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*What it is to be
human*

**Who am I?
Animated Stardust**

**Beyond
human?**

**Some Biblical and
Theological Reflections
on the Human Vocation**

Also:
A Theology of Stigma in a
Time of HIV and AIDS

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editorial



What it is to be human


Most of us probably do not spend much time reflecting on our human-ness. It is such a given that it provides an unnoticed frame of reference. But much recent work in several disciplines, including naturally enough psychology, considers what it is to be human – and thinks about how that human-ness can be modified, even manipulated. Is modification desirable, or is it unethical? Is our human-ness as defined by our rationality, our intelligence, our emotional responsiveness, our creativity, and other such characteristics. Is it something that could or may be should be changed by advances in biotechnology? Melbourne psychologists Wilson and Haslam¹ discuss such matters, and how they might be evaluated.

It may seem simplistic or reactionary to believe that the Bible, in describing humanity as made in the image of God, advocates against manipulation, regarding humanity rather as in need of redemption, and re-creation, so dealing with that sinful propensity and nature inherited from the Fall. But that surely is the Scriptural emphasis.

David in the eighth Psalm is overwhelmed by the immensity of creation, and the apparent insignificance of humanity: *"When I consider the stars... what is man?"* – even though he has dominion over the animal kingdom. Yet the writer to the Hebrews turns the phrase on its head – finding in it a prophecy of the Son of Man, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Made for a while *"lower than the angels"* and subject to human limitations, yet now ascended. As such he is the precursor – the forerunner – *"now entered into heaven itself for us."*

To be human is to be the summit of God's creation, now flawed, but when embracing his redemption, destined for eternal glory.

And in this life? Peter in his second letter encourages us that through God's promises we may become partakers of the divine nature, and so should strive to live in a way befitting so high a calling.

In this edition we explore some of the implications of all this. To work in the health professions is to gain insight into the frailty of our humanity – even while sometimes we are amazed at its resilience, courage, and loving self-sacrifice. If fallen humanity can show such examples of nobility, what will it be when we are, as the Apostle John writes *"Like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* Speed the Day! 

Dr John Foley

¹ Wilson, Samuel and Haslam, Nick *Is the Future more or less Human? Differing Views of Humanness in the Posthumanism Debate* Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 39:2 0021–8308

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What is a Human

What is a human being? This question holds keen interest for many branches of human knowledge. Philosophy, anthropology, sociology and psychology, let alone medicine, all have a stake in the answer. To ask the question more personally: who am I? What it means to be human is inextricably linked to the question of personal identity. What, if anything, can theology contribute to the discussion?

Knowing Yourself

For many people Descartes' famous dictum is the bottom line: "I think, therefore I am." Human personhood is defined in terms of self-consciousness and self-awareness. This angle certainly tallies well with the postmodern call to define yourself and the ubiquitous advice to be true to yourself. We need look no further than ourselves to know what we are and who we are. Yet, ironically, it is arguably harder today to know who you are than ever before.

In the past an individual's identity was much more stable and predictable. Many of the big questions in life were settled before you were born: where you'd live, what you'd do, whom you'd marry, your basic beliefs, and so on. The shape of your life was molded by constraints that limited your choices. Today, the multicultural pluralism found in most Western nations presents considerable challenges to those seeking to define themselves, as it throws up an overabundance of alternative lifestyles and choices. Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman explains:

Traditional communities are rivers, while modern societies are oceans. A river has a direction and carries you along with the current, just as traditional societies direct their members in a particular way. In modern societies there is no current; we can choose to go any direction, no direction, or to shift direction with every change of winds" (Quoted in Leithart, 2008, pp. 40-41).

In addition to the standard midlife crisis, social commentators claim that you can have a crisis of identity at many points in life. These include the

"Being known by God intersects with real and felt needs and it may be a way of enlivening and even sanctifying the way medical professionals think about their patients."

"thisis" in your thirties, and "cuspiety," where people feel anxious about turning the 'big one' (30, 40, 50, 60, etc), not to mention big life changes like redundancy, marital breakdown, serious illness, death of parents, and so on. The self in the modern world seems at risk of being less stable, often in transition, with an associated stress or "angst" surrounding identity.

Doubts about the adequacy of 'knowing yourself' as a solution to the problem of personal identity also emerge from developmental psychology. Initially each of us receives our identity from outside ourselves, namely, from our parents. As infants our parents give us not only our genes, but also our names and earliest experiences. Ideally, they reflect back to us who we are and that we are loved. In a myriad of ways adequate parents validate our needs and our very selves. In effect, the identity of every human being, at least initially, is given to us from outside ourselves. We know ourselves by being known by someone else.

Being Known

As it turns out, this more relational answer to the question of both personal identity and what it means to be human is fundamental to Christian thinking about God and humanity. In Psalm 8 the question, "what is a human being?" (verse 4), is answered in connection with our being known by God; God is mindful of us. And regularly in the Bible, the question, "Who am I?" is met with the answer that God knows me. In 2 Samuel 7:18-20, for example, King David prays introspectively, "Who am I, Sovereign Lord?" David then confesses to God: "You know your servant."

The biblical theme of being known by God suggests a different answer to the question of personal identity. It challenges the Enlightenment's definition of personhood in terms of the subject's capacity to know, by locating the essence of humanity in what lies beyond the person; we know ourselves, because we are known. In this light, instead of "I know, therefore I am," Pope Benedict prefers "I am thought, therefore I am," and N.T. Wright claims the support of the Apostle Paul in favouring "I am loved, therefore I am."

Although less frequent than the theme of knowing God, references to being *known by God* in the Bible appear at critical points: in the Old Testament, Abraham (Gen. 18:19), Moses (Exod. 33:12), David (2 Sam. 7:20), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and the nation Israel (Amos 3:2; Hos. 13:5) are all known by God; and in the New Testament being known by God defines Christian existence, (Gal. 4:8-9; 1 Cor. 8:3) is a criterion of the last judgement, (Matt. 7:23 ['I never knew you'] 25:12; cf. Luke 13:27) and is a

Being?

By **Dr Brian Rosner**

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measure of eschatological glory (1 Cor. 13:12 [‘then I shall know, even as I have been fully known’]).

A range of biblical and early Jewish texts support a link between being known by God and being a *child of God*. Galatians 4:8-9 contains a self-conscious reference to being known by God: “Formerly, when you did not know God ... but now that you know God – *or rather are known by God*.” The broader context makes clear Paul’s preference for being known by God over knowing God. The subject of Galatians 3:26-4:7 concerns divine adoption of believers as God’s sons: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). As several Jewish texts make clear, to be known by God is to be his child: Psalms of Solomon 17:27b: “He (i.e. the Messiah) shall know them, that they are all sons of their God:.” and Odes of Solomon 41:2: “41:2: ‘And *his children* shall be known by him.’

Social researcher Hugh Mackay’s book *What Makes Us Tick*, looks at the ten desires that drive us. They include the desire to connect, to be useful, to belong, for love, and so on. The chapters are deliberately not numbered so as not to give any suggestion of a hierarchy of desires. But according to Mackay the most important desire is the desire to be taken seriously, which he explains as the desire to be noticed, to matter, to be appreciated, to be valued, to be remembered. We all say, to quote him, “Please recognise me and acknowledge me.” In Mackay’s view, however it’s expressed, the desire to be taken seriously continues to drive us to the end of our lives. Being known by God supplies the ultimate recognition and acknowledgement that each of us craves. It gives my life and self a significance, irrespective of my failings or achievements.



What is a Human Being?

Part of the Bible's answer to the puzzle of personal identity is the fact that I am known by God.

Possible Implications

Christians often cite the idea that everyone is made in the image of God to underscore the significance and value of every human life. Being known by God is another way of making the same point. Being known by God intersects with real and felt needs and it may be a way of enlivening and even sanctifying the way medical professionals think about their patients.

With reference to ethics, the notion of being known, ultimately by God, may have something to contribute to modern debates about the status of a person in various conditions. If being human means having the capacity to know, then the embryo, the person who is severely mentally-disabled and the person in a persistent vegetative state, for example, fail the test. Gilbert Meilaender is typical of a growing number of Christian ethicists who dispute the modern tendency to define personhood in terms of consciousness and self-awareness. If being human is fundamentally to be known, a case for the human status of the aforementioned may be more readily mounted.

By way of illustration, think of the experience of parents whose child is profoundly disabled. In some cases, depending on the severity, by Descartes' standard the status of the child's personal identity might be difficult to maintain. But to those who've met such children, in many cases it is obvious that the child's status as a person depends not on what he or she knows, but rather on the fact that they are known by their parents. The parents' loving interaction with their child, attending to his or her needs and drawing out their albeit limited responses, give such children a secure and meaningful identity.

“...being known by God does expose the inadequacy of defining personhood purely in terms of the capacity to know...”

To cite a further example, the need to be known was set in sharp relief in the early twentieth century in a different context. In the First World War, Britain was faced with the dilemma of how to mark the remains of soldiers whose identity had been lost. At the suggestion of Rudyard Kipling, who was a member of the Imperial War Graves Commission, every grave of an unidentified British Empire soldier was marked with the words, “Known unto God.” This poignant inscription, still in use today, gave the person buried therein a significance and identity they would otherwise have been denied. Similarly, one of the four texts around the tomb of the unknown soldier at Westminster Abbey is, “unknown, yet known” (i.e., by God; 2 Cor. 6:9).



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Possible implications for mental health are also worth considering. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor and conspirator against Adolf Hitler, supplies a powerful illustration. Kevin Rudd described Bonhoeffer as the man he most admires from the twentieth century, in part for his commitment to following the implications of his faith in public life. Incarcerated for two years, Bonhoeffer offers profound reflections on the subject of anguish and suffering. One of the poems he wrote in prison underscores the value of being known whilst in the midst of a distressing situation and shows how being known can protect personal identity and a sense of self. His poem, “Who am I?,” was written as a kind of self-analysis in 1944, the year before his execution. It concludes with a powerful affirmation of the existential value of being known by God.

The question of the title occurs five times in the body of the poem. The opening three stanzas report how the guards view Dietrich as “composed, contented and sure.” Bonhoeffer's view of himself in the next stanza is less positive and more anguished. The final lines of the poem voice further his frustration, but close with a simple but powerful affirmation:

“Who am I? Lonely questions mock me.

Who I really am, *you know me*, I am yours, O God!”

Bonhoeffer's “lonely questions” are answered in part by the reassuring knowledge that he was known by God.

What is a human being? Who am I? I am not suggesting that “I am known by God” supplies a full and final answer. Nor am I qualified to navigate all of the implications for bioethics and psychology. Nonetheless, being known by God does expose the inadequacy of defining personhood purely in terms of the capacity to know and it rings true to human experience of how relationships are so critical to our identity and what it means to be human. **U**



What does it mean to be **human**?

A historical perspective

The question of what it is that makes us human can be assessed from a wide array of disciplines including philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology and biology. It is fundamental to the Christian understanding of what it is that makes us distinctively human and different from other members of the animal kingdom in that we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Christian doctrine has affirmed that human beings have a soul and are capable of freewill and the exercise of moral choices. Modern science using approaches of evolutionary biology has attempted to define certain aspects of the human condition, but these are limited by their capacity to define human purpose. As an introduction to these issues, it may be helpful to trace some of the key historical developments in Western understanding of the human condition and how these might influence worldviews not only within Christianity, but also in the secular world.

The philosophical study of human nature can be traced to classical Greek philosophy originating with Socrates (c 469–399BC) especially addressed by his most famous student, Plato (428–348BC). Plato studied the question of how a person should best live. He was a rationalist who tried to understand the human condition and the universe in terms of “form” or “thing in itself” that lies behind the reality that we perceive. In Plato’s philosophy ultimate reality is found in the spiritual world of forms; the physical is not to be trusted and is imperfect. This system is dualist where there is a physical world we see and a spiritual world of forms. He espoused the idea that our souls existed before they entered our bodies and are eternal, however the soul is captive to our bodies, creating conflict and a tension in human nature. Aristotle (384–322BC) who was Plato’s most famous student, rejected Platonic ideas of form and was an empiricist who preferred to proceed from observation of the world rather than just pure reason to reach his conclusions.

Aristotle’s views were a significant departure from Plato’s. He was originally a student of Plato’s at the Academy and originally agreed with his teacher’s views. Later in his life he established The Lyceum where he developed his own distinctive teaching. Instead of looking to the spiritual he was more down to earth and had a more pragmatic view of human existence. Whereas Plato looked to the spiritual world for perfection, Aristotle looked to the physical.



Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), *School of Athens*, 1509

The philosophy of Aristotle has influenced western thinking about the nature of man throughout history. In his works man has a divided nature in which one part is rational and another part is spirit that can understand reason. The function of the rational part was to rule other parts of the human soul. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he elaborates the question of what makes someone a “good person” and what is the nature of true virtue. To act virtuously is to learn from one’s mistakes and continuously monitor one’s own behaviour in daily life. Underlying Aristotle’s description of human nature is the particular teleological idea that humans are meant or intended to be something.

