracious manner. He could have had the Steward severely punished, or even imprisoned, but he chose only to dismiss him.

There had to be some consequence for the Manager's action, but the Master acted mercifully.

But the story is not over. As they say on TV, "There's more!"

The Manager may have been found out and dismissed, but he didn't stop thinking.

The same mind that had conjured up ways to cheat his Master, now went to work on his own personal predicament!

He remembered the power and prestige he had enjoyed in the community because of his important position.

He understood immediately that once his new status became public knowledge he would be shunned and rejected by those who had previously shown him respect.

He was also acutely aware that he was too old and no longer had the physical strength to get work as a manual labourer, and he was too proud to ask for help.

What was he to do?

Without wasting any time, and before news of his dismissal was passed around the community, he pretended that he was still the Manager, called in the tenants one by one, and gave all of them a substantial reduction in the



amount they had to contribute to the Master at the time of the next harvest!

This guy would have made a great political campaign manager!

He understood that a sure way to gain instant popularity was to reduce taxes!

The tenants thought he was acting on the authority of his Master, but he was actually writing his own life insurance policy!

He was confident that the gratitude of the tenants for what they thought was the generosity of the Master would flow over to him and he wouldn't have to worry about the future.

Now, this man wasn't stupid! He knew that he would be found out for a second time and taken back to the Master to face the consequences of his actions yet again.

He knew that he was taking a big risk and that this time the wrath of the Master might well descend on him. But he also knew the Master, and he knew that the Master was a merciful and compassionate man.

So, what about the Master?

When he found out that his former Manager had cheated him for a second time, he had a big decision to make.

With just a word he could have cancelled the new arrangements made by the Manager.

It would have been easy enough to do, and it would have been justified, but it would have left the

tenants feeling very disappointed and angry!

Or, he could allow the new taxes to stand, and therefore lose a proportion of his income, but enjoy the respect and gratitude of the people.

Not only did he accept the changes, he actually commended the Manager for his shrewdness in acting as he did!

Not because he had acted dishonestly, but because he had understood so well that the Master was a generous, compassionate and merciful man!

And that brings us to the whole point of the parable: the Manager was guilty twice, but he was saved!

He had entrusted himself to the mercy of the Master and that mercy was the source of his salvation and the key to his future life.

So this is a parable that points us to the God revealed in Christ – a God who is generous, compassionate and merciful.

This parable teaches us that true wisdom lies in the recognition that there is salvation in God alone – the salvation won for us in Christ.

We have to come to terms with, and learn to live wisely in relation to the economy, taxes, investments, savings, superannuation and life insurance.

But it's all pointless if we don't understand that in the final analysis we are totally dependent on the grace of God.

From the Editor

Let me tell you about the late Chief Timothy Koni.

In 1994, I visited the village of Gapae on the magnificent Marova Lagoon in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands.

Chief Timothy met us when we arrived: three white westerners who dared to intrude on the well-ordered life of his small village.

Few white people had stayed in the village previously and we were welcomed with incomparable hospitality.

These gracious people had constructed the most magnificent lavatory just for us to use during our brief three day visit.

Although chief of his village and of two larger neighbouring villages, Timothy Koni was a very poor man, even by local standards.

From my observation, he had only two sets of clothes and lived in what was arguably the most dilapidated dwelling in the community.

With no electricity, television, radio or telephone contact with the world beyond, he lived the simplest of lifestyles with minimal possessions and no access to social security.

Old and somewhat frail, Chief Timothy's prized possessions were his chiefly carved coral land ownership token, some medals from the Queen presented for his service as a sentinel during WWII, and his battered *Good News Bible* – he had been the pastor of his village.

"My father was a head-hunter (cannibal)," he told me, "But my mother was a Christian."

Each morning we would hear him calling for the "Australians".

Carrying a glass jug of freshly squeezed lime juice and three glasses, he would find us and offer the tantalisingly refreshing nectar he had prepared for us.

Standing in his old torn t-shirt and faded baggy shorts he would grin with pleasure as we eagerly consumed his gift.

I was learning that in my culture prestige and kudos in the community were gained by what you possessed and what you accumulated.

A big house, nice car, club membership, big bank account, overseas holidays – all say to others that we have wealth and status in Australian society.

In a village where there isn't even access to a fridge, accumulating "stuff" doesn't have the same attraction.

You might catch a wild pig but you can't eat it all in one sitting and you can't keep it for next week, so you invite your neighbours and friends around for a feast.

In Chief Timothy's village, status in the community was gained not by what you possessed, but by how much you gave away.

The blessing is in the giving, not the getting; the stature is in what you share, not what you own.

This was not some socialist ideal. I was living in the midst of an economic system I had read about in the scriptures.

Chief Timothy Koni taught me more about the God's economics than all the sermons I have listened to and all the books I have ever read.

Bruce Mullan

JOURNEY

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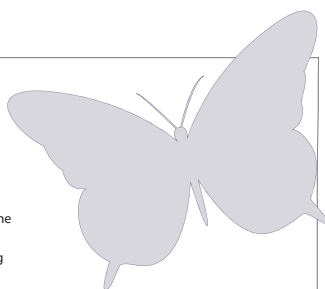
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Sign of the Times



WITH 77 Nursing Centres, 5290 residential beds, 1188 independent living units, 9847 staff and 3030 volunteers, BlueCare is one of Australia's largest providers of community care and supported living options.

This sign reminds the community and the church of the amazing amount of care provided by this important agency of the Uniting Church in Queensland.

David Weddell snapped this photo on the corner of Jephson Street and Moggill Road in Toowong late last year.

Send your Sign of the Times to journey@ucaqld.com.au.

Controversial Bishop to visit Brisbane

By Bruce Mullan

THE ONLY United Kingdom Church of England Bishop who in a 1997 poll could name all five members of the Spice Girls will deliver the Uniting Church's 2008 Rollie Busch lecture.

Rt Rev Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, who was ordained an Anglican priest in 1976, was consecrated as the first Bishop of Raiwind in Pakistan in 1984 – at the time, the youngest bishop in the Anglican Communion.

Fleeing the country of his birth when his life was endangered, the Pakistani born Bishop of Rochester has stirred recent controversy by suggesting that Islamic extremism has turned "already separate United Kingdom communities into 'no-go' areas" and claiming that there had been attempts to "impose an 'Islamic' character on certain areas".

Dr Nazir-Ali is currently receiving special protection and police are investigating phone calls threatening that he would be "sorted out" and would "not live long" if he continued to criticise Islam.

Citing the amplification of the call to prayer from mosques as an example, Bishop Nazir-Ali had asserted that "those of a different faith or race may find it difficult to live or work [in such areas] because of hostility to them".

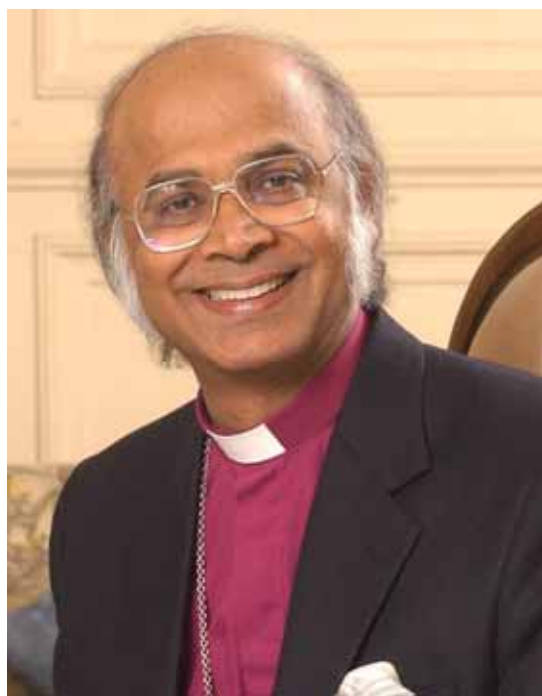
He criticised the government's integration policy proposing that "the best way for integrating newer arrivals should have been a Christian vision of hospitality and not the secular policy of multiculturalism."

Dr Nazir-Ali has been a prominent spokesman for engagement between Christianity and Islam and is President of the Network for Inter-faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion.

He has written several books on Christian-Muslim relations.

A member of the House of Lords, Dr Nazir-Ali was suggested as a possible Archbishop of Canterbury prior to the appointment of Rowan Williams.

The topic of his Rollie Busch Lecture will be "Conviction and conflict: Islam, Christianity and world order".



Controversial Bishop Rt Rev Dr Michael Nazir-Ali is the 2008 Rollie Busch Lecturer. Photo Courtesy of Dr Nazir-Ali

Bishop Nazir-Ali will deliver the 2008 Rollie Busch Lecture at Chermide-Kedron Uniting Church on Monday 31 March 2008 at 7.30pm.

Enquiries to Trinity Theological College on ph 3377 9958 or for more information visit www.trinity.qld.edu.au

Lay Preachers honoured

MR HARRY Thompson, former secretary of the Bremer Brisbane Presbytery and member of the Uniting Church congregation in Oxley, was awarded an Order of Australia (OAM) Medal in the 2008 Australia Day honours list

One of 473 people receiving awards, Mr Thompson was commended for service to the Uniting Church in Australia through administrative roles at local and state level, and to the community of Corinda.

A Elder in the Oxley congregation and Secretary for the Church Council, Mr Thompson has been an accredited lay preacher since 1966.

Another Uniting Church Lay Preacher, Mr Douglas Miller from the Camp Hill Uniting Church congregation, was also awarded an OAM.

Mr Miller has been a lay preacher for over 65 years and was honoured for service to the community through a range of amateur photographic and church organisations.

Clinical Manager of the Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit at the Uniting Church's Wesley Hospital in Brisbane, Sandy McKeller was recognised in the Australia Day Honours.

Ms McKeller was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her service in the area of cardiac rehabilitation as a clinician and educator and through her contribution to professional bodies.

By Bruce Mullan

Workers bear the Cross - sweatshop makes "Jesus junk"

By Bruce Mullan

A DISTURBING report from the US based National Labor Committee (NLC) claims that religious goods sold in Christian bookshops are manufactured in a Chinese sweatshop by workers labouring under abysmal conditions.

Workers are reportedly paid just 26½ cents an hour, less than half China's legal minimum wage of 55 cents, which is itself set at below subsistence levels.

The report indicated workers were routinely at the factory over 100 hours a week, including being forced to work 51 hours of overtime.

The report also indicated that workers were housed in primitive, filthy company dorms, sleeping on narrow, double-decker bunk beds.

There was also concern that workers may be handling toxic chemicals, paints and solvents whose fumes sting their eyes and skin contact causes rashes.

The religious goods made at the factory are distributed in the US by the Association for Christian Retail.

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has launched an investigation into whether items such as crosses and nativity sets currently sold in Christian specialty stores across Australia are made under similarly horrific work conditions.

Victoria and Tasmania Synod Director of Justice and International Mission Dr Mark Zirnsak told *Crosslight*, "The Christian community in Australia



Crucifixes made at the Junxingye Factory in China. Photo smuggled out of the factory by the National Labor Committee www.nlcnet.org

needs to take action to ensure that goods sold to proclaim the glory of God are not made through gross violations of the person who made them.

"In many ways it is also exploiting the good intentions of people who purchase such material.

