

A decorative frame with a ribbon-like border, containing the text 'PICTURE THIS' and 'Christians and the Arts'. The frame is set against a background of vertical stripes and dotted lines.

PICTURE THIS

Christians and the Arts

NEW CREATIONS
FOR THE ARTS

Pauline Reeve

ART AND
WORSHIP

Rachel Lotherington

FOR HIS
NAME'S SAKE

Heidi Fuelling

FILM REVIEW:
AMAZING GRACE

Amy Just



ishah

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

welcome...

This edition looks at Christians and the Arts because we observed that visual arts aren't incorporated very much in worship services and Christian communities. We feel Christians miss out on the contributions of artists when they aren't invited to share their gifts.

We want to encourage more use of the arts by Christians, and affirm those who have creative gifts. We believe God has given us creative skills and the ability to use them wisely to reflect on life and celebrate Him.

The articles focus on the visual arts because it isn't possible to comment on all forms of art in six pages! We haven't covered all the visual arts either! Instead, the writers look at the principles behind using art in our lives and in our worship of God.

Perhaps the idea persists that God doesn't sanction the use of visual arts? After all, the Second Commandment does say 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below' (Exodus 20:4).

Rachel's article looks at how Exodus 20 was interpreted in church history and how we can work with it now. Pauline's article speaks of the arts as a God-given human activity and addresses the role of art in the body of Christ.

Heidi shows us how graduates of the Art Evangelists School in Perth use visual arts to explain the Good News cross-culturally to people in Asia.

Amy's review of the film Amazing Grace is another discussion about how an art form is effective in revisiting complicated issues, like the slave trade in the British colonies. It is distressing to hear that a trade in slaves still goes on! Praise God for the many organizations that are fighting against slave traders and we have listed some of these groups.

What an appropriate time to introduce a face-lift to ishah, just as we are thinking about the arts that enrich our lives. We thank our fabulous designer for giving the magazine a new look.

Amanda Coverdale for the *ishah* team

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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.

ISSUES TO COME...

ISSUE 26:

In the Vine:

Union with Christ

ISSUE 27:

Mental Health



NEW CREATIONS FOR THE ARTS



BY PAULINE REEVE

Picture this. Any Sunday in the 1960s. A suit-clad congregation seated around a lace-covered table set with wine and bread. On the front wall, in decorative print—white on a beige background—‘For God so loved...’ Nearby is a closed piano. There’s a clatter. Everyone is standing as a well-tuned male voice leads in a hymn.

Now jump to the year 2007. Another church. A congregation of several hundred casually dressed people sit facing a platform on which is another table spread with bread and wine. A screen angles in overhead with the words of a song just announced by a young man strung with a guitar and leaning into a microphone. A band strikes up. Later, a sermon is delivered. Projected onto the screen is a painting by Albert Tucker. On another Sunday it is a poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Either way, it is the launching place into the sermon. Leaf through the newsletter and you find a glossy pamphlet headed Pentecost Art Show.

How do we account for the difference in the use of art by these communities?

Longstanding Tensions

These personal encounters with art, or its absence, are symptoms of the uneasy tension Christians have always found between art and faith.

This unease has various origins depending on the art. Suspicion of the visual arts goes back to Christianity’s roots in Judaism and the Second Commandment: ‘You shall not make for yourself an idol...’ (Exodus 20:4). Augustine of Hippo, an early Church Father, was initially opposed to the language arts. He thought the fiction of poets to be lies, enticements to evil and distractions from more profitable pursuits. Later however, he saw their value for preaching in an engaging way.

During the Reformation, some scholars took a stance against visual arts and, in outbursts of iconoclasm, images were destroyed in many churches.

Regardless, the arts had their theological defenders and have flourished, at times, in harmony with faith. Within the Eastern

Orthodox Church the visual arts were, by 787CE, integrated with faith. To this day they are regarded as a vehicle for the reception and expression of God’s grace, with icons regarded as symbols pointing to Christ. Later, the Middle Ages saw an unsurpassed fusion of faith and art under the influence of Thomas Aquinas’ theology.

