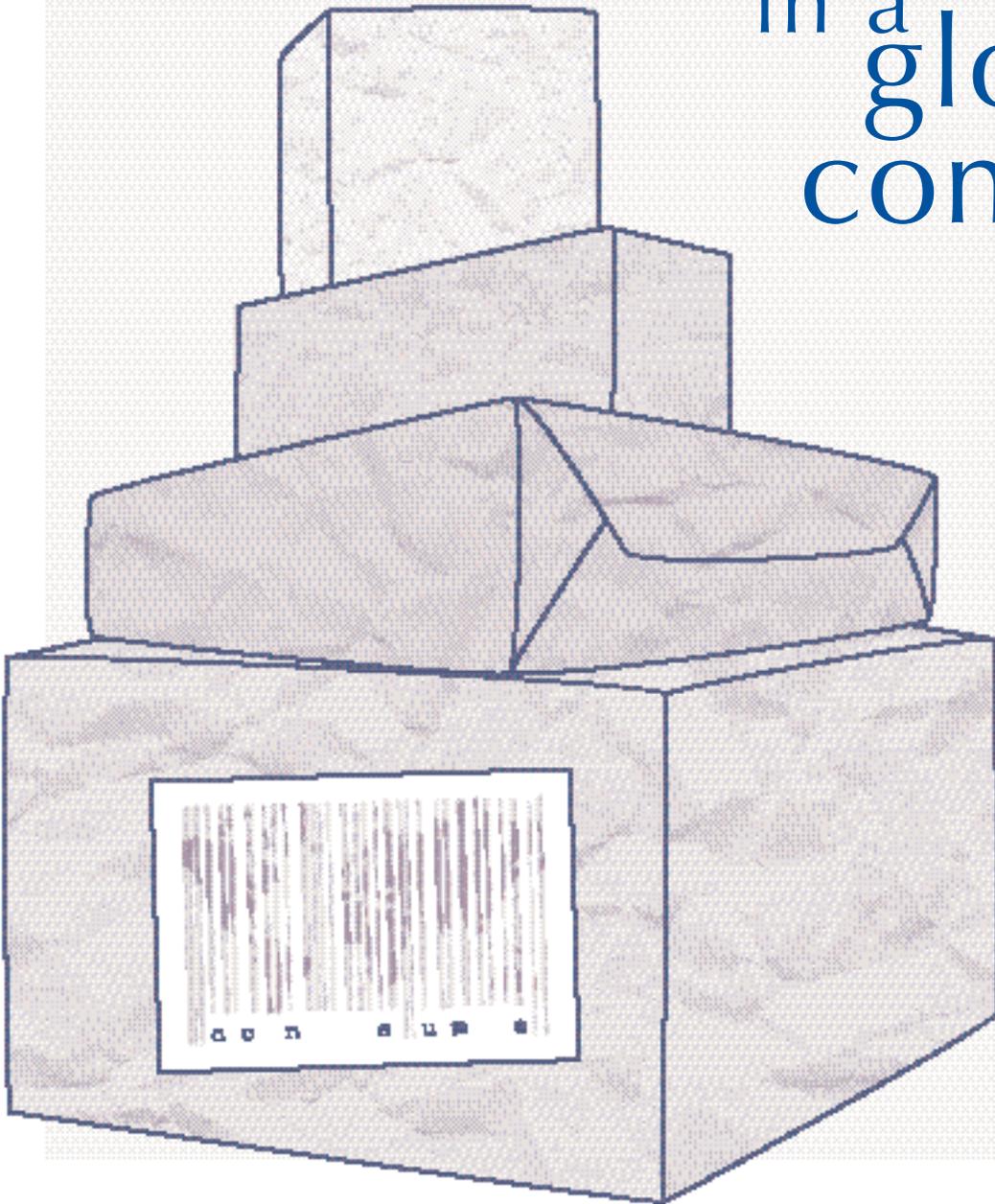


Materialism in a global context



OVERSTUFFED:
THE CURSE OF
AFFLUENZA
Dominique Emery

CONFESSIONS OF
A SHOPAHOLIC
Jean Williams

WEALTH AND
THE WORD
Joy Linton

NEW SECTION:
WRITE OF REPLY!