"Many would be shocked to know that treasured religious items were made through the exploitation of young people," Dr Zirnsak said.

Journey contacted a number of Christian bookshops in Brisbane to ask what assurances they had that religious paraphernalia sold in their shops was made under humane conditions, by workers whose fundamental rights are respected and are paid a fair wage.

National buyer for gifts for Koorong Books Mr Robert Rombay told *Journey* he had no knowledge of the companies named in the NLC report. He said Koorong checked when possible

that there were no abuse of labour in the manufacture of goods, but it was difficult to be 100% certain.

"We actually import very little for our gift range directly from China.

"Most of the things we buy come in from wholesalers or suppliers in the USA," Mr Rombay said.

"Some of their stuff would be made in China too but that would be up to the USA to ensure their suppliers were checking it as well."

Minister at Broadwater Road Uniting Church, which manages Vision Books, Rev Bruce Johnson said his bookshop didn't sell "Jesus junk".

"Our original intention was to pick up the gap of getting access to Uniting Church resources in Queensland but has expanded in response to people looking for books they can't access from the larger Christian bookshops," Mr Johnson said.

Journey asked Mr Johnson why Vision Books didn't sell Bible covers and fridge magnets.

"We just can't see the point," he said. "You can get them anywhere else so why would we bother."

To read the full NLC report go to www.nlcnet.org

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With U.C.I.S Giving Direct, you can automatically give your regular offerings to your church from your everyday bank account.

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Marda Pitt and Lesha Woodley having fun at Dreamworld.
Photo courtesy of Michelle Cook

It was Summer Madness

SUMMER MADNESS was the adventure of a lifetime for seven young people from Mapoon and Weipa who attended the program with 250 other young Uniting Church people in January.

Weipa Minister Rev Michelle Cook said the young people learned more about God and were inspired to serve others in many areas, including prison chaplaincy and overseas mission.

In the second week of their adventure the Cape group visited theme parks where Marda Pitt said she would remember her first rollercoaster ride forever.

Lesha Woodley went on every single ride at Dreamworld and

declared she would be a daredevil when she grew up.

Youth Worker from Sherwood Uniting Church Andrea Robertson said it was exciting to see relationships develop between the Weipa and Mapoon group and the young people from Sherwood Uniting Church who had visited the Cape in July 2007.

"We hope that this will continue in the future".

There are plans for the Sherwood group to visit the Cape again in 2009.

This trip was made possible by the contributions of the young people, the UC Foundation, St Luke's Church, UnitingCare and Sherwood Uniting Church.

Caring steps to indigenous employment

BLUECARE HAS been taking steps to increase the number of Indigenous staff members within the organisation through involvement in the Indigenous Employment Program.

During 2007 BlueCare went from employing eight Indigenous people to over 100.

BlueCare Executive Director Stephen Muggleton said the target was reached through a cooperative approach across the organisation.

"We are now the largest employer in Queensland of Indigenous people funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations with over 160 Indigenous people in our workforce," Mr Muggleton said.

"It should also be noted that the retention rate of our Indigenous staff is higher than the organisational average."

Indigenous consultant Mick Adams was called in to review the structure of the Indigenous employment program.

Following extensive consultations across Queensland, BlueCare developed an Indigenous Care Strategy with thirty recommendations aimed at improving service delivery and establishing ways to make BlueCare a leader in providing mainstream services to Indigenous clients across the network.

Principal Advisor to Community Services Damien Conley said the answer was increasing the commitment to the mentoring and strategic placement of Indigenous staff in meaningful employment.

"We decided establishing collaborative partnerships with Indigenous service providers and restructuring the BlueCare



North Queensland Indigenous Employment Coordinator Gavin Kum Sing.
Photo by Maria Zsoldos

Indigenous employment program would be the means to achieving this," he said.

The interest in such initiatives was evident early last year when BlueCare advertised three Indigenous Employment Coordinator positions and received 85 applications.

North Queensland Indigenous Employment Coordinator Gavin Kum Sing said his work was not only in attracting Indigenous employees.

"While it is a priority for BlueCare to attract and retain

Indigenous people in meaningful positions, a secondary and equally important role is to change the image of BlueCare so that services we offer are culturally appropriate and accessible by Indigenous people," he told *Blue Print*, the BlueCare magazine.

In an address to BlueCare staff, Mr Muggleton said, "Your passion, hard work, perseverance, determination and your genuine commitment and heart does make a difference."

By Mardi Lumsden

SEEDS OF HOPE

National Lay Preachers Conference "For People Who Preach and Lead Worship"
April 28 – May 2, 2008 Meroo Conference Centre, Kurrajong

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Jana Childers
Bill Loader
Val Webb



REGISTER TODAY!

ELECTIVE SPEAKERS

Robert McFarlane
Janet Dawson
Glenda Blakefield
Mark Hillis
Lindsay Cullen
Amelia Koh-Butler
Anne Ryan
Lee Levett-Olsen
Peter Davies
Damian Palmer

REGISTRATION

Online at www.elm.org.au
Email: elm@nsw.uca.org.au
Mail: The ELM Centre, Centre for Ministry, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta, NSW 2151
Phone: 8838 8910

HURRY! EARLY BIRD PRICES FINISH MARCH 7!

COSTS

(Includes 4 nights accommodation, conference materials and all meals.)

\$350 Twin/Triple share (Early bird paid in full by March 7)
\$390 Twin/Triple share (\$200 deposit req'd by March 31)
\$260 Single Supplement



Uniting Church in Australia NSW Synod



UnitingCare Queensland's Chief Executive Officer Ms Anne Cross celebrates Pancake Day with staff at the Crepe Cafe. Photo courtesy of UnitingCare

QUEENSLANDERS FROM across the state helped raise money for UnitingCare on Shrove Tuesday, with a record 700 registrations.

UnitingCare's Pancake Day, is an annual fundraising event where businesses, schools, community groups and church organisations cook, flipp, stack and sell \$2 pancakes to help UnitingCare to provide vital services to local people in need.

"It was record year," said UnitingCare Queensland's Chief

Executive Officer Ms Anne Cross. "We had to stop registrations well before the event day simply to manage the volume."

UnitingCare Queensland's network of care providers includes Lifeline Community Care, Crossroads, BlueCare (including Blue Nurses) and hospitals such as The Wesley Hospital, St Andrew's Hospital, The Sunshine Coast Private Hospital and St Stephen's Hospitals in Maryborough and Hervey Bay.

Reading the Easter story

By Mardi Lumsden

THE EASTER story is one of the building blocks of the Christian faith but people have many different interpretations of the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

Trinity Theological College Academic Dean and Director of Studies in Systematic Theology Rev Dr Geoff Thompson said it is understandable that there are different ways of interpreting the Easter story.

"On one level everyone reads a story differently," Dr Thompson said.

"People come with their own presuppositions and everyone has their own questions.

"We do have different accounts of the resurrection in the New Testament.

"The documents themselves throw the question up 'what is it all about' because you have four different accounts in the Gospels.

"A very muted account in the Gospel of Mark and then you have Paul's quite different account that doesn't describe the events of Easter Sunday but the more direct appearance of Jesus to himself."

Dr Thompson said the onset of modernity has also raised questions,

particularly historical questions, about what actually happened.

"Not that those questions have not been asked in the past, but they are asked with a bit more energy and force in the modern era," he said.

Possibly the biggest divide is in interpretations of the Easter story and the mainstream debate has occurred in relation to the historical question of what actually happened on Easter Sunday.

"There are those who would say that the resurrection literally and necessarily involved something happening to the body of Jesus and that it took on a new form and that the tomb is actually empty.

"On the other end of the spectrum there are those who would argue that the bones of Jesus are still in a tomb somewhere in Jerusalem and that the language we have in the New Testament about resurrection is a kind of metaphor for Jesus' ongoing presence."

Banora Point Uniting Church minister Rev Rob Brennan said the Easter story and its literal occurrence is necessary for him to understand his faith.

"As I read it, Christ's death and resurrection stamps the world with both real meaning and hope," he said.

"Without the gritty, ugly and uncomfortable reality of both, the story has little to say to people in a world that experiences real pain every day.

"If it is only symbolic, then the whole deal is a sham not worth bothering with."

Retired minister Rev Graeme Adsett reads the story a little differently.

"I don't read the Easter story as a history story, but as a reminder that it describes a person who had lived in such harmony with the divine spirit of love, care and compassion, that he gave himself completely to needs of others.

"I think the way the Easter message is told with the empty tomb and the like is but a useful vehicle to express dramatically the conviction of the gospel authors

that Jesus' way of sacrificial love which had given believers' lives such meaning and purpose has no chance of being contained, but must be given urgent expression.

"The Jewish people reporting the truth of this new life in Jesus were used to parable and metaphor, and would not have been trying to underline every detail as literal fact," he said.

"For me the loving, sacrificial spirit of Jesus is set free in the Easter story, and is nothing to do with a resuscitated body."

Dr Thompson said as modern people we are trapped into thinking the issue is decided by the question of the physicality of the resurrection.

"That is important but the resurrection of the body is so much more than that," he said.

"We have got to learn to ask a whole range of different questions about the resurrection if we are to understand what it meant for the early Christians.

"I think we have been a little bit too focused on the question about what happened to Jesus' body."

Dr Thompson suggests alternate questions could focus on what the resurrection meant for first century Jews and how resurrection language differs from language of visions and dreams in the Bible and why it is only put on Jesus.

For Mr Brennan it is the willingness of God to enter the world that brings the hope of Easter alive.

"The Easter story is the climax of God's story in the world," he said.

"God gets his hands dirty, sore and bloody, then deals with stunned incomprehension and fans a spark of hope and love into flame in spite of everything.

"Now that is a story worth reading."

Mr Adsett is inspired by the complete nature of Jesus and the power of the Spirit within.

"It is tremendous that we can get inspiration from a life lived in this God-like way," he said.

"The divine spirit within Jesus



Christ on the Cross by Peter Paul Rubens (1620) oil on canvas.
Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp Belgium

was rich and beautiful. Therefore, his impressive identity was in the life that he lived for others.

"Jesus was nailed to a cross because of the honest and transparent way that he lived. A way of enduring love and compassion, together with a complete sense of justice.

"Self-absorbed, controlling people were offended and greatly inconvenienced by this beautiful selfless life.

"For me, each day is an Easter Day. Each morning I can give thanks for my spiritual possibilities because of the life of Jesus. For there is a divine spirit in me too that needs to be released for others.

"I read my Bible every morning and know that the divine spark within me needs to be challenged by interpreting what the Easter Christ means for my context."

Such diversity of thought within churches and communities can be

a strengthening and dividing thing and the Uniting Church continues to negotiate a path to work together through that.

"I think that is part and parcel of life as the body of Christ," said Dr Thompson.

"You could even say that was part of the experience of the early Christians as well.

"Given the fact we have got different accounts, I think that tells us the story of Easter was being told in different ways right from the beginning."

Retired minister Rev Bob Griffiths said the truth of Easter is grounded in the experiences of the witnesses and early followers of Christ.

"He is confessed to be 'Lord' as a consequence of that experience," Mr Griffiths said.

"The challenge for followers today is how we live that confession."

Sea of Faith in Australia

(www.sof-in-australia.org)

"Human Images of the Divine"

Seminars and discussion with Val Webb on her new book 'Like Catching Water in a Net: Human Attempts to Describe the Divine'.

