



## Wealth and recession

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## About Candour

*Candour* is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

### Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

### Advertising

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### Glen Innis Vacancies

April 13 - 20	Cottage
April 20 - 27	Homestead/Cottage
May 4 - 11	Homestead/Cottage
May 11 - 18	Cottage
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To enquire about vacancies, please email [glen.innis@xtra.co.nz](mailto:glen.innis@xtra.co.nz) or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

There is **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis.

## Internet resources

Towards the end of last year, the editorial committee held a teleconference to plan the *Candour* themes for this year. I'm grateful for the advice of the committee, who are for 2009: the Rev Howard Carter, the Rev Mary Jane Konings, the Rev Allister Lane, the Very Rev Garry Marquand, the Rev Nathan Parry, the Right Rev Dr Graham Redding and the Rev Dr Kevin Ward.

One of the things we discussed was how to make it easier to share useful online resources. Perhaps we should have a regular column, by a different person every month, outlining what they find most useful; or perhaps we should just encourage people to send in snippets or urls pointing to good resources. If either of these approaches appeals to you and you have something to contribute, I would love to hear from you.

Please email [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

## Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz) for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

# All together now

Amanda Wells

At the moment, I'm working on a feature for the next issue of *Spanz* about the recession and our churches' response. Without giving too much away, it's interesting to hear some people say that they are yet to see any real effect in their communities<sup>1</sup>. It started me thinking about our perceptions of the economy and how they are generated.

For example, many in the media are worried about their jobs; there have been rounds of redundancies and advertising (and therefore revenue) is demonstrably down. This isn't wholly due to today's climate; print media are yet to figure out how to replace classified advertising lost to the Internet, and web media are still trying to work out how to make money while giving away costly content. These anxieties pervade the media and feed into what reporters write; it's only human nature to extrapolate your own concerns to a wider context, especially when some people around you confirm them. In Wellington, many public servants are worried about their jobs as the Government swings the axe (again a situation driven less by the recession than by other factors). If you also consider that those plugged into international networks of friends or family feel close to the dire economic conditions being experienced in the United Kingdom and the United States, and that people who consume international media are being repeatedly exposed to staggeringly bad statistics<sup>2</sup>, then you create a climate in which recessionary news will flourish.

But it seems naïve to believe that New Zealand will escape its share of suffering. The key questions remain "when?" and "how much?" Predictions of economic performance have never been hugely accurate; I instantly think of the joke about the economist who predicted seven of the last three recessions. Consider the current, unusually high, level of uncertainty and the myriad of contributing factors, and your guess is as good as mine. Possibly either of our guesses is as good as any politician's or economist's.

A couple of weeks ago, *The Listener's* cover featured a glowering Gareth Morgan asking "can you afford to see

your home halve in value?" But last week, after the G20 summit in London, which saw an agreement to pump US\$1 trillion into the world economy, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared the end of the global recession was achievable. "We have begun the process by which it will be solved," he said. Have we? Or is the confidence that we have more significant than the actual deed?

All of this talk is predicated on the survival of our existing economic model. We forget that life based on credit is a relatively recent phenomenon; even if you personally never use it, without it our banking system would collapse. Should we be considering alternative economic models? This question is asked by several contributors to this issue. Is an economic model driven by consumption consistent with a Christian model for living?

I'm not suggesting there's an easy answer to that question, particularly when you start to consider the daily decisions you make. For example, I buy a wetsuit so that I can spend time snorkelling and diving around Wellington's coast. I choose to buy a new one because it's on sale, rather than waiting for the right size to come up on Trade Me. A large proportion of the purchase price will go to the Wellington shop; some to the NZ distributor of the brand; hardly any to the foreign worker who made the garment. It's been internationally transported and its manufacturing process may not have been particularly environmentally friendly. Also, technically, it's not something I actually need.

If I agree that we need a new, more sustainable model of living that is based on more than consumption, how can I justify this action? How strongly should I critique yourself? Does cutting my car use by walking to work make the wetsuit OK? Questions like these are both ridiculous and too hard at the same time. It's so much easier to be a self-focused consumer, and that's a huge component of our society's greater economic problem. The individuals in America who took out unsustainable mortgages weren't considering their collective ability to tip the global economy into chaos.

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme "Technology and cybercommunity". If you're keen to contribute, please drop an email to [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

1 If you've got any interesting stories about the recession, please give me a call on (04) 381-8285.

2 According to the International Monetary Fund, the world economy will shrink by 2.7 per cent this year; its worst performance in 60 years.

# Are we heading back to the 1930s?

Margaret Galt and John Kernohan\*

You will have seen mention of the current state of economic affairs compared with the depression of the 1930s. The Church Property Trustees and their advisors see no evidence yet that we are headed into a 1930s scenario. It is clear though that we are into the most severe recessionary period for 20 years. In our commentary below, we provide some data derived from Church records of the last 20 years, and also some information from the 1920s and 1930s.

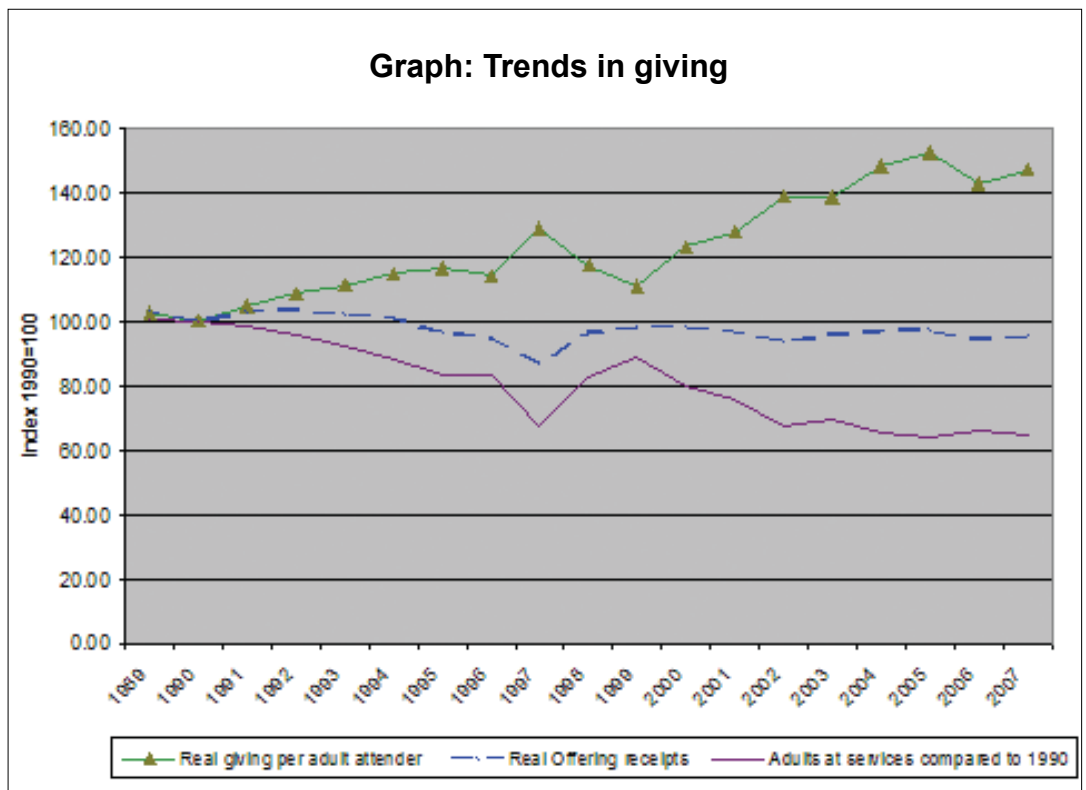
Total giving in real terms, as you will see, did not drop all that much over these periods but there were year-by-year fluctuations. What did happen is that church attendance dropped significantly during the 1930s and again in 1997/8. Expenditure in real terms dropped a bit but again not significantly (for example, the drops in giving and expenditure in real terms did not follow interest rates or share values downwards to anywhere near the same extent). Stipends dropped slightly in real terms during the 1930s. Bear in mind that we are looking at numbers in real terms and not dollars of the day. (This would mean that stipends would have dropped significantly in dollar or pound terms.)

