



IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

THE CULT
OF THE BODY

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DIFFERENT SIZE

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ANCHORS IN THE
STORM OF LIFE

Alex Pierce

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INDULGENCE?

Ellie Scott



Woman (Hebrew *ishah*). Woman, with man, was made in the image of God. 'Male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

welcome...

A free lunch - there's no such thing – but ishah is now a free magazine! The ishah team would like to make the magazine available to as many people as possible so we have decided to make it a free publication. We hope this change will enable even more women to be challenged to think Christianly about contemporary concerns and to be equipped to be creative, confident and effective in communicating the gospel. Production and postage costs will be covered by donors wanting to support the ministry of ishah.

So, if you are a person who has subscribed for a number of issues and would like a refund, contact the editors and it will be forwarded to you. Alternatively, your subscription will be used for the ongoing work of ishah. Electronic versions of the magazine would be the easiest to distribute, but hardcopies of ishah will still be available. If you are not a current subscriber, let us know the format in which you would like to receive ishah:

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With these positive changes we hope that even more women will be able to think critically about issues that confront, challenge or irritate them. You may have read ishah regularly in the past. You may have valued the efforts taken to apply the Bible to our everyday lives. We trust that there will be people who will join us in this ministry by making a donation so that cost will not be a barrier to further readers.

Finally, as we make this change we would like to acknowledge those people who have put in time and energy to help make ishah work through the years. Their contribution has been greatly appreciated. If you'd like to join the team we're looking for people to volunteer in the marketing, finance and subscription areas; see our contact details if you'd like more information.

Let's see where this new venture will take us.

Di Appleby.

ISSUES TO COME...

ISSUE 13:
Refugees:
Aliens and
Strangers

ISSUE 14:
Women, Men
and Ministry

our aims

1. To value the Bible as God's inspired Word to us and the ultimate authority on matters of faith and practice, through thinking hard about how the Bible applies to our everyday lives.
2. To encourage women to grow in godliness and maturity in Christ.
3. To equip Christian women to be creative, confident and effective in communicating the gospel.
4. To give women in a variety of roles and situations the forum to think about contemporary issues from a framework of Biblical theology and to articulate their thinking in a manner that stimulates themselves and others to live lives that are more faithful to God's Word.

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Design

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The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the *ishah* editorial committee.

> The cult of the **body**

BY MERRILL CORNEY

Beauty is a surprise that catches us unawares. A glimpse of heaven. It has a power all its own. The wonder of it is its diversity. Yet the beauty industry has taken away the shades of difference and replaced them with a manufactured all-of-a-kind product.

This emphasis on the perfect body means we can never make the grade. Ask any group of women if they are satisfied with their body-image and they will immediately launch into a detailed list of their defects. Even the most perfectly-proportioned woman will find some defect which she thinks is obvious. Why do we do this to ourselves? If our bodies function adequately why do we worry so continually about their appearance? The excuses are 'I need to keep healthy' – true – 'I need to look my best for work' – maybe. But it doesn't stop there, does it? We set ourselves these impossible physical standards, or perhaps it is truer to say that they are set for us by the world of commerce which plays incessantly on our dissatisfactions. They know only too well the rarely-quoted proverb: 'Human desires are like the world of the dead – there is always room for more' (Proverbs 27:20 GNB).

Today, of course, people with sufficient money can change all that. They can have bits added on, bits lopped off or sucked out. They can modify or completely remodel themselves in someone else's image. This, after all, is the control generation. You can decide to give birth on Friday so that you can play in the golf tournament on Sunday, so why not take control of your body shape along with everything else? To be able to use the miracle of plastic surgery to remodel a disfigured face or body is a wonderful gift, but to remake ourselves for fashion's sake seems a terrible waste of time, money and energy.