The Christian expression of what it means to be human is most succinctly described in the key verses pertaining to the origin of human life in Genesis 1:26–27: “Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” The phrase declaring that God made human beings in his image and likeness is commonly referred to by the Latin phrase, *Imago Dei*. Whilst there are few scriptures



What does it mean to be human? A Historical Perspective

explicitly expressing this concept, it is clear that the Bible's description of "image of God" is pervasive through the whole Scripture. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "While statistically the phrase is infrequent, the interpretation of man which it enshrines is all pervasive."

Whilst the Bible speaks of humanity being made in God's image, the nature of this affirmation was first questioned by the early Church fathers. In the patristic period there was a distinction placed between the two phrases, "image of God" and "likeness of God". In the writings of Tertullian (c160–220AD), human nature retained the image of God after the Fall, but could only be restored to the likeness of God after redemption. Origen (c185–254) in a similar manner likened the image of God to the condition of man before the entry of sin into the world and the likeness of God referred to the final human nature after perfection at the final consummation.

For Augustine of Hippo (354–430AD), the characteristic of humanity which sets us apart from the animal kingdom is the faculty of reason. In Augustine's *Confessions* he writes, "We ought

therefore to cultivate in ourselves the faculty through which we are superior to the beasts, and to reshape in some way. So let us therefore use our intelligence to judge our behaviour". In Augustine's writings the most distinguishing feature of the human condition was the ability given by God to relate to God. Augustine further described how human reason had been corrupted by the Fall, but that it may be renewed by grace, "for after original sin, humanity is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of its Creator."

The notion that man is created in the image of God has been pivotal in establishing the basis for the original uprightness and dignity of all human beings. The concept was first developed in the writings of Lactantius (c240–320) in his *Divine Institutions*, which correlated the dignity of all human beings with the belief that all are created in the image of God.

Central to the concept of humanity created in the image of God is the feature of man's capacity for moral choices or free will. We live in a moral universe in which the Creator God has given us a conscience and awareness of good and evil. The ability to make these moral choices is often referred to as "free will" often translated in the Latin, *liberum arbitrium*. This is not a Biblical term, but it derives from Stoicism and was first introduced into western Christianity by Tertullian. Augustine also used the term free will, but modified it to a more Pauline meaning by emphasising the limitations placed upon the human free will by sin.

The writings of René Descartes (1596–1650) particularly his *Meditations on First Philosophy*

in 1641 represent an important milestone in the description of human nature or what it means to be human. Descartes was a devout Catholic and was troubled by the skepticism of his contemporaries such as Montaigne. His writings aimed to build a system for attaining certain knowledge about the world. His famous phrase, *Cogito Ergo Sum*, (I think therefore I am) affirms the belief in his own existence based on his capacity to think or to reason. It has become a fundamental element of western philosophy and a bedrock for all knowledge. The statement is sometimes given as *Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum* (I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am.) This statement was never used by Descartes and is potentially misleading as it suggests that his argument is based on doubt whereas it was meant to be a positive affirmation linking cognitive function to human existence.

A notable aspect of Descartes' meditations is the exposition of mind and body dualism; that is, we consist of both physical bodies, but also we exist as minds or souls. Descartes distinguished man from the animals who unlike humans did not have souls. This form of body/mind dualism has been at the heart of much subsequent philosophy and important questions about how mind and body interact have been central to the philosophy of knowledge (epistemology) as well as to modern psychology.

The origins of modernist philosophies on human nature are often traced to the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) who declared that the essence of what it means to be human is that the autonomous reasoning in an individual can be improved by self-acceptance and self-love. His second discourse proposed that humans had once been solitary animals, without reason or language or communities and had developed these things due to accidents of pre-history. His approach was not to look to God for identity, but to look inwards to self. The idea that human nature was flawed by sin as expressed in orthodox Christianity was opposed by other enlightenment figures such as Voltaire (1694–1778). The writings of Voltaire and Rousseau were influential in 19th century scientific thought and understandings about human nature. Darwin accepted the philosophy of Rousseau and argued from his observations that animal species have no truly fixed nature at least in the very long term. He gave modern biology a new way of understanding the origins of human nature. Similarly Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, famously referred to the pathological character of typical human behaviour and popularised his notions of the id and of desires associated with each aspect of personality.

Many modern scientists are monists or materialists who reject the Cartesian dualism and propose that the physical world is the only reality. To them all aspects of human nature including our thoughts, emotions and will can be explained as physical phenomena without reference to spiritual or religious experiences. For them the mind is assumed to be a mere illusion generated by the workings of the brain. This represents the mantra

of the new atheists, particularly Richard Dawkins (b 1941) and Daniel Dennett (b 1942). As Dennett expresses in his book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, "if you have the right sort of process and you have enough time, you can create big fancy things, even things with minds, out of processes which are individually stupid, mindless, simple. Just a whole lot of little mindless events occurring over billions of years can create not just order, but design, not just design but minds, eyes and brains."

Dennett is far from the only materialistic philosopher who argues that there is "no you in you at all" and that consciousness and soul and freewill are just outmoded concepts. Many but not all in the field of current neuroscience adopt his views. American culture critic Tom Wolfe put this in focus with his essay, "Sorry your soul just died". He writes, "Since consciousness and thought are entirely physical products of your brain and nervous system – and since your brain arrived fully imprinted at birth – what makes you think that you have freewill? Where is it going to come from, what "ghost", what "mind", what "self", what "soul"...?"

Many scientists however are of the opinion that the materialists' account of what it means to be human does not bear up well under examination. The fact is that materialism has stalled without any useful hypotheses for the human mind or spiritual experiences. It has not been able to answer the key questions about what it means to be human nor does it seem likely to do so in the future. Today non-materialist neuroscience is thriving and draws on the inheritance of famous scientists such as Charles Sherrington, Wilder Penfield and John Eccles.

In the last 20 years there has also been an explosion in the area of evolutionary psychology in which scientists attempt to assess the fundamental questions about human nature or what it means to be human from an evolutionally materialistic perspective. Numerous papers have appeared

asserting that all human behaviour including morality, altruism, sex, love, war, rape and religion can be understood in terms of beneficial qualities that enabled our ancestors to survive. Evolutionary biology however has come under fire from a number of quarters especially because of its lack of testability or falsifiability of any particular hypothesis. Philosopher of Science and Nobel Prize winner, Karl Popper (1902–1994) called this scientific approach "promissory materialism". Similarly Australian Nobel Prize winner and neurophysiologist John Eccles (1903–1997) famously stated, "I maintain that the human mystery is incredibly demeaned by reductionism, with its claim in promissory materialism to account eventually for all of the spiritual world in terms of patterns of neural activity. This belief must be classed as a superstition. We are spiritual beings with souls in a spiritual world, as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world."

This very brief historical survey can barely do justice to the crucial discourse on what does it mean to be human. The question of human nature can be approached from a philosophical, theological or even scientific method. As Christians we can affirm confidently that we are created as God's image-bearers and are bestowed with a certain dignity and are in the likeness of God. Also as Calvin and the reformers emphasised, God also created us to live *Coram Deo* which means to live "before the face of God". In our daily lives we were created as human beings to live in the presence of God and under His authority and for His Glory. **||**

Further reading:

1. Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain. A Neuroscientist's Case For the Existence Of The Soul*. Harper One, New York (2007)
2. Karl Popper and John Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism*. Routledge, London (1977)
3. Keith Ward, *More Than Matter? What Humans Really Are*. Lion Hudson, Oxford (2010)

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT NEWS



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Who Am I?

Who we are as people has been subject to intense scrutiny, especially in the last few years. New insights from science challenge and complement traditional Christian understanding on the nature of humans and our responsibility towards God as humans made in God's image. In Sunday School we were told that 70% of us was water. The other 30% was composed of blood and bone, rather cheap items in the garden shop. On our own we are not worth much, but in Christ we are of infinite value. Later on, doing chemistry, I realised that carbon in the form of graphite is not very valuable when compared with carbon structured as diamond. The atoms were the same, the structure gave the value. Blood and bone in a bag in the garden supply is quite different from the blood and bone making up our bodies. Further, we are more than just the physics and chemistry of who we are. As Charles Birch said, quoting Sir John Eccles, "I'll be reduced to physics and chemistry, only when I'm dead."¹ But who are we? How are we structured? What is our value?

Cosmologists tell us we are animated stardust – dust from stars of high metallicity which have evolved from the Big Bang. The oldest (postulated population III) stars have only primitive molecules, hydrogen and helium. It takes the huge energy of fusion in younger stars (populations II and I) to create the larger molecules like nitrogen, carbon and oxygen out of which our bodies are made. Our sun is an intermediate population I star. Out of these elements from our sun our dust on earth is made.

The Bible talks of *adam* (man) from *adama* (the earth). This is traditionally interpreted as man made from dust. Hebrew scholar, Robert Alter, translates this pun as humans from humus² – a nice neat and rather fertile description. When I am counselling patients with rock bottom self esteem I make a point of saying dust is dust but dust is not faeces. We are of the dust, and God recognises that (Psalm 103:14) but we are not waste or worthless.

We are *animated* stardust. The spirit (breath) of God gives us life. When we die, our breath (spirit) leaves

“New insights from science challenge and complement traditional Christian understanding on the nature of humans and our responsibility towards God as humans made in God's image.”

us, and our bodies return to the dust from which we were created. The creative processes of God have given us life, which will continue while we have breath, but that earthly life ceases when our breath gives out. St Paul in the New Testament (1 Cor 15) argues that as a result of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we too will be raised to newness of life, and that we will replace our natural body (Greek *soma psychikon*, psychological body) with a spiritual body (Greek *soma pneumatikon*, spiritual body). We don't know much about what this new body will be like, beyond the rather poetical series of comments of St Paul that it will be a body like Christ's glorious resurrection body, related to our old body as a flower relates to its seed. Sown perishable it is raised imperishable; sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness it is raised in power. The point is that we will not be resuscitated into the same body, nor will our souls be immortal. On the contrary, we will be resurrected into a whole new mode of glorious existence, of which the resurrection of Christ is the forerunner.

Our genes are regarded as the fundamental blueprint from which we are formed, but we understand our genes far more clearly now than before. In the last 30 years or so the human genome has increasingly been clarified. We are deeply indebted to Dr Francis Collins, a Christian geneticist, for his leadership in describing the human genome³. He also prevented the genetic discoveries from being patented, and hence commercially exploited. Comparative genetics show that we have a lot of genes in common with our evolutionary neighbours. Thus we share 98% of our genes with chimpanzees, even though we are so different from these chimps. We also share many mutations accumulated over the years of evolution. These mutations allow us to map out the evolutionary branches of our pre-human ancestors⁴.

But our genes are not just the foundations upon which we are inexorably built. Eric Kandell's Nobel prizewinning work with the *Aplysia* water snails shows us that our genes are in constant interaction with our environment. Our learning consists of switching on neural regulator genes which cause new axons to grow, creating new connections and therefore more surely learnt behaviour.⁵ As long as we learn we are putting down new neural tissue. Other genes in other cells in other organs are continually responding to external stimuli to respond by absorbing food, developing muscle, remodelling bone and the like. Our bodies thus are in constant interaction with our environment, from the time we are born, until we die, through the switching of our gene activity on and off.

When we are born we are the most dependent and helpless of mammalian infants. We grow

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Animated Stardust



and develop dependent on our environment, and especially on those who care for us. Not only do our parents feed, clean and protect us, but they also train us to interact with increasing maturity with our environment and therefore with other people. We learn how to get what we want, but also how to give, to cooperate and to negotiate⁶. We learn our language from our immediate others and that language also teaches us a culture and lifestyle. These relationships shape, build and damage us. These cultures enable and disable us from seeing what is there in the world.

The milieu in which we are shaped is an emotional milieu, from the time we cry for our food and comfort, through the fun and laughter of learning to the shame and despair of having violated another and therefore having to learn how to make amends and reparation. Humans are built for pleasure. Anandamides, endorphins and other endogenous pleasure hormones in our limbic system mediate our emotions. Comparative biology suggests that we share these pleasure systems with animals, and that we, like animals, have a whole range of emotions, both positive and negative. The negative emotions protect us by forcing us to withdraw from threatening situations. Positive emotions⁷ allow us to relate and thus create society – husband-wife, parent-child, and friend-to-friend bonding that have been called all the different dimensions of love.

Part of pleasure (and pain) is our sexuality – that great gift that has led (for me) to 3 children and 4 grandchildren – but this drive also so shapes (and sometimes distorts) our identity. As health professionals we are sometimes called on to advise patients distressed by these drives. For the drive to procreate also can sometimes drive us towards promiscuity or infidelity and (in some tragic cases that we have to deal with) into drives which are sometimes personally very distressing and sometimes socially unacceptable.