Our view is that, overall, in a recessionary period church members make a surprising effort to maintain giving, which is not affected as much as most discretionary household spending in difficult times. That includes giving for General Assembly activity. We think the Church should note our observations about church attendance in times of recession, although it is only an assumption that this time too, we will see a drop.

Of course, if there is a very severe depression, at the end of the day giving would be affected and attendance would drop. But this would be countered by a stabilising

(or reduction) in church costs, including stipends (which are, in many cases, the largest expenditure for a congregation).

One of the current factors, which we think is not helpful, is the tendency of media reports to emphasise the unfavourable aspects of current events. Although in the past 30 years interest rates have been much higher than in 2007/8, we are coming off a 20-year peak in interest that lasted only for two years or so. Likewise, the news of the weak dairy prices emphasised the large drop in prices to dairy farmers but the new (low!) price is still the third-highest ever.

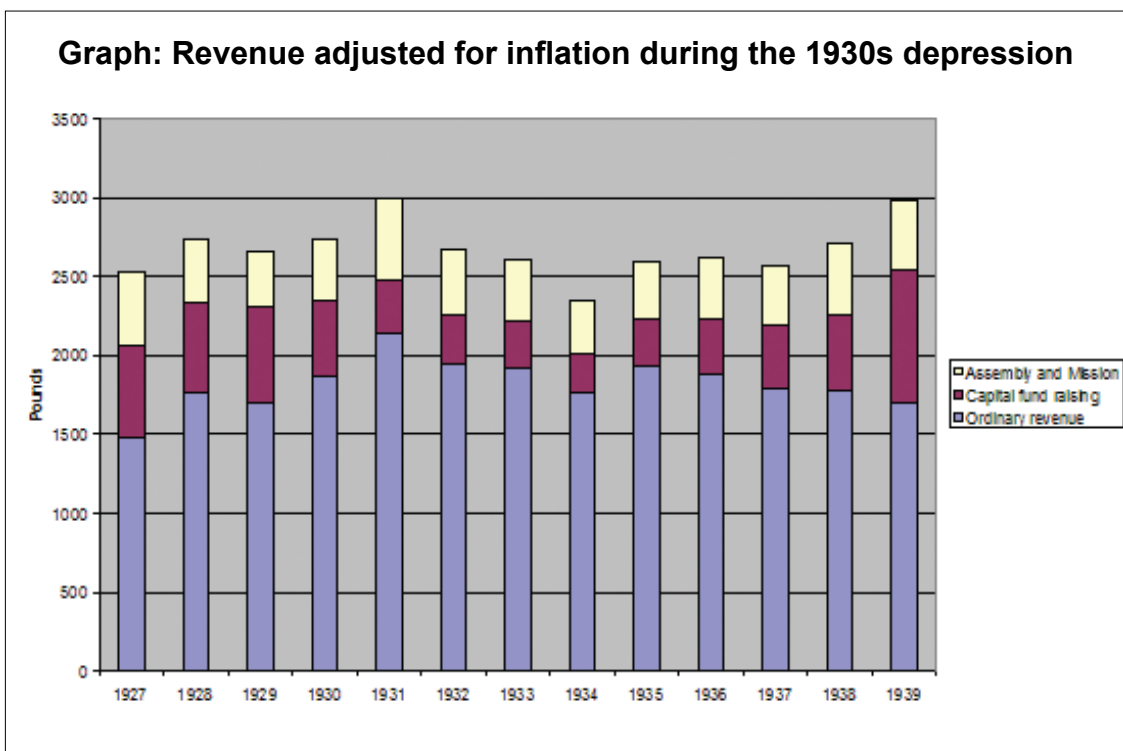


## The effect of lower incomes on giving

While we acknowledge lower interest rates will have some effect, we would expect that a far greater risk to parishes may come from a drop in giving if parishioners have less income. (Many of our older people in particular may have significantly less income as their interest receipts fall.) Essentially, since 1990, the church has been sheltered from the impact of the declining attendances by a very large increase in real terms in offerings per attendee.

It would appear that year after year, the remaining parishioners have increased their giving so that the overall level of resources available to parishes has been constant in real terms. If the growth in real giving were to stop, then parishes would be faced with a serious decline through the double-whammy effect of lower giving from a reducing number of people. This happened in the period from 1998 to 2000, which was a milder recession than the present one.

not increase over the decade. Secondly, parishes were relatively sheltered because money was preferentially directed towards congregational activities. The revenue dropped in the parishes – but not nearly as much as giving to the Assembly and mission work or to capital fundraising. If this pattern is replicated, it suggests that if things do become difficult, the Assembly budget and other non-core parish activities will suffer disproportionately.



Finally, one striking trend, particularly after a decade of steady growth in the 1920s, was a steady drop in attendance from 1928 to 1935. It would seem likely that some people stopped going to church once their resources were stretched – possibly out of embarrassment of having nothing to put in the offering plate or inadequate resources to take part in activities.

If New Zealand does have a serious depression, it would be worth drawing this

## The 1930s again?

Given the propensity of commentators to draw parallels with the 1930s, we thought a review of those years might provide some insights of what might be in store if the worst-case scenario did happen, though again we wish to stress that, in the Trustees' view, the parallel is not supported by the current evidence.<sup>1</sup> Over the 1930s, real giving dropped (but mainly in the capital-raising and Assembly-giving categories) and there was a tendency for debt levels to increase, particularly at the beginning of the depression.

However, in real terms this decline had relatively little impact on parish expenditure. There were two reasons for this. First, stipends were adjusted down in nominal value, (though in real terms they were better off than most of the population), so that the cost of ministry did

risk to the attention of parishes so that they think carefully before pressuring parishioners to increase their giving to either the parish or to the various relief efforts that are likely to emerge.

## Conclusions

Trustees have some concerns about present economic trends and the uncertainty of the timetable for them to pass. But provided they do not get very much worse, we believe it is most likely that, overall, the effects on most congregations will be manageable

*\*This is an edited version of a paper produced in response to a query from the Assembly Executive Secretary of the Church Property Trustees*

<sup>1</sup> These are our best estimates of the year-to-year variations. The numbers are complicated by the fact that the Church changed its balance dates twice in five worst years of the depression.

## Economic inequality – a serious theological issue?

Andrew Bradstock\*

If there is any upside to the economic turbulence we are passing through, it's the opportunity it gives us to reflect – both on how we got here and what we might do differently in future. As the Church leaders who met during the Prime Minister's "Jobs Summit" in February said, the break in the outright "culture of consumerism" afforded by the current crisis "allow[s] us all to reconsider our values".

Many of those values will have caused us concern as Christians. They include the assumption that happiness and wellbeing could be achieved simply by consuming. That it's OK to increase GDP with little regard for how it is distributed. That all should be encouraged, almost regardless of their means, to borrow and live in debt. The exaltation of business models predicated on maximising profits for shareholders over any social contribution or concern for the planet.

Another feature of our economy we should feel uneasy about is the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots". It is sobering to reflect that during the past two decades, New Zealand has shown the greatest growth in income disparity of all OECD countries. While the median income for wage and salary earners is around \$35,000 a year, the average salaries of our 44 top chief executives is more than \$1m (and in 2005 these top salaries increased by 23 percent, while average wages rose 3.1 percent - which is below the rate of inflation). There is even greater inequality when income for Māori and Pacific peoples is considered: the average weekly income for Māori is around \$200 less than European/Pākehā, with Pacific people an additional \$50 lower.