As a sixty-four year old I am still not immune to feeling pangs of shock when I unexpectedly catch sight of myself in a mirror. Who is this overweight old lady whose face and body is descending into folds? This can't be the trim little blonde gymnast I knew so well. It's not. It's me – a grandma whose grandson loves and admires her big tummy so much that at a grandparents'

day at Kinder he joyously announced, 'Hey, everyone! This is my grandma. She's got a big tummy because she eats too much cake!' – then buried his face in that comfy tum and gave me the biggest hug. I think I'm glad to be me...until the next time I look in the mirror.

► Body Image and the Bible

The body has always been feared, revered, worshipped or reviled. Why? Before the Fall we are told that the man and the woman were naked 'and they felt no shame' (Genesis 2:25, NIV). After the Fall they became aware of their nakedness and attempted to cover themselves. In the beginning there was a perfectly balanced integration of mind, body and spirit. When sin entered the scene the balance was upset and the mind turned on the body.

*Could it be that
God has no interest
in our appearance
as we are all equal
in his sight?*

When we look for a biblical view of body image we find virtually no references to physical appearance. The Song of Songs, of course, is a great poem in praise of the beauty of the beloved. However, the beauty in this case is seen through the rose-coloured lens of love and may not be apparent to all. With Jesus as the focus of the Bible one would expect some comment about what he looked like, but we are given no idea. In Isaiah 53:2 we read, 'He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him', so we can assume that Jesus was nothing out of the ordinary to look at. Or perhaps the Bible is telling us that an individual's appearance was of no great interest in those times. Or could it be that God has no interest in our appearance as we are all equal in his sight?

The idea of God valuing us as equals is lost as we pursue physical beauty in a society driven by a fiercely competitive, success-orientated culture. We compete as individuals on many levels to attract attention. Our



worst fate is to remain unnoticed, invisible. This emphasis on personal success was unknown in biblical times. It is still unknown in many cultures today where the individual finds fulfillment in being an integrated cog in the larger wheel of family, tribe, and nation. In the Bible those who stand out are those who are obedient to God's call to leadership – not always those with natural talent but those who were obedient. Looks had nothing to do with it. Obedience was the key.

► **So what are we seeking?**

Although personal appearance does not rate a mention in Proverbs the word that reappears again and again is wisdom. Not cleverness, not intelligence, not quantifiable education, but wisdom. We are encouraged to

desire it, to pursue it above all else: an intangible quality that speaks of God's will, goodness and direction. A culture based on the pursuit of godly wisdom would be a far cry from the trivial, superficial one we find ourselves in.

We all like to feel good about ourselves and no one should feel guilty for dressing in a way that flatters them and pleases the eye, but when our appearance becomes an obsession we are in trouble. When a larger and larger percentage of our income is spent on spas, gyms, personal trainers and beauty aids then we are not seeking wisdom, we are squandering God's resources on a mirage. Ask yourself how much time you spend on your appearance per month. How does this compare with the time you spend on prayer, Bible reading or encouraging others?

One of the most beautiful women I ever met was a middle-aged obese lady with orange hair, wearing a Hawaiian print dress.

If, as the Bible says, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit then of course we need to keep that body clean and healthy and strong so that it can do its work for God more efficiently – not to compete with its brothers and sisters for worldly approval. The pursuit of physical beauty can drive a wedge between us and others. As caring Christian friends we should guard against that age-old girlie pursuit of criticizing others' size, shape or dress sense. It is not edifying, it is not encouraging; it is destructive. Proverbs 29:25 says, 'It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you: but if you trust the Lord you are safe'.

One of the most beautiful women I ever met was a middle-aged obese lady with orange hair, wearing a Hawaiian print dress. After the initial visual shock her generosity of spirit, genuine love and interest in even a stranger like me overwhelmed any perceived ugliness and was replaced by a warmth that could only be described as great beauty. The outworking of her faith transformed her.

As Christians we believe that we are made in God's image. That image has surely more to do with our ability to create, to empathise, to exercise free will and to be compassionate, than to resemble him physically. My desire should be to polish that image, to keep it untarnished, so that I might grow in likeness to my father, God – so that the beauty that is seen in me is his beauty.

