

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

When Jesus' followers stood gazing into heaven following his ascension, the angels reproved them with gentle humour in words which encouraged them to get on with their lives. With the assurance that "this Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11 NRSV), they were to set about their work. With vigour and conviction, they went to it and watched enormous growth in the church within the first generation.

Many generations later, we are still in the same state of waiting for his return, but arguably, with less conviction about what should be done in the meantime. Since the time of the first church, Christians have lived through periods when the prevailing culture has been antagonistic or accommodating to Christianity, times when Christianity has shaped the culture and times when the culture has "shaped" Christianity.

The Australian church finds itself within a culture which, while not overtly antagonistic, has greatly restricted Christian influence. In our grandparents' generation, Christian beliefs were supported by social practices. It was common for people to identify with a church, marry in a church, baptise babies and open civic events in prayer. These practices have evaporated suddenly leaving Christians wondering what they did wrong. Like shags on a rock, Christians have been left behind. What has happened is that we have been overtaken by bigger cultural forces shaped by the Enlightenment and its off-shoots¹. Unaware of its influence, we may even have colluded in its advance.

Many Bible readers believe that the best way of changing society is through the power of changed lives. They believe that societies and institutions will be changed only when people are changed. Therefore, it is the first duty of the church to address individuals. While this is no doubt important, it fails to deal with the embedded structures of our world. While individuals, even groups of individuals can do much good in bringing others to faith, their life-

¹ The Enlightenment was a strand of 18th century European culture, characterised centrally by optimism about the powers of human reason to yield knowledge and to improve human life. Four key features are:

1. Belief in the power of critical inquiry, especially scientific inquiry, to give a true understanding of the world and to competently guide human life; contrasted with emphasis on tradition, religious authority and magic.
2. Belief in human autonomy: the capacity and right of individuals to assess traditional values and practices, and to choose for oneself the principles by which one will live.
3. Belief in human progress: growth in knowledge, moral enlightenment, economic prosperity and other aspects of well-being.
4. Promotion of secularisation of public life: Explicit and implicit encouragement of the idea that government institutions, the workplace and discussions in the press about public policy were best confined to concrete, this-worldly goals, while interest in God and other non-empirical realities, along with questions of ultimate value and meaning, should be relegated to the private sphere.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

places in their culture may make them blind to the deeper evils in the world order. Without noticing, their lives as Christians may even be deeply compromised by being part of an oppressive order. Many devout Christians lived under the protection of the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Nazi regime in Germany and segregationist governments in southern USA. Many of us today benefit by living in first-world countries in a global economy nourished by poorer third-world economies. This is deeply disturbing for us, yet we have only a weak understanding of a Biblical perspective which may challenge this.

Contemporary culture throws up perplexing questions. National issues like participation in war, refugee policy, biomedical technologies and the shape of the economy, create anxieties. We suspect we ought to have something to say but are not quite sure what. Closer to home, changes at work, changes in lifestyle expectations and changes in the family bring persistent and uncomfortable questions into daily lives. Hoping to effect change through the influence of enough regenerate Christians throughout the nation, seems too small an answer for such profound questions. We need to contest the broader framework that underpins our national life.

Where can we find in our Christian lives, the resources and incentives to enter the public debate over these issues? Can the Bible help us understand the issues and formulate a response? We believe it can.

The kit has been designed by the Newbigin Group, a group of Melbourne evangelical Christians with an interest in public issues. They have expertise in education, disability, development, health and science and their life and work continue to be illuminated and challenged by gospel questions. The studies have been written by Barbara Deutschmann, who remains responsible for any errors therein.

The toolkit is not aiming to make it any easier to decide on the right Christian opinion on particular issues.

- Using Biblical material, it will trace the wider dimensions of the gospel story.
- It will suggest ways of applying a gospel framework to our public lives.

The kit is designed for groups, trusting that gatherings of Christians meeting together to seek more faithful lives, provide the right setting to

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

wrestle with work and life-place questions. This kit is therefore suitable for home groups or for small groups at church camps.

SOME WIDER READING

The toolkit does not assume that people will read these books. These are suggested for those who want to read further.

Richard Bauckham: The Bible in Politics. How to read the Bible Politically. SPCK; London: 1989

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon: Resident Aliens; Abingdon Press; Nashville; 1989

Lesslie Newbigin: "Can the West be Converted?" International Bulletin of Missionary Research; January 1987

Lesslie Newbigin: Gospel in a Pluralist Society; Eerdmans; Grand Rapids; 1989

John Howard Yoder: Body Politics; Discipleship Resources; Nashville; 1994

John Howard Yoder: The Politics of Jesus; Eerdmans; Grand Rapids; 1972

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 1 NEW COMMUNITY: NEW SOCIETY

Resources: The Bible

"Just an Old Church...?" Article by Gil Cann, first published in *Working Together 1997*, publication of The Australian Evangelical Alliance. (Used with permission.)

Christians are involved in public life in lots of different ways. Consider these examples:

1. John, a practising Anglican, has taken up a career in federal politics and been elected to parliament for a conservative party.
2. Stephanie, a Baptist, works on her local primary school council.
3. Dave, who goes to a community church, was actively involved in the planning group for the Jubilee 2000 debt reduction campaign.
4. Rowan, a Uniting Church member, regularly writes letters to newspapers advocating more funding for government schools.
5. Ruth, an elderly Catholic prays regularly for government leaders.
6. Peter, an Anglican Archbishop, is often invited to make public comment on behalf of the Anglican church.

Although their understanding may be different, all consider themselves to be giving some expression to the idea that the gospel has public dimensions. Are any of the activities above more Christian than others? What happens if, for instance, John and Rowan, both claiming Biblical warrant, find themselves at loggerheads over state-funded education?

GROUP TASK:

- Share examples of public dimensions of the gospel from group members' involvements.
- What is the basic motivation for each of these examples?