Sunshine Coast:

venue TBA.

Information: Kay Ackerman (5456 2005)
(Sun, 9 March 2.00pm - 4.00pm)

Brisbane:

Uniting Church, Gympie/Rode Roads,
Chermside Cost: \$30.
(Sat, 15 March 10.00am - 3.30pm)
Information: Jan Noble (3359 3103)

Gold Coast:

venue TBA

Information: Barry Hora (5533 5211)
(Sun 16, March 2.00pm - 4.00pm)

These seminars will address questions such as:

- How changing the God metaphors/ descriptions helps our experience of contemporary life.
- How God-images have changed through history - and in the Bible.
- What are our current images of God and how do we relate to them?
- What are some new images that can form new relationships between us and the Divine?

"Like Catching Water in a Net" has been named the winner in the USA Best Books 2007 Awards in the "general religion" category.

"Insightful, imaginative, and provocative! Val Webb's new book has freed the Divine from the religious. A striking achievement." John Shelby Spong

Val Webb, born in Brisbane, is a university lecturer in religion, with a graduate degree in science and a Ph.D. in theology. Val divides her time between the US and Australia teaching every year at Augsburg College in Minnesota and Whitley College in Melbourne. She is the author of seven books including *John's Message: Good News for the New Millennium*, commissioned by the World Methodist Council.

CARETAKERS/CUSTODIANS

Birdsville

Frontier Services' museum at Birdsville needs an energetic and committed volunteer couple with an interest in our history to live in and maintain our facilities, provide a welcome to visitors and continue to develop the historic displays.

If this opportunity would suit you or someone you know, please contact Rosemary Young at Frontier Services for more information on 02 8270 1320 or rosemary.y@frontierservices.org.



www.frontierservices.org

Family faith activities for Easter

Easter can be a wonderful faith time for young children.
Here are some tips for parents:

Good Friday

Create quiet atmosphere at home.

Avoid shopping or housework and limit television, radio, and computer use.

Choose some special music such as Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* or Handel's *The Messiah*.

Eat Hot Cross Buns.

Saturday

Decorate and/or dye eggs or a white candle.

Set the table for tomorrow's Easter lunch.

After dark, light the decorated candle and share a short prayer.

Easter Day

Enjoy a special breakfast of fresh rich bread.

Attend an Easter Day service.

Hide Easter eggs and have a hunt.

Have a special lunch with Easter table decorations of eggs, fresh flowers from the garden and your decorated candle.

An apology without guilt means nothing

By Scott Stephens

LIKE MANY Australians, I watched the carefully staged media drama unfold.

From the unprecedented "welcome to country" that marked the commencement of Parliament on Tuesday, 13 February 2008, to Rudd's delivery of the "historic" apology, and his subsequent interaction with a number of invited guests – the whole ordeal reeked of kitsch, empty ceremony and pretence.

Quite frankly, I thought it was an overblown PR exercise for the new Federal Government, and that it verged on pandering to latent racist feeling in this nation.

And so, while there are many leaders, elders, politicians, academics, journalists and clergy who have welcomed the events of today with fanfare and enthusiasm, I'm afraid I can't join their number.

Because, in the immortal words of *The Princess Bride*, I don't think this apology means what they think it means.

Let me be clear. There is no denying the inherent rightness of apologising to those generations of Aboriginal families whose lives have been destroyed by the ignorance and bigotry of white Australia.

There is no question that this apology will be received as a long-overdue official show of respect



One of the images carried by the crowd of thousands outside Parliament House as the Prime Minister delivered the Apology

So, what was the motivation behind the apology? Or, to put this question another way: For whom was this apology intended?

Throughout the coverage of the apology, I couldn't shake the sense that the Indigenous Australians included in the televised spectacle – whether invited guests in Parliament House or the dozens of emotion-filled faces from around the country – were little more than props.

Their role was to express and register the emotional content of the event.

But the apology was not intended for them. The true recipients of the apology were those white Australians who watched and wanted to be made to feel as if they had taken part in something good.

Rather than being left to listen and grieve and celebrate in private, these Indigenous Australians were made to take part in a kind of emotional voyeurism for the benefit of thousands of white Australian viewers who wanted to feel, as Noel Pearson rightly put it, "the warm inner glow that will come from having said sorry."

For me, this leads to an inescapable conclusion.

The reason that Kevin Rudd had to reiterate that this apology "does not attribute guilt to the current generation of Australian people" is not because we don't believe we are complicit in the misery of Indigenous Australians, but because we know that we are and don't want to admit as much.

As a nation, we have a pathological aversion to guilt precisely because of the objective guilt we all share.

In his recent essay in *The Australian*, Noel Pearson made the stunning claim that "Aboriginal people's lives were stolen by history."

It wasn't simply that children were taken from their families, but the very capacity of Aboriginal people to "pursue any form of sustainable and decent life" was taken from them "in the wake of European occupation and Indigenous dispossession."

It is as if Indigenous Australians are systemically excluded from the very cultural and economic way of life that was brought to this land with the occupation.

Pearson here points to a kind of objective guilt that goes far deeper than the bare acknowledgement of past injustices, however brutal.

It is a guilt that we can neither admit nor address without acknowledging the unjustifiability of our very existence as a nation, as well as the inherent inequity of the global economy in which we all participate and through which

we all prosper.

It is not simply that crimes have been committed by our forebears; it is we ourselves in our very Antipodean and capitalist existence that are wrong.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Success alone justifies injustice done. Guilt is scarred over, or cicatrized, by success."

Our prosperity as a nation, aided and abetted by tokenistic acts of penance – such as Rudd's apology – have enabled us to repress and ultimately deny our guilt as white Australians.

But there can be no turning of the page, no meaningful advance toward genuine reconciliation, without a willingness to tell the truth about ourselves, to lay bare and accept our guilt.

This sort of national repentance would demand language far closer to Keating's Redfern address, with its overtly collective language and devastating litany of white crimes ("we took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life

... we committed the murders ... we practised discrimination and exclusion ... it was our ignorance and our prejudice"), rather than Rudd's languid prose.

And because our culpability is not simply past, but is now being repeated in the exclusionary logic of the Australian economy, such national repentance would have to include the provision of taxpayer funded compensation to indigenous Australians.

Kevin Rudd knew that if either of these measures – accepting our guilt and providing compensation – was adopted in the apology, the groundswell of popular support would evaporate.

Perhaps this is the final proof that the apology was little more than a spectacle for white Australians and a vanity exercise for a fledgling Prime Minister who needs people to love him.

Scott Stephens ministers at Forest Lake Uniting Church, and teaches ethics at Trinity Theological College

Uniting Church welcomes apology

THE UNITING Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) congratulated the Federal Government on its formal apology to members of the Stolen Generations.

The President of the Uniting Church, Rev Gregor Henderson, said the Christian view of confession was a recognition of wrongdoing.

"We take confession to mean that what has been done is not in accordance with the hopes and possibilities that God has for us," Mr Henderson said.

"Confession is both an acknowledgement of this and an expression of resolve to live, by the grace of God, differently in the future.

A formal apology was made to Australia's Indigenous people by the Uniting Church more than a decade ago.



National Administrator of the UAICC Rev Shayne Blackman

"Our partnership and covenanting agreement with the UAICC is one way in which we have demonstrated our resolve to walk alongside our Aboriginal and Islander brothers and sisters; to seek forgiveness and reparations," Mr Henderson said.

"The Government's apology to the Stolen Generations marks the beginning of a sense of renewal.

"We hope it will be backed up with practical measures for better outcomes for Indigenous Australians."

National Administrator of the UAICC Rev Shayne Blackman said the Church and the UAICC have had a longstanding view about the need for the Australian Government to say sorry.

"The formal apology from the Government is greatly welcomed by UAICC members," Mr Blackman said.

"However, we believe that true repentance involves both an apology and a change of attitude and we hope the Government takes further action to clearly demonstrate its commitment to the apology, such as tailored Indigenous programs and opportunities for socio-economic equality."



This was the sign outside Calvary Christian College at Springwood on the historic day of 14 February 2008. Photo by Syd Abrahams

after the prolonged and disgraceful humiliation of "a proud people and a proud culture" (to use Rudd's own language).

And there is no alternative but to hope and pray that this "sorry" acts as a catalyst for the grieving and healing process – the beginning of the cathartic "sorry business" for which Indigenous Australians have waited for so long.

Nevertheless, this apology (like so much of the moral tokenism we perform today, superficial acts of charity designed to make us feel better about ourselves) seems to me to have been internally corrupted by wanton self-interest and political expedience.

In this instance, it is particularly important to remember Immanuel Kant's assertion that the moral worth of an act lay not in its commission but in its intention.

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Doing ministry in the big wet

By Bruce Mullan

WITH FLOODING across two-thirds of the state Premier Anna Bligh indicated the damage bill will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Central Queensland town of Emerald was one of the worst hit with over 1000 homes flooded, scores of businesses damaged and 2,500 people evacuated to safety.

The Nogoa River, which divides the township, broke its banks and floodwaters spread across the town in what locals described as one of the worst floods the region had ever experienced.

Emerald Mayor Kerry Hayes said the flood was the highest ever recorded in the district.

"People here wouldn't have seen any water like this since the great 1950 flood and this one obviously exceeds it on the heights," he said.

"We have got around 2,500 people who have registered at the town hall and agricultural college where evacuation centres have been set up," he said.

As people were fleeing their homes, local Uniting Church minister Rev Russell Reynoldson was providing pastoral care and support for people as they arrived at the evacuation centre.

During the recovery phase the Department for Community Services set up a support centre at the Uniting Church right in the centre of town.

"In the recovery program my role was to monitor people's social needs, passing them on, hearing about needs and trying to meet those needs," Mr Reynoldson said.

He said they had also opened up a storeroom at the showgrounds so if people needed a fridge, chairs or tables they could pick them up even if they needed them for only a short period until their insurance came through.

"I feel a bit like Santa Claus at the moment, I'm handing out fridges and washing machines left, right and centre.

Mr Reynoldson spoke about the exhaustion people were feeling and the need for carers and support teams to take time out for a beer or cup of coffee.

"People have been hitting the wall. People have been working their butts off over the past weeks and need to monitor their level of energy, take some time out, get some rest and have a breather."

It is questionable whether Mr Reynoldson was taking his own advice but he has been inspired by the spirit in the life of the community.

"The most common thing you hear from people's stories in the recovery centre is that there is always someone worse off.

"People have become aware of how important it is to be a community.

"With Emerald being such a diverse place, with people coming



Rising flood waters in the Emerald district devastated many homes and businesses. Photograph with thanks to Emerald resident Jon Kirk www.captainkirk.com.au

and going, contract workers coming in and flying out, people are now aware there is a heart in this community.

"I think we've found that heart over the last week or so and it's



Charleville flood heights were not enough to break the levy banks.

Photo by Rev John Case

shown itself in the way people help each other.

"The reality is, in any disaster the community comes alive and it has been no different in this community. We just need to keep it going and not fall back into our old ways.

Mr Reynoldson told the story of farmer Karen Bray who, as the flood waters approached, had been warned by a neighbour to move things to a higher ground.

"We mobilised a team from the church quick smart and packed up her whole house within a day and moved everything to higher ground.