 **write of reply**

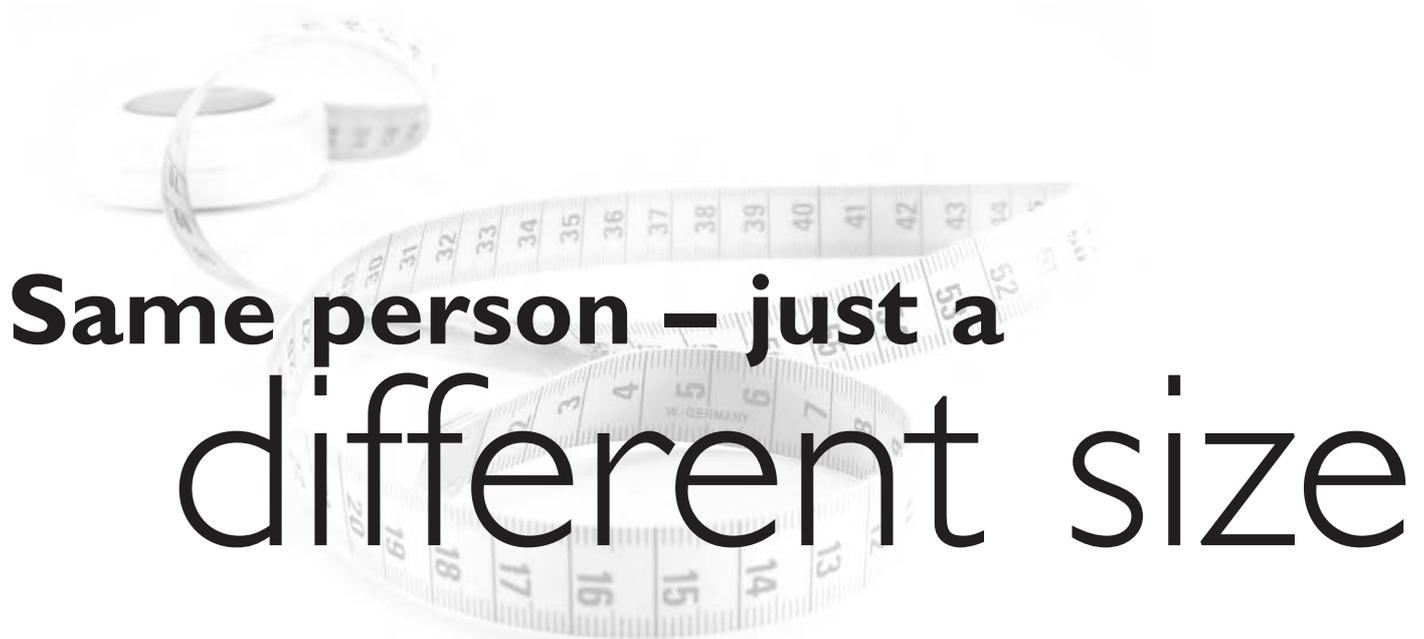
ishah welcomes reader responses to topics dealt with in previous issues. These should be no more than 200 words long and can be emailed (to ishahmag@hotmail.com) or posted (to Ishah, c/- 56 Collier Cres, Brunswick West, VIC 3056).

Dear *ishah*,

You should be very encouraged to know that your magazine has an avid readership among men as well as women. Perhaps they would be too embarrassed to subscribe, but I was taken aback after the publication of my last article (on bioethics) that all the comments I got came from men. Obviously they are getting hold of the magazine somehow, and are interested in what women are writing and reading,

Denise Cooper-Clarke

■ *Merrill Corney is the author of four books of religious education material. She is married to Peter, an Anglican minister. They have three sons and four grandchildren and worship at St Hilary's Anglican Church, Kew. She currently teaches watercolour painting. Email – aphantom@ihug.com.au*



Same person – just a different size

BY SUE BAZZANA

Three years ago I lost 30 kilos.

I'd set about losing weight with a strategic plan that rivalled a military operation. I wasn't trying to look more like Britney or Jennifer. That was never my motivation. Two things coincided to put losing weight on my Must Do list.