For many, these public involvements happen outside of their congregation or church life. In other words, they are acting as individuals seeking to have an influence on society. Do churches have any part to play? An important Biblical truth to rediscover is that the church is a pattern of a new society and that this will "speak" for itself. This is not a new idea but one which was embodied in the people of Israel and one of which Jesus spoke long ago. Jesus founded a community to speak, not only by its pronouncements but by the way it lived together, of the kingdom of God.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

GROUP TASK:

- *Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7 or briefly, 5:1-26) Matthew makes a point of telling us that Jesus was speaking with the disciples, that is, the foundation members of the new people of God. The Sermon asks them to imagine themselves in a new society which functions on very different principles than the wider society. According to the Sermon, what are some of the characteristics of this new society?*

Following his ascension, Jesus' followers called themselves an ekklesia, meaning a parliament or town meeting where the community could together discuss and apply the law of God. It was an unusual group, replacing the usual hierarchy of social relationships with a community where masters and slaves, men and women, Jews and gentiles, were mutually subordinate. While the community was meant to care for its members, it had a much more significant role. As the Sermon on the Mount described it, it was to "shine" in such a way that others would give glory to God. (Matt 5:16)

"Jesus anticipated the future hope of the unrestricted, uncontested sovereignty of God".² He invited people to live within it although he knew it was not fully realized. In their common life, believers were to practise the presence of the Kingdom.

GROUP TASK

- *Read the article "Just an Old Church..?" How does the new society take effect in the church in this article? Reflect on your own church. Which practices model the new humanity? Which do not? Is it a visible pattern of the new people of God?*

John, Stephanie, Dave, Rowan, Ruth and Peter (see introduction) are all finding valuable ways to contribute to the society. How much stronger would be their impact were they part of believing communities that understood their role as a pattern of a new society.

² Richard Bauckham: The Bible in Politics, p.142

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

GOING DEEPER

The book of Acts describes in short cameos some of the ways this new community lived together. One example is their common meal.

A common meal was central to the life of the disciples of Jesus before his death and resurrection but took on special significance after his death. Many of Jesus' appearances after his resurrection took place around a shared meal (Luke 24:28-33; John 21:9-14) Although the Lord's Supper has become a church ceremony sacramentally remembering Christ's death "until He comes", its origins are a Passover meal remembering the Exodus, shared by the extended family. It drew the new family together around a table with Jesus as host. In the early church, it was not symbolic but real sharing, making sure that all had enough to eat in recognition that that they were now part of one body (1 Cor 11:17-34) It signaled the fulfillment of Deuteronomy (15:4) that "there should be no poor among you." In foreshadowing the Messianic banquet, the Lord's Supper became an example of a different economy, one in which all people are provided for.

GROUP TASK:

Read Acts 2:37-47. What elements of the new community described in the Sermon on the Mount are present in the first Jerusalem ecclesia?

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

JUST AN OLD CHURCH....?

By Gil Cann

This article first appeared in Working Together, publication of The Australian Evangelical Alliance, 1997.

Standing in an inner-suburban street, the old church building looks somewhat severe. It is of a traditional style - tall steep roof, narrow windows, small entrance porch. No room around it for landscaped gardens or a car-park – it is tightly wedged between a motley assortment of offices, small factories and dwellings of many shapes and sizes. Its entrance opens directly onto the footpath. Very few trees in sight, no lush nature strips. Asphalt and concrete all around.

After parking at the kerb nearby, my wife Cathie and I sidestepped around discarded condoms as we approached the building. A young woman welcomed with a beaming smile – such a contrast to the cold morning and drab surroundings. Inside, the furnishings had been rearranged. The former lofty pulpit, and pews either side of the central aisle, were gone. Much used stackable chairs now gathered around a simple lectern. The soaring archway over the one-time organ and choir area had been simply inscribed. It read, “I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.” John 10v10.

The people began to arrive – people of every kind. Young and old, professionals and labourers, single parents, unemployed and homeless people. People of several different races, men and women bearing the marks of difficult circumstances, people with disabilities, on walking frames and in wheelchairs, all came in, walking, shuffling and ‘wheeling’ over the well-worn carpet.

A buzz of excitement filled the building. Many greetings, smiles, hugs and handshakes. Singing began while folk were still finding their friends, and their seats. Sensitive, worshipful and life-related songs, about God, and His grace, about love, community, creation and caring for our world.

The Scriptures were read, the pastor welcomed and introduced visitors. A drama was enacted by several children. Prayer requests and answers to prayer were shared.

We were there because a mother, now on her own, whom we had known since she was a girl, was dedicating her six children to the Lord. A large fabric banner had been painstakingly created especially for this occasion. Beautifully handcrafted, and displaying the names of each child, and prayer for God’s blessing on them, it expressed this church’s love for this family. Their mother, let’s call her Ruth, stood before the people with her youngest child, a baby, in her arms. She wanted to tell her story. It was a story filled with trauma and heartache, not easy to tell. She pressed on bravely, honestly. Some came and stood with her, arms around her shoulders, encouraging her. Out it came – her loss of both parents in tragic circumstances at the age of five, a long succession of many

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

different foster homes, motherhood under difficult circumstances, a protracted struggle with alcoholism, and much more.

The pastor had earlier quoted an old African proverb – ‘it takes a whole village to raise a child.’ How true this is and how appropriate to Ruth’s situation. She went on with tears to declare her determination to follow the Lord. She declared her desire to be a good mother and seek the very best for each of her children, whatever hard decisions that might involve. She thanked the people for their support, patience, love and practical help. Many had cared for her children, long-term, during her times of rehabilitation, sickness and other traumas. Some would continue to do so, beyond this day.

Time to pray for her children. A large number of Ruth’s friends gathered around them. These people, many who were members of this church, and some others, were truly their ‘extended family’ – the ‘whole village’ of which the pastor had spoken.