For Christians this should be of particular concern. The Bible is clear that inequality has a harmful effect on communities and is something God calls us to redress. Recent independent research has also shown that narrowing the gap between rich and poor in a society produces a stronger and more stable community; one more likely to generate trust, reduce violence and crime, increase life expectancy and improve social mobility. This research,

undertaken by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, and based on comparing data from across different countries and US states, provides the first real evidence that inequality is the most important explanation of why, despite their material success, advanced societies are often social failures, and how, when income differences between rich and poor are smaller, outcomes are invariably better.

Discussions about "equality" often get bogged down in arguments over definitions, so I want to focus just on economic inequality and argue two simple points: that Biblical teaching that all people are of equal value because they are created in God's image places demands upon communities with respect to their social and economic arrangements – specifically, to ensure that no one is unable to meet their basic needs in terms of food, shelter and security; and that there are sound Biblical and sociological reasons for governments consciously to pursue policies aimed not simply at relieving poverty but at narrowing the differential between rich and poor in society.

A core theme in Genesis is that people are endowed with an equality of worth and status by virtue of their being created by God. While

all are subject to differences in terms of gender, ethnicity, size or physical or intellectual ability – to be equal is not to be the same, and we are to celebrate our differences – all have

an inherent equality through creation. We are all "a little lower than the angels" and bear to an equal extent the "image of God".

When the man in Genesis 2 speaks of his companion as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," he sums up their inherent equality. Inequality, with one ruling over the other, comes in only after the Fall. Genesis 1 and 2 are clear that all people are made in the image of God and should reflect that by enjoying the gifts God bestows - described in the final verses of Genesis 1. Inequality is a consequence of human action, not the outworking of a divine plan. As Pelagius tellingly puts it,

*...we possess equally with others all the things which are not under our control but which we receive by*

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### The Bible is clear that inequality has a harmful effect on communities

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*God's dispensation, and on unjust and unequal terms only the things which are entrusted and subjected to our own rule...*

Affirmations of our inherent equality under God appear throughout the Hebrew scriptures. While disparities of wealth and status are evident and acknowledged – the riches of certain patriarchs and kings are described uncritically or taken as a sign of divine blessing, and the existence of slaves is accepted – a concern that none should be denied their basic needs is constant. For the Biblical writers, the fundamental equality of all people before God means that all must have their basic needs met, and God's displeasure with those who act unjustly in this respect is plain.

All wealth belongs to God and is not for people to do with as they please. "All that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours" (I Chron 29.11-12); "the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (Lev 25.23). Creating wealth is good, but it carries a responsibility to care for the poor. The "good wife" of Proverbs 31 is commended not only for her ability to run a profitable business, but because "she opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy".

God is perceived to be against systems that institutionalise the exploitation of the poor. This is most clearly seen with respect to the distribution of that most basic commodity, land. In Numbers 26, when Moses is instructed to divide the land among the tribes in proportion to their size, he does it by lot to prevent the most powerful securing for themselves the best. The Jubilee laws stipulated that land should never be sold in perpetuity; that those who benefited from the poverty of others by buying up their land should not retain it permanently. While these laws did not envisage a fully egalitarian society, they did aim for a degree of equalisation through workable redistributive mechanisms (even if there is no evidence they were ever put into practice). References to the land being divided equally also appear in Ezekiel, while Isaiah, Micah and Zechariah envisage a time when all will enjoy the security that comes from having their own access to the necessities of life.

Underpinning the concern that all should have equal access to land is the importance of community: in Biblical terms it is fundamental that no one is denied membership of their community on account of their economic circumstances. In the Leviticus 25 passage, material aid is given to the impoverished person to enable them to live once more alongside their helpers. Community is predicated on an assumption that every person can maintain their

own well-being: this seems to be the point of the prophets' depiction of "all sitting beneath their own vine". Where even one person becomes dependent upon others, the community is deficient.

The New Testament is also clear that community and fellowship only truly exist when all members are held to be equal. In I Corinthians, Paul employs the metaphor of the body to describe the relationship between the followers of Christ, stressing that all limbs and organs are of equal value and equally vital to making the body function. As people join the fellowship of Christ, so any social status or standing they have becomes of no importance. Paul stresses that diversity of gifts and abilities does not mean diversity in terms of worth or status. True fellowship cannot exist where some members are held in higher esteem than others. James warns against showing favouritism to people attending church on account of their outward appearance.

Another example of equality among early Christians appears in Acts 4, where members of the Jerusalem church preferred sharing goods to individual ownership. Again, the requirement that basic needs be met seems to have been fulfilled in that "there was not a needy person among them". Equality between churches was also important for Paul, as his call to the Corinthians to share their goods with a poorer fellowship suggests (II Cor.8.13-14). This has echoes of the provision of the manna in the wilderness, where "those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no lack" (Exodus 16).

Paul uses the powerful image of Christ's incarnation, his rejection of riches and adoption of poverty, when encouraging giving to ensure the well being of others (II Cor.8.9; cf. Philippians 2.5-7). In speaking of the "Word becoming flesh" John attests to the equality of all: in taking flesh, God assumed all human beings into a full filial relation.

The Communion speaks of our equality before God, as Paul's rebuke to those at Corinth who took more than their fair share implies (I Cor.11.17-34). In Scripture, this Supper anticipates the heavenly banquet when none shall be distinguishable by rank or status. It remembers the One who ate with social outcasts and taught that, while in society people pull rank on one another, "it shall not be so among you" (Mark 10.43-44).

In many ways, Jesus reflected the tenor of the Scriptures in which he was immersed. In Luke 4 he affirms his call to proclaim the year of Jubilee, and he taught that, in the kingdom, the poor are raised up and the rich brought



down. Mary prefigured her son's mission by speaking of God filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty, and Jesus literally challenged people to sell their possessions and give to the poor. Entry into the kingdom required the abandonment of wealth, presumably because there the categories of rich and poor will not exist.

How do we challenge society to reflect this teaching that all are created equal and should be able to meet their basic needs; that none should permanently benefit from the poverty of others? How do we relate fellowship and sharing to present-day economic systems? Clearly we cannot take economic principles emanating from ancient nomadic communities and apply them today, yet a debate about the implications of allowing the Bible to inform our thinking on economic inequality could be of great value.

What issues might it raise? I guess one will relate to the role of the state, always a controversial area: for despite fears in many quarters (not least among politicians!) about the "big state", it is difficult to conceive how the Scriptural idea that everyone should receive an income sufficient to live on (also reflected in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights) could be fulfilled without some centrally administered apparatus.

Unlike relieving poverty, ensuring that every person or family has the basic necessities for survival requires co-ordination. This is not to advocate a return to old Soviet economic models, nor to rule out a vital role for the voluntary or business sectors; but it is to rule in a managing or organising role for the state, rooted in a conscious commitment to achieve basic equality. While some will prefer a direct role for the state in providing for basic needs, it is possible to conceive of government maintaining a mixed approach to service provision, reflecting modern, progressive attitudes to the state, within a well-defined framework for tackling inequality.

Another issue will be the minimum wage and welfare and pension levels. How are these levels set? What are the merits of a living wage, and welfare rates and pensions which take into account research into minimum income standards? Should incomes – especially those of people on the minimum wage – rise in line with average earn-

ings? This would act as a brake on inequality and ensure the lowest earners do not get left even further behind.