"Peter her husband had said not

to worry about it but Karen was convinced that's what she had to do, and sure enough water went through her place to 150mm in depth.

"She had discovered she didn't have insurance to cover flood damage and called Brisbane to be told that she could get insurance but there would be a 48 hour waiting period."

"The flood waters came through just over two days later.

Mr Reynoldson said the Brays will need to stay in their temporary accommodation for two or three months while the floorboards dry out and the house is restored.

"She's one of the lucky ones. The recovery will not be months for some people, it will be years. Some people have taken a major loss and we don't know the implications for the farming community.

"Farmers have lost thousands of head of stock, their fences are down, and there will be some major emotional scars that will take years to heal."

Serious flooding also occurred in the Western Queensland town of Charleville where Patrol Padre Rev John Case is based.

A military Hercules touched down in the flood-ravaged town of Charleville on the evening of Friday, 18 January to deliver temporary water barriers to hold back the Warrego River.

A member of the local State Emergency Services team, Mr Case helped erect the temporary levies which held back the Warrego River and said they will now be left in place until the end of the wet season.

He said residents were understandably nervous after major flooding in 1990 when the whole town was evacuated, and again in 1997.

"People are still pretty wary about things. The gully came up again fairly quickly in a storm a few days ago and a few people were anxious about that, so there is still anxiety within the community."

Synod launches Flood Fund

MODERATOR OF the Queensland Synod Rev Dr David Pitman, who visited Emerald in Central Queensland to view the aftermath of the recent flooding, has announced a Queensland Synod Flood Disaster Relief Fund.

"The Synod Leadership Team has responded to information about the damage caused by recent flooding in various parts of the State and is encouraging congregations, groups and individuals to contribute as they are able.

"The money given will be distributed in accordance with needs and priorities identified by local church and community leaders," Dr Pitman said.

"I was able to visit Emerald last week and obtain a first-hand account of the flooding that occurred and its impact on the town and surrounding areas.

"It will take time for damage to be repaired and initiatives taken to benefit those most badly affected."

General Secretary of the Queensland Synod Rev Douglas Jones said the Synod Leadership Team had set up a small group to manage the fund.

Dr Pitman said gifts to the Synod Flood Disaster Relief Fund will undergird the recovery process and encourage hope for the future.

"Gifts for an appeal of this nature are not tax-deductible but I know people will want to contribute anyway.

"Please continue to pray for those in the flood-affected areas of our State."

Cheques should be made payable to the Uniting Church in Australia Queensland Synod and be accompanied by a note indicating that the gift is for the Synod Flood Disaster Relief Fund.

By Bruce Mullan

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Forgive us our debtors

By Bruce Mullan

WHILE INTEREST rates continue to rise, University of Western Sydney economist Steve Keen believes Australia's growing household debt burden is a much more serious problem than inflation.

Speaking to the ABC's *World Today* program in February, Keen warned it's now only a matter of time before the widespread mortgage defaults seen in the United States are reflected in Australia.

"That explosion in debt has been ignored by economists and policymakers and that's what's causing the crisis in the States, and it's about time that the attention of the economics profession and the political classes changed to that far more serious issue and stopped obsessing about what is still, historically speaking, a fairly low rate of inflation."

Keen said the ratio of private debt to GDP (gross domestic product), was half of America's level debt level 20 years ago but is now equal to America's level.

"America's private debt is 167% of GDP. Ours is 163% of GDP."

While much of Australia's private debt is owed on home mortgages it is also boosted by a retail culture of "buy now, pay later".

Journey spoke with a sales consultant at a major electrical superstore and heard of low income earners racking up substantial debts on luxury electronic items.

"They only earn about \$600 per week but are borrowing thousands to purchase wide-screen TVs and home theatre equipment," she said.

It is little wonder that Australian credit card debt hit \$41 billion last year and household interest payments reached a record high of 11.9% of total disposable income.

Reserve Bank figures show that, on average, Australians owe a total of more than 160% of their annual disposable.

After 25 years in the banking industry, General Manager of the Uniting Church Investment Service (U.C.I.S.) Mr Stephen Peake believes most people who enter into a loan know they have to pay it back.

"But I think there is so much temptation out there in our consumerist society and

everyday you are bombarded with 'buy, buy, buy'.

"Consumer lending in this country is dictated by legislation and it is illegal for a lender to knowingly convince someone in to a loan arrangement that they can't afford," Mr Peake said.

"That doesn't stop some people from jumping in and telling strange stories about their capacity to support a loan."

Mr Peake believes responsible borrowing goes with responsible lending.

"A responsible lender has legal obligations in terms of how it lends its money, but borrowers also have to take responsibility about what they tell a lender."

While the Bible does not appear to expressly forbid lending money for interest there does seem to be a prohibition about doing so on loans for the poor.

Former Director of Old Testament Studies at Trinity Theological College and now Synod Secretary Rev Douglas Jones said the Old Testament has some strong statements on usury (charging interest on loans) which presented some real difficulty for Martin Luther and the early church reformers.

"He was wrestling with the prohibitions against usury in the Old Testament but that was a very different economic context where inflation didn't exist and money retained its value."

Mr Jones explained that usury could lead to poor people becoming so indebted that they ended up in slavery so the book of Leviticus prescribed a Jubilee to occur every fifty years in which slaves and prisoners would be freed and debts be forgiven.

During the Jubilee year the land was to lie fallow, but there was also a requirement for the compulsory return of all property to its original owners or their heirs, except the houses of laymen within walled cities.

"There is no record of the Jubilee ever happening and scholars have debated whether it was ever put into practice, but it was an idea towards which the society was taught to aspire and it enshrined good principles about giving people a fresh start and the opportunity to wipe the slate clean."

Mr Jones said the Old Testament



convention of not exploiting people and not removing them from their livelihood is still valid.

"The principles are that you don't rip people off and you don't exploit people to such an extent that all they have left is to sell themselves into slavery."

The church could well consider if it may be good theological and commonsense wisdom for Christians to avoid using easy credit for the purchase of luxurious nonessential items, and to discourage retail establishments from making credit too readily available.

Indebted to justice

By Mardi Lumsden

"NIGERIA BORROWED \$5 billion, has paid back \$16 billion to date and still owes \$32 billion."

That's the story told by Jubilee Australia, an ecumenical Christian organisation endorsed by the Uniting Church which has called for Jubilee debt cancellation for some third world countries.

"Industrialised nations are quick to point out how much they give in aid; yet poor countries often spend more on debt repayments than they receive in aid."

According to the Make Poverty History campaign, the problem with Third World Debt is that countries are unable to spend money on health or education because they are paying debts with exorbitant interest rates.

It is not that these countries have not already paid back what was borrowed in the first place.

Jubilee Australia says there are four big roadblocks to achieving the Millennium Development Goals adopted by 189 world leaders in 2000.

Their document *What Jubilee Wants* states: "Eliminating global poverty requires utilising all available measures. Aid, trade, debt, and corruption are the four issues that hold the key to addressing this global problem."

"Addressing global poverty requires increasing and better targeting of aid, improving fairness in trade, debt cancellation and improved governance."

Director of UnitingCare Queensland's Centre for Social Justice Greg Mackay said economic justice is not just something that affects developing countries and pointed to events taking place in Australia.

"Politics is dominated by wealthy individuals and heavy-weight corporations, which in turn threaten our rights as citizens of a democracy," he said.

"This has resulted in declining spending for social programs, increased incarceration (especially of the poor, of Indigenous people, and of women), reduced access to legal recourse, massive numbers of homeless and impoverished people, erosion of worker rights under the WorkChoices legislation, lack of

adequate public health care, and increasing environmental degradation."

Mr Mackay reminds us that as Christians we are called to live ethically.

"The Scriptures provide for each of us a clear call to an attitude of compassion for the poor and by extension a readiness to use our resources and position to stop poverty."

"Justice in trade must do more than build a level playing field which in and of itself will never cause the eradication of trade debt and poverty; instead we must expand the preferential option for the disadvantaged to differential and special treatment of the poor."

Mr Mackay said the Fair Trade movement was an excellent way to live ethically while doing a small part to influence governments and others organisations.

"Fair Trade is an attempt to reverse the bias towards unfair global trade. It's not going to fix the global system. That will take major institutional changes and a determined campaign."

"But we can put our Gospel values into effect by trying to follow simple principles of fair trade and by educating ourselves."

Mr Mackay said we could select products that meet Fair Trade Association principles.

HOW FAIR TRADE WORKS

- Producers are paid a fair price and workers a fair wage.
- Farmers are paid a stable minimum price for crops like coffee, tea and bananas.
- The links between buyers and sellers are shortened, doing away with 'middle men' and buyers.
- Producers develop long-term relationships of mutual support and benefit.
- All aspects of the trading relationship are open to public accountability
- Exploitative child labour and forced labour are prohibited.
- Working conditions are healthy and safe.
- Goods are produced and crops grown in an environmentally sustainable way.

For more information on Fair Trade visit the Fair Trade Association at www.fta.org.au

Interest matters can cause stress

By Bruce Mullan

AFTER A lifetime exploring the numbers in our lives two retired numbers men are convinced that we don't have to be experts to keep an eye on things in order to understand the signals which the numbers provide.

Former Deputy Commonwealth Statistician Mr David Allen and former Professor of Economics and Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at the University of Queensland Dr Rod Jensen believe we should think of numbers as signals of things happening and changing, sometimes for the better, sometimes as signs of potential problems.

"Governments want to make sure that things stay fairly stable and have the economy grow in a healthy fashion at a good steady pace - if it grows too fast then inflation increases and the value of our savings decreases and the value of superannuation falls," Dr Jensen said.

"One way to stop the economy overheating is to put interest rates up and this is a Reserve Bank decision. The aim is to take money from people's pockets so they spend less."

"If the economy is going too slowly, they reduce interest rates giving more money to spend."

"Thus interest rates are a very important signal that we can all read - that the economy is overheating or slowing down too much."

Both Uniting Church members, Mr Allen and Dr Jensen noted that interest rates are also currently showing that Australia and the United States now have radically divergent economies.

"Australia is now much more tied to China these days and because of the boom in exports to China that's saved Australia from a lot of hardship and strife," Mr Allen said.

Stress inducing numbers

Dr Jensen said economic statistics are much more newsworthy in the current situation when people are so much more dependent on superannuation for retirement incomes.

"The numbers tell us what the government and the Reserve Bank are thinking as they



Retired 'numbers men' Mr David Allen (left) and Dr David Jensen discuss their interest in the economy over a cup of tea. Photo by Bruce Mullan

keep an eye on how we are travelling and that they are counting more on the psychological effect as we react to these signals rather than any organic effect," said Dr Jensen.

Mr Allen said, "The psychology of it is important - the sub-prime market is a US problem but it's influencing the entire world through the volatility of the stock market."

"It is a politics of fear that has been practised for a long while."

Psychologist and Queensland Synod Human Relations Manager Ann Warren told *Journey* economic anxiety is a symptom of stress.

"Stress is the perception of whether you

have the necessary resources, whether that be time, finances, skills or whatever, to cope with the demands that are placed on you by your environment."

"It's a perception issue," she said. "You may have sufficient resources but you perceive that you don't so therefore you get stressed."