Heartfelt prayers, tears of sadness and joy, warm embraces and praise to the Lord for His grace and enabling filled the timeworn building. No choir, organ, stained glass, immaculate fittings and no advanced technology. Just people with few of this world’s goods, some in tracksuits and beanies, expressing long-term, sacrificial love to this family.

Then I remembered! Only a few weeks ago I had written an article for the last issue of Working Together – ‘How to Tell if Your Church is Healthy (even though it looks sick).’ Here was a living example of church health – despite lack of furnishings, facilities, finances and finesse! The meeting was marked by reality – not grim, but stark. No pretence, excuses or show. And no condemnation. Simply a bunch of frail, fallible people struggling with pressures, temptations and addictions as they seek to follow Christ in a fallen world, openly acknowledging their need of each other’s help.

What would bring so many people to that church on a cold, wintry morning? Especially when you consider that much finer venues in much more pleasant surroundings, on that very same morning, saw only a handful of regulars. I wonder?

By the way, it was also Ruth’s 40th birthday. So there was lunch with goodies enjoyed by all and a large birthday cake ablaze with candles. Speaking of blazing candles, the service and the party were a blaze of flashlights too. After all, everyone needs ‘roots’, and a family history. A record of friends and special events to reflect on, and to know that they really belong. These camera-happy people were making sure that from now on, if never before, Ruth and her children would have all this too.

Oh, and another thing! A young man remembered that Ruth had missed her tram and had to come by taxi. Informing the people that this had cost ‘an arm and a leg’ he put the need before them. No problem! Her fares were paid in moments!

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Eventually, reluctantly, two or three hours after starting time, a joyful bunch of people headed home, renewed in their desire to honour the Lord in the struggles of the coming week. And they looked as though they couldn't wait for next Sunday.

I'm not surprised! This is not just any old church.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 2: JESUS: REVOLUTION OR RESURRECTION?

Resources: The Bible

In Part 1, we looked at the church as a pattern of the new society to be fashioned along the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. Where did this idea come from? What was it in Jesus' coming that produced the moment of radical change?

It was clear from the start that gospel writers saw that Jesus' coming would bring social change.

GROUP TASK:

- *Read Luke 4:14-22 and Isaiah 61. What is the common theme of the things that the anointed one is to do?*
- *Verse 19 is an allusion to the Year of Jubilee. Remind yourselves of its provisions by reading Leviticus 25.*
- *Is there evidence of the restorations of Luke 4 and Isaiah 61 happening in Jesus' lifetime?*

Jesus was far from being just an inspiring *teacher* of social action. The excitement and the controversy of Luke 4, is that his coming activated change.

Jesus' coming was the climax of a much bigger story, that which began with creation and with the setting apart of Israel.

GROUP TASK:

- *Read Acts 13:13-42. Summarise the story. What gives it the sense of purposeful movement?*
- *What has been God's role in the story?*
- *What is the significance of the resurrection to the story?*

The resurrection affirms bodily existence and is God's "yes" to our earthly lives. It signifies that God is not just interested in heaven but earth, not just spiritual life but the whole of life. The resurrection can be seen not only as an affirmation of our created lives but also a vindication of Israel's history. Jesus, the one true Israelite, had been obedient to death and been raised as vindication and now reigns as King.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

GOING DEEPER:

- *Read Ephesians 1:18-2:22. What changes have come as a result of the resurrection? What practical and visible effects would have been felt in Ephesus as a result?*

GROUP TASK:

- *"(The resurrection).....keeps us dissatisfied, hopeful, imaginative and open to new possibilities."³ Take one of the areas in which group members work. To what extent does the resurrection make a difference to their work? Should it?*

³ Bauckham, p.150

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 3: JESUS AND POLITICS

Resources: The Bible

"Churches are Proud to Stand for Peace." Article by Peter Matheson, The Age, 18-19 April, 2003 (Used with permission)

In Part 2, we looked at the changes in our world implied in the death and resurrection of Jesus. But did he have anything to say about the political world in which he lived? If so, what can we learn about our own attitude to politics? While Jesus' life is not reducible to politics, it certainly had political dimensions. Jesus' responses show he identified neither with the Zealots who would violently throw off Roman rule nor with a passive quietness in political matters. Nor was he only interested in "spiritual" matters. In two startling encounters, Jesus tackled the questions of the political and spiritual realms, head-on.

GROUP TASK:

Read Mark 17:24-27. The temple-tax was the half-shekel tax levied on every adult male Jew to finance the public worship in the temple in Jerusalem. The tax, levied in God's name, made no allowance for those who were poor.

- *What lies behind Jesus' question to Simon?*
- *Jesus presumably, had access to coins so what then, was the meaning of the provision of the coin through a miracle?*

Jesus' response draws attention to the difference between the fatherly provision of God and the harsh rule of religious authorities.

GROUP TASK:

Read Mark 12:13-17. The devilishly clever question of the Pharisees and Herodians regarding the paying of tribute to the Emperor was designed to force Jesus to choose between unpopularity with the people and the displeasure of the Roman authorities. The payment of this tribute (as distinct from other indirect taxes), was introduced to Judea by Pompey, conqueror of Jerusalem and profaner of the temple. It was a provocative regulation to force acknowledgement and worship of the Emperor. On the denarius coin, in which coinage the tribute was to be paid, was the bust of Emperor Tiberius with

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

the laurel circlet signifying divinity. The title said: "Emperor Tiberius august son of the august god."

- *Why do you think Jesus chooses to engage with this question, despite the risk?*
- *Jesus is never trapped by the way we put our questions to him. How does he reshape this issue to challenge his audience?*
- *Why did he not answer with scripture as he usually did? (e.g. 12:10; 12:24; 12:29 etc)*
- *Jesus' answer calls people to a process of discernment. His answer, far from ceding to Caesar sovereignty of the everyday world, implies that careful discernment will be needed in daily life.*
- *Look at the context of this passage in Mark's gospel (11:27-12:44). Why does Jesus' presence provoke such a menacing entrapment?*

Jesus was not just a teacher of spirituality whose teachings unfortunately trod on some political toes. His life, death and resurrection initiated a new social and political world. This was deeply threatening to those in power at that time. His presence created crisis and conflict.