There are other drives than our sex drives. We have the drive to compete, to dominate and to succeed. There are other drives which inhibit us towards caution and even towards fear. When these drives are in conflict the patient may need some support to resolve these drives. When these drives are directed against the desires of God, they have been designated in the Bible as the “flesh.” St Paul lists a representative example of these in Galatians 5:19ff. Note that the drives themselves are not bad; they are only bad when they drive us away from God rather than towards God. But this does not diminish the agony we face as the flesh and the spirit are at war with each other. While that war may lead some to despair, there is no doubt that Paul sees hope in the death of Christ and power in the Spirit of Christ to empower us to win over our flesh.

But where does reason fit in? There is now good neurobiological evidence that our much flouted rationality (for we have been labelled *Homo sapiens*, from the Latin sapiens, meaning wise) flourishes within a healthy emotional environment, and that if that emotional environment is unhealthy, not only are we emotionally truncated, but our reasoning also is astray. Our reason is driven by our emotion and shaped by our social and cultural environment⁸. There is fairly good evidence that we come to a position intuitively and that our reason then shores up the position we have taken. “Reason is a slave to the emotions,” in David Hume’s famous phrase. Nevertheless reasoning is a tool by which we have made great strides in understanding this world and changing it – not necessarily always for the better.

We are in the image of God – that enigmatic phrase has puzzled theologians for centuries. Are we like God because we think or are there other properties that make us like God? Or is the whole question

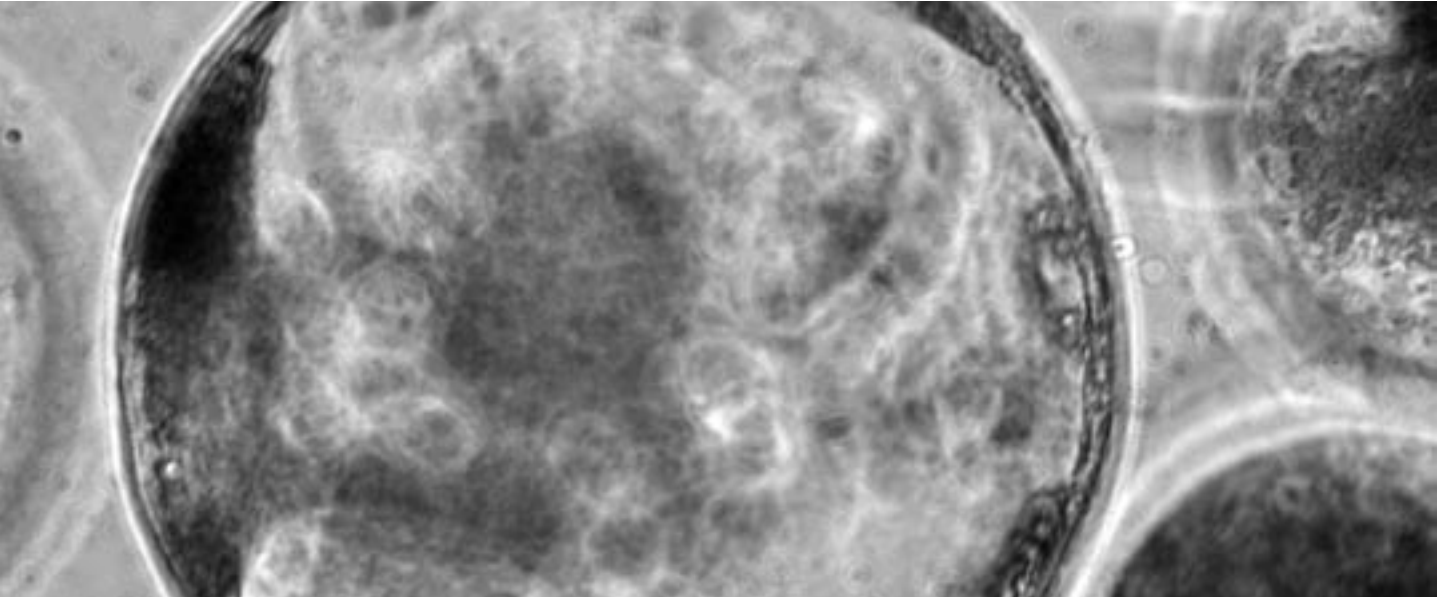
Continued page 13





What is it to be **human**?

The view from IVF practice – a personal reflection



One of the most extraordinary moments of my working days comes when I view with an infertile couple the progress of their recently thawed embryo, originally frozen at day five of life at the stage we call 'blastocyst'. The embryo has survived the transition from extreme cold to body temperature, and then in the hours before it is transferred, the fluid space inside the blastocyst reconstitutes, visible evidence of continued life. After days, weeks, months or even years frozen, growth resumes. The embryo, changing each time it is looked at, is ready to be transferred into the mother's uterus and implant there. Is this verdant life part of what it means to be human? Again and again I breathe "surely God is here". And He is.

Yet my views have changed over the course of my working life. In 1983 as I set up in private practice I was asked to join an IVF Practice, then in its own seminal stage. I declined, concerned that if life starts when two genetic codes fuse into a new creation, then freezing such new life posed unanswerable moral questions. Is human life bankable? How can we dispose of embryos 'excess' to our requirements?

The black and white seemingly clear vision of the young is attractively simple; yet for me it has not stood time's test. Life in all areas is so complex; to understand even oneself is a daunting task. I now am a gynaecologist with a practice in IVF. There were several key factors that led to my change of heart.

Firstly, I remain committed to serving the true and living God. Jesus is Lord, and he will return to establish the new earth and heaven!

Secondly, we live in a world that is fundamentally wrong; nearly beautiful, but too often darkly ugly. Disease is part of that ugliness. And infertility is part of the broken-ness of this world; it is a disease. I have slowly found it untenable to put my intellectual concepts of the beginning of life over the needs of the sick. Living with my unease with some aspects of IVF is the price I pay for being able to work healing in the pain of infertility.

Thirdly, I now question the belief that complete life starts at fertilisation of the ovum, and that the fertilised egg has the same human value as the scientist working in that laboratory. This debate has raged for years. In my view, the Bible itself is not clear on when life starts. It is clear that God recognises intra uterine life, but not surprisingly, there is no Biblical ground for determining my attitude to a human embryo. I worry when intellectual towers are built, founded on such uncertain ground. Such belief systems may be flawlessly logical, yet stop treatment for a disease. To use an extreme example, the logic of someone who kills an abortionist may have wonderful internal consistency, but if the end action is wrong then the foundation of the argument is somehow in error. The point of balance between love and righteousness is always difficult, but I have tried to change my own fulcrum towards love.

Preimplantation genetic diagnostic techniques have shown us that over 50% of all human conceptions are chromosomally abnormal, the vast majority of which are totally incompatible with ongoing life. They will never form a human being. God has designed a marvellous system that sieves conceptions, preventing some from implanting, miscarrying others. Only abnormalities of small

chromosomes that carry less critical information, such as chromosome 21, can make it into postnatal life. Life is indeed His miracle! Yet if God has written into his design for new life such a selection process, is it wrong for our scientists to select embryos that are growing progressively, for uterine transfer, over embryos that arrest their growth? I do not think that is wrong.

So how does that change in me work out in clinical practice? Firstly, in our laboratory, admittedly part owned by the Uniting Church, each embryo is treated as unique, God gifted, vastly precious. No embryo is discarded by the laboratory until it has proven to have arrested in its development, showing it to be incapable of continuing life. Because vitrification is now available and results in reliable freezing and thawing of good blastocyst embryos, we have moved to routine single embryo transfers, with liberal recourse to use of subsequent cycles for the frozen embryos. Only a small proportion of human embryos make it to day 5 blastocyst stage, so there are not a big number of 'superfluous' embryos, though there are some.

There are a number of options in dealing with such unusable embryos. Some Christians decide not to fertilize more embryos than they can use each time. They pay the price by undergoing repeated fully stimulated cycles, each with an anaesthetic and considerable extra cost. Sometimes, God has honoured those who have so honoured Him, with a child; sometimes not. Some donate embryos to other needy couples, though the consequences of such 'adoption' need to be squarely faced. Finally, some couples elect to thaw their embryos, which disintegrate, and can be remembered in the regular service of mourning in our hospital chapel. The decision is left up to each couple, and they are encouraged to anticipate that day before they first commence IVF.

Personally? I feel no guilt at my involvement. I feel happy to leave both the decision, and the responsibility, to the couple involved, with no sense of judgement by me. In couples who welcome it, I am happy to pray with them as we transfer their embryo into the uterus, and am confident that our seeing God hears and answers, speaking life into existence. And sometimes we share wonderful joy five weeks later in seeing with ultrasound a foetal heart beating in that hitherto barren uterus.

So what does this, my story, tell about what it is to be human? It tells me that human life is complex, messy and does not fit into our neat boxes, and ideologies. Can we separate human-ness into separate parts? Is a body with no soul a person? Is an embryo without a uterus a person? (Currently there is a political move in North America to have all embryos given full constitutional rights). We are made up of many parts, but it is the sum total that is fully human. Human-ness is a process, a journey towards a new healed world. Our deconstructionist age misses that big picture.

As I conclude these comments I confess that my heart trembles. The question of what is human life has been so politicised that I can see already in my mind's eye the heated responses to this article. I do know that many respected and admired evangelical Christians have very different views to mine. I respect those views, and accept they may be more correct than mine are, so I submit this testimony of my path towards my understanding what it is to be human with care and deliberation, with honesty and trepidation, for your consideration. ☒

Who Am I? Animated Stardust *continued...*

of properties misleading? Should we understand the image of God as a statement about our relationships to God and to the creation God has given us in stewardship? The second commandment suggests we need to be careful how we define and describe the mystery of the image of God, but it is clear that that image remained after the Fall, even if it was marred by the Fall⁹.

When Jesus came on earth he showed us the true image of God (Col 1:14ff). As true God and truly human, he showed us what God is like, and what humankind should be like. Further we learn that we are saved to become like him and in the end we will be like him (1John 3:1-3). Then the true image of God will be restored.

The Bible describes us as spiritual beings alienated from God yet with the potential to be reconciled to him and through him to one another. When we accept God by faith we are indwelt by his Spirit, our characters are being shaped to be more like Christ (Gal 5:23). This is a mystery we can only glimpse after, for it is too wonderful for us to comprehend. The light is too bright; we are so used to the darkness. Nevertheless we journey – not on our own, but incorporated into his body – the people of God, the church. While we are surprised that we are in that body we sometimes show greater surprise to think that others should also be included and wonder how they could be – then we remember grace and learn to give that grace to some pretty prickly people!

So then, what is it to be human? We are animated stardust, sharing our physicality with the earth and with the animals, sharing similar genetic material, but being given the ability to reflect on our emotions and drives. We are social beings learning how to interact through our relationships in family and community. We are driven people. Some of these drives are in conflict with others and in conflict with our best intentions. But most deeply we broken, sinful conflictual beings are recipients of the free grace of God in Christ by which we are empowered to develop a new way of living in community and in the hope that one day we will be like God, when we see him face to face. ☒

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Beyond Human?

“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)

The Apostle Paul might be astounded at some of the enthusiastic answers he would receive to this question today. “We will rescue you”, says the Immortality Institute for Infinite Lifespans (<http://www.imminst.org>), whose mission is “to conquer the blight of involuntary death”. “We will”, says Elixir Pharmaceuticals, an early stage drug development company focussed on the science of ageing.

Of course that’s not what Paul was asking: his anguish was to do with his captivity to the law of sin at work in him. He was not asking to be spared physical death, the ageing process, or the limitations of bodily existence. But if Paul was not interested in these things, there are many people today who are, and are putting enormous resources into achieving them.

“The quest for immortality is an ancient one, associated with a wide spectrum of religions and mythologies...”

The quest for immortality is an ancient one, associated with a wide spectrum of religions and mythologies. It seems to be a basic human trait to long to overcome the transience of life. Traditional religions usually see this in terms of life after death, of death being the gateway to a new kind of life in another world. And the mechanism by which this new life is entered is a spiritual one, whether through faith, or performance of religious duties, meditation and so on. However there is also a long tradition of utopianism, the idea that in this life, there is the possibility of a perfect society of perfect people on a perfect earth. And many ancient mythologies associate physical substances with the granting of immortality. Consider the nectar and ambrosia of the Greek gods, or the amrita of the Hindu gods, or the seeds of tree of life in ancient Persian mythology. The alchemists’ search was for the elixir of life, supposedly able to turn other metals into gold, and to make anyone who drank it immortal.