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

welcome...

Pick up a newspaper and globalisation is used to describe trends in everything from the economy to industry, education, work and travel. While we may not completely understand the concept, we are familiar with some of its effects – we now communicate electronically, trade on a global scale, move from country to country with speed and ease and adopt new cultures, languages and lifestyles. There is no doubt that, in many respects, globalisation has improved and enhanced our lives. But the powerful forces that shape the communities we live in also have a profound effect on others. As Christians we need to examine our position in the world around us.

In this edition of ishah we explore what it means to be a consumer in a global context and consider how our possessions, wealth and attitude towards money impacts ourselves as well as others. We live in a culture that encourages us to define ourselves by the clothes we wear and the car we drive. How as Christians do we reconcile being good stewards of all God has given us with the cultural drive to acquire and possess? How do we reconcile the cost of our consumption on others in the world with a biblical mandate to pursue justice and mercy? Our three writers have spent much time considering these issues and they share their thoughts as well as some practical strategies they have devised. You may not agree with their conclusions – how we remain in the world but not of it is a perennial question. But we encourage you to use the articles as a place to start your own reflection.

The Editors

[FORTHCOMING ISSUES]

...EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

...THE 'GOOD GIRL'

- You are invited to the first ishah writers' workshop.
- Saturday 11th May 2002
- We want to encourage you to develop your ideas and writing skills and to think through issues from a Christian point of view. The day will include workshops and lunch. For details, email or write to ishah.

ouraims

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.

EDITORS

Editorial Committee

Susan Bradbeer
Fiona McLean
Kirsten Deane
Heather Patacca

Editorial Adviser

Denise Cooper-Clarke

Design

Judith Graham

Marketing

Kirsty Bradbeer
Heather Patacca

Subscriptions

Phillipa Hood
Fiona McLean

Finance

Bee Nah Ng

SUBSCRIBE

1 year : 4 issues
hardcopy \$20 : concession \$15
electronic version (via email) \$10
> Please make cheques payable to 'The Timothy Institute'.
> Mail to: c/- 23 Bundoran Pde, Mont Albert North, VIC. 3129
> Email: ishahmag@hotmail.com

COPYRIGHT

Material published by The Timothy Institute in ishah magazine is subject to copyright. Requests for permission to reproduce any part thereof for purposes other than private study should be directed to the editors. Additional copies and back issues can be obtained by contacting the editors.

CONTRIBUTE

You are invited to submit articles or letters to the editors for publication in ishah. Writers of articles are strongly encouraged to discuss their potential contribution with the editors before submitting. All material should be in electronic format and be submitted with a covering letter detailing the writer's name and contact details, requesting consideration for publication. Material will be published at the discretion of the editorial committee.

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

ishah is produced in association with Women and the Word, a part of The Timothy Institute.

overstuffed: the curse of affluenza

BY DOMINIQUE EMERY

And you know that we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl (Madonna)

There can be no doubt that we in the West are outrageous consumers. Despite representing only 20 per cent of the world's population, we somehow manage to consume 80 per cent of its resources. But it's more than just a desire for "stuff" – the cars we drive and the clothes we wear are seen to define us. We achieve our identity through the goods and services we consume. There is no escape from the pressures of consumerism – it is part of the fabric of our society. And the burden falls most heavily on urban women. There are more products, more services, and more opportunities available to women today than our mothers and grandmothers could have ever dreamed. We consider 24 hour access to shopping malls, cinema complexes, mobile phones, banking

and credit cards to be basic necessities. The pressure is on to be consumers rather than believers.