GOING DEEPER:

GROUP TASK:

- *Read the article "Churches are Proud to Stand for Peace" According to Peter Matheson, on what grounds did some Christians oppose the War in Iraq? On what ground may others have supported it?*
- *To what extent can we expect governments to have characteristics of the rule of God?*

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

CHURCHES ARE PROUD TO STAND FOR PEACE

PETER MATHESON

The AGE, 18-19 APRIL 2003

One good outcome of the Iraq war is the peace movement's newfound energy.

Gerard Henderson's column ("Is there any war the Christian churches would regard as just?", on this page on Tuesday) critiquing the church's opposition to the war against Iraq raises some interesting points.

True, to begin with the egregiously inept comment that it is "not settled whether or not God is a Christian" – as if the transcendent Lord of all creation could be reified in this way – might seem to disqualify Henderson from engaging in any rational discourse. We'll overlook that however, along with his use of sophisticated analytical categories such as "vomitous". He is, no doubt, a bit out of his depth.

Henderson's basic worry appears to be that naïve Christians and their devious leaders, from the Pope down, are giving comfort to the enemies of the West such as Saddam Hussein. As Henderson complains: "No group within the West protested more actively than the Christian churches."

Yet, as any participant in the Melbourne marches will testify, the moral and intellectual leadership for the protests came from a remarkably broad band of concerned groups: trade unions, political parties, Islamic organizations and many others. It is the sort of alliance we have seen in the past on reconciliation and asylum seeker issues, and which we will see again. Church people were proud to be part of this movement.

For a moment some people may be bemused by the military victory. A fourth-rate military dictatorship has been rubbed out by the world's superpower. Hardly a surprise.

It is more difficult however, to overlook the human cost of this, in shattered lives and limbs and hopes. But the humanitarian issue is not the only one. The basic reason for the churches profound and unrepentant opposition will become clearer in the months and years to come.

The ominous aspect of this war is that it has been driven by paranoia, by quiverfuls of unproven allegations, and by half-thought-out strategies, that, if persevered with, will imperil international relationships for decades to come.

With countless others, the churches have a responsibility to point this out. Above all they have had to nail the assiduously propagated myth of redemptive violence: the assumption that the US government has the

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

God-given right to use its overwhelming military supremacy to intervene pre-emptively to safeguard its alleged interests.

It is this arrogation to itself of divine legitimation that compels Christians to speak out. It would be very unwise to underestimate the degree of outrage in Christian congregations on this issue.

The real costs for this war have not begun to be counted. They are not the financial burden, grave as this will be. Not the destruction of museums and the whole infrastructure of a nation. Not even the human casualties. The real cost is that this war signals a descent into barbarism, made all the worse because of its technological sophistication and high-minded rhetoric. The terror of terror has unhinged us. We have lost the place.

We have to remind ourselves quietly that this is a war waged by a small group of English-speaking peoples. European resistance has been ignored. The United Nations has been swept aside.

Who knows what price will have to be paid for the humiliation of the Arab world. Who knows what the long-term destabilising and alienating effects in the whole Islamic world will be. This ethnocentric juggernaut will have to be stopped. God is the God of all peoples.

Christian people are denouncing this war because the values it represents are an affront to the very heart of the Christian gospel, as Easter reminds us so poignantly. There is prophetic obligation on the Christian Churches to point to the chasm between the rhetoric of liberation and the realities of Realpolitik, and to speak out on behalf of the victims.

The excuses for sweeping aside the UN are an insult to our intelligence. We badly need a reality check; to take a hard look at our common future, and start developing alternative strategies for subverting dictatorships and introducing freedom and justice.

The newfound energy, networking and creativity of the worldwide peace movement is one encouraging part of that process. The emerging dialogue between Islamic and Christian leaders is another. A sharpened awareness of the ruthlessness of the ambitions of this US regime is a third.

Whether Gerard Henderson is right that the Christian churches have been the most active group in resistance to this obscene war is debatable. It is encouraging however, that he thinks so.

It is still more encouraging to be sneered at by him. For as the fourth-century church father Abba Anthony said: "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him saying, 'You are mad, you are not like us.'"

Reverend Dr Peter Matheson is principal of the Uniting Church Theological Hall in Melbourne.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 4: THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC LIFE

Resources: The Bible

"Politics with a Soul. Yes, it is Possible." Article by Tim Costello, Sydney Morning Herald, December 23, 2002. (Used with permission)

In Part 3, we considered how Jesus' negotiated his way with the political authority of his day. Since that time, the church has been through times when it has been persecuted by the state and other times when it has closely identified with the state. What ought to be its role in relation to government? Should Christians aim to gain control of government or should Christians eschew involvement with government?

GROUP TASK:

- Read "Politics with a Soul".
- Costello writes: "So can the church acknowledge its need for renewal and be dislodged from its privileged place of playing chaplain to progress and religiously consecrating its triumphs?" What is he accusing the church of doing? What would he like to see?

At some times and places in history, the church and state operated as one. Constantinianism, after Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, is the name given to this state of affairs. His successors declared Christianity the state religion (Edict of Milan 313CE). Far from being a good thing for the church, it led to its weakening as the church became a passive handmaid to the state.

Another approach is seen in the churches in the United States and increasingly, in Australia, which work to get Christians into positions of power in the government.

Still others think that church and state should have nothing to do with one another. Church figures who make critical comment on government policy are sometimes reminded by our government leaders to stick to "spiritual" matters.

GROUP TASK:

- A key text in church and state relations, is in Paul's letter to the Romans, 13:1-7. Paul wrote this during the reign of Emperor Nero in about 57CE. Seven years later, Paul's witness

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

to the worship of God alone, led to his death under the same emperor.