One of the chief defendants of the language arts during the Reformation was Sir Philip Sidney. Himself a Puritan, he wrote *The Defence of Poesy* in response to Richard Baxter who warned against the ‘poison’ of fiction and plays (Ryken 2002: p9). Sidney appealed to Jesus’ use of stories and to Biblical writing. Imaginative literature, he felt, was the best mode of language for education because of its ability to couple the general and the particular, the abstract and the concrete. It had the superior ability to ‘strike’, ‘pierce’ and ‘possess the sight of the soul’ (Ryken 2002: p10).

Today’s Dilemma

Twentieth and twenty-first century theologians have put forward various bases for the support of art. George Pattison (Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford University), for example, justifies the visual arts in a theology of redemption. He writes, ‘Art anticipates ... the messianic kingdom itself, the return of the world to that created fullness in which we may declare, with God, that it is all “very good”’ (Pattison 1998: p153).

Christians today wanting to clarify the contribution of the arts to faith discover a dilemma arising, not only from differing views, or lingering opposition within the church, but also from uncertainty within the arts. The very purposefulness of the arts has been undermined by the possibility raised in modern science that humans are mere elements of a meaningless physical nature. Christianity, by contrast, does not reduce humanity to the mere physical and believers might still, by revisiting those earlier theories of art that offered a sense of direction, discover starting points for several

contributions the arts can make to their personal and corporate lives.

Reflecting Truth

The arts offer Christians a vital area of human activity which affirms everyone’s uniqueness. Artistic products such as paintings or poems, according to Aristotle, resemble reality. They help people to feel what it is like to be human in different situations. Reality is mirrored to enable truth to be understood. Humans can use the arts to make connections and predictions needed for survival in ways that animals cannot.

The task for the believing artist is to mirror truthfully their reality. To the extent that the believer and unbeliever both encounter a reality comprised of the impersonal, physical world and the personal, human world there will be overlap in what is mirrored. However, full reality to the believer includes the felt experience of God’s creative presence in a fallen physical world in which they, as a new creation, await possession of a spiritual body and a new heaven and earth. This reality is experienced as conflicted while also purposeful.

Ultimately, God confirms through His ongoing creative presence His own statement, that what He has made is good. There is no need then, as George Pattison says, to ‘overthrow art—unless we are driven by some mad necessity to overthrow ourselves.’

Reaching for Life

The arts, through their beauty, offer Christians an opportunity to affirm life and purpose in a suffering world. Beauty is thought to reside, at least in part, in the artistic product, achieved by form and arrangement. The very act of God in creation involved bringing form to a formless void (Genesis 1). Similarly, God in His redemptive act of new creation is re-forming, re-shaping lives to a renewed purpose of love. John Ruskin, writing between 1843 and 1860, developed in his critical work *Modern Painters* a theology of visual art. He maintained that the

purpose of the artist was to reflect the God-given beauty of created things as a witness to God.

Beauty is important to us for it affirms life and purpose, drawing us away from grief and ugliness (Ryken 2002: p88–92). It contributes to our desire for life. So Christian artists, such as Melbourne painter Vena Henning, speak of the visual arts as a grace, and the Eastern Orthodox church honours beauty as a witness to God's grace.

Beauty itself, in the Christian view, is subject to the Fall. Beauty fades. By attracting attention, beautiful artistic objects and performances can invite worship, and the threat of idolatry can arise. However, to dismiss art for this possibility fails to recognise the importance of beauty or the use of all manner of representational arts in the making of the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 26, 1 Kings).

Witnessing the Heart

Finally, the arts, because they communicate attitudes and emotions towards their subject matter, offer Christians a realm for the public disclosure of beliefs, feelings and attitudes. People with or without Christian faith bear witness to their reality, expressing and taking in each

other's response. In this way the arts are the means by which a community knows its heart and clarifies what is worth caring about, whether with love or distaste.

As part of a broader secular-dominated community in Australia, the Christian might know the heart of that community through the arts. By attending to such disclosure the believer will find starting points for their witness. Genuine dialogue (artistic or not) can then occur, much as it did for Paul when he first observed the heart of the Athenians, expressed by their poets, before disclosing his believing heart (Acts 17).

Similarly the artists who are part of the Christian community described in Scripture (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 4:16) as a body with Christ as the head, building itself up in love, might help this body to know its own heart, affirming what is good or expressing disgust at what is not. They might also express to God, who lives with them, not only joy, praise and devotion but their fears, struggles and anger, much as did the poets of the Psalms.