Our addiction to consumerism has been labeled affluenza – the designer disease of the Western World. And, like most addicts, we are loathe to admit we have a problem. But affluenza is a disease, because it feeds a global system of inequality, drives a wedge between rich and poor and corrupts our faith.

The earth has enough for every man's need, but not every man's greed (Mahatma Gandhi)

From 1994 to 1998 the world's 200 richest people more than doubled their net worth. During the same period, however, per capita incomes fell in almost half the countries of the world. Around the world today more than four billion people live on less than US\$2 a day. Many of these people are in sub-Saharan Africa, where per capita income has fallen from US\$661 in 1980

to US\$518 today. More than four billion people have no access to tap water - 1.3 billion have no access to clean water at all. Each Australian uses 100 times more energy than a person in Bangladesh. For the first time in history, the number of overweight people in the world now equals the number of underweight people. But if all the Third World increased their consumption to Western standards, we would need four more worlds just to hold the rubbish. Affluenza is therefore more than an affliction for Westerners to overcome – it is a life or death problem for the poor.

I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips and hearts (Dom Helder Camara)

let's go shopping ...

Part of the problem with changing the way we live is knowing where to start. Cutting out extra luxuries is an obvious first step – but what next? For essential products and services, try switching to local producers, higher quality products, or making your own products. Encourage others to do the same – it's not only advertising that entices us into consumerism; our friends, family and work places can place enormous pressure on us to pursue the Western lifestyle dream.

And next time you're in the market for something, try using the following questions to guide your shopping. Just the questions themselves are a challenge. Following them can be revolutionary...

- > Do I need it?
- > How many do I already have?
- > How much will I use it?
- > How long will it last?
- > Could I borrow it from a friend or family member?
- > Can I do without it?
- > Am I able (and willing) to clean, lubricate and/or maintain it myself?
- > Will I be able to repair it?
- > Have I researched it to get the best quality for the best price?
- > How will I dispose of it when I've finished using it?
- > Are the resources that went into it renewable or non-renewable?
- > Is it made of recycled materials, and is it recyclable?
- > Is there anything that I already own that I could substitute for it?

There are obviously sound environmental reasons for changing the way we live. Some would also argue that there are moral and ethical reasons for doing so – questions of justice, for example. But I would argue that, as Christians, there are also biblical reasons for reassessing our priorities and our addiction to consumption. Lifestyle and faith are intrinsically connected – our choices have spiritual implications. Affluenza has its price. It causes its sufferers to enter into and perpetuate an economic, social and environmental system that is fundamentally unjust. On a global level it encourages us to ignore the biblical admonition to pursue justice. On a personal level it encourages us in the love of money and takes us even further from Jesus' lifestyle of simplicity and dependence.

From the perspective of consumerism, money is a tool for the enhancement of lifestyle for the individual. Jesus, however, speaks of money as the corrupter of souls. Jesus simply couldn't reconcile money with faith, and so chose a life of poverty. In meeting a rich young ruler, he presented the man with this very choice – money or faith. The lifestyle consumer left, saddened to know he could not give up his riches to follow Christ. The struggle to give up his love of money was too difficult for him. Jesus leaves him with a proverb: "It is easier for a camel to

go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". (Luke 18:25).

I would argue that simplicity is a kingdom value. To follow the lifestyle of Christ is to follow a man who owned no home, few clothes, and relied heavily on the hospitality of others for his survival. His disciples, and many revolutionary Christians throughout the ages, have practised simple lifestyles as a central part of their faith. The communities of Acts chose to share their possessions, and many monks and nuns have followed in their footsteps.

But what does this mean for Western Christians? We can't all leave our families, homes and jobs and lead the life of an itinerant minister, relying upon others to feed and clothe us. I believe we need to use the money and resources we have been given in a different way to those afflicted with affluenza. This may mean giving it away (money is a hot potato), putting it into resources for the poor and needy (my money is not mine), or choosing to earn less and devote more time to our communities and families (money is like salt – a little is nice, too much just makes you thirsty). These choices help build a lifestyle that reflects a Christian faith. They are also values that reflect God's

love of mercy and justice in this world.