- *Read Romans 12:1-13:14. Note the way the passage to do with authority (13:1-7) is framed by a wider context of the transformed minds and lives of believers as a result of the rule of Christ ("Therefore..."12:1) How does this framework shape the interpretation of the passage?*
- *The word translated "be subject" (NRSV) in 13:1, 5, is not the word for "obey". Paul calls for "subordination". How do these two ideas differ and why may Paul have chosen the word he did? How does Paul delineate the tasks of governing authorities (vv3-7)?*
- *It is clear that Paul is influenced by Jesus' call to discernment in Mark 12:13-17 as he composed v7. The same verb is used in v8 ("Owe no one anything, except to love one another.") How does this influence our reading of vv1-7?*

Churches, aware of their allegiance to the rule of Christ, will need to tread warily in the realms of power. They will be grateful for stable governance which fosters justice and allows gospel work to proceed. They will also be watchful for the abuses which agglomerations of power encourage. Ultimately, churches will need to be critically watchful of the processes of government.

GOING DEEPER

GROUP TASK:

Debate the proposition that Christians should vote for the Family First party in the next Federal election.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Politics with a soul. Yes, it is possible

December 23 2002

Many young people find more spirituality in the Greens than in the church, writes Tim Costello.

Several days ago I heard a vice-chancellor of a major university finish a speech by pronouncing that "we are huge, powerful, resourceful and talented and nothing will get in our way". Instantly I understood why the Greens were attracting so many young people and why they won more than 10 per cent of the vote on November 30 in the Victorian election. This old institutional language sounded so hollow. Its zeitgeist was progress and its spirituality an unreflective triumphalism.

By contrast a few weeks earlier I had stood with Bob Brown and church leaders on the steps of the Victorian Parliament at a press conference. As church representatives we mumbled about the regressive redistribution of poker machines' revenue from the poor to the rich. Brown, by contrast, spoke with directness and simplicity. He boldly declared that the promotion of pokies by the state was a profound moral and ethical issue that had to be named. Justice is indivisible and universal. As the traditional institutional custodians of the moral high ground, we as church leaders listened enviously.

Later we remembered ruefully that once we could speak like that. But now our purchase on this moral franchise was gone with too many scandals and cover-ups.

Where did the freshness and moral clarity that Brown epitomises come from?

The Greens' zeitgeist is the ecological belief that all of life is interconnected and that we are dependent on a system of relationships that are universal. The spirituality that flows from such a belief system is to nurture and attend to these relationships - both those of the natural and human worlds.

This belief can function like a religion in giving a "meaning map" and hence a discipleship path to walk that comes from awe for the organic interconnections.

The daily disciplines of meditation, recycling, using public transport and greening one's neighbourhood are parallels to the rhythms of prayer, Bible reading, witness and love of neighbour in Christian teaching.

Many Greens would reject any pseudo-religious tag and point out that scientific discoveries are now demonstrating the insight that everything in the material universe is connected with everything else. The Greens may have intuitively arrived earlier than others at the right conclusion because of the ecological impulse, but eventually it will be empirically verified. But I believe their appeal is deeper than any scientific vindication.

Many young people are searching for a fusion of their deepest and truest private aspirations with public meaning. They know that the public secular institutions of government, media, unions and educational institutions like our universities are running

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

on empty because they have little language of interconnectedness or priority for spiritual values.

Indeed, many of these institutions are terrified by the mushrooming interest in spirituality.

But those people caught up by a passion for meaning are looking for transformation. They might just feel that the Greens offer this fusion of the personal and the sacred with a renewed public politics. In many ways, the personal, daily "green" choices can have spiritual and public meaning. Locally, this takes shape in voting for an Australian political party, and globally by embracing an international justice movement.

Most of these same people think that they cannot go back to credal religious faith, as it is too rigid and too historically aligned to the progress and triumphalism of nation building. Many have been so shaped by a non-institutional spirituality that they do not even register that the church may offer a path.

I am amazed at how many young people tell me of their spiritual search and then are genuinely surprised when I suggest they check out the church as a resource. They are not hostile to the idea - just truly astonished by the novel notion that a church might have something to do with spirituality.

So can the church acknowledge its need for renewal and be dislodged from its privileged place of playing chaplain to progress and religiously consecrating its triumphs?

First of all, we need to humbly accept that this Green renewal does extend to the church in its faith and practice. It is much easier in this light to reconsider the fundamental truths of Christian faith and discover that Scripture teaches that all of creation bears the image of the Creator, not just humans. That all of creation is the intricate, indivisible work woven by a God who is indeed green.

We should also be reminded that, more than that, salvation was never about "rescuing souls" but renewing and redeeming creation. It has to do with right relationships between God, humans and Earth that can restore the fracture and de-spoliation.

Brown is right to speak out against a prospective war in Iraq that will mutilate people and mutilate creation through its struggle to control and exploit fossil fuel wealth. His views challenge those of us who are part of the "Christian West" to think about the triumphalism that says we are militarily powerful and nothing can stop our access. Despite a millennium of Christian "just war" theory that served our progress we might rediscover Jesus. He appeared to believe that war never achieved its purposes and had already outlived its usefulness when He taught "love your enemies".

Just as slavery and racial discrimination, once entrenched and unassailable, have been theoretically abolished, so we might renounce war and truly discover the sacred interconnection of all of life.

The Rev Tim Costello is CEO of World Vision Australia.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 5: RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE

- Resources:**
- Case-study: WorkVentures; St. Mark's Malabar (Used with permission)**
 - Case-study: Edward Smith Hall**
 - Case-Study: Jubilee 2000 (Used with permission)**

One way that churches can give expression to the public nature of the gospel is by carefully preparing members for their roles in their life places and work places. Many churches have taught the Bible in disembodied ways, leaving members to make their own connection with life and work issues. Few can do this without training and encouragement. Those who teach in churches often do not know much about the work life of members. Visits to workplaces or even homes, are rare. Clergy formation and training often takes them out of workplaces leading to disconnection of focus between clergy and non-clergy.