There have been times when the arts and religion have come together to the point where the arts have been seen

as salvation and times when Christian authorities have insisted on their mutual exclusivity. In this time it is possible, however, to find oneself meeting with other believers to view art or listen to poems of protest in a Pentecost art show integrated with a sermon about freedom. This is faith working itself out in life. The arts are a God-given human activity that intimates God's grace and opens up a realm of disclosure crucial for ushering in the new creation.

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- Eldridge, Richard (2003) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Pattison, George (1998) *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the Image*. SCM Press Ltd: London.
- Ryken, Leland (ed.) (rev. 2002) *The Christian Imagination*. Waterbrook Press: Colorado Springs.

■ *Pauline Reeve attends St Hilary's Anglican Church, Kew. Her poetry appeared in Best Australian Poems 2006. A Horse and More is her first children's book.*

Resources: Christians and the Arts

An incomplete list of resources which will lead you to others.

Books

These books are still in print.

Modern Art and the Death of a Culture, HR Rookmaaker, (1970, 1973) Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1994 edition Crossway Books (Good News Publishers): Westchester, Illinois

Walking on Water—Reflections on Faith and Art, Madeleine L'Engle, (1980) Bantam Books, 2001 edition Shaw Books: Colorado Springs

Art and the Bible by Francis Schaeffer, (Revised 2006) Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois

Addicted to Mediocrity, Twentieth Century Christians and the Arts, Franky Schaeffer, 1981 Crossway Books (Good News Publishers): Westchester, Illinois

'The Church's Stake in the Arts', *Loving God with One's Mind—Essays, articles and speeches* by F Thomas Trotter, F Thomas Trotter (1987) Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

Organisations

Arts Association at Shac Community, Kew
St Silas and St Hilary's Anglican Church, Kew, Victoria
12 John Street, Kew, VIC 3101, ph (03) 9816 7100
The Arts Association publishes and promotes songs, music, drama and literature which express a Christian world view, to engage society and contemporary culture and to encourage young people in this.
www2.shaccommunity.org.au

Fellowship for Evangelism in the Visual Arts, Petersham (NSW)

An independent and interdenominational missionary organisation that takes the gospel to the visual arts community in Sydney. FEVA focuses on four specific ministries: students in the visual arts, architects and designers, Petersham Evening Church, and generating material to promote Jesus. www.feva.org

Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts
A research institute based at St Mary's College, the Divinity School at the University of St Andrew's, Scotland. See the website's comprehensive Resources section which covers Theology of the Arts, Theology through the Arts, the Theology of Film and Theology through Film.
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/institutes/itia/resources.html

ART & WORSHIP

BY RACHEL LOTHERINGTON

Understanding Protestant attitudes to the visual arts requires stepping back in time to understand how Christians have interpreted the Bible in the past. One of the key texts is Exodus 20:3-5:

³“You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God.” (ESV)

In response, Jewish art traditionally steers clear of human figures. Similarly, Islamic religious art traditionally consists of elaborate patterns and decoration, but contains no figures, so as to discourage idolatry.

For Christians, the Jewish law is read through the lens of the person and work of Christ. Medieval Christians allowed God, humans and animals to be depicted, as long as they were not drawn in a realistic manner. They appear primitive, flat and distorted for religious reasons—not because the artists couldn’t draw well!

In those times, most people couldn’t read. Every church, therefore, displayed the key doctrines of the faith—the Nativity, Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection—in visual form. The walls of the church were their Bible!

The visual language of Medieval Art was complex, with countless symbols. Many came from Biblical texts, such as the dove, which alighted on Jesus at his baptism (John 1:32). The dove was used to represent the Holy Spirit. The lamb represented Jesus (John 1:29), the olive branch represented peace (Genesis 8:11), and the lamp, scripture (Psalm 119:105).

Some symbols came from nature, such as the shamrock to symbolise the Trinity and the white lily for purity and the Virgin Mary. Other symbols were borrowed from mythology or legend and were given new meanings in Christian art—such as the phoenix to represent the resurrection of Christ.