I had known for a number of years that I had Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), a reasonably common condition in women that impacts on the body's ability to balance hormone levels. A confirmed side effect of PCOS can be the onset of diabetes. Less is known about its role in weight control but lots of women with PCOS struggle to maintain their weight. I was seeing a specialist to monitor the PCOS and having regular blood tests. It was clear I was rapidly moving towards becoming a diabetic. Weight loss had the potential to help bring the blood tests back to something more normal.

While the thought of daily insulin injections was a pretty big incentive it was really a photograph that gave me the resolve I needed to lose weight. Who was that person in the picture? Oh my goodness, is that what I look like? I had no idea!

I'd never been small. My family are all solidly built people. At high school I was taller and broader than many of my friends but was fit and well proportioned. With my bone

structure I knew I never would be size 8 or 10. I was comfortable in my skin.

It is not like I never thought about body image – you can't get away from it! In my early 20s I read a great book by Josh McDowell called *His Image My Image* that encouraged readers to see themselves as God sees them. I understood that my outward appearance had nothing to do with how much God loved me. I could be incredibly disfigured and still acceptable to Him. The outward appearance was much less interesting to Him than my inner being. I was able to make peace with my body knowing that He loved me.

I had a healthy self-esteem, but personal self-esteem was not my ultimate goal. I wanted to know Christ and worked on coming to grips with how much God loved me. Sometimes I did things like looking in the mirror and telling myself that "Jesus loves me" or "Remember you are a child of God." It might sound silly but those things really helped me come to a point of self-acceptance.

In my early 30s I knew I was putting on weight, probably partly to do with the PCOS and partly because lots of other aspects of my life were changing. Whatever the reason, I was get-

ting bigger. To be perfectly honest the mental picture I had of myself looked nothing like those photographs. I was so shocked. I had no idea my physical reality was so different from my mental picture.

But did I still like and accept myself? Yes. Was I sure that Jesus had died for me? Yes. Did I think that the Lord was more interested in my heart than my physical appearance? Yes. Did I need to lose weight? YES!

Who was that person in the picture?

Oh my goodness, is that what I look like?

I had no idea!

It took losing about 20 kilos before anyone said "Are you losing weight?" And then I began to notice things I was certainly not expecting to experience.

I was convinced people were starting to treat me differently. At one level it was as simple as suddenly realising a man was flirting with me in a café but it was more insidious than that. Someone actually told me that they thought I had had a personality transplant and that I was easier to get along with than I was before. Some people seemed to take me more seriously. Suddenly my opinions seemed more important because I was thinner!

I'd been praying for a growth in godliness and thought the perception of my "personality transplant" was much more likely to be a response to answered prayer than any weight loss – the fact I didn't hit the person was, I thought, evidence of this! I also could not see how losing weight would affect my capacity to make intelligent comment.

Even in Christian circles people are quick to judge overweight people: "They have no self-discipline or are gluttons"; "You need to look great to attract/keep your man." The issue, of course, may actually be self-esteem or an underlying health problem they know nothing about.

I'd read an article telling me that size 14 models were only used in "Plus size" fashion shoots when someone told me they thought I was getting too thin! I'd also read that at size 14 I was now an "average Australian woman".

I'd lost over 30 kilos and my blood test results were fabulous and the specialist was excited. But I became incredibly confused. Sure I looked different but I was still me! In my mind nothing about my personality had changed because I had lost weight. I had liked and accepted myself before I had lost weight and, despite having a bit of a crisis about catching glimpses of myself in shop windows or being surprised at my shadow on the footpath, I knew I was still the same person.

The experience of being treated differently as a thinner person created doubts in my mind. A man expressed interest in going out with me which



led to self-doubt. He didn't know me before, so was his interest in the "inner me" or in my new "outward appearance"? Would he have been interested in dating if I was five sizes bigger?