Should taxation – particularly of the highest earners - be used to generate the extra revenue needed to ensure a decent standard of living for all? This could be a way of meeting the twin Biblical imperatives of getting the rich to share their wealth with the poor and achieving a greater level of economic equality, though it would hardly be popular! Tax is now seen almost universally in negative terms, as punitive and freedom-restricting, so is there scope for a fresh debate about its purpose? This might include reflection on the Muslim concept of "Zakah", which derives from a theological understanding of wealth as something to be shared in order to achieve social justice.

Critics of wealth redistribution to achieve social good claim that it stifles ambition and represents a loss of freedom, yet the relatively small reduction in the range of choices open to the richest decile when subjected to, say, a higher level of personal taxation, compared to the enormous increase in "freedoms" that redistribution

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## Should taxation be used to generate the extra revenue needed to ensure a decent standard of living for all?

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would mean for the very poor, makes that argument unconvincing. When redistribution is effected to enable poor people to increase their chances of realising their God-given potential, the freedom enjoyed by the society actually increases. There is freedom from (poverty and dependency) as well as freedom to (spend one's resources as one chooses).

Could we promote a debate around the values of generosity and giving, of putting something back into the community? No society can legislate to make people generous, but we can highlight the moral issues involved and seek to stimulate fresh thinking. Could a "commission on inequality" examine the costs and impacts of growing wealth inequality and identify remedies that would attract broad public support?

In talking about inequality we risk saying things people do not want to hear (as Jesus did in his day) – for example, that economic growth alone will not necessarily address poverty and inequality (as NZCCSS stated in their "Facts about Poverty 2008"); that poverty cannot be reduced without affecting the standard of living of



the better off; that people (including in some cases ourselves) who enjoy a comfortable lifestyle do so, to some extent, because others receive low wages; that being human involves not just having enough to remain alive but being able to share in and feel one belongs to a society, and therefore what other people take home does matter. Stressing the importance of community and partnership over and against greed and consumption as foundation stones for a society may jar for some – though perhaps less so than a year ago. And what do we say about the tax cuts in effect from 1 April? The reasoning behind them may well be sound, but because they are proportional to income they increase further the gap between the highest and lowest earners.

Some inequality of income will always exist in society. The Bible acknowledges that some will enjoy greater

wealth than others, and nowhere does it advocate economic equality – what we might now define as “equalised after-tax real income” – even if that were practically and politically possible. Yet where conspicuous wealth exists alongside material poverty, it does have much to say, both about the fact of that poverty and the structures that allow such gross inequality to exist. It’s a word we need to hear, especially now.

*\*Andrew Bradstock is Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago. Prior to taking up this new post in January, he co-directed the Centre for Faith and Society at the Von Hugel Institute, Cambridge, and from 2000-2005 was Secretary for Church and Society with the United Reformed Church in the UK. He was a post-doctoral fellow at Otago in the 1990s.*

## Ministry exchanges/overseas ministers

I have received expressions of interest from overseas ministers wanting to either exchange charges with Presbyterian ministers or serve in Presbyterian parishes.

### **United States of America – Presbyterian Church (USA)**

A minister from Washington State is interested in an exchange for about three months in 2009-10. He lives in a town with a population of 1800 primarily in retirement and recreation and with a fading timber industry. The congregation is made up of 90 people from many denominations and the emphasis is on basic Christian doctrine, mission and ministry in the Reformed tradition. The congregation is active, worshipful and caring. The minister also has extensive training and experience in counselling and chaplaincy work. Accompanied by his wife, he is interested in a variety of ministry contexts: rural or city, large or small, senior pastor or associate.

### **Scotland – Church of Scotland**

A minister from Dundee is interested in a six-week sabbatical in the North Island. She has 30 years experience as a minister and is currently splitting her time between teaching religion and philosophy in a high school and providing stated supply ministry to a parish. This minister is not looking specifically for an exchange as her husband and youngest child would stay in Scotland. However, if possible, she would like an opportunity to bring her eldest daughter (late teens) who is studying classical music so that she may spend time with like-minded people here.

### **United States of America – Presbyterian Church (USA)**

A minister from Florida is interested in an exchange for approximately 4-6 weeks from June - August 2009. Situated in a small town, the parish has 250 members, is traditional in worship and theologically moderate. The minister would like to serve in a parish located on or very close to the coast but is open to other options.

### **United States of America – Presbyterian Church (USA)**

A minister in a team ministry situation is looking to exchange with a New Zealand minister. The minister comes from a large parish (average weekly attendance 450 people) in Charlotte, North Carolina. This would be a good opportunity for a minister wanting to gain experience in a large parish whilst being supported by a senior minister.

**More opportunities available - please contact me for the full list, or for more information on any of the above.**

Juliette Bowater  
Personnel Advisor  
(04) 381-8282 or [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz)

# What economic model offers enough?

Bruce Hamill, Coastal Unity parish, Dunedin & North Otago

Just prior to the credit crash, John Naish published a book entitled *Enough: Breaking Free from the World of Excess*<sup>1</sup>. In his chapter on “Enough Growth”, he argues that the much-publicised need to limit economic growth for the sake of a sustainable future is hampered by the way our brains operate mimetically. We do not operate rationally as *homo sapiens* or even *homo economicus*, but are driven by a kind of mimetic herd mentality and an insatiable drive for more, such that we are better characterised as *homo expetens* (wanting man). This he sees as a kind of lower brain function that dominates in times of insecurity (like an economic crisis).

Naish’s solution to the problem of economic sustainability (prior to the crash) was not to give up on the rational and spiritual possibilities entirely, but to focus on realistically harnessing the herd instinct in support of a sustainable “enoughism”. In other words, creating a snobbery of trendy sustainability (“an unspoken belief that nice, well-educated, *caring* people recycle and go to farmers’ markets. Nasty ignorant common folk don’t.”<sup>2</sup>) This, he thought, was not ideal, but the urgency of the situation called for it as part of the solution.

Maybe, thought Naish, this movement for sustainability would become so trendy that the bubble of unsustainable growth would burst and a new era of enoughism would be born. With this in mind, he went in search of economics experts who would offer him a model of what economic life might be like in that new era. He searched in vain. No one was addressing the issue of a model. However, everyone pointed him in the direction of Tim Jackson at Surrey University, who is a professor of sustainable development. Jackson was sceptical about Naish’s view of how to get there, but their discussion of the issue of a model is very instructive. I will quote from Naish’s book:

*But what if we were to wave a magic wand, so that one morning we woke to find that suddenly everyone in Britain was living a personally and planetarily*

1 Hodder and Stoughton, 2008  
2 Ibid, p. 218

*sustainable existence? Jackson is disarmingly frank. “This is the hardest question of all. I’ve just raised this at our commission and was told by a Treasury official that switching to true sustainable development might mean that we have to go back to living in caves,” he says. “The government has a split personality on this. It keeps telling people to get out of their cars and consume less. But it would be up the creek without a paddle if everyone did. As it currently exists our economy relies strictly on increases in consumption.”*

*Jackson says nothing for a moment, then sighs and continues: “it’s extremely hard to find political space to have this discussion. It is closed down very quickly by the interests of economic stability – there’s a lot*

*of ‘we have to protect the economy at all costs’. Eastern Europe during the collapse of the Soviet Union shows what can happen to people’s happiness during a falling econo-*

*my. I don’t know the answer to this, but I feel it’s the only question worth wanting to solve. On my own I don’t feel that I’ve got what it takes to come up with the answer. It’s astonishingly difficult. It will have to entail a cultural shift with its own momentum.”<sup>3</sup>*

All this was before the economic crisis, in the days when some thought history had ended and our capitalist end-game had been realised. Now governments in their desperation have started to recover from their split personalities by telling us to consume more to save the economy. To save what economy, you may well ask? To save the post-war growth economy, which gives full rein to our saviour, *homo expetens*. All of which raises the question as to whether the big shake up we are now experiencing makes the cultural shift that Jackson talked about more or less likely. As a Church, we might reflect on that and we also might reflect on the nature of that cultural shift.