Paintings, icons and sculptures were used to teach the doctrines of the church, alongside the priest’s preaching and teaching. However, there was from the beginning a debate over their value. Some argued that images were dangerous and could lead to idolatry.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) pointed out the differences between the helpful use of icons in worship and the dangers of idolatry: ‘He is a slave to a sign who uses or worships a significant thing without knowing what it signifies. But he who uses or venerates a useful sign divinely instituted whose signifying force he understands does not venerate what he sees and what passes away but rather that to which all such things are to be referred’ (On Christian Doctrine).

In 600 AD, Pope Gregory discouraged idolatry, but encouraged the use of images: ‘it is one thing to worship a picture, another to learn from the story depicted what should be worshipped. For what a book is to those who read, a picture presents to the uneducated who observe’ (Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers).

The Reformers were not against art, but were stricter about the use of images in worship. They were concerned that images used to represent God simplify Him, and the viewer is in danger

of reducing Him to what is depicted. Many paintings destroyed during the Reformation reflected doctrines Protestants no longer agreed with. Images of the Virgin Mary and saints were destroyed because the Reformers believed the way to God was through Jesus alone, and wanted to curb the practice of prayer to saints. By reforming doctrine, art was also reformed.

The Second Commandment in Exodus 20:3-5 has been interpreted in different ways throughout history. So, what should we make of it?

In the context of the book of Exodus, we can see that the intention was not to prohibit art (Exodus 35:31-33, 36:35, 37:17-24). The items of the tabernacle were highly decorated with beautiful imagery, including cherubim, branches and flowers. Artistic skill was given by God and decoration and imagery adorned the place of worship.

Most Christians understand this commandment to forbid God’s people to worship images instead of God. Some believe that it also implies we should not make images to use in the worship of God.

The latter is a common Protestant view today: don’t make any images of God, and don’t use any images (physical or mental) in worship of God, because God cannot be fathomed. However, the commandment seems to refer specifically to images created with the intention of worship, and therefore causing idolatry.

Jesus gave us many ‘images’ to describe himself. In John’s Gospel, for example, Jesus describes himself as the vine (15:1), the gate (10:9), and the shepherd (10:11). By giving us these visual symbols, Jesus seems to be inviting us to imagine him visually, even if we cannot fully fathom his glory.

Throughout the Bible, the highly skilled craftsmen, embroiderers and designers were given their abilities by God, and used these abilities to His glory. Some, however, in disobedience to God’s commands, were employed in creating idols, which the people of Israel worshipped instead of the Lord their God.

The use of art in church and worship has often been oversimplified by Protestants who believe it to be analogous to the idolatry described in the Old Testament. From both Augustine and Gregory’s warnings, we can see the possibility of worshipping the object itself, however art can also be used as a way of focusing the believer’s attention, pointing them to the Gospel.

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Augustine of Hippo, ‘On Christian Doctrine’, quoted by William A. Dyrness in (2004) *Reformed Theology & Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, vol xii, (1900) Scribners: New York, includes a section on Pope Gregory.

■ Rachel is an artist and graphic designer who is inspired by the beauty in nature, art and other people.



BY HEIDI FUELLING

The Apostle Paul had a heart to preach the Gospel in places where Jesus's name had never been heard (Romans 15:20, Amplified Bible). The heart of the Art Evangelists School (AES) in Perth is to train and release visual artists to the nations, able to communicate the gospel beyond cultural and language barriers.

Over six months, the AES journey includes art-making, Bible teaching and discipleship. This is followed by an outreach phase, which can involve anything from painting murals on walls in slums, to sketching portraits and using drawing boards to share testimonies on the streets. It's using art in many ways to build relationships with people, as a platform to share the gospel.

Paul, a passionate evangelist, writes, 'It is through Him that we have received grace and [our] apostleship to promote obedience to the faith and make disciples for His name's sake among all the nations' (Romans 1:5). Apart from making tents, we have no record of Paul's gifts in visual art making. However, there is application here for us as artists. Receiving God's grace secures our identity in Christ, instead of securing our identity around being 'an Artist'. Jesus' Lordship in our lives helps us lay everything before Him in loving response, including our gifts of visual art. Art wasn't intended to be about expressing our self and our ideas. We are not the ones worthy; it wasn't us who died on the cross. That was Jesus. Whatever we create our foundation for doing so is a zeal for His name to be known. Through my involvement with the AES, it's this zeal, burning and passionate, that God is awakening in me.