“ That which distinguishes the Christian way from the common way is the voluntary. Christ was not someone who coveted earthly things but had to be satisfied with poverty – no, he chose poverty. ”
(S. Kierkegaard)

In the West, our greatest luxury is our ability to choose a lifestyle. As Christ, his disciples, his friends and his followers chose poverty, so we can choose simple lifestyles that avoid the exploitation of the poor, and learn to rely more on each other. At the end of the day, I believe, it's a personal choice between the consumerist lifestyle, and the Jesus lifestyle. It's not possible to have both.

■ Dominique Emery is a twenty-something Christian with two degrees, a mortgage and a passion for literature over non-fiction, who knows more about art and cars than she can explain. She works for Tear Australia, and says that while she would have liked to write an article saying it's okay to lead a comfortable, aesthetic lifestyle, she found it biblically impossible to do so.

> do try this at home

- > The Lorax by Dr Seuss is one of the most entertaining and educational approaches to issues of consumerism and environmental destruction. Read it with the kids – and be challenged yourself!
- > For an antidote to advertising visit the AdBusters site at www.adbusters.org. It's a fun and somewhat alarming play on the marketing approaches of big brands – attempting to show them for what they really are.
- > To attempt to minimise your use of money, join a Local Exchange Trading System (LETS). It's a local community approach to trading products and services via a points system (rather than legal tender). CERES in Brunswick runs one, and can be contacted through LETS@ceres.org.au
- > Try living like your grandmother used to – cook most of your meals from raw materials, walk to the shops, make your own clothes, and turn off the TV.

suggested reading

Here are some books Dominique suggests might be helpful if you are interested in pursuing the topic further:

Andrews, D. (2001). Not Religion, but Love. Lion: Oxford.

Klein, N. (2001). No Logo. Flamingo: London

Sheard, M. (2001). Living Simply: Studies in Learning to Live as Jesus Did. World Vision New Zealand: Auckland (Available for \$5 from TEAR Australia).

Sider, R.J. (1973). Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. Hodder and Stoughton: London.

Confessions of a Shopaholic

BY JEAN WILLIAMS

Never have I felt so unqualified (or is it qualified?) to write on a topic. Many times in the last ten years, I have felt overwhelmed by greed for possessions, and crushed by guilt over my seeming inability (or even desire) to overcome this sin. I am bothered more by my obsession with buying new things, and my lack of moderation and control over my spending, than by the exact amount that I spend.

Our modern, consumerist society presents me with a multitude of choices, a high disposable income (at least compared to most of the world), endless advertising and sales cleverly designed to entice me into spending more, and respect for the well-dressed, well-decorated and well-appointed. But this does not explain why I shop; why I endlessly feel the need for something more.

I feel increasingly helpless and guilty about this sin, and it begins to impact my ministry (how can I tell someone else to struggle with sin when I fail so consistently?); my marriage (I become devious and manipulative in my quest for possessions my husband doesn't want); my children (exposed to my example, how will they escape acquisitiveness?); my friendships (competitiveness and envy mar relationships with women, and I lead them into temptation by my own spending); and, above all, my relationship with God (guilt keeps me from praying, damages my assurance, and tempts me to give up the unequal struggle with sin).

How did I, a "mature" Christian whom others look up to and imitate, get into this mess? What do possessions represent to me, that I seek them so desperately and obsessively?

“be accountable to a friend or mentor; imitate godly friends”

Like food, which I eat when I'm bored or depressed, spending promises quick relief, at least for a moment. I enjoy feasting my eyes on God's good things; there is a right pleasure in what he has given: but my obsession with buying

things tells me that spending promises much more than a brief moment of pleasure. I don't so much want more things, as the best things, the complete collection. When friends or family don't respond the way I want them to, when the house is chaotic, when I'm anxious about the future, this is one area of my life I seem to have some control over. When I buy things, I feel like I am purchasing completion, perfection, happiness.