GROUP TASK

- *Brainstorm ways that churches may better prepare people for their Monday-Friday lives.*
- *Some churches have found real points of contact with their community.*
- *Read the case-study of St. Mark's Anglican Church, Malabar. What do you think of this model of engagement? What does it say about the gospel? What are the risks? Are they worth it?*

Some Christians will by choice or necessity, work for change outside of church structures. We are all familiar with the outstanding work of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect in working for the abolition of slavery. We are less familiar with the work of early Australians.

GROUP TASK

- *Read the case-study of Edward Hall. Do you know of modern examples of people such as Edward Hall? What are the risks of this type of involvement?*

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Edward Hall's work was solitary yet powerful. There are many advantages in working together with others to bring change in the public arena. One example of such cooperative activity has been the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt reduction.

GROUP TASK

- *Read the Jubilee 2000 case-study. What were its strengths? Why was it not as successful as hoped?*

God continues to inspire people to work actively in the public arena. Knowing that the gospel is not just for our individual spiritual health but the beginning of God's new creation, and knowing that God's kingdom has come and is coming, we can confidently work in the public arena for the common good. How can your own group respond to the matters raised through these studies? This will be the subject of the final study, Part 6.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

WorkVentures

WorkVentures grew out of a ministry of St. Mark's Anglican Church at Malabar in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The founding members were influenced by the increasing radicalism of the universities in the 60's and 70's and also the radical discipleship movement. They sought to express the values of the Kingdom in everyday life and were concerned to bridge the gaps between the church and the working class and between the First and the Third Worlds. A small intentional community was formed in 1975 made up of people who wanted ways of developing a deeper common life, closely connected to the needs of the local community.

In 1987, a parish ministry team was developed. Social Work graduate Steve Lawrence took responsibility for the Neighbourhood Ministry area. This aimed to build bridges through which the church could care for and work with the people of the local neighbourhood. Its philosophy was to work with what sociologists call "mediating structures" which include organisations such as schools, housing associations and parish churches, which are generally found in the local community. Early efforts focussed on needs: children's holiday centres, provision of a horse and cart for community fun, the sale of second-hand clothing, the establishment of food cooperatives, camping, craft and transport resources etc.

In 1980, general community work became focussed on economic empowerment rather than welfare. Peninsula Community Services was born. The intention was to encourage the local community to confront the absence of job skills, financial resources and entrepreneurial initiatives in their locality. The Peninsula area, although it had much of historical value, was regarded as the dumping ground of Sydney. Prince Henry Hospital, which once treated infectious diseases like Leprosy, became an AIDS treatment area. Long Bay Gaol and Malabar Sewage works were each in the area. Bordered by the Botany industrial area, the Peninsula was literally "caught between the devil and the deep brown sea". Large scale industries began to close down, ICI, Australian Paper Mills, Bunnerong Power Station, GMH, W.D. and H.O. Wills and the Caltex Refinery.

In the light of this need, WorkVentures, the new name of the project, focussed on enterprise and employment creation. Some early projects like youth services and the community newspaper were discontinued. New projects such as CompuSkill, which offered training in word processing, job-seeking skills, healthy work practices and relationships, were set up in premises at Matraville.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

In February 1992, key WorkVentures staff and supporters had one of their periodic times of reflection and strategic thinking. They developed a vision statement setting out their aims as:

*To empower people to explore creative alternatives and achieve their goals in the areas of work and employment; and
To contribute to meeting the challenges facing Australia in the area of employment and economic activity.*

Significant changes in Australia were identified as:

- *The globalization of world markets and society;*
- *The changing orientation within our society to seeing Australia as part of Asia and the possibility of becoming its 'poor white trash';*
- *The need for Australia to become a clever country and therefore an emphasis on skilling and reskilling the workforce;*
- *The changing industry structures within Australia, in particular the decline of the manufacturing sector and the growth in the tertiary sector evident in the increasing size of the tourism and education industries;*
- *The changing nature and place of work in the society;*
- *The increasing disparity between those with wealth and those living in poverty;*
- *The changing strategies of WorkVentures' competitors (ie, the bundling of education as part of technological product sales);*
- *The continuous development and introduction of new technologies;*
- *The increasing importance of environmental issues.*

Given these changes to the Australian working culture, WorkVentures set the following directions for its work:

1. ***Building New Partnerships:*** *with business in Australia and overseas, church and community groups, government and other.*
2. ***Broadening Client Base:*** *to include anyone requiring skilling or reskilling, employed or unemployed while not losing focus on serving the culturally disadvantaged.*
3. ***Diversifying Services:*** *in traditional work and life skills for the disadvantaged.*
4. ***Model Workplace:*** *through better communication, clearer understanding of roles, staff development and career paths, childcare and relaxation facilities.*
5. ***Building a Public Advocacy and Communication Profile:*** *involving education and advocacy, participation in national and state policy making processes.*
6. ***Increasing Financial Self Reliance and Diversifying Income Sources:*** *through establishing more self-funding businesses and by developing an alternative loan fund.*

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

In 1993, WorkVentures employed 70 staff. It had an annual turnover of nearly \$4 million and offered free services to approximately 1400 unemployed people with an encouraging employment rate.

WorkVentures is not just a job creation programme but an arm of the church. Despite the importance of the personal dimension, the role of Workventures is not evangelism. It seeks to embody the values of God's Kingdom, like justice, peace, reconciliation and community. It has, and needs, relative independence but retains strong links with the worship and witnessing life of the church. In the late 1980's while Gordon Preece was Rector, St. Mark's developed a strong emphasis on holistic, pastoral evangelism. "Without this, the emphasis on the Kingdom can seem to be merely humanitarian and be viewed as only another social justice ideology. The Kingdom emphasis needs to be balanced by a face to face encounter with the King, who fleshes out the Kingdom in personal terms. This then needs to be followed by involvement in the Church which sees itself as a community called to embody and preview the reign of God". (*Changing Work Values* by Gordon Preece, pages 125-6)

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

EDWARD SMITH HALL

Edward Smith Hall (1786-1860) was the son of a minor English banker and involved in both religious and social work in England under the inspiration of his fellow evangelical and friend, William Wilberforce. He emigrated to NSW in 1811 and in 1821, took up a land grant of 1000 acres at Lake Bathurst near Goulburn. In 1826, his wife, Charlotte died leaving him to care for 9 children. He took on the education of the nine children himself.