"With the bombardment of economic statistics, people may be perceiving that it's doom and gloom and therefore they start questioning whether they have the financial resources to be able to cope with that, which then in turn can create stress, or concerns or anxieties."

Ms Warren said one of the problems with

all the economic data is that it is data and not necessarily presented in a cohesive fashion that people can understand.

Don't worry, be happy

Journey asked about the worry factor for the "numbers men" and found that, as retired people depending on the stability of the market, neither Dr Jensen or Mr Allen seemed too concerned about the numbers.

"I don't really want to know about it, I don't want to spend the rest of my life worrying about fractions of a percentage in my investment return," Dr Jensen said.

Mr Allen said he too had come to the same opinion.

In insurance we trust

By Bruce Mullan

WHETHER IT'S floods, property damage, health problems, or car accidents most people crave some mechanism to cushion and protect them from the consequences of calamitous events.

In many traditional communities there are informal mechanisms to help people cope with risk and misfortune often through



Mr David Munro

family and community-based mutual assistance.

Some Christians have pointed to the early church which held all things in common and would "sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" and see in that collective activity the origins of the modern insurance industry.

Insurance was initially based on the principle of sharing one another's burdens as a group of people agreed to put a sum of money aside into a pool for protection against loss of possessions, health or even life.

This assumes that not everyone will suffer loss or will suffer it in the same manner at the same time and that the risk of losing everything is covered by spending a much smaller sum of money, known as a "premium".

Synod's Risk and Insurance Manager Mr David Munro says the Uniting Church's insurance

scheme is based on these very principles.

"Insurance is about restoring the lilies of the field and the birds of the air after they have been annihilated at some point."

Mr Munro said the church has two key areas of insurance cover.

"For general liability we have a policy that covers us for about \$150 million in total so that we are covered for some kind of catastrophe."

"Then if you look at the value of all the properties across Synod congregations, agencies and so forth, there is about two billion dollars worth so we have to make sure all of that is insured."

"The benefit of our structure is that we have a fairly good geographical spread of that risk so the likelihood of having all that property go in one hit, while it's not unimaginable, is certainly very remote."

Mr Munro said the Uniting

Church bulk buys insurance from the retail insurance markets but carries some of the risk in-house.

In this way the local church or agency carries the first deductible part of the insurance, the Synod carries a larger part, and the main coverage for big claims comes from the insurance companies.

Sharing the risk in this way means cheaper insurance for each individual congregation and also that annual fluctuations can be evened out over time by absorbing any huge premium increases.

"Because we have such a big economy of scale we save everyone on their price."

Mr Munro said an individual congregation trying to find the same level of coverage to that which UC Insurance provides out in the commercial market would be paying many times higher premiums and would be subject to the risks of market fluctuations.



A Bookfest customer browses the selection. Photo by Pete Johnson

Lifeline Bookfest hits new record

THE JANUARY 2008 Lifeline Bookfest in Brisbane was a complete success, raising more money than ever before in its 19 year history.

Bookfest coordinator Roy Frith said this year's event made over \$750 000.

"Our fundraising record for the

Lifeline Bookfest was \$680 000, raised in January 2007.

"The success of this year's event surpassed the record," said Mr Frith.

"The money raised goes towards helping those in need through our 24-hour crisis counselling line, free face-to-face counselling services and support programs for children and families."

Mr Frith said the event could not have been a success without the generosity of Brisbane's avid readers.

"Thank you to everyone who shopped at the Lifeline Bookfest. Your generosity helped make this event the most successful we've ever had."

Lifeline Brisbane Volunteers Anastasia Magriplis said the Bookfest was also dependant on hundreds of volunteers.

"We had over 350 volunteers at this year's event doing everything from packing, sorting and pricing books, to setting up and tidying up at the end of each day," Ms Magriplis said.

"Some coming in the early morning, and others staying late at night.

"The Bookfest could not have been such a success without the time and effort put in by our volunteers."

Lifeline Brisbane Public Relations Manager Elissa Jenkins said the support shown at this year's event was extraordinary.

"It's amazing to see the book lovers of Brisbane and beyond come out every year to shop at the Bookfest and support Lifeline services."

"This year we had customers come in and buy an entire trolley of books, then come back the next day for more!" Ms Jenkins said.

The Lifeline Bookfest has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1989 in the old Lifeline warehouse at Bowen Hills where books were laid out across hay bales covered with blankets.

Now close to two million books go on sale in January and June each year at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, helping to raise funds for Lifeline Brisbane's 24-hour Crisis Counselling Line, free face-to-face counselling services and support programs for children and families.

United States activist to speak at NCYC09

YOUNG AMERICAN evangelist and activist Shane Claiborne will be one of the key speakers at NCYC09 from 3-9 January 2009 in Melbourne.

"Shane is excited to be part of NCYC09, and we're delighted that Shane is excited!" said an obviously excited Rohan Pryor, NCYC09 Convention Coordinator.

Shane is a compelling Christian speaker in demand around the world, author of *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* and a founding member of The Simple Way, a Christian community based in urban Philadelphia working to change the world one loving act at a time.

Shane also loves the circus, and sews his own clothes.

"We love God, love people, and follow Jesus", Mr Claiborne said.

"We are about ending poverty, not simply managing it. We don't give people fish. We teach them to fish. We tear down the walls that have been built up around the fish pond. And we figure out who polluted it."

NCYC is the largest gathering of young people in the Uniting Church.

It is a temporary but intentional residential Christian community that forms every two years to celebrate God through worship, Bible studies, community living, great bands and music, and to hear inspiring speakers like Mr Claiborne.

"We come from many different places and converge to discover,

celebrate and deepen the faith and unity we share in Jesus Christ", said Mr Pryor.

"Shane will challenge us to live our faith radically, and show us how in ordinary ways."

Mr Claiborne said "Many spiritual seekers have not been able to hear the words of Christians because the lives of Christians have been making so much horrible noise."

"It can be hard to hear the gentle whisper of the Spirit amid the noise of Christendom."

"As an evangelical, the only way I know to invite people into Christian faith is to come and see."

"After all, I'm not just trying to get someone to sign a doctrinal statement, but to come to know the love, grace and peace in the incarnation of Jesus, and now in the incarnation of the body, Christ's church."

"Let me show you Jesus with skin on."

NCYC09 will feature international and Australian speakers, great bands and new music, solid Biblical teaching and uplifting worship, and communities of young people gathered from around Australia.

NCYC delegates will be invited to assist in offsetting the ecological impact (primarily carbon emissions) from the travel of Mr Claiborne and other key speakers.

To register for NCYC09, and for more information, visit the website www.ncyc.org.au or phone 1300 00 NCYC (6292)



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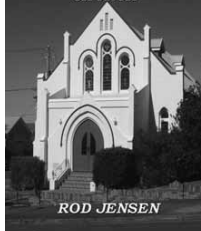
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TWO SMALL BOOKS ON LAYPEOPLE AND THE CHURCH



ROD JENSEN

Two Small Books on Laypeople and the Church is a new release from retired Professor, Rod Jensen. His controversial book explores themes which offer a lay voice or lay perspective on the church of today. It captures the real concerns of today's laypeople about the present state and the future of the churches, describing vividly the massive changes in the place of the layperson in the church of history.

"Some clergy friends were surprised and somewhat dismissive that a mere layperson should take such a step, into the traditional preserve of the clergy. My claim, ... is that it is only the laity who can tell the story of the lay mind and frustrations, as the gulf between the laity and the clergy widens in today's world."

Two Small Books on Laypeople and the Church is a timely publication indeed, and is a fascinating read for anyone interested in religion, society, spirituality and ethics.

"This book is intended as a contribution to establishing a new integrity and a new awareness for the Christian laity in Australia."

www.zeus-publications.com



Evangelist and activist Shane Claiborne coming to NCYC09.
Photo from www.ysmarko.com

Queensland academic rattles the church cage

By Bruce Mullan

FRUSTRATED BY the number of attenders hemorrhaging from local churches, retired Professor of Economics and Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at the University of Queensland Dr Rod Jensen believes any school with a drop-out rate as high as the churches of today would be forced to undergo a rigorous performance evaluation.

That's the goal of his new book *Two Small Books on Laypeople and the Church* which asks some hard questions of the institutional church.

"Who speaks for the laity who have left the churches or who are feeling uncomfortable or frustrated as they sit in the pews? Where is their voice as they walk out the doors without a farewell wave, or contemplate doing so, or simply wish that things were better?" asks Dr Jensen, a Uniting Church layperson.

Born into a Methodist farming family near Kingaroy Dr Jensen spent a period during his youth as an avowed atheist.

He slowly and carefully returned to Christianity through the influence of some lay friends, some less conventional clergy, some

challenging writers on religion and the church, a patient wife, and the need to open a spiritual dimension in the lives of his children.

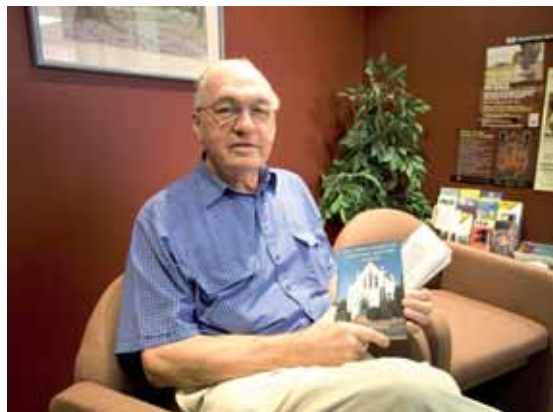
"The laity of old were mainly 'followers' in the sense that they took for granted the authority of the church on matters of God and religion and were more or less content to follow the practices and beliefs of their own institutional church," Dr Jensen said.

"The laity of today with their post-modern values have less respect for institutions and authority. They value more their freedom to decide for themselves what they will or will not accept, and they are far better prepared than the laity at any time in history to make this decision.

Believing the laity has changed dramatically over the last several decades and that the church has not come to grips with the extent of these changes, Dr Jensen refuses to "park his brains at the door" and has published a book that is guaranteed to provoke controversy.

Two Small Books on Laypeople and the Church by Rod Jensen is published by Zeus Publications.

A review by Merv Bengston can be found on page 13



Dr Rod Jensen with a copy of his book featuring the Sherwood Uniting Church on the cover. Photo by Osker Lau



UC Safari Board members Rhonda Heathwood (left), Bob Heathwood, Doug Fergusson, Janette Stringer and Bev Preston working on the "Outback n' Ocean Safari" to be held in late April 2009. Photo by Osker Lau

25 years on the road

By Bruce Mullan

THE LONG journey started with a conversation at Queensland Synod in 1983.

Rev Aubrey Baker was sharing his experiences as Patrol Padre of the Burke and Wills Patrol with Mr Jim Smallbone who later described it as "one of the best kept secrets in the Uniting Church".

"We need to let people see something of that," Mr Smallbone said. "Could I bring a coach load of people and show them the Padre at work."

The next day Mr Baker handed Mr Smallbone a suggested itinerary for a 16 day safari to the South

West including Birdsville and six months later forty people set out on the first Uniting Church Safari adventure.

Current UC Safaris Chairperson Mr Doug Fergusson from Sunnybank Hills said since that first UC Safari over 40 Safaris have travelled to some of the most remote parts of Australia.