I had to go back to the beginning and work on making peace with myself (and my body) again. Was I sure that Jesus had died for me? Yes. Did I still like and accept myself? Yes. Did I think that the Lord was more interested in my heart than my physical appearance? Yes. Was being 30 kilos lighter signifi-

cantly improving my medical outcomes? Yes.

I needed to regain perspective. When it all comes down to it whether I am heavy or light I am STILL a child of God, and that, more than my body image, is what forms me.

■ Sue Bazzana works for the Church Missionary Society – Victoria and attends St Matthew's Anglican Church in Prahran. Email: sbazzana@cms.org.au

SOME USEFUL BOOKS...

- > Cooke, K. *Real Gorgeous*.
- > Crabbe, L. (1998) *Inside Out*. Navpress.
- > McDowell, J. *His image, My image*. (out of print, but available second-hand from Amazon.com)
- > McGee, R. (2003) *Search for Significance*. Transit Books.
- > McGrath, A. & McGrath, J. (1992) *Self-Esteem: the cross & Christian confidence*. IVP.



Will your anchors hold in the storm of life?

ALEX PIERCE SPOKE TO **ADELE** ABOUT HOW HER EXPERIENCE OF CONTRACTING POLIO HAS AFFECTED HER UNDERSTANDING OF BODY IMAGE.

Adele knows what it's like to struggle with body image. She was a nurse in the 1960s, when she contracted polio, from a patient. She had been feeling run down for a few days when things got worse and she went to hospital, being unable to see and also experiencing photophobia (aversion to light), which is a symptom of polio. She ended up spending five or six months in a respirator (an iron lung) and another 16 months in hospital, an experience she describes as distressing, due to the lack of independence and increasing paralysis. Christian friends provided a lot of support: people came to her bedside each Friday, to sing hymns and to pray for her. This support was invaluable, because recuperation was a tedious and tiring process.

Polio affects everyone differently. Adele was largely affected in the legs, probably because she had done a lot of walking in the days leading up to her diagnosis, as well as some other musculature problems. She has had to walk with callipers and crutches for most of her life since, and has recently started using a wheelchair outside the house. Some polio sufferers are left with even less mobility.

Growing up in a Christian family, her time in the respirator was the first occasion that Adele seriously questioned her faith, because of her pain and frustration. However, Adele remembers very clearly one day asking God, "What should I do?" The answer that came was: "My grace is sufficient for you." Looking back on her life now Adele is, in fact, accepting of the fact that she contracted polio, because of the people she has met and the experiences she has had as a result. These growth experiences (both positive and negative) have helped her to grow and mature as a Christian. She also feels that because of her disability, she is more dependent on God for things that other Christians take for granted.

That Adele has had positive experience as a result of polio is certainly not to say that living with it has been easy for Adele. She remembers that going out among able-bodied people was at first very difficult, because she was on crutches and felt self-conscious about being so different. She also found that people sometimes might feel uncomfortable around her. When you

are young, she points out, your body image is often largely affected by other people's perceptions and attitudes, rather than what you might know about yourself. She is thankful that body image is no longer such a big issue for her, although immobility is increasingly a problem.

There have been times when people have made derogatory comments towards her, saying that she must not have enough faith, or that there was some sin in her life, that caused her still to be disabled – not something that would help anyone cope with problems. She believes churches may need help in understanding how to be inclusive of people with disabilities (for example, with regard to accessibility, transport and toilets), because all people need fellowship and friendship. It has also led to her co-founding DisCross, a semi-regular and informal Christian service designed for people with a disability.

As well as being disabled, Adele is now getting older – something which often affects body image, particularly for women – and Post-Polio Syndrome. She feels that she has actually been 'old' for a long time: coping with many of the issues that her peers are now faced with, of restrictions on mobility and other changes. She has seen that the whole and hearty often don't adjust very well. Her advice to people getting older – to anyone facing physical changes – is to remember that God helps you, and appreciate what you do have: so often people lose sight of good things when negative things intrude.