Both the utopian strand and the search for a physical agent of immortality come together for the enthusiasts of biotechnology who believe it offers the prospect of significant or even indefinite postponement of physical death. Biotechnology

has become for many a surrogate religious system, in that it offers an alternative form of salvation, a different way of dealing with natural human anxieties about death, impermanence, vulnerability and the dissolution of the self. But biotech salvation is not about some future world, with a new or spiritual body, but staying on in this world and this body as long as possible.

There are a number of ways this might be realised, based on recent developments in medical science.

Telomerase

At the end of chromosomes are cufflike structures called telomeres that shorten each time a cell divides. When the telomere has become very short, the cell stops dividing. This process is thought to explain ageing. But an enzyme called telomerase, absent in most normal human cells, can maintain telomere length, and this occurs in cancer cells and other “immortal” cells such as stem cells which go on and on dividing. Perhaps telomerase could be used to prevent the lengthening of telomeres of normal cells, but the difficulty is to avoid creating cancer-like cells which divide indefinitely and indiscriminately (<http://www.immortality.org/helcloning.html>).

Stem cell therapies

The use of either embryonic or adult stem cell therapies to provide replacement tissues or stimulate tissue regeneration in vital organs may prolong life, some might claim indefinitely.

Cryogenics

The idea that bodies might be frozen for thawing in the future when a therapy exists for the illness which caused death has been around for many years, but we are no closer to finding a freezing technique which does not itself irreversibly damage cells. There is a further ethical problem in that to have the most chance of success, the body should be frozen before death actually occurs.

Transhumanism

Some use the term “techno-utopians” or “technopians” to refer to a new breed of utopians who believe that the perfect society will be created through technology. These are the self-styled transhumanists, who explicitly reject conventional religion (<http://www.transhumanism.com>).

Profoundly dissatisfied with the world as it is, especially with human finitude and frailty, suffering and death, transhumanists seek to transcend their bodily limitations through merging themselves with machines. *Nanotechnology* refers to precision machining at the level of micrometers, i.e. at the



molecular level. It is speculated that implanted nano-robots might be able to destroy cancer cells, repair genetic mutations, replace damaged tissues, take over physiological functions and so on. *Cybernetics* is the science that attempts to combine living organisms (including humans) with machines, to produce cyborgs. Many of us might currently be described (though we probably wouldn't think of ourselves in these terms) as cyborgs, if we have false teeth, a hearing aid, or a pacemaker. But transhumanists are particularly interested in harnessing the computational power and speed, and the artificial intelligence of computers, to augment human attributes. Computer implants have already been used to treat Locked-in syndrome and blindness (<http://www.optobionics.com>). Could one achieve immortality through downloading one's mind into a computer?

Parahumanism

Other methods for "enhancing" humans centre around human-animal combinations- a possibility which might be particularly worrying for Christians, as it seems to threaten the distinctive identity of humans as made in the image of God, and raises profound questions about what it means to be human. As with the search for a physical agent of immortality, the concept of human-animal hybrids is an ancient one, the stuff of Greek mythology. Echidna, who was half woman and half snake, Sphinx, a lion with a human head, and the centaur Chiron are examples of mythical chimeras, which have at least two genetically distinct populations of

cells. Hybrids, on the other hand are the result of breeding between two different species.

In the Genesis creation story, chaos gives way to order at the hand of God who sets boundaries between the land, the sea and the heavens, between the beasts, the birds and the fish, and between humans and the other animals. Crossing species' boundaries might therefore be morally problematic, and yet Christians do not appear to have been seriously troubled by the breeding of the liger (lion/tiger) nor the common mule (horse/donkey). But human-animal combinations seem to raise much more serious moral questions.

And yet there are a number of ways in which human and animal material may be combined, which are relatively uncontroversial. It is routine for humans to be injected with material derived from animals, such as insulin, or vaccines. Patients have received pig heart valve transplants, and even whole baboon hearts. Potentially more problematic are a number of, at this stage, experimental biotechnologies.

What do we make of cytoplasmic hybrids, formed by somatic cell nuclear transfer from human cells into cow or rabbit eggs? They are 99.9% human. Or the chimeras which have been produced by implanting human neural stem cells into the brains of African green monkeys, in the search for a treatment for Parkinson's disease? Human neural cells have also been inserted into the brains of mice. Concerns have been raised that if enough human cells were inserted into an animal brain, human-



like consciousness might develop. But the monkey or the mouse would still look like a monkey or a mouse. How would we regard such a creature?

Transgenic animals are animals which have had DNA from another species inserted into their genome. Human genes have been inserted into bacteria, and mice. Most insulin is now produced from transgenic *E. Coli*. Mice with a human-like immune system can be used to study HIV/AIDS. There is a trend towards the insertion of more and more human DNA into other species. We might not think that a small amount of DNA from a human inserted into an animal would change its moral status. After all, we share most of our DNA with other species anyway. But should there be a limit? At what point would we start to think of the animal as in some way, human? By what criteria would we decide this? Likewise, if we could create transgenic humans by inserting genetic material from animals, would we regard them as



the benefit of the doubt. But a parahuman future may well raise questions we haven't even thought of yet, and another reasonable response is simply a blanket opposition to any crossing of human/animal species boundaries.

Christians have equally compelling reasons to be cautious, as well as sceptical, when considering the promises offered by biotechnology of immortality or of the transcendence of human limitations through becoming "more than" human. On the one hand, we affirm the impulse to reduce human suffering and disease by legitimate means, including science and technology. The scientific enterprise is an exercise of the stewardship assigned to us by the Creator, to be used for the good of the earth and its inhabitants. In

particular, it ought to be used to heal the sick and to benefit the disabled and disadvantaged, as we understand disease and death to be the results of sin, and hence to be countered and resisted. Love and compassion demand that we work to alleviate suffering. But on the other hand, we know that there is always the danger of imagining that we can take the place of God with our human ingenuity and achievements, as the story of Babel shows (Genesis 11). We are constantly tempted to become our own Creator, our own Saviour, and to usher in our own Eschaton – the glorious future which we hope for.

Our basic human problem is not finitude or ageing, but sin. There is no technological fix for this, and even physical perfection if it were possible could not compensate for it. Our salvation does not lie in endless physical existence or enhancement with machines. Utopia – the perfect world – is impossible unless sin is dealt with. And we are helpless to deal with our own sin. Death itself is an enemy whose power comes from sin and which cannot be defeated by human efforts. Only God can deal with sin, and so ultimately with death. And we are confident that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ he has done this, he has defeated death. Yet (rapture excepted) we will all die. And in a sense, we must die – it is the gateway to resurrection life. Our hope lies not in postponing death indefinitely, but in resurrection to a wonderful new life after death. Paul already had the answer to his question: *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:25). [\[1\]](#)

Further Reading

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"We are constantly tempted to become our own Creator, our own Saviour, and to usher in our own Eschaton – the glorious future which we hope for..."

less than human? They might look completely human. What makes us human? And can there be such a category as "part-human", morally speaking? Parahumans would create uncertainty about our moral obligations to them, and blur, perhaps threaten, the conceptual, social and moral boundaries which set humans apart.

In defending the concept of species boundaries, one might argue against the reductionism and materialism inherent in equating the identity of an organism with its DNA or its brain cells. Being human in particular has relational, behavioural, social and spiritual as well as genetic, physiological and morphological dimensions. Biblically, humans have a unique status as made in the image of God which sets them apart from the rest of creation, even the higher primates with whom they share so much genetic material. Humans have an innate dignity absent from the animal kingdom. We are allowed to do things to animals we may not do to humans, such as eat them or conduct lethal experiments on them. Conversely, there are some things we may do to a fellow human being, which we may not do to animals, such as have sex with them.

Given the biblical association between being human and being made in the image of God, what constitutes the *imago dei* moves from an academic to an urgent question. One solution would be to give any creature with apparently human characteristics

Human Nature

What the Scientific Literature is Saying

The following six articles are good examples of the current debates around human nature outside a purely Christian framework. I have assembled some of the abstracts from each article/piece and provided brief comments. Exploring these articles will expand the material in this edition of *Luke's Journal* for interested readers. Continue to grow in grace!

Paul Mercer, Editor



Is the Future more or less human? Differing Views of Humanness in the Posthumanism Debate

Article 1

By Samuel Wilson and Nick Haslam,
Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 39:2, 0021-8308

A summary of the assumptions of the advocates and opponents of modification.

Comment – This excellent in-depth article explores the ethics of human modification. The following table summarises the issues for each side.

Advocates of modification	Opponents of modification
There is no human essence (human nature is dynamic, still evolving)	There is a human essence (human nature is given, fixed)
A focus on non-essentialised qualities (e.g. intelligence, self-control)	A focus on essentialised qualities (e.g. emotion, warmth, agency)
An emphasis on the “beyond nature” parts of ourselves: Human Uniqueness	An emphasis on the “in nature” parts of ourselves: Human Nature
The qualities of human nature as modular parts that can be separably maximised	A focus on indivisibility and preserving the “wholeness” of human nature
Repudiation of the “natural” as a guide to what is normatively good or right	Protection of the “natural” as a guide to what is normatively good or right
Privileging rational ways of knowing (intelligence, thought: “agentic” mind)	Privileging nonrational ways of knowing (emotions, desires: “experience” mind)
Enhancement does not affect qualities fundamental to self-identity	Enhancement does affect qualities fundamental to self-identity
Modification represents a gain of humanness (HU)	Modification represents a loss of humanness (HU)
Modification will produce superhumanised beings	Modification will produce dehumanised beings

Homo Religiosus: Linnaeus and Beyond – Three Theories of Human Nature

Article 2

By Mikael Stenmark in *Zygon*, vol. 44, no.4 (December 2009)

Abstract – In *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Steven Pinker maintains that at present there are three competing views of human nature – a Christian theory, a “blank slate” theory (what I call social constructivist theory), and a Darwinian theory – and that the last of these will triumph in the end. I argue that neither the outcome of such competition nor the particular content of these theories is as clear as Pinker believes. In this essay I take a critical as well as a constructivist look at the challenge presented by a Darwinian theory of human nature – a challenge to the social sciences and the humanities and also to theology and more specifically to a Christian understanding of human nature.

Comment – This is a thoughtful and challenging article. It both stretches and affirms faith.



Human Nature: A Comparative Overview

By Henrik Høgh-Olssen in *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 10(2010) 59-84

Abstract – The differences and similarities between human and non-human animals are constantly up for discussion and an overview is needed. Four central fields of behaviour related to (1) complex symbolic activities, (2) tool making and tool use, (3) culture and social transmission and (4) sociality and morality, are surveyed and comparatively analysed to identify particular human characteristics. Data from a broad range of sciences are brought together to introduce light and shade into the picture. The differences found inside field four are especially striking. Humans are “ultra-social”. Evolution seems to have favoured a more collaborative kind of society in our species, and features like other-regarding preferences, large scale cooperation with non-kin, and strangers as well as third party sanctions, appear to be derived properties of humans that have evolved after Homo and Pan diverged.



Comment – This article is an interesting example of a cross-discipline collaboration to help provide answers about human nature.



Universals of Human Nature

By Noam Chomsky, *Editorial Psychother Psychosom* 2005; 74; 263-268 DOI; 10.1159/000086316

Comment – In this editorial, celebrated philosopher Noam Chomsky reflects on the qualities of language and human rights and how their intersection may help our understanding of human nature.

Perspectives on Techno-science and Human Nature – A Better Life through Information Technology? The techno-theological eschatology of posthuman speculative science

By Michael W. DeLashmuth, *Zygon*, vol.41, no.2 (June 2006)

Abstract – The depiction of human identity in the pop-science-futurology of engineer-inventor Ray Kurzweil, the speculative robotics of Carnegie Mellon robotocist Hans Moravec, and the physics of Tulane University mathematics professor Frank Tipler elevate technology, especially information technology, to a point of ultimate significance. For these three figures, information technology offers the potential means by which the problem of human and cosmic finitude can be rectified. Although Moravec’s vision of intelligent robots, Kurzweil’s hope for immanent human immortality, and Tipler’s description of humanlike von Neumann machines colonizing the very material fabric of the universe all may appear to be nothing more than science fictional musings, they raise genuine questions as to the relationship between science, technology, and religion as regards issues of personal and cosmic eschatology. In an attempt to correct what I see as the cybernetic totalism inherent in these techno-theologies, I argue for a theology of technology that seeks to interpret technology hermeneutically and grounds human creativity in the broader context of divine creative activity.



Comment – An ‘interesting’ meeting of sci-fi, robotics and theology.

Looking for the Fundamentals of Human Nature

By Vincent Dreary and Wendy Johnson, *Journal of Mental Health*, December 2009, 18(6): 459-466

Abstract – Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST) is a theory which proposes that three basic neurophysiological systems explain and predict individual differences in personality, behaviour and experience of distress. Two of these systems are sensitive to aversive and appetitive stimuli respectively, and mediate avoidances and approach behaviour. The third is a conflict resolution module activated by conflict between and within the other two systems, and it mediates cautious approach and threat assessment.