"The excess funds from the tours have always been given to support ministry in rural areas and during a 1985 Safari Mr Smallbone handed over \$15,000 to Flying Padre Rev Bob Heathwood because he had to replace his aeroplane."

Participants in the 1995 North West tour led by Mr Baker were

present for the unveiling of the memorial to Women of the AIM (Australian Inland Mission) by the Rev Fred McKay in Cloncurry.

UC Safaris paid for Mr McKay and his wife Meg to be present.

A former Bank Manager, Mr Smallbone organised a 1993 tour to Victoria, but passed away before the departure date.

Mr Fergusson said a 25th celebration of UC Safaris will be held on Saturday 24 May, 2008 at the Sunnybank Uniting Church.

For more information call Doug Fergusson on 3273 2689 or email doug.fergusson@hotmail.com

Christians attack MySpace

VUNET.COM has reported that radical Christian hackers have been waging an online war against atheism.

The hackers are reported to have attacked MySpace's Atheist and Agnostics Group page, deleting groups and members and renaming the site 'Jesus is Love'.

MySpace shut down the group last month despite having promised to keep it up after earlier hack attacks.

The site was put back up in February, but some members are still being barred and some discussions are lost.

MySpace has yet to comment on the issue. "MySpace is running foul of existing laws on religious tolerance," said Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society.

"It is disgraceful that this site was taken down.

"It is religious discrimination because these actions will protect religious hackers to the detriment of others."

Cornish at PNG 40th celebrations

NORTH QUEENSLAND Presbytery Minister Rev Bruce Cornish and the Director of Uniting International Mission Rev Kerry Enright attended the launch of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the United Church in Papua New Guinea in January.

PNG Governor-General Sir Paulias Matane touched briefly on the history of the church, citing in particular, the separation of the United Church in PNG from the Solomon Islands.

"Its history is a story of pain and gain, triumphs and trials," he said.

Mr Cornish said Sir Paulias Matane shared his own faith as a member of the United Church

and addressed some of the social concerns in the nation.

"As Governor-General he does not shy away from being critical of the actions of the government of the day when he believes that is necessary," Mr Cornish said.

Mr Cornish called for the Uniting Church in Queensland to pray for the United Church in PNG as it continues to provide important spiritual and practical support to a nation that is very poor with limited health and education facilities.

"The United Church has been one of the key providers of health (through clinics) and basic education to many villages."

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Higher Ground is committed to the Professional Development of its staff and where appropriate assists in meeting costs of training requirements. Career Paths are available.

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WHAT'S ON

March 1, 8.30am. Ignite Children's Ministry Expo at Citipointe Church 322 Wecker Rd Mansfield. Training Electives, resource displays, inspiring input - everything you need to kick off your year in children's ministry. For more information contact Paul Yarrow on ph 3377 9866 or email Paul.Yarrow@yacmu.ucaqld.com.au or visit www.igniteexpo.org.au

March 7, 7.30-9.30pm. Lent Seminar: A Crucified Messiah at Capalaba Uniting Church. Input from Rev Dr Greg Jenks, Lecturer in New Testament at St Francis Theological College and fellow of The Jesus Seminar, and Rev Dr Geoff Thompson, Director of Studies in Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College. Entry by gold coin donation. For more information contact David Busch on ph 0438 646 559 or email davidbusch@bigpond.com.

March 8, 2-4pm. Sea of Faith in Australia Sunshine Coast seminar entitled 'Human Images of the Divine' with author Val Webb. For more information contact Kay Ackerman on ph 5456 2005 or visit www.sof-in-australia.org.

March 15, 6am-12noon. Pre-Fair Garage Sale at the Gap Uniting Church. Second hand furniture, clothes, books, toys, sports gear and much more. Contact the church office on ph 3300 2712 or email thegapuc@inet.net.au.

March 15, 2pm. Easter floral demonstration at Sandgate Uniting Church (116 Board St Deagon) by renowned florist Robert Manton, including choral music, liturgical dance and afternoon tea. Entry \$10. Arrangements for sale. Contact Bobby Jeays on ph 3269 6565 or email djeays@bigpond.net.au.

March 15, 10am-3.30pm. Sea of Faith in Australia Brisbane seminar entitled 'Human Images of the Divine' with author Val Webb. Chermide-Kedron Uniting Church. \$30. Contact Jan Noble on ph 3359 3103 or visit www.sof-in-australia.org.

March 16, 2-4pm. Sea of Faith in Australia Gold Coast seminar entitled 'Human Images of the Divine' with author Val Webb. Contact Barry Hora on ph 5533 5211 or visit www.sof-in-australia.org.

March 20-24. 40th Easter Family Venture Camp at Tewantin Teen Mission campsite. A camping and devotional experience and an opportunity to study, walk and talk with your Saviour, family and friends. A variety of accommodation available. For more information contact John Horchner on ph 5496 8371 or email marjanborchner@bigpond.com or Camp Director Rev John Woodley on ph 5429 8993 or 0419 025 150.

March 21. Good Friday

March 23. Easter Sunday

March 31, 7.30pm. 2008 Rollie Busch lecture by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali of Rochester, UK. The Bishop will address the relationship between Christianity and Islam in his lecture 'Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order' at Chermide-Kedron Uniting Church. For more information contact Trinity Theological College on ph 3377 9950 or email ttc@ucaqld.com.au.

April 8. Ministry to/with Seniors river tour on the Murray River. Seven day tour of Adelaide and the Murray River. Aimed at those who may be helped by widening their circle of friends, those recently bereaved or retired, or feeling lonely. Contact Lew Born on mobile 0409 347 224 or ph 5580 0338 or email lewborn@bigpond.com.

April 11-13. Grassroots Mission Festival in Carlton, Melbourne. The national Forge Mission Summit includes speakers Sally Morgenthauer, Danielle Strickland, Andrew Jones, Steve Timmis, Debra and Alan Hirsch, Mike Frost, Ray Simpson and Darryl Gardiner. Interactive streams will focus on culture and consumerism, collaborative leadership, church planting, global justice and the environment, spirituality and worship, apologetic theology and evangelism. Register online at <http://festival08.forge.org.au> or for more information contact Duncan Macleod on ph 3377 9809 or email duncan.macleod@ucaqld.com.au.

April 18-20. Lifeline Ipswich and West Moreton Bookfest at Ipswich RSL Services Club, Lowry St, North Ipswich. Free entry. Books priced from \$1. For more information contact Kathy O'Meara on ph 3281 1920 or email a.mcdorwell@bluecare.org.au.

April 25. Anzac Day.

April 28-May 2. National Lay Preachers Conference at Karrajong NSW. For more information visit www.elm.org.au.

May 2-5. Round-About Arts and Crafts show at Bulimba Uniting Church. For more information contact Wendy on ph 3399 8657.

May 9, 5.30pm. QCT ecumenical worship service at the Cathedral of St Stephen, Brisbane. A service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Week of Christian Unity. For more information contact Jela at QCT on ph 3369 6792 or email gensec@qct.org.au.

Want to promote an event?
Go to www.journeyonline.com.au and click on 'What's On'



Air Commodore Murray Earl (left) is commissioned by Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd AO. Photo courtesy of the Royal Australian Air Force

Chaplain flies to new heights

ON THE 11 January 2008 Rev Dr Murray Earl was inducted as Principle Air Force Chaplain in the Royal Australian Air Force.

Dr Earl was commissioned by Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd AO and is now ranked Air Commodore.

Dr Earl has been an RAAF Chaplain since 1991 and in 2004 and 2005 was deployed to the Middle East Area of Operation.

Head of Defence Force Chaplaincy Rev Gale Hall said Dr Earl had the support and respect of his colleagues.

"Murray has the confidence of all the Air Force chaplains and probably all the defence force chaplains," said Mr Hall.

"He has shown good leadership qualities and is quite a scholar.

"He is widely read and continues to be up-to-date in understandings of theology and questions relating to ministry in military service."



Uniting Church President Rev Gregor Henderson in Machilpatnam with a young man who lost all of his family in the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami. Photo courtesy of the National Assembly

President visits South India

UNITING CHURCH Church President, Rev Gregor Henderson, visited South India in January.

He met with new leadership in the Church of South India and attended their biennial national synod meeting, held in Vishnukapatnam, a large coastal port city.

Mr Henderson visited dioceses in which the Uniting Church continues to have a presence through program and projects funding.

Uniting Church Overseas Aid supports tsunami relief in the South India area, as well as a vocational training project and an integrated tribal development project. Uniting International Mission supports children's ministry by training Sunday school teachers.

The Uniting Church also supports lay training in the Madras diocese and has volunteers working in a theological seminary and on an agricultural project.



On the Bible

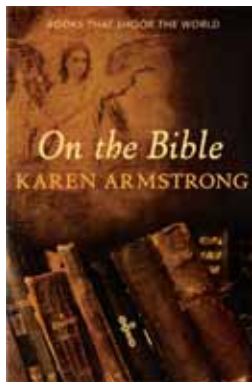
By Karen Armstrong
Allen & Unwin
RRP \$24.95

Described as "one of the provocative, original thinkers on the role of religion in the modern world" and as "arguably the most lucid, wide-ranging and consistently interesting religion writer", Karen Armstrong in *On the Bible* first tells the story of the writing and coming together of the 66 books we call the Bible.

In what she describes as a biography of the Bible she tells us of the many ways these words have been understood and used by Jewish and Christian scholars and leaders, in pre-Christian and early Christian times, then through the mediaeval and Reformation eras and now in modern scientific days.

Ms Armstrong is clearly not content with an arid academic text about these struggles for meaning: she writes with passion, disturbed by Jewish and Christian "fundamentalists" who have used the words of Scripture to justify violence and the oppression of those who believe differently.

For her the Bible is a spiritual resource, not a quarry to extract material to build forts or to find convenient projectiles.



She says, "Throughout this biography we have considered the ways in which Jews and Christians have tried to cultivate a receptive, intuitive approach to Scripture. This is difficult for us today. We are a talkative and opinionated society and not always good at listening."

Thank you, Ms Armstrong, for helping us learn to listen, for this is a book scholars will appreciate and all can enjoy.

On the Bible is the latest of her 21 scholarly books including biographies of Muhammad and the Buddha.

Reviewed by Rev Brian Lee,
a retired minister in the
Moreton Rivers Presbytery

REVIEWS

Two Small Books on Lay People and the Church

By Rod Jensen
Publisher Zeus Publications
RRP \$26.95

The title *Two Small Books on Lay People and the Church* belies the tone of a book that intensely challenges the Uniting Church and especially its laity.

Speaking as a dedicated layman, Emeritus Professor Rod Jensen uses his highly developed analytical skills to probe the reasons for the current and truly alarming decline in our numbers.

His language is measured but the implications of what he says will be controversial.

The central contention of *Two Small Books* is that the problem lies in the failure of our church culture to adapt to the culture of the post-modern world.

Churches need to be pew oriented, to develop a new honesty and respect for the mind of the laity, to resolve the fundamentalist-liberal schism and to cultivate spirituality rather than religion.

Jensen acknowledges the dedication of the clergy and lay folk but his insistence on the need for change will doubtless anger some.

Most laity will be intrigued and informed by his comprehensive overview of the role of the laity throughout Christian history.

He traces the emergence of Christianity from the small Christian sect, to the once dominant Roman Catholic Church, to the current smorgasbord of churches.