I believe one key question to be asked in this time of chaos is hidden in the title of this issue<sup>4</sup>. It has to do with

3 Ibid, p. 221

4 The original title of this *Candour* issue was “Being asset rich during recession”

the assets that we as the body of Christ, fellow citizens and members of the household of God have to offer the world. What are our principle assets? The answer, I believe, is nothing less than an alternative economy. William T Cavanaugh, in his groundbreaking book *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*<sup>5</sup> talks of the micro-economic practices of consumption and exchange made possible by the God in the eucharistic life of the Christian community. So he is *not* talking about a model that is theoretically transferable to the global economy as a means of saving the world. This alternative economy is inseparable from worship. It presupposes a new humanity, which is (in part) a cultural shift. Of course this cultural shift only ever exists in the world of *homo expetens* as a piecemeal witness to God's future economy – an economy that burst into that world with the raising of Jesus.

William Stringfellow<sup>6</sup> says that the principalities and powers (like, for example, the state and the market) rely on the dominion of death for their sway. This does not mean that they can be rejected as purely evil, but simply, that those whose economic practices are grounded in the resurrection, where the dominion of death is exposed and undone, should expect nothing more from the principalities and powers than their fearful response to the ever-more-obvious grip of death in time of crisis. In this context, it is our duty to bear witness to the resurrection as a critique of the culture controlled by the principalities and powers.

In a world shaped by an economics of scarcity, the assets of the Christian community are nevertheless enormous. They are the liberty not to need more but to share more, since for us death has lost its sting. This is the most economically radical claim possible. Inasmuch as it is true, a foretaste of the future is possible. Inasmuch as it is true, we know that the future of Creation is secure in the future of God. Inasmuch as it is true, we know that although we cannot save the world, we can participate in God's saving and in the sustainable world to come.

In the language of John Naish, the resurrection takes away the insecurity that feeds our evolutionary instincts to strive for more. The risen Christ is "enough". The NT talks about its impact as that of a mind re-script (Romans 12: 2). Thus the discipline of Christ in worship should form sustainable economic practices. In the place of a herd instinct in which our neighbours are our rivals and covetousness leads up the ladder to murder and planetary destruction, the resurrection creates a new herd in which

the self-giving of Christ is imitated by the power of the Spirit for the common life.

Such a radical (the atheist might say romantic or hypocritical) conversion/cultural shift is cold comfort for those who want to advise the principalities and powers on how to get out of an economic crisis. However, advice is not our asset. What's more, it's hard not to wonder whether in fact the Christian community has demonstrated the sustainable practices of the kingdom; whether Christ is, in fact, risen.

I wonder whether this dangerous doubt is part of the reason why the Church so often retreats into the escapism of private, non-political and non-economic spiritualities. That might explain why the notion of the economics of the body of Christ seems like a strange idea and our theological imaginations shut down.

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5 Eerdmans, 2007

6 See in particular his book *Free in Obedience*

# Who saw it coming? An American view

Tom Haupert\*

Like many people of retirement age, I manage my own finances, and try to make good decisions about funds saved for retirement. So I look for relevant articles in the *New York Times*, the *Economist* magazine, and *Barron's*, put out by the publishers of the *Wall Street Journal*. Sometimes *Barron's* publishes an interview with a seasoned financial manager with many decades of experience.

About three years ago, some of these experienced managers were pointing out that debt was ballooning ominously within the United States: household debt, company debt, and government debt. When measured against Gross Domestic Product (GDP, the value of all goods and services a country produces in a year), the total US debt, during a period of 10 years, had ballooned from five times US GDP to eight times its GDP – an increase of many trillions of dollars (equal to a multitude of US federal budgets). But during the same period, the savings rate of US households had dropped from about 2.5 percent to 1 percent of after-tax income. The households of Britain and Japan save at twice that rate, and Germans at 10 times as much!

Well, about the same time, three or four years ago, some of these managers interviewed in *Barron's* also pointed out that over half the assets held by US banks were made up of house mortgages, and that many of these mortgages had adjustable rates that would reset to much higher rates in a few years' time. And when the rates reset, many foreclosures would occur, they predicted, because standards for granting mortgages had become lax, and many who shouldn't have borrowed were allowed and even encouraged to do so. Many would be unable to pay these higher rates of interest when the rates reset. Since US banks held such large amounts of this debt, and since so much of it would probably not get repaid, these managers said, a US banking crisis was almost inevitable.

Recently, one of these managers, Jeremy Grantham, said looking back on this unfolding crisis "was like watching a train wreck in slow motion". "This financial crisis seemed so inevitable and so merciless, and yet the bosses

of Merrill Lynch and CitiBank and even Hank Paulson [US Treasury secretary] and Ben Bernanke [Federal Reserve chairman] – none of them seemed to see it coming."

"Why didn't they see it coming?" Grantham asked. "I have a theory that they are real organisation-management types who focus on what they are doing this quarter or this annual budget. They are somewhat impatient, focused on the present. Seeing these things requires people with a historical perspective who are more thoughtful and more right-brained – but we ended up with an army of left-brained immediate doers – people who don't look very far down the road." (*Barrons*, 13 October 2008, p 45).

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## The financial circumstances bringing the global financial community to its knees have come from the wealthiest nation

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This is a specifically American crisis. Over the past decades, whenever the global financial system has come close

to breaking down, a problem within one or more of the poorer countries has most commonly touched it off. But this time, the financial circumstances bringing the global financial community to its knees have come from the wealthiest nation.

The crisis has come from the American financial markets and institutions: the US housing market, the US debt market (where US mortgages were sliced up and sold internationally), the US investment banks and regular banks, and the US debt-rating companies, which assured international and domestic purchasers that these US mortgages were as risk free as holding cash. It came too from the US Congress, Federal Reserve, and Treasury, which encouraged lax lending and the buildup of a huge bubble in house prices.

Hundreds of billions of dollars were invested in these US mortgages from the US and from around the world. This was money that sought the safest kind of investments; money that people could not afford to lose. It was not the money of speculators being put into high-risk stocks, but rather money, such as retirement savings, that people could not do without.

How few expressions of regret we hear from those who caused this situation! Many have suffered loss – across America and around the world. These are people who are losing their jobs as companies scale back; who are finding it very difficult to feed and house their families. People who have lost retirement savings as stock and bond markets have dropped.

I believe that it will become apparent that many in leadership positions did not look very far down the road, either in decisions they made that helped bring on this crisis or in omitting to perform the financial oversight that was their duty. And many households went further into debt than they should have.

Some of Barron's interviewees say that the US and its markets may take as long as five to 10 years to recover

from this crisis. So it's important for individuals to look carefully down the road and see if they can avoid using up assets that have fallen in value, in order to allow for their slow recovery.

Since things look pretty bleak in the financial area, might this be an opportune time for reflecting on some other areas of life, for looking over the priorities that guide our decisions? Perhaps there's an opportunity to devote more time and energy to relationships, and to enrich life with things that cost little or nothing, such as more visits to a nearby library rather than to a mall?

*\*This article was contributed by the Rev Rob Yule, who studied at New College, Edinburgh, with Tom Hauptert, an American from Pennsylvania. Tom sent Rob this personal reflection on the global financial crisis.*

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# Credit crunch: A perspective from Britain

Ray Galvin\*

In September 2007 I came back to Cambridge, England, where I've lived for the past seven years, from a month of field research in Germany. As I walked through the town in the late summer sun I was astonished to see a very large queue outside the local branch of Northern Rock, a bank with headquarters in Newcastle.