Hall's work as an evangelical Anglican in NSW, took place at a time when the church was high church in character and dominated by the clergy.

In 1826, he founded the *Sydney Monitor*, an eight-page, shilling a copy weekly which had as its aims the introduction of trial by jury, and representative government, the defence of civil liberties and a concern for defending the interests of those at a disadvantage in NSW society, in particular convicts, emancipists and aborigines.

Hall saw that the main problem in NSW was the stranglehold on the economic and social life by the 29 landholders who had secured the best land of NSW through Gov. Darling's patronage. These plutocrats had formed an oligarchy that controlled the magistracy, the legislative and the civil offices. It formed a powerful coalition against the interests of the disadvantaged.

Hall editorialised that Darling had made NSW "singularly prone to espionage, suspicion and a servile dread of offending higher authorities." He also ridiculed the actions of Darling's chief supporter, Archdeacon Thomas Hobbs Scott, of St. James' Church, Sydney. This resulted in Hall being locked out of his pew at St. James'. Scott sued Hall for libel and was successful in gaining one pound in damages. However, Hall ultimately won 25 pounds in damages for the St. James' incident. His fierce editorials which sometimes included statements which were factually inaccurate, resulted in many libel suits against him. In 1829, he spent 15 months in gaol whence he continued to conduct the *Monitor*.

From gaol, Hall and the editor of the *Australian*, A.E. Hayes, continued to struggle for freedom of the press against Gov. Darling's repeated attempts to silence his critics. Darling's term of office was not renewed when it expired in 1831 and Hall found common cause with the new Governor of NSW, evangelical Sir George Gipps, who had been instructed by the new Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, to attend to the interests of the aboriginal people. The Myall Creek Massacre of 19 November

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

1838 was to become a watershed for policy in NSW towards the aboriginal population. Here is an extract of Hall's writing on the massacre which illustrates his passion for justice and his concern to expose the underlying causes of injustice.

"The company or tribe of blacks put to the sword by these eleven men, had not only been innocent of all personal violence, but they had become domesticated among these very men. One of them (Kilmaister) had been the cause of their taking residence near his hut, and he himself seems to have formed a friendship for them; for in the evening on his return from his journeys after his cattle, he was in the habit of playing and dancing with their children....

The blacks, it appears, were residing at the hut of Kilmaister, in peace and confidence as usual, when a party of men, mounted and armed with swords and pistols, galloped up to the place. From the manner of the party, the Blacks, who are by no means as deficient in intellect as they are represented in books, perceived danger, and ran for safety into the hut. They were taken out, and tied one by one to a long rope used to catch cattle by the horns. Perceiving their fate, they began to weep and moan. The women, though tied, continued to carry their infants in a net slung from their shoulders. Being all secured, men and boys, women, girls, and sucklings, one of the horsemen led the way, with the end of the rope attached to himself or horse. The other ten horsemen divided into two parties of five, one behind the other and five on the other side. The funeral procession then commenced its march, amid the tears and lamentations of the victims. It must have been a heart-rending sight to see the aged Black, named "Daddy", led to the slaughter, a man of giant-like stature, and probably brave as he was magnificent in his form; the tears rolling down his aged cheeks at the sight of his wife, children and relatives. The children perhaps scarcely knew their sufferings until the sharp steel had passed through their bodies, and put a speedy end to their troubles...

What was there in this murder of eight-and-twenty poor helpless betrayed men, women and children, that should induce the magistrates and gentlemen of Hunter's River to hire Counsels for the murderers? Do they hire Counsel for the other men when tried for murder? How will this fact tell in England, in France, in Austria, in Prussia and in America? For we doubt not but there are men in the two houses of parliament who will now make the colony known over all the world - in kingdoms and cities where it was scarcely heard before.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

The verdict of acquittal was highly popular! It was with exertion that the Chief Justice could prevent the audience from cheering - such was their delight! The aristocracy of the colony, for once, joined heart and hand with the prison population, in expressions of joy at the acquittal of these men.

We tremble to remain in a country where such feelings and principles prevail. We always dreaded an oligarchy... The verdict of Thursday shews, that let only a man, or a family, be sufficiently unpopular with the aristocracy and the prison population of the Colony conjoined (in this case) and their murder will pass unheeded. Money, lucre, profit - these are thy Gods, O Australia!"

Despite his mixed dealings with the established church, Hall maintained an abiding interest in theology and apologetics. His magnum opus entitled *The Credulity of Deism* was never published but remains in the Mitchell Library.

Hall's work was finally recognised not least by Sir Henry Parkes. In 1857 he was appointed to a position in the Colonial Secretary's Office, a position which he held until his death in 1860.

Australian Dictionary of Biography; ed. Douglas Pike; Vol 1, 1788-1850

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

JUBILEE 2000

On Good Friday 2000, the Australian government announced that it was cancelling the debt owed to it by Nicaragua and Ethiopia. More than twenty million dollars had been owed to Australia by these two "Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC countries)". Although of little consequence to Australians setting off for Easter holidays, the announcement was jubilantly welcomed by a small group of people known as the Jubilee 2000 campaigners. The announcement on Good Friday recognised the part played by churches in the campaign.

The year before, following its meeting in Cologne, the G7 countries had instructed the World Bank to reform the debt repayment package labelled "HIPC 1" to give more substantial debt reduction to the poorest countries on earth. An improved, although still flawed debt reduction plan known as HIPC 2 resulted and has led to substantial changes in the lives of some of the world's poor. This was also the result of the Jubilee 2000 campaign.