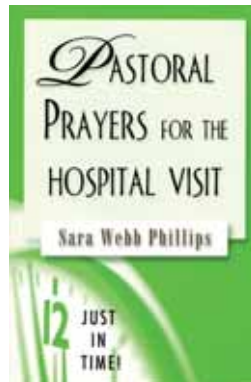
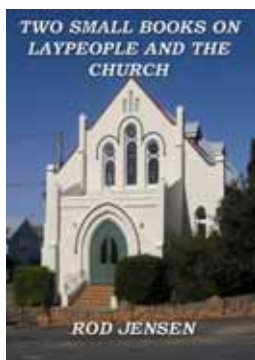
He identifies the 1640's as the beginning of the divorce between religion and many aspects of life as Copernicus, Newton (both Christians) and others established science based on observable facts instead of dogma.

Conflict between science and religion has continued and nowadays theological correctness stifles the laity. Jensen queries why the church is defensive.

Two Small Books is not easy and it offers no readymade solutions.

It is a discussion starter and should be required reading for all thinking members of the Uniting Church.

Reviewed by Merv Bengston, a member of Indooroopilly Uniting Church and a retired scientist



Pastoral Prayers for the Hospital Visit

By Sarah Webb Phillips
Abingdon Press
RRP \$16.25

Pastoral Prayers for the Hospital Visit may be a handy resource for chaplains (paid or volunteer) and for others engaged in pastoral ministry elsewhere in the church.

Initially I was reading this thinking I wouldn't need it, but others might.

And then I changed my mind - simply because of the vast numbers of prayers and scripture readings given, covering a multitude of topics.

So many folk that we meet have the greatest of needs. I am sure that many of the prayers included in the book would touch base with them.

Pastoral Prayers for the Hospital Visit contains prayers dealing with the ill patient, the worried, the dying and the grieving, but also prayers for the "new immigrant who has fallen ill", and prayers for a patient who is anxious about their child who serves overseas in the defence forces.

Prayers are written in general language, accessible to all and are presented in a very comforting and compassionate manner.

Pastoral Prayers for the Hospital Visit is light and easy to carry and suggested Bible readings are apt.

There are some great general suggestions about pastoral visiting and some appropriate hymns to use in pastoral care.

Reviewed by Rev Rowena Harris,
Manager of the Department of
Pastoral Care at Wesley Hospital

Into the Wild

Directed by Sean Penn
Rated R
140mins

Adapted from Jon Krakauer's best-selling non-fiction book *Into the Wild* about real life adventurer Christopher McCandless, this film was nominated for two Oscars.

After graduating from university in 1990 (aged 22), Mr McCandless left his family and their middle-class expectations behind to embark on a solitary journey that would eventually lead to his great challenge - winter in the wilderness

of Alaska and his untimely death in an abandoned bus at age 24.

Into the Wild raises more questions than it answers: was Mr McCandless on a brave rite of passage or was he a young man running from reality? Was his rejection of his parents' world a powerful statement against hypocrisy or an immature belief in an impossible ideal? And most importantly, was his a spiritual quest or a flight of evasion?

Central to these questions is his attempt to attain freedom from the confines of relationships and possessions.

McCandless makes a series of extreme and romantic gestures by all accounts based on fact: the ceasing of all contact with family making him an official missing person, the donation of his savings to OXFAM, abandoning his car and burning cash.

Are these the acts of a spirit seeking to free itself or of a spirit bound by turmoil? The answer, of course, is both, for the spirit need not seek freedom unless it is first bound.

How much is his youthful impulse towards 'freedom' a kind of avoidance at root - of the pain of the past and the messiness of human relationships and their dependencies?

What role does nature play in this story? If Mr McCandless had simply toured the cities of the U.S. and died in a back street of Chicago a movie would never have been made about him.

Nature, in this story, operates as a metaphor for the spirit. If the city represents the ways of the world, the wilderness represents inner life and the majesty of God's creation.

This, in a sense, is exactly what sets Mr McCandless apart from the multitude of young people who take up alternative lifestyles that are not what their parents had in mind.

Mr McCandless was living out, consciously or not, nature as spirit metaphor. And for this Sean Penn has honoured and remembered him with a fine film.

Reviewed by Meera Atkinson
and courtesy of
The Transit Lounge
www.thetransitlounge.com.au



Other reviews at
journeyonline.com.au

Fool's Gold directed by Andy Tennant
Rendition directed by Gavin Hood
Original Girl by Michelle Witheyman-Crump and Vicky Duncan

The Christians: An Illustrated History

By Tim Dowley
Lion Hudson Books
RRP \$34.95

I was pleasantly surprised by this concise historical coverage of a two millennia history.

I wondered about the title, because nowadays the term is used sometimes apologetically and sometimes aggressively.

However, I was impressed as the story of the Christians, in their many forms and in their diverse circumstances, was well covered, with fairness and with honesty.

The Christians: An Illustrated History is very well presented, well-bound and uses high quality paper. The setting out makes for easy reading and the art work is especially worthy of mention.

Modern printing makes it possible to show us photos of ancient manuscripts, elaborate icons and works of art that most of us would never see otherwise.

The history is comprehensive. Included are those parts we know fairly well, but also segments from historical eras and various traditions that many Protestant laypeople would miss from their education.

For example there are chapters on the Patriarchal Period, the Monastic Movement, the Eastern Church, Islam and the Crusades, the Reformation of course, but also the Counter-Reformation, modern Catholicism, the Ecumenical Movement and the modern missionary era.

In the Introduction Mr Dowley, an historian based in London, confesses the difficulty of writing a small book, (much more difficult than a large one) on such a topic.

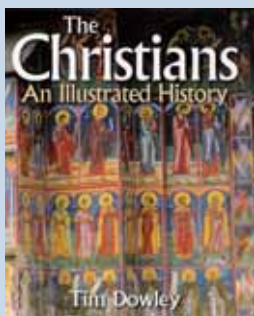
Summarising complex themes and condensing long histories has to lead to some oversimplification.

Mr Dowley deals honestly, but all too briefly, with modern issues of Biblical interpretation, theological controversy and pluralism (no mention of feminism), and Pentecostalism, but I have the sense that I am sitting on the cusp of a massive change in the way we view ourselves.

Seeing the Christians over against other religions makes one wonder about the future.

The Christians: An Illustrated History is a must for any school or church library. It is a well-produced summary of who we are and where we have come from.

Reviewed by Rev Bill Adams
a retired minister in the
Moreton Rivers Presbytery



PRAYER DIARY

Practical prayer is harder on the soles of your shoes than on the knees of your trousers.

- Austin O'Malley

9 March:
Hospital Chaplaincy

There are 14 paid part-time or full-time hospital chaplains throughout the Synod, many working with teams of trained volunteers both in the public hospitals and UnitingCare Health hospitals.

While the paid chaplains are placed in major hospitals there are many volunteer chaplains working on their own in small rural hospitals, especially throughout the Darling Downs.

Hospital chaplains tend to work as part of an ecumenical team. We provide pastoral care not just to Uniting Church members but to whoever needs it, regardless of denomination or religion, and to patients, staff and their families.

2008 sees us with a new Chaplaincy Coordinator, and several new members on the Chaplaincy Commission.

It will also see the appointment of a new Chaplain Educator during the year.

An area of growing need and concern is that of more chaplaincy for mental health.

Please pray for:

- Rev John Cox, Rev Robyn Kidd and the Chaplaincy Commission as they settle into their roles.
- The new Chaplain Educator and the future of the Hospital Ministry and Pastoral Care Course
- Kath Hobson, the new intern at The Wesley Hospital
- Vacancies within hospital chaplaincy, especially at St Andrews War Memorial Hospital
- More students for the Hospital Ministry and Pastoral Care Course, through either Trinity or Coolamon Colleges
- Ray Reese, the new ecumenical chaplaincy coordinator at Greenslopes Private Hospital, as he settles into his new role
- The need for more mental health chaplaincy.
- Our volunteer, full-time and part-time chaplains.

16 March: Chapel Hill
Uniting Church

Like all Churches, we appreciate the prayer support of the wider Christian community that we may be effective in our worship of and witness for Jesus Christ.

We have a great history; are conscious of our Chapel on the Hill from which the suburb gets its name, and pray that we will continue to be a beacon showing God's love to the people around us.

Give thanks to God for the faithfulness of our various ministry groups and life groups, and for the work these groups have done in the past.

Pray that we may find new and effective ways to reach the people of our area throughout 2008.

We would also appreciate special prayers for the planning and implementation of our 'Nearly Spring' Fair to be held on 23rd August.

Pray also for:

- The many young families within our congregation and for the influence of our playgroup that there will be both spiritual and numerical growth
- A number of maintenance projects that need to be addressed in relation to our grounds and buildings, and that the necessary personnel and funds may be provided to complete these tasks.
- Our Church Council that they may continue to know the mind of Christ, and bring honour and glory to His name.
- Our Youth and Children's Ministry that it too will grow in numbers and be a blessing to all those involved.

We have a particular need for leadership in this area, including the provision of a part-time Youth/Children's Worker, and we seek wisdom and guidance as we work towards that end, while also supporting and encouraging those currently involved in this ministry.



Peter Dunstan, Hope Brock, Dennis Harth, Noleen Kidd, and Harold Kilah are presented with Certificates of Attainment for the Introduction to Aged Care Ministry course. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Aged carers graduate

FIVE NEW aged care chaplains graduated from the BlueCare Introduction to Aged Care Ministry Course in February.

New course coordinator Lynne Gibson, who took over from Jan Chalmers, said in some cases the students were already working in aged care.

"We are resourcing them for ministry, in some cases a ministry they are already undertaking. Some have come from parish ministry to

aged care chaplaincy.

"It is an orientation to Aged Care Chaplaincy because it is so different," said Ms Gibson.

"Others are working as pastoral carers or have an interest in aged people in general and want to be better equipped to minister to the people they come in contact with."

The five people who received Certificates of Attainment were Dennis Harth, Hope Brock, Noleen Kidd (who did most of the

course via correspondence), Peter Dunstan, and Harold Kilah.

At the ceremony in Brisbane, Synod Chaplaincy Coordinator John Cox thanked the graduates for what they had done.

"Thanks for your effort and energy in responding to God's call," he said.

BlueCare Director of Mission Colleen Geyer said the organisation felt compelled to educate its people.

"To provide the opportunity to do training in Aged Care is very important to us," she said.

Ms Gibson said she hoped the graduates would be well resourced for their work after taking the course.

"My hope is that they will be better equipped to minister to the elderly people who so much need their love, care and their informed and educated support. I hope they will continue in their education. This is an introduction to aged care; it is a stepping off point," she said.

Ms Gibson said another 11 people will graduate from the course in Toowoomba in March and there are four more students currently working through the course.

By Mardi Lumsden



AJ Jenkins, Nathan Pershouse and Emily Jensen, prepare for their free car wash. Photo courtesy of Euan McDonald

Free car wash raises funds

'HOW COULD a free car wash raise money?' you may well ask.

Three young people from Iona West managed to raise around \$500 last December by getting sponsored to supply the car wash free of charge to motorists.

Emily Jensen, Nathan Pershouse and AJ Jenkins had the idea after having contact with homeless youth in their community.