Most of the people were over retirement age. There was silent worry on their faces. Passers-by informed me that Northern Rock had fallen into crisis in the last few days and its depositors were anxious to get their life savings out in case the bank collapsed.

It was a strange feeling. A bank run was something you saw in old movies about the American West, or read about in British 19th century history. I would never have expected to see one in my lifetime. These things didn't happen in our financially sophisticated society where banks managed investments via complex "financial in-

struments", with carefully balanced risks designed to take account of every possible calamity. I wondered what kind of mistake someone must have made, and what it signalled for the rest of the banking world.

Over the next year and a half, the apparently sound financial basis of British banking unwound in a great tailspin

that has lumbered on and on from crisis to crisis, defying even the most innovative and daring efforts of politicians to pull it back into balance.

Until late 2007, Britain was awash with money and the pound was riding high. The

workforce had seamlessly absorbed half a million new immigrants from Eastern Europe. Unemployment was low. House prices were climbing. The party was in full swing.

The only apparent down-side to this economic plenty was a crass, loud arrogance among many Brits, with per-capita alcohol consumption double its 1950s rate, big-

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**Unemployment was low. House prices were climbing. The party was in full swing**

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ger and bigger gas-guzzling cars, and many of Europe's pleasant holiday destinations invaded by rowdy, over-paid monoglots seeking to reproduce British boorishness wherever the sun shone.

Much of this is now gone. But gone, too, are the jobs and even the pensions of many hardworking people. Many have lost their homes, if not their fine East European neighbours, who are trickling back to Poland and its former Warsaw Pact allies. Many good national initiatives are gone, too, or fading – like the government's enthusiasm for costly climate change mitigation measures and increased foreign aid. There's nothing pretty about a recession, and a depression will be just plain ugly. Poverty is a great evil.

As a local preacher in our Cambridge Methodist circuit, I mention the credit crunch occasionally in sermons. I even wrote a Christmas song about it<sup>1</sup>. But I'm not yet sure what to say about it as a preacher. Its root causes seem to be the Western world's foolishness in living beyond our means for so long, plus neo-liberal reluctance to control financial instruments, plus the greed of the sub-prime mortgage promoters, plus the remarkable blindness of our economists in failing to see it coming. The basic duty of a bank is to shift money from those who have saved it and don't need it, for the time being, to those who do need it for productive activities that will benefit both themselves and others. Banks got into profit-making ventures that were nothing like this, and crashed so badly they can't do their basic job any more. But we can't let them fail because they'll take the savings of the poor with them to the grave. Perhaps we should be praying very hard for leaders like Barack Obama and Gordon Brown, who have the awful task of trying to sort out the mess.

People often say that changes come to New Zealand a year or so later than to the rest of the developed world. So it's not much of a surprise to find that the Credit Crunch has only just begun to bite in Aotearoa. I really hope it doesn't bite anywhere near as hard as it has in Britain. In any case, I'm pretty sure we're entering a period where the Church's role in caring for the poor will come more sharply into focus. Hopefully we'll all learn some important lessons that might protect us from the worst impacts of future boom-and-bust cycles. Or perhaps this really is the end of the Western world's economic supremacy – or maybe the end of the good times for us all.

Those brought up in the years of plenty (say 1960–2007) may feel that economic wellbeing is the norm for Western

peoples. Of course it isn't. Poverty is the more common state of peoples in most lands and ages. Our theology needs to adjust to this. The Gospel we preach has to be ready for anything that comes.

*\*Ray Galvin is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand now living in Cambridge, England, and doing doctoral studies in environmental politics. He served as minister of Belmont and Birkenhead Presbyterian Churches, Auckland University chaplain, minister of the international congregation in Vienna, Austria, and in a full time peace education ministry. He has also worked as an engineer and mathematics teacher. He is a member and local preacher in the Cambridge Methodist Circuit*

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<sup>1</sup> The song can be downloaded at <http://justsolutions.eu/music/ColdDecember16kHz.wav>

# A new economic order?

Eric Dodd\*

The impact of the international economic recession on New Zealand is now being felt. Slowly and inexorably, as the economic trough deepens, various adverse changes are becoming apparent in New Zealand business and our financial community. Many professional economists and governments both here and overseas are struggling to analyse the developing, baffling economic situation and all that has previously gone on, and what they might do now to soften the impact.

However, of one thing they are certain: there is no quick-fix solution or silver bullet that can easily be deployed to effect a rapid recovery from this economic recession. Furthermore, we are told that it is going to be a long, slow grind back to economic reality. In New Zealand, therefore, despite best endeavours and ideas that might come out of such things as the recent Job Summit, it is likely that unemployment figures will continue to increase this year and a number of companies will be forced to cease trading. Reserve Bank governor Alan Bollard told the Job Summit that this global recession is the “biggest destruction of global wealth ever”; although it could be argued that the wealth that was in existence was never truly there. People living beyond their means can be translated simply as greed in another disguise.

Despite the gloomy predictions, there is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Our successful emergence depends on whether or not we have learnt our lesson from this experience. When we emerge from this crisis, there will be a need for corporations and governments to overhaul their social consciences. As a Church, we also need to learn from this situation; to publicly stress that we should avoid returning to “business as usual” and encourage our leaders to review past practices, with the intention of accepting the fact that future business decisions must be based on only doing things for the common good. We should not stand aside from political and social questions and preach a purely spiritual Gospel, as some Christians have sometimes mistakenly imagined. It is our

Christian duty to get involved in these areas of life and communicate our feelings.

The vice president of The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, Ruby Duncan, has said that “we don’t want to go through this recession and come out worse off as a society. We want to come out healthier, having learned some things and realigned some of our values.” The Council has also told the Government, in a briefing paper, that welfare benefits and accommodation supplements should be raised to boost the poorest tenth of the population. This is in response to the Government’s own figures, which show that the real after-tax incomes of the poorest tenth of our population did not improve at all in the 20 years up to 2007, while the real incomes of the richest tenth grew by more than 30 per cent. The chasm that has

now grown between highly paid company executives and the average worker would probably have appalled our parents during their working life, even though they themselves struggled to secure a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

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People living beyond their means can be translated simply as greed in another disguise

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Church leaders must emphasise that the economic crisis is an opportunity for New Zealanders to turn away from greed and give more time to their communities and their families. They need to categorically state that it is not just about people having money. This is a time to look at what we really value. Society and families are of fundamental importance. We need to be putting time into relationships and into learning how to do those relationships well.

This also applies to our relationships with the poorer countries of the world. They have not contributed at all to the global credit crunch generated by the wealthy in the West, but it is striking the poorest people in countries that have always been at the bottom. Financial aid is likely to be one of the first casualties of this international financial crisis, and this situation will be compounded by falling export earnings, against which poor countries have little or no defence.



The Rev Dr Sharon Watkins, a member of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee, is quoted as saying in her sermon at the first prayer service attended by United States President Barak Obama after his inauguration: "Even in these hard times, rich or poor, we can reach out to our neighbour, including our global neighbour, in generous hospitality, building communities of possibility and hope." It was further pointed out in a letter to President Obama that poverty, violence and war are amongst the "enormous and formidable" challenges of the present time and that the WCC is prepared to partner with his administration to bring about changes so desperately needed to foster God's vision for humankind and all of creation.

The point is that behaviours must only be judged rational, efficient or productive to the extent that they maximise love and caring, rather than just money or power. Those who in the past have gained excessive wealth for themselves at the expense of those who are not so well off, and have subsequently left their needy fellow creatures without aid, have not advanced God's work in our world. The house-price boom in New Zealand was driven by people rich enough to buy investment properties - but the social price has been paid by low-income families forced to work long hours to pay for their homes. These wealthy speculators have dishonoured everything that Jesus stood for. Money cannot be carried into the next life; it is not needed there. But the good deeds done to give a helping hand to the disadvantaged will be recorded as a faithful investment of God's entrusted treasure to be carried to the heavenly courts.