Comment – This is an interesting theoretical model. It may have spiritual implications.

PS – I would also strongly recommend the writing of French Christian academic theologian **Jacques Ellul**. Ellul is a strong critic of the thoughtless application of technology as profoundly dehumanizing. He argues our faith is primarily relational and we should maintain this space in human experience and not surrender to technology.

Paul Mercer, Editor



Technology Musings

Technology and its impact on being human...

By **James Wei**
a 5th year clinical
student at the University
of Melbourne. CMDFA
National Student
Representative.

This was one of the rare times I wasn't taking a budget flight. And I was making full use of the in-flight entertainment system. After a movie marathon, I paused for a moment – allowing my mind to sift through the information and emotional overload. *The Social Network*¹ had somehow stirred something deep within me. The story of how a social misfit could become one of the most influential people of our time fascinated me. I wondered about my own achievements in comparison and felt puny, insignificant.

From time to time, I hop over to the TED² website. During my last visit, there was a lanky man passionate about re-energizing humanity's spirit of exploration and adventure. His vision was to commercialise space travel in the hope that a new generation of children will be inspired to reach for the stars – literally. What a neat idea, I thought. I thoroughly researched his ideas, and found that he's quite close to realising the beginnings of his vision. There is truth in his laments though. This generation, my generation has lost its fascination with exploring new frontiers, and has instead been content with traversing virtual worlds. Maybe there's treasure to be found on Mars that we're missing out on.

I flip open the leather cover of my smart-phone almost as a reflex to the subtle buzz indicating I have received a text message or an email. Or maybe it is just a reflex to the social isolation I am feeling in the crowded tram. It's just another one of those mass emails, and I instinctively touch the Facebook icon. I wonder what would happen if I were to say "Hi" to the person next to me on the tram. No, that would be just weird. I return to my pocket companion, and get excited by the red icons reminding me that others were thinking of me.

Mark Sayers³ believes we're in the age of the horizontal self. The horizontal self looks to others for validation and a sense of identity rather than to something larger than oneself. Identity is exchanged for imagery; publicity takes precedence over character growth. We're constantly trying to keep on the move, playing to our culture's rules of identity and constant competition with those around us for attention and affection.

There's no doubt that the horizontal self is on the rise in today's culture. Its insatiable appetite is constantly fed by the animal of technology, resulting in uncontrolled and explosive growth. The inevitable is malignant metastatic disease that consumes our souls. Cheap thrills from a false sense of popularity, a loss of a greater purpose for which to live, fascination with the celebrity of our time.

I disagree with Mark on one point though. I don't believe we can blame today's culture for being especially consumed with the concept of the horizontal self. Delving into ancient biblical text, I find that this has been the case since man made the choice to be enlightened to good and evil. Those insecurities from within have always been there, the only difference is the language.

In our ever-changing, technological world, our inner self somehow still desires to find a home, a place where we can be accepted and loved unconditionally for who we are, not the person we desire to project to others.

Technology is surely not the enemy of such a desire. The enemy has always been the ancient deceiver of human hearts; the problem has always been in the very nature of every person. Technology then is a mere beast, which should be tamed into submission.

I've heard of people going on technology fasts. No Facebook for a month they say. Add Youtube in as well. That's certainly an evolution from food fasts. So there we have it. In order to tame the beast, we lock it up in isolation. And on its release, it is often more ferocious than before.

"My generation has lost its fascination with exploring new frontiers, and has instead been content with traversing virtual worlds."

In 2005, there was a BBC documentary called "The Monastery"⁴ featuring five men who volunteered to spend forty days and nights in a Benedictine monastery in a social experiment to see if Christian spirituality had any relevance for the modern UK man. When the time came to leave the monastery, one of the men, who worked in the sex industry, had a final session of spiritual direction with one of the monks. Almost to his own disbelief, he came to the conclusion that he could not return to the life he came from. Slowly and gently, the monk told the man that he had a name, but he also had a name he did not yet know.⁵ He described how the book of Revelation speaks of our true names written in heaven on white stones, pointing to who we truly are. To which the priest hands him a white stone, telling him to keep it as a reminder of his quest to find his true name before God.

The technological age is here to stay, but we cannot stay stagnant in our spirituality. If we are not vigilant, we shall be swept away by the prevailing culture of the horizontal self, and with technology as its work horse. The only effective way to seize control of it is to understand the true problem. We need to be constantly in pursuit of our name – our true name, not just any name with the longevity of a status update. [1]

References

1. The Social Network is a 2010 drama film about the founding of the social networking website Facebook and the resulting lawsuits. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Social_Network Accessed on 5 June 2011.
2. TED is a non-profit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading. It started out (in 1984) as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Entertainment, Design.
3. Sayers M. The Vertical Self: How biblical faith can help us discover who we are in an age of self obsession. 2010.
4. http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/04_april/22/monastery.shtml. Accessed on 5 June 2011.
5. "I will also give each of them a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it". Revelation 2:17.



What it is to be human

I was a ministerial invitee to the Rudd 2020 summit at parliament house. A lovely dignified older Aboriginal lady and gentleman from a remote community read this letter from their whole community to the group I was involved in:

"We are asking you for help because we can't do this by ourselves. Are there people with good hearts who can come and help us? We need just some people with good hearts to come and help us please?"

Mathew 25:34-40

The king will say *"I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you were doing it for me."*

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat and drink." (Indigenous nutrition issues, food supply, access to fresh fruit/vegies are among the worst in Australia).

"I was a stranger and you invited me in." (Indigenous housing, overcrowding, vagrancy, and home ownership is the worst in Australia).

"I needed clothes and you clothed me." (Indigenous disposable income among lowest in Australia for usual necessities, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey).

"I was sick and you cared for me." (Indigenous health is the worst of any group in the country, with shorter Life Expectancy – median age at death in Queensland for males is 53 years vs 71 for the rest of Queensland).

"I was in prison and you visited me." (Indigenous is highly over-represented in prison – 2.6% of the population and 21% of the prison population).

I could add a few more that I am sure would be consistent with scripture...

I was hot and smelly after walking five kilometres in the hot sun to get to the clinic and you didn't look down your nose at me but offered me the same service as anyone else.

I had cardiovascular disease and you offered me a CABG. (See AIHW (MJA-Cunningham) review on the odds of getting a principal procedure at an Australian hospital if you are Indigenous versus non Indigenous).

The list could go on, but I am sure you get the drift.

The longest journey...

The Canadian Aboriginal people have a saying: "the longest journey is from our head to our heart".

As Christian health professionals, this strangely, is as much a *call* to action, to the Christian values in our lives, as it is about our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The clear issue for Christian health professionals is how well you stack up to the scriptures concerning these issues for your own personal journey. As the scriptures say, this is actually between you and God, and not just you and Indigenous peoples. Everyone will give account of how we lived our **lives**, not our presumptions or assumptions.

Reconciliation should be an easy concept for Christians to grasp, after all our faith is built on this, so it is surprising when we cannot apply the concept to our nation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Admitting wrongdoing, turning, and committing to a new approach are also

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He is a past president and founder of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association and was a

member on the National Health and Medical Research Committee – National Health Committee for the last three triennium, chairs the Andrology Australia – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Reference group, sits on several other committees. He is a council member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and a member of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council.

Dr Wenitong has been heavily involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and has helped develop several national workforce documents, sits on the

COAG Australian Health Workforce Advisory Council. He is involved in several research projects, and has worked in prison health, refugee health in East Timor as well as studying and working in Indigenous health internationally. He was a member of the NTER review expert advisory group in 2008.

He is involved in clinical and policy work with the aim of improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes in Australia. He has received the 2011 AMA Presidents Award for Excellence in Healthcare, and the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, Hall of Fame award (2010).

– Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander issues

concepts we should all clearly be across, yet we still struggle with regard to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and apologies to the stolen generations.

The policy and ideology of self-responsibility is a winner for governments with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, as it absolves them of responsibility, but, we should be very relieved that God didn't use this one for the human race, but chose to do quite a lot for us personally.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also value multicultural policy though I would have to say that it didn't work that well for us so far (joke!)

A question was asked to me by an elder at Alice Springs during a visit there. "Tell me doc, why is it that if I am a white man and I am involved in politics and rights, I am a politician, but if I am a black man, I am an activist?"

As Sean Chillburra an Aboriginal comedian notes "we are introduced to politics at very young ages as Aboriginal people "when I was a kid my father took me up on a hill overlooking ancestral lands and said, "Take a good look boy – one day all this is going to be *somebody else's!*"

Indigenous people represent a small proportion of the Australian population, and are a highly diverse people. There are some qualities that they share that can be seen as negative or positive depending on your ideology. Sharing, caring for extended family and being expected to do this are noble and positively human qualities. In a context of dysfunction this can become a negative as in "demand sharing". Ultimately though, this is about communalism versus individualism and how we in the western world "get ahead in life" as individuals versus caring about our whole communities.

I was asked to present at a national health forum on "what makes a healthy community" and as I looked at the dysfunction in many of our Aboriginal communities I also thought about the alternatives offered in western systems. Not to be disrespectful, as I enjoy a nice café latte as much as any urban twitterer, but it seems the current Great Australian Dream is to *own a house in the suburbs, with 2.5 kids, 1.5 marriages, lifelong debt and episodic depression*. This doesn't really excite most of us looking for a life of value. How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples keep the positive cultural influences of sharing, caring for the collective, as well as get ahead in life, and stay human, in the ways the scriptures are very clear about?

In the context of Indigenous Australia, I sometimes think, God left us here to remind creation about the Creator, and how we should always put people and

relationships before other things in life, and celebrate the beauty of life with dance and art. And Indigenous people do enjoy life, in spite of the dysfunction – for every angry blackfella there are another nine laughing and enjoying family and relationships. In spite of the media narrative of negatives and dysfunction, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still live a valued life, with rich relationships that matter more than houses and cars or the holiday in Bali.

This is not to paint a picture of the "noble savage", because no-one could deny there are major problems, but to imply that, our traditional cultural principles are likely, more closely aligned to Christian values, than contemporary western values.

In finishing, we can all do a lot more in this area, and commit to living the values of Christianity with respect to practical reconciliation. This includes health service delivery with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the way we personally respond and act as health professionals.

This also means how we respond to health systems issues that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using our services. Are we advocates for change or are we too busy or feel it must be someone else's job.

We come from professions that enjoy the ultimate fruits of our country and advantage, and as such we have a position of power that influences high levels of government policy and programs. How well do we share that power with the powerless?

Our central pillars of medical ethics include: Justice, Beneficence, Non-maleficence, and Autonomy, all of which apply to health practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As a noted Canadian Aboriginal speaker often finished his talks on the story of Aboriginal people in his country:

"...this is just a story, you can do what you like with it, think about it, retell it, forget it, even joke about it, but don't say as you live your life, that you would have done things differently, lived your life differently if you had heard this before,.... you've heard it now." [1]

"Reconciliation should be an easy concept for Christians to grasp, after all our faith is built on this..."



What does it **mean** to

Some Biblical and Theological Reflections on the Human Vocation

The question of our humanity is a vital one for us all, not least for physicians who profess dedication to the care of human beings who face everything from mere disruptions to virtual enemies to life and flourishing. There is a series of perennial questions concerning 'being human' as well as new questions raised by technological intervention at the beginning and end of life – and also in between; so much so that some even speak of an emerging posthuman existence.

When we ask "What does it mean to be human?", we are, at first glance, asking a descriptive question or opening up a set of descriptive questions. In response, it is tempting to locate some particular aspect or capacity of human beings and to identify it as *the* fundamental quality that makes us 'human'.

"Human beings know in their bones that they are made for each other, made to look after and shape this world, made to worship the one in whose image they are made."

Whether it is language use, the capacity to reason, deliberative and purposive action, or our genes that is posited as the 'essential thing' that makes us unique as human beings, we face the challenge either of a definition too minimalist to actually tell us much at all, or, more seriously, the implication that there are those among us who in some way or form do not live up to the definition. Perhaps this is nowhere more clear than in our dealings with the profoundly disabled. Even suggestions that being human requires a sense of self, an interior life, and recognition of others can exclude people who live completely dependent upon others and exhibit, as far as we can discern, none of these qualities. In that case, *caveat inquisitor*.

Nonetheless, I want to suggest that we must take our embodied diversity – including our weaknesses and defects – very seriously. Let us not assume that we can or should simply ignore our physical diversity, and strengths and weaknesses relative to each other and come up with a baseline definition of the human on a naturalistic basis that guarantees full inclusion of everybody and confers equal dignity and recognition to all. Let us also not assume that our diversity does not render some persons to be in a better position, naturally speaking, than others. Upon what basis then can we be inclusive of all human beings – including those still in the womb – and also all be spurred on to aspire to be more

than what we are: not more-than-human, but more *fully* human?