The event was publicised in the local paper and had the support of the Iona West congregation and local businesses.

Iona West minister Euan McDonald said he was very proud of such an innovative idea.

"It was a great effort and we were delighted in the fact that this came from the young people themselves," he said.



Working with respect

Ben de Nys expressed concern about the Church's response to the previous Government's intervention into Indigenous communities *Journey* (February 2008) and urged the Church to action.

We need to be clear that there are two issues here. One is the process which was applied to the intervention, and about which none of us could be happy.

There are still issues associated with the intervention which need to be, and are being, addressed. Some of the action as a result of the intervention however has been welcomed and is helpful, and these are the elements which we need to encourage.

For our own part, Frontier Services is on the ground working with elders and communities where we have been invited to do so, to support the provision of services until strength and confidence allow communities to do that for themselves.

There is no way that we can barrel into communities and insist that we know how it is done, but where we are trusted to do so, we can provide our expertise and our support to ensure the confidence and hope that may be the outcome of the intervention, provided that its best elements are sustained and its worst discarded.

Rosemary Young
Frontier Services

"X" is OK

In response to two letters in "Journey" (February 2008), let me tell a story and give some explanations.

As a high school student (1950's) I remember using, in a debate, the argument that to use "Xmas" is taking Christ out of Christmas.

My very biblically literate English teacher was at pains to point out that "X", the Greek letter Chi (Ch in English transliteration and the first letter of Christ in Greek), is one time-honoured way that the Christian Church, east and west, has abbreviated the title "Christ".

The other way is "XP" (Chi Rho/Chr) seen on walls and icons in countless old churches and quite visible today in Brisbane's Orthodox churches.

Similarly the abbreviation for Jesus (the first three letters of the name) is what looks to modern Anglo eyes to be IHS. All our

Greek friends would be surprised at our ignorance.

The point for *Journey* is not that the journalist took Christ out of Christmas, but whether it was wise to use the time-honoured abbreviation for Christ which is known to be misunderstood so often today by people who have no knowledge of the original language of the New Testament.

Often *Journey* is at pains to require the church to be relevant in today's world or was *Journey* wanting to see how widespread the misunderstanding is?

I would think there are very few English teachers in our schools able to point out where "X" comes from and what it means in Xmas/Christmas.

Perhaps we need to ask why manufacturers of beer and computer programmes are misusing ancient Christian symbolism.

Rev Dr Geraldine Wheeler
Collingwood Park

I am surprised at the letters from Russel Vickers and Carol Ross, under the heading "No X in Christ".

Obviously they were not told in Sunday School that the "X" in "Xmas" is the modern abbreviation for Christ.

If they or others wish to be pedantic, they should properly write 'Christmas' as 'Christ's Mass' – the Mass to celebrate the official birthday of Jesus, the Christ or Messiah.

Apology not needed.

Dudley Horscroft
Banora Point

Journey received a number of other letters with very similar content defending the use of "X" in Xmas.

Thank you to all those who wrote. Ed.

of a bear market, private pensions don't look like being able to deliver for the last years of many people's lives. And in addition to those who have lost and will lose their homes, we are all now suffering the effects of the subprime gamble which has sent the global economy on a downward trajectory.

Perhaps now is the time for all of us to reassess whether wise stewardship is really about the pursuit of profit, or more about the protection of the financially vulnerable.

Jonathan Bartley is co-director of *Ekklesia*. This column is adapted from one that first appeared in the *Church Times*, and is reproduced and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 England & Wales License. www.ekklesia.co.uk

LETTERS

WWJD Editorial

The WWJD on my car key ring is a constant reminder to me to ask just that, several times a day. I also have a neck WWJD lanyard for my work security pass.

I was wearing this lanyard at a BBQ in Townsville before the last federal election. The national secretary for the biggest clerical union commented that he was always interested in the messages on lanyards, and what did the WWJD stand for.

When I said it stood for "What Would Jesus Do", he was genuinely interested and asked what I thought Jesus would do at the upcoming election.

I said Jesus was concerned about the sick and the poor.

Any prompt which asks us to think about, "What would Jesus do", is a good prompt and not at all tacky!

Merilyn Thomas
Townsville

What Would Jesus do if he were here today?

I don't think you'd find him in church warming pews or sipping cups of tea and exchanging pretty conversation with the so called "loyal followers".

Jesus would be in the refugee camps, in the jails, in the homes of the Indigenous peoples, in the mental institutions and among the street people.

Janet Jones
Toowoomba

Turning economics upside-down

What would happen if just a small proportion of the huge consumer debt is owed was defaulted upon or suddenly called in?

This article from the United Kingdom by Jonathan Bartley, co-director of Ekklesia, casts an eye toward contemporary economic revolutions, and asks what revolutionising economics from practical interventions informed by the standpoint of the Gospel would look like.

Ekklesia is an independent, not-for-profit think tank which examines the role of religion in public life and advocates transformative theological ideas and solutions.

THE TURMOIL in global financial markets caused by the widespread failure of subprime loans in the US, does leave one wondering what would happen if just a small proportion of the £1.25 trillion (that's right, trillion) in consumer debt we all owe on cards, mortgages and loans in the UK, were defaulted upon or suddenly called in.

But whilst most Christians maintain that charging too much interest is unacceptable, the Church Commissioners, like most of us, are at their happiest when the returns on their own loans – in the form of investments – are being maximised.

How you feel about debt depends a great deal on whether you identify with the lender or the recipient.

Many a sermon has been preached using the Parable of the Talents as a justification for getting a premium.

But some poorer churches have a different reading.

Given that the lender is a ruthless absentee landlord, out apparently only for financial gain, and who puts to death both the servant and his family for failing to deliver a return on his money, it



is unlikely that he represents Jesus, they say.

The story is really a warning against lending for profit.

The Gospel is about freely giving having freely received.

The great driver of growth at Pentecost was cooperation, not competition.

So in the current climate the church perhaps has something special to offer if it is brave enough to do it.

Often found at the margins, and in less affluent parts of Christianity, is a rich tradition of alternative economic models on which to draw.

Cooperative housing, credit unions, investment, pension and insurance schemes from Monasticism to early Methodism suggest there are alternatives where money can be lent not for profit, but for the good of the recipient. And in so doing risk can be carried by communities rather than individuals, and vulnerabilities limited.

Sadly, however, the idea that success means a decent return for

lending our cash often remains unquestioned, even in our churches.

Indeed, it has steadily replaced other ways of organising economically – and not always with good effect.

State pensions for example were initially set up so that the working population paid directly for the retirement costs of others.

But low birth rates, a declining workforce, and increasing length of life led many to the stockmarket, and private pensions, instead. And although more than 1.2 million families in the US live in property occupied through cooperative associations, in the drive for home ownership, subprime mortgages were offered instead to those who found it hard to get credit.

Since those who took them out were, by definition, in a vulnerable (subprime) financial position higher rates of interest were charged to reward the lenders for their entrepreneurial daring.

But with the FTSE now over 1000 points lower than eight years ago, and apparently at the beginning



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JOURNEY asks...

*Jesus said, 'I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear.'
How do you try to live that out as a Christian?*

Mark Cornford

Not long ago as I was channel flicking, I came across a documentary series on SBS looking at the diamond trade from mining in poor African countries to selling in rich western countries.

In this one segment they were interviewing a poor diamond miner and he said something like this: "At the moment I barely earn enough to keep our family in housing and fed.

"Soon I have to make the decision - put enough food on the table for our family - or send our kids to school and try and make do.

"I lie awake at nights worrying about this."

I looked at my TV, my stereo, my CDs, my full fridge, etcetera, and was once again reminded how rich I am.

A number of years ago my wife Leesa and I decided that the worst possible economic future that we might face was really nothing to be worried about.

We are blessed to live in a country with public health, education and welfare (and supposedly public housing but that is a different issue) - our issue is never survival or education - just how much luxury we have.

For us Jesus' words of "do not worry" are not about comfort but about challenge.

When we read Jesus saying "do not worry about possessions etc" we hear Jesus say to us "do not be obsessed with your 'things',

the value of your super and your house, how many portable DVD players you need.

"Instead think about my kingdom - about those who have nothing - about those you are called to be a neighbour too."

It is this that motivates and challenges us to work part-time, to share our lives, and share our wealth.

Because in the end we know our "worry" is not about needing more but how, when we face Jesus, we will answer when he asks, "How did you use what I gave you to benefit the least of these?"

Mark Cornford lives at Deception Bay and ministers at Deception Bay Uniting Church part-time



Samantha Jockel

Challenging words!

Even though I have read those words hundreds of times, as I sit and ponder them once more I feel saddened by my life and the lives of those around me (particularly those who are also familiar with these words) and the trust we place in our financial stability rather than the God of the Universe.

To me this passage is a challenge to trust God rather than the Australian economy, low interest rates, growing superannuation, property prices, the share market and the latest stuff.

For my husband and me, these words force us to continually ask ourselves, do we really need a plasma screen television with surround sound and home theatre?

Do we want to invest in a share market that contributes to a culture of corporate profit at the expense of employees and often the common good of the society around it?

Do we need to own more than one property and contribute to the decline in the availability and affordability of housing, creating a bigger gap between the haves and the have-nots?

Can we continue to live with one car and a scooter even though this can be inconvenient?

Over the past three years I have invested significant time and money into starting up a social enterprise that values people above profits.

Thus far I have not drawn a wage from this enterprise.

The pay from my husband's current teaching job barely pays our monthly bills, however at this point we have decided that I will continue to spend my time developing Biddy Bags and looking after our five month old daughter trusting the promise that God will never leave or forsake us.

A burning question for us right now is: Having a tight and stretched budget, do we still trust God enough to continue tithing our first fruits?

If we dare to have faith and have the world call us fools the answer is.....yes.

Samantha Jockel is a member of the Simply Living Community at Deception Bay and founder of the social enterprise Biddy Bags www.biddybags.com.au



Malcolm Cory

"Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers labour in vain."

There is nothing in this life that we control 100%.

I enjoy my health, family, my work, church life, water sports, being house proud, the assumed respect of the people I meet, having discretionary money to spend or give away.

Almost every one of the things I enjoy in life could be lost in an instant.

Professionally, I enjoy the business world; it is a little like a game.

I see that by the sweat of our brow we eat our bread, but I see some of the hand of God in the economy.

If we are creative and industrious we may make a new product or service that other people enjoy and are prepared to pay for, then there is a chance we could become rich.

However the economy goes through economic cycles like the seven good years and seven bad years in the story of Joseph in Egypt.

We can plan and be careful but then have to take risks. The risks are like having faith.

We don't know the future but if we plan ahead, work hard, push through problems we can achieve amazing things.

I feel some comfort when I recall particularly difficult times when I did turn to God and sensed that nothing else mattered.

He knew my pain, sense of loss and utter bewilderment but I still know he was pleased when I looked to him in love and trust, in the middle of my discomfort.

When I reflect back over my life and

recall the love of parents, grandparents, fun times around a game or meal table, teachers and school friends, the times I have valued most in my life, I see an unselfish love and acceptance given to me.

I also see the hand of God being the source of that love, and the people his instruments to share that love, and the Lord and giver of all good gifts smiling in the background.



Malcolm Cory is company secretary for a property developer on the Gold Coast and member of the Newlife Robina Uniting Church Congregation

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