Let me tell you about two friends of mine. The first is Shirley, an artist zealous for God's fame among the nations. For a number of years she has been involved in creating media resources for unreached people groups as part of Create International. In 2003 she was a student in the AES. Stepping out in faith with her gift, Shirley went on to produce a contextual evangelistic tract for the Tu, a minority people group in China, as well as a chronological evangelistic storybook for Tibetans. For the Tibetan project, Shirley spent over 1200 hours hand-painting 40 illustrations depicting the stories of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This process involved laying down her own style and preference for art-making, and undertaking extensive research into Tibetan art and style of visual storytelling. Shirley has now pioneered a Create International centre in Thailand, which has a particular emphasis on using visual arts for evangelism among people groups who have not yet heard the Gospel.

Another friend is Rebecca (name changed for security reasons). After attending the AES in 2005, she went on to complete a

School of Frontier Missions, which has an initial two-year outreach phase in South East Asia. Rebecca is now there as part of pioneering in a church planting team. As she submerges herself in another language and culture, opportunities are opening up to use her gift of visual arts as a tool in evangelism

and intercession. Here is another artist who has asked God specifically how and where to be making art ... and making disciples.

Of course, these are only two of countless ways visual art can be used as a tool to share the gospel. However, their examples challenge us. If we're not making art for His name's sake, why are we doing it? As our AES School leader reflects, 'Our challenge this year

has been to unlearn what we thought we knew about art; to stop, listen and hear God's heart describing us and our job; to be defined by Him, in our gifting and—in the bigger picture—our purpose; and to set our hearts on obedience.'

■ Heidi is a staff member at a Youth With A Mission base in Perth. One of her primary roles there is to staff the Art Evangelists School. The next School started in October and will travel to Jakarta, Indonesia, for Outreach.

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Stott, John (1994) *The Message of Romans*. Inter-varsity Press: Leicester, England

Wilkin, Desiree (2007) 'The AES School Report', YWAM Perth, *The Chapter—October Quarter 2006*. YWAM Perth: Australia

The Amplified Bible (1954) Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, USA

Websites:

www.ywamp Perth.org.au/aes
www.createinternational.com
www.createthailand.com
www.uofn.edu/colleges

Visual Arts and Missions Websites:

www.usa.om.org/OMartslink
www.squidoo.com/VisualArtsandMissions/

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FAITH PROMPTS ACTION

Film Review:

Amazing Grace

Directed by Michael Apted

Starring Ioan Gruffodd, Ramola Garai and
Benedict Cumberbatch

Rated PG

BY AMY JUST

How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

You'll be singing that with greater feeling and passion once you see this film. I must admit to being somewhat perplexed that the title of the film regarding the life and achievements of William Wilberforce was taking the words that rightly belong to the story of John Newton—the converted slave trader (perhaps a future film). However you'll be pleased to know that in seeing the film this tension is resolved!

Amazing Grace is well acted and has an outstanding cast of first-rate British actors. I confess that I am unpracticed at detached assessment—I always get too involved in the story line, providing it's decently told—no problems here (let the reader understand tissues recommended)! At the beginning of the film Ioan Gruffodd presents convincingly as an aged, wearied and somewhat beaten Wilberforce. From here you are taken back to where the Abolitionists' battle began, when he was a young, fresh-faced and enthusiastic Member of Parliament, armed with a quick wit ready to match any seasoned and professional stuffed shirt. Our time travel is the excuse to bring a little romance to the storyline as Wilberforce meets Barbara (Ramola Garai), the woman credited in the film with helping him reignite his passion and energy for the cause. The romance, while nice, does not cloud the real issue of Wilberforce and his team of Abolitionists' achievement in finally passing the Bill in Parliament, ending the trade in human lives in 1807.

The film has been criticized for not having enough graphic exposure to the reality of the slave trade. I think that is a woeful acknowledgement that we live in a visually saturated and sensationalised world where unless our eyes are horrified our hearts cannot be stirred. There is enough to make you aware of the horrors and atrocity. Wilberforce was stirred to action on what he heard and knew to be true, realising the gross inhumanity and therefore compelled to do all he could to change it. He did this off the back of seemingly little personal exposure to the trade and the film helpfully brings out his heart's conviction by downplaying the visual aspects.