We are also asking something that is implicitly *normative*. We recognise that in the freedom we intuit ourselves to have (conceptually contested though it may be), human beings can be engaged in practices that seem to de-humanise us, that seem to make us, in some sense, less than human. This is, of course, again, potentially dangerous territory. To even speak of certain persons as being, in any way, 'less than human' – even in behaviour – invites oppressive, destructive or even cruel treatment upon those persons by others who see themselves as somehow policing the borders of 'true humanity'. Nonetheless the language of 'true humanity' finds frequent expression among Christians as they reflect upon the significance of Jesus Christ, the true 'image of God' and the 'last Adam'. So, there is a sense in which 'being human' is as much aspirational – or a matter of divine promise – as a statement of nature or ontology.

Being human, for Christians, reaches toward a goal. Christians aren't alone in such an idea. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre describes the Aristotelian notion of ethics as involving 'untutored' human nature needing training and development in the virtues in order to realise its *telos*. Some kind of developmental view, often involving salvific elements through processes of education, training or maturing, or crisis events with coinciding rituals, is common to many human societies. This suggests a recognition that there is some kind of tragic element to human beings. There is a 'human condition' that requires repairing or overcoming.

So, between these two 'poles' of the descriptive/ontological and the normative/teleological, we all fall short in some way or another of what we understand or hope human beings are meant to be. All of us. Being human is a shared project. We all have limits and defects: some, perhaps more than others, but we all have them. We all rely upon one another to live life. The one who lives alone with no other persons begins to lose vital human capacities. We are social beings.

The biblical narrative elucidates such a human condition that must be overcome in order to realise a God-intended destiny for human beings and the rest of creation. Questions about the nature of human beings that often exercise the minds of philosophers and thinkers in other academic disciplines are, in the main, not directly addressed by the biblical writers. As we are led on the journey from Eden to the New Jerusalem, the biblical authors tend to use concepts and images that are ready-to-hand for their particular tasks or concerns.

be human?



They are not systematic; and attempts to outline a clear 'biblical' anthropology have been repeatedly frustrated. This is not to suggest the Bible presents a haphazard and utterly inconsistent view of human beings; nor does it suggest that the biblical writers were not interested in humanity: "What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:4). But the Bible does not articulate a systematic 'doctrine of man' (as it was once called) or 'doctrine of humanity' (as some now call it).

In order to answer the question, "What does it mean to be human?", we must make inferences based upon the trajectory of the biblical story centred in Jesus Christ. Though we may pay attention to questions of 'nature' or ontology, these are questions along the way as we make sense of our identity from a *vocational* point of view.

Humans as Creatures in God's Image

Australian theologian Graham Cole is fond of saying "We are creatures before we are Christians" – and rightly so. The Bible opens with an account of creation. In the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, we discover that the God whom we will come to know as the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Triune God, is the creator of all things and the author of life. God's "promissory and redemptive activity does not occur in a vacuum, but in a context shaped by life-giving, life-enhancing work of the Creator." Indeed, "God's work in creation is necessary for there to be a people whom God can redeem and a context within which they can live well."

Whatever our debates over the nature of these opening chapters – and they are a minefield – it

is clear that the opening of the book of Genesis sets the world in the context of the loving purposes of God and is concerned with the meaning and purpose of the world, including human beings. We discover that the will of God in creation is for human beings to flourish in all respects, and that, as sexual, social and cultural beings, they should "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:27).

Human beings are made "in the image of God" and called to exercise a loving dominion reflective of God's rule over the creation. This remarkable phrase – "image of God" – is actually found explicitly only three times in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6) and twice in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9) – aside from those ascriptions of the image to Jesus Christ – and yet has rightly exerted a powerful influence on the Jewish and Christian imagination. Unsurprisingly, it has also led to much speculation as to what quality the image of God might be and it is no surprise that many thinkers have singled out rationality as a candidate for the 'image'. Commonly, also, the 'image' is taken to be something 'spiritual' rather than relating to the physical aspect of human beings. However, Richard Middleton severely chides theologians past and present because they "largely, if not entirely, ignore the massive literature in Old Testament scholarship on the *imago Dei*." He notes theologian Hendrikus Berkhof's scathing remark: "By studying how systematic theologies have poured meaning into Gen. 1:26, one could write a piece of Europe's cultural history." For contemporary theologians, Middleton sees this as particularly "shameful [as] there is at present a virtual consensus among Old Testament scholars concerning the meaning of the *imago Dei* in Genesis."



What does it mean to be human?

According to Middleton, this consensus emphasises the royal-functional interpretation of image. Beyond the specific “royal mandate” in verses 26-28 to “rule and subdue the earth and its creatures”, the

... God in whose image and likeness humans are created is depicted as sovereign over the cosmos, ruling by royal decree (“let there be”) and even addressing the divine council or heavenly court with the words: “let us make humanity in our image,” an address which parallels God’s question to the seraphim at the call of Isaiah (in Isaiah 6:8), “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Just as Isaiah saw Yahweh “seated on a throne, high and exalted” (6:1), so the writer of Genesis 1 portrays God as King presiding over “heaven and earth,” an ordered and harmonious realm in which each creature manifests the will of the Creator and is thus declared “good.”

Furthermore, Genesis “democratizes an ancient Near Eastern royal use of image language” and teaches that all males and females share this position and calling. This understanding of human beings is not restricted to word studies or even detailed reading of Genesis 1-9, but rather is unveiled through God’s of tutelage of Israel through the *Torah* and the prophets. N.T. Wright makes this link explicit:

“The key is that humans are made in the image of God. That is the equivalent, on the wider canvas, of Israel’s unique position and vocation. And bearing God’s image is not just a fact, it is a vocation. It means being called to reflect into the world the creative and redemptive love of God. It means being made for relationship, for stewardship, for worship – or to put it more vividly, for sex, gardening and God. Human beings know in their bones that they are made for each other, made to look after and shape this world, made to worship the one in whose image they are made. But like Israel with her vocation, we humans get it wrong.”

Rather than swinging between substantialist and functionalist views of the *imago dei*, we can conceive of it as a vocation for which we are uniquely fitted among all God’s creatures, with a unique capacity to relate to God. (In the evocative words of Orthodox theologian Pavel Florensky, humanity in prayer are “the eyes of the world looking back at God.”) It is no surprise that our ‘nature’ fits with God’s designs for us. But it is not necessarily clear *from our nature* that we can accurately discern our proper *telos* or detect or identify properly the distortions we make. The abandonment by humanity of the self-revealing God in favour of lies and self-deception has led to a distortion of human practices. This seems to be the argument of Paul in Romans 1. We are reliant upon God’s revelation and rescue to realign us with God’s purpose.

The nature of ‘The Fall’ account continues to be debated; whether it is a straightforwardly ‘historical’ moment or a truth-teaching ‘saga’ that looks back

to a primal rebellion by humanity. Regardless, the ongoing consequences of human disobedience to God remain. The entry of sin into the world is conceivable as a *deviance* from God’s purposes and thereby a *defilement* of creation. It is not however an ultimate destruction of it. Only God has the power of uncreation (demonstrated in the Noahic flood narrative). Humankind remains the “image of God”. Nevertheless, in ways that are variously debated, humankind has become corrupted – in Reformed systematic theology, this is frequently referred to as ‘total depravity’, meaning that all aspects of our being have been tainted by our disobedience. It seems that in our ignorance, God’s wrath is presently manifest in our suffering the consequences of sin (Rom 1:18ff), which is the reign of ‘death’ in the midst of life.

Perhaps the hardest aspect of our finitude to bear with in light of alienation with God is the prospect of death and the forfeiture of the ‘tree of life’, the promise of life together in God’s presence and care without end. If one Psalmist can answer his question about ‘man’ as “crowned with glory and honour” with all things “in subjection under his feet” (Ps. 8:5), we also encounter the other pole of human self-understanding in the Psalter: human beings, mere ‘flesh’ are “like the grass” which appears for a short while and is soon withered and gone, or as merely made of dust. If the *Torah* draws the people of God into a life-affirming community with the hope of perpetuity of each household, in uprightness, prosperity, and honour, as a blessing, there is also the nagging question expressed once again in the Psalter:

*“What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness? (Ps. 30:9)*

The question emerges: Do God’s rewards suffice without a post-mortem eschatological frame? What happens to ‘the righteous’ and ‘the wicked’ at or after death? Is there a reckoning with the Creator to be had? The majority view in Old Testament scholarship is that developed ideas of an afterlife – and especially resurrection – are relatively late innovations in the faith of Israel, perhaps resulting from greater exposure to foreign ideas in the Exilic period as much as to ‘theological reflection’ on the faithfulness of God to the righteous remnant of Israel. Yet it is notoriously difficult to reconstruct the history of the development of Israel’s ‘religion’.

It is interesting that the Israelites did not attribute human ‘glory’ to some specific ontic component of human beings such as an ‘immortal soul’ but rather located it in terms of humanity’s potential *relationship* with God and the vocation given to humanity by God. But what of death? Possibly extinction at death or more likely a lesser existence such as ‘sleep’ or as a ‘shade’ in the realm of the dead (*Sheol*) seems to have been envisaged. *Sheol* is the primary reference to the fate of the dead and is closely associated with the grave. *Sheol* was thought of as ‘below the ground’ in some vague

sense, simply as an extension of the brute fact that that was where dead people were buried.

According to E. Earl Ellis, “biblical anthropology is a necessary precursor to understanding biblical eschatology.” On the other hand, Brian Edgar argues that “traditionally biblical anthropology has been controlled by *eschatology*.” Whichever way we approach this ‘chicken and egg’ discussion, we can be assured that there is a strong interrelation between eschatology and theological anthropology. How one conceives of the destiny of human beings is likely to shape how one thinks about the constitution of human beings. It is also very likely that the manner in which one conceives of the ontology of human beings will be reflected in articulations of the Christian hope. In some Christian theology and still in much popular piety, the assumption is that Christian hope entails a post-mortem entry into an otherworldly realm to dwell with God there forever since human beings are eternally existing immortal souls and/or spirits. That being the case, they will either survive eternally with God in heaven or without God in ‘hell’.

N.T. Wright suggests that all Israel’s aspirations and hopes were this-worldly and the (later) eschatological extension of these hopes concerned the redemption of the historical, material world and were never concerned with an escape anywhere else. If God is indeed “mindful” of humanity, one can expect that God will act in accordance with the promises made ‘by grace alone’ to Israel for the purpose of blessing humanity and setting the world to rights with a view to a renewed creation characterised by *shalom* – harmony, prosperity, peace. Ultimately this brings us to the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead for the sake of the world.

The faithfulness of Jesus Christ ‘unto death’ (Philippians 2:4-11) is paradigmatic for human life and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is paradigmatic for our understanding of human destiny. The task of Christian reflection, then, is not to *establish* the possibility of bodily resurrection as a hypothetical account of an afterlife (since it responds to the ‘happenedness’ of the risen Christ) so much as – in the spirit of ‘faith seeking understanding’ – to work through ways of coherently speaking of the reality of resurrection in relation to other realities. We must beware of allowing a prior commitment to some account of human nature or of metaphysics to predetermine whether resurrection of the body is or is not possible. Instead, we search for a cogent account of human nature and post-mortem personal identity which coheres with the resurrection event. If we were to wait for a consensus on these matters prior to committing ourselves to belief in the resurrection, then we may never believe – in much the same way as we might never come to believe in God were we to wait for philosophers to establish incontrovertibly the existence of God.

The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates to us that physical existence is fundamental to human existence – not just now, but in the future beyond our death. Human beings are embodied and their future is embodied, after the pattern of Jesus. Christians have

a variety of theories as to whether we are constituted by distinct ‘parts’ such as soul or spirit along with the body, or whether these are each ways of talking about the ‘whole person’. The biblical view of ‘being human’ does not seem to come down clearly in favour of dualism, emergentism, monism or physicalism; and texts can be adduced that favour this view or that view. But whatever view we hold, for instance, on the nature of ‘spirit’, it cannot be allowed to supplant the fundamental Christian hope in resurrection. Resurrection is a vindication and fulfillment of God’s plans for creation, not their annulment.

The Bible grounds human life in the creative act of God, a free act of grace or favour with a particular goal in mind – conformity together to the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament envisages resurrection as transformation – more than a return to creation ‘in the beginning’ – but a ‘new creation’ where heaven and earth come together and the presence of God dwells with us. This is already anticipated by the Spirit coming to dwell in the community of believers in Jesus and in each member of that community, the ‘body’ of Christ.

The goal toward which God is taking us transcends our capacities to achieve and yet it evokes us to take on change responsibly – we already anticipate resurrection in the pursuit of godliness now. In an important sense, we are not becoming more-than-human so much as *fully* human. God attains for us, through the achievement of Jesus Christ, that which he has called us to – to express his loving dominion over the world he loves, expressing the character of Jesus Christ his Son, and living in loving communion with each other and the Triune God, free from the dehumanising powers of sin and death.