Adele believes that God provides strength and avenues in times of need. It also helps to remember that this world and its suffering are transient, because eternity with God is ahead. Finally, as a Christian Adele knows the sure hope she has in Christ. She is promised that upon Christ's return, there will be no more tears and no more pain: she will have a restored body, and this is something worth looking forward to. Christianity provides hope in weariness.

■ Alex Pierce is a member of the ishah editorial committee. Adele declined to be identified further in this article. One thing she wanted to remind readers of is that polio vaccinations need to be updated every five years, if you are travelling in places where polio is still a problem! For more information on DisCross, you can call Peter on 9370 1097.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

BY FRAN BOYDELL

BOOK REVIEW

Buchanan M. (2002) *Things Unseen: Living in Light of Forever*. Multnomah Publishers Inc

Mark Buchanan's book, *Things Unseen*, explores the practical implications of living life in the hope of heaven. It is a book about heaven or, even more, about being heavenly minded but certainly not an invitation to be of no earthly good! Quoting C.S. Lewis, Buchanan makes the point that many who have made a significant impact in this world are those with their eyes firmly fixed on the next.

Things Unseen is not a tightly reasoned book but rather a series of moving accounts with each chapter encouraging the reader to visit or revisit a set of priorities which mark those who live eternity now. He shows how these priorities affect our attitudes to all the plagues of western civilisation such as our desperate consumerism, attempts to retain a youthful body, and wanting to fulfil our desires now regardless of the impact on others.

The book begins by explaining the pull we all feel towards 'home'. He describes the groaning we can find ourselves expressing, even in good times, as a God-given longing for somewhere else. "Groaning," he says in keeping with Romans 8:22, "is creation's song, the blues of the cosmos, and we're to hum to its melody and take up its chorus." The book goes on to encourage readers in those habits which confirm the desire for heaven and enable fruitful living on earth with a confident attitude to death.

Buchanan combines a love of literary allusion with illustration and story and a confidence in the Bible. *Things Unseen*, like its predecessor *Your God is Too Safe*, is the work of a pastor. For those who, like me, enjoy this style, a feast of encouragement and inspiration awaits.

■ Fran Boydell became a Christian in her teens over forty years ago and is always delighted to read a book which encourages her to keep living the Faith and to be real in her hope. She is the mother of two teenagers and the teacher of eight in a special setting, all of whom give her great delight. She and her husband attend St Jude's Church Carlton.

Starting Point is a regular column that aims to encourage readers to engage with a contemporary issue in the media.

A Catholic Indulgence?

Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* has been dubbed 'Catholic instead of Christian'. Is it?

Well, I do believe Gibson got in all of the Stations of the Cross; but other denominations, including Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran, often still practice the Stations of the Cross. Mary was addressed as 'Mother', but most other cultures in the world address their elders with kinship terms regardless of blood relation.

There was certainly a lot of room for relics to be left-over, but I think we fear symbols too much in evangelical Christianity. In our efforts to avoid idolatry, we forget that God made us creatures who live by symbolism, and he himself gave us symbols throughout the Scriptures. Just because someone holds a symbol dear does not mean that they worship it. We wear crosses, sing about them, even bow before them in prayer – but are we worshipping the cross, or are we showing our gratitude to him who bore the cross? We should not judge those for whom symbol is a powerful part of worshipping God. God knows their hearts.

I guess I'm one of those people who doesn't see 'Catholic' and 'Christian' as mutually exclusive, so I wouldn't hold this against Gibson. Now if the disciples had been passing out indulgences, I would have been perturbed. But let's not forget that Luther himself did not intend to start a different denomination of Christianity, and that for 1500 years or so the Catholic church, along with the Orthodox and Coptic church, was Christianity. Our roots go back here, and we should not be terrified of the symbolism that the Catholic church holds dear. This film should not be an excuse for denominationalism. As Christians, we should celebrate in unity a film in which Jesus is the centre and which upholds – without contradicting – the Gospel.

■ Ellie Scott will soon be moving to Indonesia, with her husband Graham, to work with Wycliffe Bible Translators as linguists and trainers. Email: graham-ellie_scott@sil.org