It isn't a film of high-paced action, danger, and mind-blowing special effects—I suggest you see *Die Hard 4.0* if you are looking for that. It is a film that aptly tracks the tireless efforts of Wilberforce and those with him to change forever the way the greatest world power of its time treated human beings, thereby changing

the lives of untold thousands he would never know. It is an uplifting film for those who have patience for a story line that is well scripted and credibly acted. Wilberforce's faith is clearly and rightly in the picture without a sanctimonious air, making this a good film to see with friends and discuss over fair trade tea and coffee afterwards—bar the sugar of course (see the film)!

■ *Amy Just is currently a student at Ridley Theological College, having moved from Adelaide to Melbourne to study and continue to be equipped for a life of ministry. Amy loves people and spending time sharing life with them—which includes going to the movies—provided they adhere to the strict movie-goers code of conduct: no talking and open your lolly bags before the movie starts! She can be emailed at acjust@internode.on.net*

FIGHT THE SLAVE TRADE TOGETHER

The film *Amazing Grace* marked the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the British colonies. However, the evil of slavery still exists. Here are some resources about the current global slave trade.

Not all of these organisations are Christian, but they join with the Kingdom of God in the fight against evil and they give us practical ways to get involved.

www.stophetraffic.org

www.setallfree.net

www.antislavery.org

www.notforsalecampaign.org





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@ishah.org or posted to *ishah*, c/-56 Collier Cres, Brunswick West, Vic, 3056.

Dear Gina et al,

I'd like to join up some more women from my church (3 or 4). Thanks for a great mag. The recent one on money has been most helpful to a number of women I have spoken with. Blessings to you all.

Rosie Leslie

Hi Committee,

Congratulations on the new edition of *Ishah* [Issue 23]. It's the best I've seen. Beautifully written, biblical, thoughtful and provoking.

Barb Deutschmann's article on sin is excellent, as is Maria Brand-Starkey's review of *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Keep up the good work.

Blessings in Christ

Rev Paul Arnott

State Director

Church Missionary Society Victoria

Re: *ishah* magazine edition 23 on 'Christians Facing Sin'

This last edition was very good on a tough topic—thanks!

Ruth Holt's metaphor was graphic (but where I live in the Middle East, prickly pear fruit, served peeled of the skin and thorns by the vendor, are an expensive seasonal delicacy. Maybe we need to look again at how we view it in Australia!)

Yours warmly,

I.D.

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

Can politicians be human?

When your career depends on what people think of you, the way you present yourself to the world becomes pretty important. Every three years the voters have their chance to decide a politician's future based not just on their achievements, and political affiliations, but also on their public image.

Does the politician have 'ticker'? Does their publicly known indiscretion work for or against them? Should a change in hairstyle or the clothing be a factor in how people vote? Is being perceived as ambitious a positive or a negative characteristic?

The temptation for politicians must surely be to stage manage their every move, to never go out without their lippy on and think carefully about where they go and who they are seen with. Hanging out with sports stars and world leaders might just play better in the media than the 487th visit to the local community centre or work on a complex immigration issue for a refugee in the politician's electorate.

But what happens when it all goes wrong: when they trip over on their morning walk or get caught without their trousers on or people find out they got drunk and went to a strip club? How do those kinds of incidents change people's perceptions?

Should they drop into damage control and deny everything and refuse to apologise or admit guilt and say 'Sorry I'm human, and I do actually make mistakes sometimes'?

As we approach a Federal election it is going to be interesting to see how much we have matured as a society. Are we going to make electoral decisions based on policies and a vision for the future of our nation, or are we going to get sucked into image debates? Do we expect our politicians to be perfect human beings or are we prepared to vote for people who are as flawed and human as the people they represent?

In this age of the fifteen-second sound bite and twenty-four hour news coverage do you think we've grown up enough as a nation to allow our politicians to be human?

■ Sue Bazzana has a fantasy that one day she will be "C.J." Cregg (from TV's *West Wing*) but worries her lipstick is the wrong colour. She currently works for World Vision.