The men who run the Wall Street financial firms would do well to dwell on the words concerning the accumulation of wealth, given in Mark 8:36, after they paid out nearly US\$20 billion in bonuses for 2008 whilst at the same time petitioning for taxpayer assistance. This was typified in the case of the Merrill Lynch chief executive John Thain, who authorised the payment of some US\$3.6 billion in bonuses before the company declared its bankrupt situation. There is little sympathy when people realise that the average Wall Street bonus of US\$112,000 is about twice the average American's income.

The latest debacle concerns the ailing AIG insurance company, which recently posted the largest loss in corporate history and was subsequently awarded US\$170 billion of government bailout funds. In their misguided wisdom, they decided to continue to issue US\$165 million in company bonuses. The US president has dubbed this "outrageous" and no doubt will do all he can to have this situation reversed. As well as the comments made

by President Obama, public statements referring to these people have been scathing. For example, one letter to an editor says it all: "Having enriched themselves on a scale that would make 19th century robber barons blush whilst squandering the billions entrusted to their care, the titans of the finance industry have sought to redefine the whole concept of the bonus - from reward to entitlement - in order to pocket yet more loot even as they hold out their hands for taxpayer support."

Similarly, in New Zealand the heads of those failed financial firms that risked the investments of ordinary people simply to accrue more wealth for themselves should be thinking about their own mortality. There again, there has been some harsh criticism afforded to those who have shown an unwillingness to accept responsibility for their financial dealings, which in a number of cases led to the collapse of companies, with the result that some retired investors have even lost their homes. In these circumstances, it is very hard for Christians, particularly those directly affected, to turn the other cheek against such people. How is it possible, we might ask ourselves, to forgive the fraudster Bernie Madoff, who left behind a trail of destitute retirees; collapsed charities and struggling universities, especially when immediately prior to the news being released in the press, his wife was in the process of transferring additional funds to her already existing personal fortune of \$US70 million?

Financial power has led to the illusion of invincibility for these people and hopefully when all the dust settles, there will be different people at the top who will be acting with integrity and able to make ethical and moral choices that set the example for all employees to follow. As the Lord's followers, we need to work together to encourage captains of industry to do good works, to share the responsibilities for things that go wrong and to help share another's burdens. We are in effect God's messengers to the world, depositing his hope for a brighter, equitable system that will ensure that people in future are treated with compassion and fairness.

*\*Eric Dodd is convenor of social issues for Churches Together in Northland*

# Koinonia in a time of recession

Jono Ryan\*, Highgate Presbyterian, Dunedin

While in Kolkata, India, last month, I attended a small suburban church where my friends from Servants to Asia's Urban Poor worship with their Indian neighbours each Sunday. It was a basic affair, with about 40 of us assembled on stackable plastic chairs in a small concrete-floored hall, but while language alternated between Bengali and English, the patterns of worship were comfortingly familiar, with praise and prayer, and an attentiveness to the Word.

On this occasion, it was in fact my British colleague Helen who was preaching, reflecting on these words to the Philippians: "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel..." (Phil 1:3-4, NIV).

Westerners or Indian, "we are partners in the Gospel," Helen reflected. A bold claim, for Helen was just visiting Kolkata for a few weeks. Her work for Servants, like my own, is based

within the West, and while it is true that most of our Servants community live among urban poor neighbourhoods in cities like Kolkata, as for any affluent Westerner visiting India, I was acutely aware of the economic and political realities that differentiated these surroundings from my home. In what sense could she say that we are "partners"?

This question came to mind again this week, as my church in Dunedin began to consider the future of our buildings. As with many Presbyterian churches, we have a difficult set of questions to consider, balancing the preservation of our heritage with the resourcing of our congregation for mission. Pondering this issue, I was mindful of the contrast between our elaborate sanctuary in Dunedin and the simple concrete hall in Kolkata where I had worshipped just weeks prior. However, it was not the material contrast that struck me as much as the way that church property was held so open-handedly by this small gathering in India. At the end of their service, the pastor announced that, regrettably, their lease of this concrete hall had unexpectedly expired; he wasn't too sure where they would meet the following Sunday, but would let the congregation know closer to the time. This seemingly drastic no-

tice caused barely a ripple amidst the cheerful chatting around me; it was as if the pastor had been apologising for a shortage of morning tea biscuits.

Despite the fact that we worship the same God and proclaim the same Gospel, the differences between Christian communities in New Zealand and the two-thirds world are immeasurable, not least in economic and political terms. Our perspectives and values are often markedly different. For example, while whenever God's people gather to worship in one place, we are faced with the practical issue of finding a place to gather in, our priorities and outworking of such an issue tend to have more to do with our own expectations and cultural norms than with the

Gospel that unites us. In what sense can it be said that we are "partners in the Gospel?"

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## Koinonia demands a relationship of mutuality, of close interaction and involvement

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*Koinonia* is the word often translated as "partners" in Philippians 1:4; a word

rich with expectation. Certainly it demands a willingness to share our resources and material support, such as that conveyed in Romans 15:26, when the churches in Macedonia and Achaia "were happy to make a willing contribution [*koinonian*] to the poor among God's people in Jerusalem." However, it cannot be diluted into a mere exchange of resources, as would be the case in a benefactor relationship. For *koinonia* demands a relationship of mutuality, of close interaction and involvement, and it is compelled by a shared interest; a common goal towards which we are all working. When the Gospel is our common goal, there is no hierarchy other than that of Christ; we are all equal partners participating equally in the same mission.

It is on the basis of this equal participation that we can, in good conscience, speak of being partners in the Gospel with the Church in the two-thirds world. Not because our congregation has made a financial contribution to a certain project, or because we have sent mission teams to a certain community; not, in short, because of anything we have done, because all of these relationships are still rife with the inequalities and injustices of our own human condition. No, it is on the basis of the call of the one God

that we have all received to participate in his one Gospel. Though this may appear unlikely, it is this reality we proclaim (and our sisters and brothers in India proclaim) every time we gather around the communion [*koinonia*] table: “The bread that we break, is it not a sharing [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1Cor 10.16-17, NRSV).

We can speak of being “partners in the Gospel” with the Church in the two-thirds world because, in Christ, that is what we are. The challenge is for us to live in light of this reality—not least in a time of recession. However, while our economic crisis may prompt a reluctance to offer financial assistance to global Churches and projects, it may also challenge us to move beyond this comfortable role of “benefactors in the Gospel” toward the more demanding

and invasive relationship of *koinonia* with our partners in the Gospel. Not only sharing the Gospel with them, for example, but asking them to share the Gospel with us. By allowing the life of the body of Christ in the two-thirds world to inform our own life here in New Zealand, perhaps we have something to learn about how we use our own resources.

Being (asset) rich when New Zealand is experiencing economic recession presents us with challenging questions; however if we took our *koinonia* with the church in the two-thirds world seriously, these would be questions we would always wrestle with, recession or no recession.

*\*Jono Ryan is New Zealand Coordinator for Servants to Asia's Urban Poor, and a minister at Highgate Presbyterian Church, Dunedin*

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# Being asset-rich in a time of hardship

*Kerry Enright\**

Differences between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand are apparent financially.

One difference is that the equivalent of Presbyterian Support operates from within the Church rather than autonomously. UnitingCare is the largest non-government provider of social services in Australia. Frontier Services is the largest provider of services to central Australia. Both are large “businesses”.