But I have personally discovered the truth of C.S.Lewis' statement that habitual sin becomes "at once less pleasant and harder to forgo" (Lewis, C.S. (1977) *The Screwtape Letters*. Collins: Glasgow, p63). Continuing sin gradually produces greater compulsiveness and less pleasure. Even while standing in the checkout queue, I often feel slightly ill at the thought of the purchases I am about to make.

I can give you a list of handy hints which I, or others, have found helpful in stemming the tide: get a "no junk mail" sign; don't order or read catalogues or magazines; remember some relevant Bible verses (e.g. Matt. 5:19-24; 1 Tim. 6:17-19); be accountable to a friend or mentor; wait two weeks before buying anything; avoid sales; set a spending or "lifestyle" limit and follow a budget; have a separate bank account for personal and household spending; destroy or put low limits on your credit cards; give money away straight after you get paid; imitate godly friends; meditate on heaven. (You can see I've thought about this a lot!) To be honest, I have found the only approach which really helps is to take decisive action: to avoid shops as much as possible, and not to let over-spending gain even the smallest foothold.

“the core problem [with materialism is] the quest for control and happiness which drives my spending”

But most of these techniques, necessary and helpful as they are, fail to deal with the core problem: the quest for control and happiness which drives my spending. I am (very gradually) learning to entrust control to God; to seek happiness in him rather than in this often painful world; to accept his forgiveness and sympathy for my imperfection; to realise that others can never meet my needs, and to enjoy the immensity and tenderness of his love. (I find that when I am more moderate in my spending, and give up the relentless search for the perfect "thing", I enjoy the good gifts and love of God and others so much more.)

My ultimate temptation is not spending, but becoming consumed with guilt and obsessed by failure over this sin, refusing to accept God's grace. As C.S.Lewis points out, to despair of God's mercy would show that I only believe in his forgiveness of my other sins because I don't "fully feel their sinfulness"; that in respect of the one sin which I really feel in its "full depth of dishonour" I cannot "seek, nor credit, the Mercy." (Lewis, 1977, p149). But God's grace is greater than my greatest sin.

I often feel hopeless, sometimes not even Christian, but I know that God meant what he said when he promised to never let me out of his hands, to complete the work he started in me, to daily give me the grace I need to obey him. I am endlessly grateful to a God who never gives up on me, who forgives and goes on forgiving. One day I will stand before him forgiven, healed, restored, perfect, and in eternal possession of all that is ultimately worthwhile and enjoyable. One day I will rejoice endlessly and fully in a love which never fails or disappoints. One day I will reach my true home.

■ Jean Williams is a homemaker with a husband, who is a student worker with AFES, and two young kids. She and her family attend Bundoora Presbyterian Church.

Wealth and the Word

BY JOY LINTON

As a young Economics student studying at university it occurred to me that God must be involved in the development of an efficient market. It is so clever, ordered and logical. Yet the downfall in economic markets occurs when people start to behave irrationally, or greedily. So while an economy can be theoretically efficient, it doesn't always work that way because of human sin. In the same way that a Christian scientist can see God at work in the world of science, or a Christian doctor can see God's hand in the way the human body is constructed, I could see God at work in the way in which wealth was created in an economy.

As I matured as a Christian and started to accumulate wealth, I started to notice that the Bible had a lot of negative things to say about money. It took me a while to work out that the Bible actually distinguishes between the creation of wealth, and how we use our wealth. I found the story of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-21) very helpful. He was described as a fool not because he was rich (indeed, his crops were described as good, v16); rather, he was a fool because he was greedy, found his self-worth in his wealth rather than in God, and was mean-spirited, not generous. I find it quite liberating to use the gifts God has given me to create wealth, being accountable to God for how I use that wealth.