In 1997, an English TEARFUND fieldworker flying over Africa at the end of her assignment there, had a vision of chains broken, releasing Africa from the appalling debts owed by many of its countries to the world's financial institutions. These debts had been incurred during a time when financial institutions such as the World Bank had a surplus of funds generated by oil money and made borrowing by unstable governments easy. Many countries found themselves years later spending the best part of their capital on interest repayments. Spending on essential services such as education and health suffered.

On her return, the fieldworker, Isabel Carter, shared her vision with others and in an extraordinary decision of faith, they decided to commit themselves to a campaign for the cancellation third world debt by the year 2000. From the start, the campaign enlisted support from all sections of the Christian community with Evangelicals, Protestant Ecumenists and Catholics all committing funds to kick-start the campaign. They were joined by a secular group known as the Debt Crisis Network which had been in existence for some time, lobbying for change. From this group came the leader of international Jubilee 2000, Ann Pettifor. In Australia the campaign was spear-headed by TEAR Australia, a Christian relief and development agency. TEAR provided the secretariat and the leadership of staff-member Grant Hill.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

From the start, the campaign showed itself to be guided by astute realists. They asked themselves: "Who are the decision-makers?" and "How would they be influenced?" The decision-makers were the heads of the G7 countries and that is where the campaign directed its efforts. They decided that it would not be primarily an education campaign but one directed at policy change at the highest levels. How were they to be influenced? There were three main strategies: First the campaign would aim to produce a huge groundswell of public pressure on leaders. The petition presented to the G7 in 2000 had 25 million signatures and remains the biggest petition in world history. The second strategy was to put as much effort and resources as possible into sound background research. Jubilee leaders became "more expert than the experts". Their spokespersons earned the respect of economists and politicians for their grasp of the subject. The third strategy was to enlist the support of celebrities. Some of these celebrities such as Bono and Bob Geldof committed themselves to research the issues in order to contribute to the debate and not just lend their names. Bono made the telling comment that "it's stupid that we have a world where I have to get up and say these things in order for people to take notice."

The achievements of the Jubilee 2000 campaign are substantial. Some poor countries have funds available for the first time for care of the poorest through the HIPC 2 scheme. Many other countries have had bilateral debts cancelled by the countries from which they borrowed. Millions of people with no experience of political action, have learnt that they can change the most resistant powers on the globe. Much remains to be done but third world debt and the grinding poverty that it produces will be part of every discussion of global poverty thanks to the work of the Jubilee 2000 campaigners. Campaign leaders, however, are still very aware of the weaknesses and failings of the campaign. Much remains to be done.

Christians were not the only ones involved in the Jubilee 2000 campaign but at every stage and level of the campaign, their influence was out of all proportion to their size. Individual Christians, local churches, denominational leadership contributed effort and money to the huge global effort to reduce poverty. For many people, the cost was damaging. Careers, families and health suffered from the demands of the campaign. Jubilee 2000 in Australia has now become Jubilee Australia under the auspices of the National Council of Churches. This softer-focussed campaign will continue to work to complete the task of cancellation of third-world debt.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

Part 6: IN THE THICK OF IT

Resources: Each group member.

Obviously it is great to have Christians involved in big public policy issues such as international debt reduction. But not everyone is a campaigner.

Most of us live our lives in work-places and life-places where we experience the results of other people's decisions about what's important. For many, being a Christian in such places is restricted to working ethically and seeking opportunities for evangelism. But every place will throw up questions for those involved, from kindergartens and supermarkets, to high finance at the Big End of town. Learning to reflect on and expose the assumptions that underlie many work-issues, is part of the responsibility of the Christian and takes practice. This group is a great way to encourage the process. We all have stories to tell of our experiences.

One way to think about work-places is to consider the basic purposes ("goods") for which the service, craft or profession is set up. This gives us a base for thinking about the things that make it difficult to achieve those "goods".

GROUP TASK:

- *Consider the following 'story':*

"Gary" is a young, single man without tertiary qualifications who works in a 5 person team handling customer service enquiries for a multinational mobile phone company. He is a casual, full-time employee, seconded from a temping agency. The department is grossly under-staffed. Up to 12 calls are queued at any one time; inches of unanswered service queries sit in fax trays. Although his calls are monitored and timed, Gary still exerts some control over his work environment, and can get satisfaction in helping a customer with a service question. He earns incentives such as free movie passes if he exceeds call quotas. The life-style suits him: he can determine the number of shifts he does in a week and need only give short notice. On the other hand, the phone company can give him very short notice by telling the temping agency that they no longer need his services. Recently, the company announced that the whole department is being out-sourced to a company that operates from Hong Kong. The temping agency says that they have another job for him with another call centre.

A TOOLKIT OF STUDIES ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND CULTURE

- *Discuss together:*
 - What 'goods' are supposed to be achieved through the work of this person? Can we endorse these as a Christian?*
 - What difficulties has this person encountered in seeking to achieve these 'goods'?*
 - What suggestions do you have for dealing with such difficulties?*

:

Each group member will have similar stories. (Suggest that each member of the group prepares a short presentation: 'a typical working (paid/unpaid) day in the life of...'. Remember this is not about being 'super Christians' - it's about sharing our struggles to be faithful to who we are in Christ, about working through the issues that arise for us in our work and life places. The presenter should use the first two questions above to assist them in their reflection.

The presentation doesn't have to be a talk. It could be a display of photographs with a commentary; a powerpoint slide show; items that are symbolic of, or central to, the person's activities, or...whatever creative format they feel is appropriate.

At the end of the person's presentation the group can discuss how best to assist and be of support in these issues.

On-going support for each other involves taking their work and life-place seriously. Regular practice in discussion of issues in the light of what we know of the gospel, will train us to be better citizens, both of Australia and of the Kingdom of God.