In the recent film, *The Tree of Life*, written and directed by the devout Roman Catholic director Terrence Malick, the main character, Jack’s mother is heard in voiceover speaking ostensibly to her sons:

“There are two ways through life: the way of nature, and the way of grace. You have to choose which one you’ll follow. Grace doesn’t try to please itself. Accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked. Accepts insults and injuries. Nature only wants to please itself. Get others to please it to. Likes to lord it over them. To have its own way. It finds reasons to be unhappy when all the world is shining around it. And love is smiling through all things.”

There is a way of being in the world, constrained by mere ‘nature’, corrupted by the narrowness and blindness of sin, that grasps for the good in life – and yet loses it. But the God who made the world also became incarnated within it as a true human being “full of grace and truth”. And it is in following his suffering Servant Way and entering by faith into his gracious achievement of death and resurrection that we ‘lose our life’ and yet attain true humanity. **U**

“Resurrection is a vindication and fulfillment of God’s plans for creation, not their annulment.”



The **person** and the

In this past fortnight I have:

- seen two amputees that have broken national records and won multiple medals in the Arafura Games
- watched a compassionate social worker help prepare a 37 week pregnant lady be ready to take on the role of being a first time mum – both are in wheel chairs and the social worker is a quadriplegic
- received a letter from one of my patients who has been offered a scholarship for a counselling course and she is wrestling as to whether she could continue her work as hospital volunteer – this lady is a 4 limb amputee
- seen the unfailing dedication and faithfulness of a wife to her quadriplegic husband who now has a brain injury
- seen the agony of a husband who will be unable to care for his wife at home following her devastating stroke – he has driven 3 hours every day for the last 9 months to see her
- witnessed the joy of a university academic who can now follow a 3 stage command following a brain injury
- seen the sense of pride in a man who can now roll over in bed by himself – this same man has done long treks through the Himalayas
- cleared a school boy to continue with L plate driving lessons – he is a quadriplegic.

Did you know that there are over 1 billion people in the world who are living with a disability and of those, 110 to 190 million experience very significant difficulties?

This is about 15% of the world population. Disability disproportionately affects vulnerable people – the poor, the old and women (*World Report on Disability* WHO 2011).

It is no surprise then that people with various disabilities lived in Biblical times. So what was Jesus' response?

The New Testament records that Jesus' ministry included 36 miracles. Many of the miracles involved healing.

I suggest we look at Jesus as a role model in how we respond to those with disabilities – by trying to model his character, his attitudes and his dependence on his Father.

Jesus' character and attitude

Jesus ministered to those with a broad range of medical conditions: fever, leprosy, paralysis, withered hand, menorrhagia, blindness, deafness,

dropsy, chronic pain and uncontrolled seizures. Some were traumatic, like a severed ear (Luke 22:50-51). Others were long standing, like 38 years of being an invalid (John 5:8).

Many of these individuals faced social rejection and stigmatisation.

Jesus responded to the needs of both the poor and the powerful. He reached out with compassion and love to men, women and children. He saw the needs of Jews and non Jews. He noticed the faith of those who sought his help to heal themselves or others.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw great crowds he had compassion on them. (Matthew 9:35).

Multi-tasking and holistic care at its best! Jesus was about whole healing – physical, spiritual, emotional and social restoration.

In Mark 1:32-4 it states *“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases...”* Note the phrases: *‘all the sick’* and *‘the whole town’*. Elsewhere *“great crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the mute and many others and laid them at his feet”* (Matthew 15:30).

If we think that being a medical registrar, or coping with the Emergency Department access block, is busy and the after-hours demands are high, I think Jesus understands.

He also recognised that not everyone is thankful or acknowledges what has been done. In Luke 17:10-18, Jesus heals 10 lepers. One of them when he saw that he was healed came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked *“Were not all ten cleansed? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”* Jesus healed both the one who was grateful and the other nine who simply left.

In the face of his own turmoil, Jesus reached out to others. In Luke 18 he predicted that he would be mocked, insulted, flogged and killed. Then a blind beggar calls out for mercy. Jesus stops, listens, responds and heals him. We too, need to take time to see, to listen and to respond.

Physical touch is also important.

A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing make me

need...



By **Dr Tracey Symmons**

Director of Rehabilitation, The Townsville Hospital. Tracey trained as a generalist before going to work for seven and a half years in PNG as a missionary doctor with her husband David and her children. There she saw evidence of dramatic answers to prayer. Since returning to Australia she has retrained as a Rehabilitation physician and currently works in Townsville as the Director of Rehabilitation. She also is an adjunct senior lecturer at JCU.

clean". Filled with compassion Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing. Be clean". (Mark 1:40).

Jesus reached out with compassion even if the person was deformed or unattractive – even if there was a risk.

To stop, recognise and respond with compassion seemed to be hallmarks of his ministry.

Others' response to Jesus

But the onlooker response was variable – sometimes to praise God, to seek help for themselves or for others, or to condemn.

Jesus challenged the establishment and ingrained attitudes (Mark 3:5). He was angry when the Pharisees placed more importance on rules and traditions than they did on restoring people's lives.

Illness and disability were often thought to be related to sin.

As he went along he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" "Neither this man or his parents" said Jesus "but this happened so that the work of God may be displayed in his life." (John 9:1-3).

This situation however difficult was used to demonstrate God's glory.

What God has created has worth and inherent dignity. We are created in his image (Genesis 1:27) but we need to understand that *"the Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jesus' response to carers

Jesus recognised and responded to the faith of those who cared.

In Mark 2, the only way a paralysed man could get to Jesus was through the roof with the help of friends. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic "Son, your sins are forgiven". Note the relationship "son", the recognition of the carers and the awareness that all need forgiveness. Neither forgiveness nor healing is a simple matter. Jesus' response demonstrates his power but also his compassion.

Instrument

I had a cute little cup that said "Dear God, I am your instrument". On it was a stethoscope. Not sure why we have a stethoscope as a symbol for being a doctor. Perhaps a better example for Christian doctors might be a laryngoscope. Think about it.



It is an instrument that can save lives by shining the light in exactly the right spot but it does nothing if left on the bench. It needs a clean blade that acts



The person and the need...

like a mirror reflecting light. Without a power source it doesn't work.

Neuroplasticity

There has been considerable interest in the concept of neuroplasticity in the medical literature.

(Following a stroke) Experience induced Neuroplasticity includes greater excitability and recruitment of the neurones in both hemispheres of the brain that contribute to performance, sprouting of dendrites that communicate with other neurones and strengthening of these synaptic cerebral connections (Dobkin, B NEJM 352;16.2005).

In essence, repetitive practice is necessary for the hard wiring of neuronal connections and if we don't keep practising, these connections are less pronounced.

This is not only relevant to our patients but to ourselves.

And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Are we being transformed?

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me put it into practice. (Philippians 4:8).

The converse is also true. The cliché states 'use it or lose it'.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10).

Let Jesus use you to reach out with compassion; trust that he can use your unique gifts and your position.

Relationship with our Father

We need to respond to the challenge given to Solomon to:

Acknowledge the God of your father and serve him with wholehearted devotion and a willing

mind for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. (1 Chronicles 28:9).

The relationship with our Father matters.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us and we are his. (Ps 100:3).

The spirit testifies that we are God's children. (Rom 8:15).

Who we are is determined by our relationship with the Heavenly Father. We have the rights of a son and heir. We are not aborted or abandoned or forgotten. Our worth is not in our external appearance or in our abilities.

Real life

In this past fortnight, I asked a retired minister about his view of his relentlessly progressive disability. This was after he struggled to walk the few steps to the consulting room in order to seek help for his unremitting pain and continence issues.

He said that "he now spends more time with God and less time on things". "He is more reflective" and "this has changed his priorities". "In fact his life is much richer".

Challenge

Do we recognise the unconditional, often sacrificial love of those who care? Are we ready to be his instrument, available and useful? Do we consistently practice this or is it a "one off"?

I encourage you to go and do as Jesus did:

- Even when it is hard – when there are huge demands and you're tired (Mark 3:7,8,10; Matthew 14:14; Matthew 15:30).
- Even when it is not acknowledged (Mark 3:6; Luke 17:11).
- Even when it is not nice or risky.
- Even if society does not agree.

We need to see both the person and the need as Jesus did, wherever we are – work, community or church. We need to reflect Jesus in all of our lives. ☐



A GP is needed at African Bible College Community Clinic in Lilongwe, Malawi

Primary responsibilities include staffing an outpatient clinic and sharing inpatient on-call and rounds duties. Among the patients currently being treated are nearly 500 regularly receiving antiretroviral drugs. Services are being expanded with the development of a maternity ward and a children's ward, and provision of infant crisis care; so Obstetrics, Gynaecology and/or Paediatrics experience would be highly desirable.

Website: africanbiblecolleges.org/abc_clinic_.php
Email: pandbartlett@yahoo.com

Contracts, Compacts and

In 2002 the BMJ published an article (BMJ 2002; 324:835-8 – Edwards, Kornacki and Silversin) entitled “*Unhappy Doctors: What are the causes and what can be done?*” The authors noted that there were increasing reports of declining morale among doctors around the world. They investigated this and found that it was not to do with work load or pay (important though these were); rather the key factor appeared to be a change in the ‘psychological compact’ between the profession and employers, patients and society. In other words the job that the doctor is now expected to do is radically different from the one she or he had expected to be doing when she or he graduated – the ‘unspoken agreement’ between doctors and society has been changed.

In the ‘old compact’ doctors:

1. *Sacrificed early earning*
2. *Studied and worked very hard as a trainee*
3. *Saw lots of patients*
4. *Provided good patient care – as defined by the doctor*

In return for which they got:

1. *Reasonable remuneration*
2. *Reasonable work/life balance after training*
3. *Autonomy*
4. *Job security*
5. *Deference and respect*

But society has a new set of imperatives which cut across the doctor’s expectations. These include:

1. *Greater accountability*
2. *Working to guidelines and protocols*
3. *Consumers rather than patients – wanting care at their convenience*
4. *More external scrutiny*
5. *A growing blame culture*

The article’s authors suggested that what was required was a ‘new compact’ explicitly agreeing what the doctor gave to patients and society and what they could expect in return. Indeed within my own Trust I have been working with colleagues to identify what such a compact might look like. However as Christian doctors we don’t simply have a contract with our employers or a compact with society – but we also have a Covenant relationship with the Living God.

So we have to ask ourselves what difference does this crucial relationship make to our work as Christian doctors? How does God view our work and what are the implications of his views on our behaviour and relationships at work? Unfortunately biblical preaching on work can be in short supply, so for many Christians it is society’s view of work, rather than God’s that colours their

thinking. Ryken in his book ‘*Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective*’ helpfully sets out a historical perspective on the way societies have viewed work – do any of them sound familiar?

- i) The Classical (Greek and Roman) view of work was that work was a curse, an obstacle to leisure and the province of slaves. This view still shapes a lot of people’s thinking: ‘If only I could win enough on the lottery then I could give up work and enjoy myself’. Work is seen as an unpleasant necessity.
- ii) In the Middle Ages a dichotomy developed between secular and spiritual work. They believed that the only true vocation was to be a priest or a nun – anything else made you a second-class Christian. This attitude is dangerous as it suggests that God is not interested in our secular work and so does not care how we carry it out. Nothing of course could be further from the truth, yet many parts of the church still act as if only the priest or Bible teacher has a worthy calling.
- iii) A sea-change in ideas came with the Reformation, the Puritans and the now much misunderstood ‘protestant work ethic’. The reformers fought to break down the barriers of sacred and secular, believing that God was sovereign in all areas of life. They taught that all moral work should be done to the glory of God and was thus sacred. They developed the doctrine of calling or vocation to work.
- iv) However the Enlightenment (so-called) brought a perversion of the protestant work ethic. The spirit of humanism replaced the Spirit of God. Work became man-centred not God-centred; a means to the end of personal success and money. Work was removed from the idea of partnership with God in the stewardship of his world and was exclusively understood as self-interest. This is well illustrated by Adam Smith, one of the architects of capitalism who said:

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love”.

- v) In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we have seen a battle between two opposing views of work: unrestrained capitalism and Marxism. But as Brian Griffiths aptly states in his book ‘*Morality in the Marketplace*’:

‘The trouble with capitalism is that there is no limit to man’s greed and the trouble with socialism is that there is no limit to man’s desire to control’.

Covenants

Do you recognise your views above? Let's be honest for many of us it is the enlightenment view: we work hard for maximum personal gain and to fulfil our personal ambitions. If we are thwarted in this we can all too easily react with cynicism, despair or anger.

The theology of work – what is God's view of work?