The danger for me and, I suspect, for a lot of other 'wealthy' Christians, is in how we use the wealth God has given us. I regularly need to examine and re-examine my motivations and intentions in how I spend my wealth. I believe that, as Christians, we need to be intentional about how we use our wealth; otherwise the seductive power of money is such that we will adopt the world's view if we don't intentionally adopt a Christian view. Money, or even lack of it, easily taps into desires that can be described as greed, idolatry, and self-satisfaction. The temptation is sometimes even more subtle than these 'obvious' sins. It is easy to fall into the trap of creating wealth for wealth's sake, or because of the status that it brings in society.

I find it helpful to break my wealth into three categories – how much I need to live on (need, not want!), how much I want to save for the future, and how much I want to give away now. Unfortunately, outside the principles of Christian tithing, which only goes part of the way to providing guidelines, I don't think there are any easy answers or simple formulae that allow us to neatly divide our wealth between these three categories. For me it comes down to working at being generous, and constantly asking myself whether the decisions I make will help me serve God, live a godly life, and further God's gospel work in the world.

Joy Linton works as a corporate finance analyst for National Foods. She is the Chair of the Vestry at St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton. Joy is married to Warren, and the mother of two year old Henry.

Fight the Good Fight

BY FIONA McLEAN

The three writers in this issue have explored various aspects of materialism: the consequent injustice on a global basis, as well as the personal temptation to put our trust in money rather than in God and to value God's creation more than the Creator. Whatever our circumstances, however wealthy or poor we are (and that is always relative), we must turn to God's word to us, the Bible, to find out how to live. We hope this brief study will encourage you to derive your values and priorities from the Bible and to put God first.

■ 1 Timothy 6: 6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called...

¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (NRSV)

■ Thinking through...

1. What does it mean to be content?
2. Do you think of yourself as one of those who "in the present age are rich" (v17)? Why or why not?
3. What does this passage say to do if you are wealthy?
4. What does it mean to put your trust in God rather than in riches?
5. Are you thankful to God for your wealth?



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/-23 Bundoran Parade, Mont Albert North VIC 3129).



Sue Robinson did a great job in pointing out the temptation to force the Bible to our own purpose instead of allowing the Spirit to regenerate our mind and change us by the power of God's word. I had come to the text with a prior faith commitment and a particular church culture that influenced my interpretation. I had also been involved in a tradition that was anti-women in ministry. The way that Scripture was used to set limits on the role and function of women within the community of God is a good example of the importance of understanding the context of a passage. A passage may apply only in a localised situation or it may have validity as a universal rule.

I am thankful for the way God used women in the bible – Hannah's prayer

in 1 Samuel 2, for example, teaches us much about the way God acts in the world. Men and women all partake in the great blessing of the New Covenant and have gifts that we should use for God's purposes. God uses all of us with all of our limitations and imperfections.

Thanks for stimulating my interest.

Peter Cumming
Rosanna, VIC



I was intrigued by the concept of "the role of men" which appeared in at least two of the quotes in the Vox Pop article. Presumably, "the role of men" suggests a specific position and function for men as distinct from women. In a

Christian context, we would find any such "role" in the Bible as God-defined; in a social/cultural context, any such role would probably be socially-defined by the majority, which we Christians know must be flawed, at least to some extent, because of the universality of sin.

Is there a social "role of men"? Historically, by virtue of their unique economic independence and education, men have held particular social roles not possessed by women. However, equal access to tertiary education and access to work outside the home in the last 50 years (and more) has proved:

1. the ability of women to take on social roles historically held by men; and

(continued)

2. that gender has nothing to do with a person's capacity to perform particular social roles. At a practical level, women can and do face discrimination that prevents them from carrying out some social roles, but it is nonetheless a fallacy to say that such roles are inherently gendered.

How, therefore, can feminism have led to women taking over "the roles of men"? Apart from fatherhood, what are these "roles" that are the sole provenance of men?