In many places, welfare services are congregationally based. The Uniting Church has inherited from the Methodists a tradition of mission congregations providing a broad range of support services. The largest, Wesley Mission Sydney, has a turnover of over \$150 million per annum. It undertakes major fundraising, has programmes throughout Sydney and overseas, runs two specialist hospitals, a training institute for the arts, counselling and an employment service. It is facing the likely redundancy of more than 400 staff because, after a tendering process, the Government department that oversees employment services has contracted them to a British company. That kind of downscaling impacts the whole organisation, because the income helps support a broad infrastructure.

Another Mission in this city runs a café and motel, owns apartment blocks and provides accommodation for people in need. One small Sydney congregation operates a school for children who have found it difficult in other state or private schools, has a large kitchen that provides food free or at low cost, and also has overseas work.

Such work is often done by congregations with quite small numbers who employ a general manager and rely significantly on Government funding.

As well, some have large investments, which are the result of selling forbear denominations' property that wasn't needed following amalgamation. That means that there is quite a heavy reliance on government funding and investment income. In one presbytery I know, less than 20 percent of congregational income across the presbytery comes from giving by congregational participants.

To generate good returns for mission and ministry, some councils of the Church entered into agreements with property developers. Some developments have turned sour and the Church has been placed under significant strain. The financial crisis has meant properties have not sold as quickly as anticipated but loans must still be serviced.

My impression is that where a Church relies more on investments or on maintaining a certain level of mission activity to generate income, during a recession it is hit harder than a Church that relies more on giving from the congregation. That impact is felt right through the Church because as local income declines, then presbytery, synod and Assembly levies also decline. As a National Assembly agency, we have certainly had to revise our three-year budget forecast downward. The declining dollar buys less aid. Investment interest diminishes. Synod income reduces. Direct donations will need to grow.

Government ministers keep saying that Australia will come

through the recession better than most countries. They have been handing out money to people to stimulate spending and there is a large investment in infrastructure development.

They have also been outlining our responsibilities. They tell us we must spend to keep people in work, avoid protectionism, keep trading and regulate to avoid market excesses.

But much is unknown. Will we be through it in two years or three or longer? How many people will lose their jobs? Is it the end of extreme neo-liberalism, as Kevin Rudd has written?

One thing is certain: those most poor bear the brunt. Bob Zoellick, the president of the World Bank, said that between 200,000 and 400,000 extra children will die each year as a result of the crisis. By 2015, the year for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 1.5 million extra children will have died. Poverty, malnutrition and infant mortality increased during every national financial crisis in the past 11 years.

A study released by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap) concluded that Asian and Pacific countries are particularly vulnerable to the triple threat of food- and fuel-price volatility, climate change and the global economic crisis. The emergence of all three crises at the same time has "hit the world's poor the hardest".

We cannot afford to let the developing world fall further behind. It is home to 3 billion people living on less than

\$2.50 a day. We need to ensure that the world's poorer countries receive significant attention and are part of any comprehensive global response.

The World Bank estimates that as many as 53 million more people could be trapped in poverty as economic growth slows around the world. This is on top of the 130-155 million people pushed into poverty in 2008 because of soaring food and fuel prices.

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### God calls us to commit again to living within the limits of God's creation, rather than taking more than it was created to give

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The Bank is calling for developed countries to pledge 0.7 percent of their stimulus packages, or as much as they can in additional money, to a global vulnerability

fund to help developing countries that can't afford bailouts and deficits.

Jim Wallis of Sojourners suggests the most important question is the extent to which we will allow the crisis to change us. Will we return to business as usual or will our life-patterns change?

It was apparent that we had created systems that were taking more from the Earth than it was capable of giving. Environmental damage is evident. A Uniting Church leader has highlighted how churches and others can put excessive trust in high interest rates and good returns, when more moderate expectations are appropriate.

I believe that in the crisis God calls us to renew our connections with those most vulnerable and to open our hearts to them again. I believe God calls us to commit again to living within the limits of God's creation, rather than taking more than it was created to give.

As we move into Easter, we celebrate how the risen Christ continues to turn hearts, overturn systems, connect lives and lift people trapped in poverty.

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We've all been asked for money before. Every minister knows that particular knock on the door, the brief display of some point of interest in the Church or its activities, and then the question about money. The story about running out of petrol on the way to a funeral in Hamilton; the costly washing machine repair that has left the family without food for the rest of the week. I've heard these stories many times, and to be honest, at times, I have given money to these storytellers just to get them off my front door step.

And then there have been the times when I have been humbled through the realisation of the destructiveness of my own stereotypes. I remember once, it was a bad day, saying, "okay, so you've got four hungry preschoolers in the house, I'll come around and see for myself," never believing that such a story could be true, and finding, on visiting the house, that it was. Four young children, left at a grandmother's by a mother who had done a runner to Sydney.

Other stories I've heard of personal economic woe were more troubling because they were rather close to my own middle class existence and the assumptions supporting my sense of security. Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren reminds us in a lecture on the collapse of the middle class that 90 percent of bankruptcies for families with children come about because of ill health, loss of job, the break up of the family or death of one of the parents. She comments that more children in the United States are now in houses that file for bankruptcy than file for divorce.

We have a theologically significant dis-ease in matters relating to value, wealth and money. It seems to me that busyness and goodness have become synonymous. Why should being too busy, as such, be the excuse for anything? All the busy people I know find time to do some things and not others. Somehow, being busy has come to mean the same thing as doing something worthwhile or virtuous. In fact, people will apologise on my behalf for mistakes I make because I must be "so busy".

A few weeks ago I asked members of the congregation at which I was leading worship, to whisper the figure of their annual gross income into their neighbour's ear. A pause of disbelief, and then the, "he-was-only-joking" laughter. Why is such information treasured with an almost sacred privacy? The annual Assembly Office budget tells everyone that my stipend is \$59,000 (plus the provision of a house) per annum. How does that relate to a person who works in a home for elderly people at \$26,000? Or my medical specialist friend who brings in \$320,000? How would our attitude change about the person who whis-

pered one of these figures into our ear at Church? Would we feel alarm, joy, sorry, contempt? I've been to churches where they record and read out on Sunday morning the amount each family have given. From my cultural perspective I find in such practise a kind of refreshing iconoclasm.

The figures provided to us by the Church Property Trustees tell us that in the Great Depression, while congregations showed significant financial resilience, the number attending worship, at least at the start of the Depression, dropped off. I wonder why?

I have been saddened by the realisation that sometimes, when things go wrong for our church families or individual members, people stop coming to church. I wonder if our congregations are sometimes not the place of radical grace and hospitality that I believe Jesus intended them to be. We would face a terrible judgement indeed if we focused our understanding of success on conforming to a particular cultural sensibility - at the cost of proclaiming the Gospel to those who felt they had personally or financially failed.

Jurgen Moltmann reminds us that "the neglect of economics is a wound in the side of the Church." In the current difficulties, it would seem inadequate to simply blame the voraciousness of bankers for the inadequacies of the American sub prime lending market. In a recent lecture, the Archbishop of Canterbury focused not on bankers' greed or other individual failings, but on the problems of an entire system geared up to giving consumers what they want - whatever the consequences. The key questions, he thought, were: "What is growth for? For what and for whom is wealth important?"

Difficult times calls for radical rethinking, and where better to go than our Bibles, and especially Leviticus 25. Getting real about the cancellation of debt, the sinfulness of usury, the care of and repatriation of land and the liberty for those in bondage to us is a Biblical imperative. We can look at our own attitudes towards wealth and money, reflect on the hospitality and welcome provided by our congregations, support food banks, develop skills in budgeting, and support those who provide an economic analysis that reflects Biblical affirmations about the value of people and land. A crisis in the economy can become a transformative *kairos* moment for ourselves, our congregations and our communities.