Is there a Christian "role of men"? The Bible starts with the more fundamental issue of the identity of men and women before God, and distinguishes this from the more secondary "ministry roles", which are sovereignly given by God to individuals through his Spirit for the edification of the church.

As Sue rightly points out, the identity issue is defined by reference to a person's relationship to Christ: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3.28). This verse is definitive not only at the point of a person's salvation, but also throughout a person's relationship with God. The ministry roles we adopt in our lifetime will not affect the quality or reality of

that righteousness which God has credited to us through our faith (Rom 4.20-25).

Therefore, if a discussion of ministry roles starts not with one's equal position to all other Christians in Christ, but starts instead with gender or the particular ministry role itself, then we may warp God's own view of his people and wrongly interpret the Bible, to our detriment. If we focus on gender or the ministry role ahead of the people whom God has gifted to perform the role, we may sinfully discriminate in a way that God does not.

Anne Messer
London, UK



Thank you for publishing Sue Robinson's article Feminism and the Bible in your last issue - not so much because I am in a position to agree with everything she said, but because it was a serious attempt to come to grips with biblical truth as it applies to us as women engaging now in church, family and the world.

I am dismayed to see mindsets regarding women (often of a restrictive kind) gradually creep into church fellowships with little or no public discussion,

as though the Scriptures are unambiguous on the matter. Sue Robinson went at least some of the way to point out that this is not so.

Clarity we do have about the essentials of our faith - the finished work of Jesus - the faith as summarised in the Creeds. Issues not so clear, such as this one, need to be examined, re-examined and discussed with charity, humility, respect and openness. Your journal is contributing to this process. My plea is that we also have this discourse as men and women together not just as women among ourselves.

All my Christian life, I have been encouraged by my understanding that the Lord Jesus was the greatest liberator of women who ever lived. It has also been my privilege to have been nurtured in relationships with men (and women) who reflect the attitude of Jesus described so well by Sayers (as quoted in Sue Robinson's article).

We owe it to a younger generation, ourselves, the church and society at large to be satisfied with nothing less than what He intended for us....so we had better keep working at finding out what it is.

Fran Boydell
North Fitzroy, VIC

STARTING POINT

Howard in the Lions' den?

BY PHILIPPA LOHMEYER

During times of crisis and insecurity we hope for more from our leaders than only the ability to make good business decisions. In the face of September 11, a federal election and, more recently, escalating uncertainty over asylum seekers, the media has been quick to suggest that Australians demand 'moral leadership'.

John Howard's actions in response to recent issues, from the Tampa crisis to the increasing violence at the Woomera Detention Centre, reveal how he views humanity. We may not agree with Howard's worldview and some may find his leadership in this instance problematic. Nonetheless, he has positioned himself as man whose leadership is derived from an ethical base.

Moral leadership means knowing which issues to tackle and which do not matter. As Christians, our worldview, and what we decide matters, must be explicitly founded on our obedience to a sovereign God. Daniel in the Old Testament knew his ethical base and is a helpful example of moral leadership. He was taken to live in a foreign land, educated in the language and literature of the Babylonians, experienced an imposed name change, confronted all manner of issues and became known for his wisdom and ability to interpret dreams. All the while he remained faithful to his God.

We should expect God to be involved in all aspects of our lives. As a politician, CEO, teacher, lawyer, student, the kindergarten treasurer or the church organist, we should be prepared to be the person God wants us to be and so affect the world, in some small way, however humble. Christian moral leadership is about knowing our God and acting within that relationship. As the media continues in its quest to define 'moral leadership' in the midst of global upheaval, the challenge for us is to lead, as God would have us lead.

Philippa Lohmeyer is married to Steve Collins and they have two young boys. They all attend St Jude's, where Philippa organises and runs the Open Forum Program. A Chemistry teacher by training, Philippa is at present studying at Ridley College in between ferrying boys to and from kinder and school.