Firstly God is a worker: 'By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work' (Genesis 2:1). Jesus makes it clear that God continues to work: 'Jesus said to them, "My father is always at his work to this very day and I too am working" ' (John 5:17). We are created in the image of God and work is part of God's perfect plan for us.

Secondly work is a creation ordinance: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2:15). Work is part of stewardship and partnership with God. It expresses an aspect of the divine character within us. God works through us to achieve his purposes.

However work has been marred by the Fall as described in Genesis 3:17-19. Work becomes toil, often appearing futile and senseless: 'Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after wind; nothing was gained under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Through the Fall, work becomes subject to abuse: idleness, unemployment and exploitation. Many people find work burdensome, boring and apparently pointless. They count the days until retirement. For others, including doctors, work becomes an idol. We define ourselves by it and draw all our self worth from it. If we lose it or it goes wrong, we despair.

But the good news is that work can be redeemed! When we become Christians we move out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Let's look at three perspectives on the redemption of work:

- i) **Jesus' work on the cross.** Colossians 1:15-21 teaches that Jesus is the creator, sustainer and reconciler of all things: '...through him to reconcile to himself all things... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Colossians 1.20). All life is God's. He created it, sustains it and redeemed it. God is interested in whatever we do and can be glorified by it: 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1Corinthians 10:31).
- ii) **The worker is a steward for God.** One of the most significant passages about work is Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. It teaches us that God provides us with talents, opportunities and materials. He expects our service (laziness is harshly judged). Furthermore as stewards we exercise choice and responsibility in our actions. Our faithful work is rewarded, often with more responsibility!
- iii) **The worker is called by God.** The reformers talked about two callings: the first was to salvation, godliness and discipleship, the second to work for God. Prior to the Reformation this was seen simply as a call to 'religious' work; Luther and Calvin extended the concept of vocation to every moral form of work. They based this calling to work on both Old and New Testament Scripture. In Exodus 35:30-35 God called Bezalel and Oholiab as craftsmen and teachers. In Ephesians 2:10 we are called to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us. In 1 Corinthians 7:17 Paul teaches that 'each



one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him'.

If we accept the idea that work, in our case medicine, is a vocation or calling from God, a number of important implications arise:

- i) **Contentment.** Paul in Philippians 4 talks about being content in every situation. If God has called us to our work then the knowledge that we are serving him makes even a difficult or dull work special.
- ii) **Persistence with vocation.** This is particularly relevant given the high medical delinquency rate. If God has called us to medicine, we should not readily give it up unless he calls us to do something else.
- iii) **Service.** If work is a calling from God then it is not just an arena in which to serve God. Our work is part of our service to God.

In summary then, the Christian doctrine of work starts with God working through us as workers in his image. Work was initially an entirely good gift which became marred through the Fall so it can be difficult and frustrating. Work can be redeemed through the knowledge that we are stewards called by God into our work which we do for and with him. As Paul says in Colossians 3:23, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men"*.

The Ethics of Work – How we behave at work

The practical implications of this theology of work are enormous. Some of them are at a political level, if work is so important, is it right to have an economic system that focuses on profit and efficiency without taking into account the impact on the numbers and nature of jobs? Some of them are very personal, work is not just paid employment, or what we do in our churches. It includes caring for children, housework and voluntary work; these are equally important areas of activity needed to sustain us as communities.

However, I want to concentrate on how God's view of work should impact on our behaviour as Christian doctors.

Firstly, work is a moral imperative. This strong theme of the Reformers is well borne out in the book of Proverbs which is full of criticism of 'the sluggard'. Paul teaches in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat'. Skiving is out! You can be absolutely sure that not pulling your weight in a team will destroy your Christian witness.

Secondly, however, work must not become an idol. This is a real danger, Christian doctors must not put work before God. Exodus 20:3,4 clearly teaches this is wrong.

Thirdly, as the Body of Christ at work in the world, our work should meet human needs. We need to

consider this in choosing our speciality. Richard Baxter, a 17th century Puritan, said: "Choose not that calling in which you may be most rich and honourable in the world, but that in which you may do the most good".

Fourthly, we serve an excellent God so we should aspire to excellence: *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed."* (2 Timothy 2:15) However, excellence must extend beyond just technical or academic excellence (important though these are). It should encompass a vision for excellence as a service to people.

Fifthly, work has to be done in a way glorifying to God. He hates dishonesty; we need to beware of the subtle ways doctors can be dragged into this. Dishonesty ranges from consultants doing private work in publicly funded hospital time to a medical student on the ward round saying, "The results aren't back from the lab" when they really mean "I forgot to take the blood!" It can be as serious as forging research results or as trivial as allowing your secretary to say you are out when you're in! We need to work hard to ensure our own Christian integrity and the integrity of our organisation.

Sixthly, we should be enthusiastic for work! Colossians 3:23 says, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men"*. One of the most corrosive and debilitating forces in medicine is cynicism. Almost every ward round, management meeting and canteen meal is poisoned with cynical remarks. It prevents excellence and undermines teaching; relationships are reduced to two-dimensional caricatures. We will never be salt and light in our workplace if we are infected by cynicism.

The antidote to cynicism is Christian enthusiasm; this is not the same as mindless optimism! As Christians we are realistic about work in a fallen world. We know that it may be monotonous or difficult at times. However, we also know we have been given our work by a sovereign and powerful God. Christian enthusiasm doesn't ignore things that are wrong but gets its energy, power and vision from God. We know that our contacts with other people are often very significant; it is us as individuals who will largely determine the quality of that contact. As doctors we have the opportunity, through direct contact with patients and colleagues, to show the love of God to tens or even hundreds of people every week. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we must work enthusiastically – then we will make a real difference to our patients and institutions.

Finally we should seek to build Christ-centred relationships at work. Health services are based on relationships between doctors, patients, nurses, health professionals, managers and students. Many of these relationships have become damaged and corrupted by sin. Restoring and rebuilding these relationships is a key way in which we can serve God in our work. How can we build these Christ-centred relationships?

- i) **We need to be Servants.** Paul says *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves... Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus ... (who took) the very nature of servant”* (Philippians 2:3-8). Let’s be honest: doctors are not always good at being servants! Try taking the ‘Nescafe Test’ – how many cups of coffee do you make for your secretary/receptionist compared with the number they make for you? Being a servant means looking to others’ interests rather than our own. We will listen to other disciplines and seek the good of the whole service, not just our speciality. We will seek to serve our patients and colleagues.
- ii) **Be Holy.** *“...just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do”* (1 Peter 1:15). In practice this includes avoiding gossip (hospitals are full of it!): *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up”* (Ephesians 4:29). It also means being peacemakers: *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy”* (Hebrews 12:14). Finally it means sexual purity. Relationships between staff are often close and emotionally intimate. Sexual temptation can be very strong but *“...among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality...”* (Ephesians 5:3).
- iii) **Be careful with anger.** There is such a thing as righteous anger (e.g. Jesus cleansing the temple). It may be right to be angry when incompetence, laziness or bad management put people at risk. However this is certainly an area that I have struggled with. We must be very careful what we do with our anger Paul says *“In your anger do not sin”* (Ephesians 4.26). Health services are full of gossip and rumours and it is very easy to get angry at something which has little or no factual basis. James writes wisely on anger, *“My dear brothers, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires”* (James 1:19).
- iv) **Exercise Christian leadership.** In many hospitals and practices there is a vacuum in medical leadership; we have the opportunity to fill this. We should be willing to take positions of responsibility but as servants, not for self-aggrandisement. As a medical student there are opportunities to be salt and light in Medsoc or the student council. As a junior doctor there is the thankless but vital task of organising the on-call rota, or leading in the AMA. Consultants or GPs have numerous opportunities to give a Christian lead in the management of the hospital, practice or State health structures. Eighteen months ago I was appointed Medical Director for a group of mental health hospitals and community services serving 1.6 million people (I am currently working on an article outlining how it really is possible to be a medical manager and a Christian!) I know that it is a responsibility that I have been called to and that I will need

the Grace and Wisdom of God to deliver it. Whatever our area of responsibility we need to exercise it with prayer for *“The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding”* (Proverbs 2:6).

- v) **Be prepared** to *“give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have... with gentleness and respect”* (1 Peter 3:15). Work is not just an arena for evangelism but it certainly is an arena where we will find many people in need of love and hope. There is the issue of the patient/doctor power imbalance but we should pray for opportunities and, when asked, be able to tell colleagues and patients the reason for the hope that we have!

Living out our faith as Christian doctors is not easy. We need to help each other. I want to finish with five practical ways that have helped me.

- 1. Develop an accountability relationship.** We need another Christian whom we can trust and develop a close and honest relationship with. They need to know us and the pressures that we are under. We need to give them permission to ask searching questions about our behaviour and attitudes at work.
- 2. Develop prayer partnerships.** If our work in medicine is part of God’s work then we should be praying for it. We should pray for our services, institutions, patients, colleagues, and ourselves. I have had the privilege of a close Christian colleague who has been my prayer partner for twenty years and we can testify that prayer works!
- 3. Seek Christian career guidance.** Romans 12:3 exhorts us to have a right view of ourselves. As a trainee think about taking up jobs locally where you can keep in contact with church and Christian friends. Have a realistic view of your skills, response to stress and ability to withstand sleep deprivation. Do not take a job that is going to stretch you beyond your limits unless God tells you very clearly to do so!
- 4. Whenever possible respect Sunday as a day of rest and ‘re-creation’.** As doctors we sometimes have to do clinical work on a Sunday but we must be careful not to let 7 day working become our routine – God has given us a day of rest for a purpose and we should enjoy it when this is possible.
- 5. Spend time with God in Bible study, prayer, worship and meditation.** Work is an integral part of our Christian life but it must not take the place of building our relationship with God. Our work will fade and die but our relationship with God will last for all eternity. **📖**

Further Reading
Ryken L. *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective*. IVP
Greene M. *Thank God it’s Monday*. SU



Champions for Life

*The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.
He raises the poor from the dust
And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set them among princes
And make them inherit the throne of glory.
1 Samuel 2:7-8*

Early in 2009 the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe drew to a close, but left a nation recovering from gross poverty, disease and an economic meltdown.

At this time a small medical student group from Newcastle University formed an organisation called *Hope Zimbabwe* under the leadership of HealthServe Australia, which aims to partner with the local Zimbabweans' endeavours to continue rebuilding their nation.

Hope Zimbabwe aims to raise awareness of the situation in Zimbabwe, gather people in prayer for the nation and provide material, educational, financial and spiritual support to those suffering. One of the ways it does this is in partnership with a group called Champions for Life (CFL).

CFL is a transformational psychosocial-spiritual program led by Celebrate International – Celebration Health that began in 2005 for children, adolescents, and young adults who face the challenges of being infected or affected by HIV. It consists of camps/conferences, day seminars, clinic outreaches, community outreaches, leadership development, mentorship, and socio-economic empowerment programs.

Young people living with or affected by HIV have so many losses – they have lost parents (often they

are single or double orphans), health, nutrition, education, and vision. Rejection, anger, fear of death, despair and hopelessness are some of the key issues they are dealing with. Poverty and HIV go hand in hand. Young people living in extreme poverty live in a deep pit and they often can see no way out. They often feel overwhelmed by life, having low self-esteem, thinking and vision and are vulnerable to abuse – sexual or as child labour. Consequently they are also subject to losses or deprivation of basic needs in life – food, clothing, warmth, education, and above all love.

Through the day seminars/camps CFL create an atmosphere of love, acceptance, celebration, accountability, empowerment, and teaching that transforms the Champions in their thinking about themselves and their environment and most importantly introduces them to the Lord Jesus. The day seminars/camps aim to empower the Champions so they in turn influence and impact their peers. Through the programs their mindsets are transformed from seeing themselves as victims to victors.

At one of the most critical times in Zimbabwe's last decade of challenges – the election period in 2008, this testimony was sent to me from Dr Reid about a Champions for Life camp that they hosted in the midst of the troubles, 'Yes in a HIDDEN valley, in conflict torn Zimbabwe, the Kingdom of God descended, bringing God's Presence and Power and Love and teenagers with HIV were set free from anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness and were filled to overflowing with God's love and peace and joy. They did not want to go home – nor did anyone!' I remember reading this paragraph

over and over, awe-struck about how amazing God was.

The camps and day seminars are run by a multidisciplinary team of pastors, counsellors, doctors, nurses, students, and young people living with HIV. The programs enable young people to develop as leaders. The leadership team includes young people living with HIV. The camps have a high leader/helper to Champion ratio to maximise input into the Champions' lives – Champions benefit from "Intensive Care." Small group "family" sessions also enable Champions to talk about their issues in a comfortable setting.

The day seminars/camps are fast, fun, dynamic, and intensive. Music, dance, drama, sound, multimedia and digital technology are important in communicating to the hearts and minds of the Champions. Wholesome, nutritious food is also important to strengthening Champions programs. Team work is caught through sport and games.

Changes have been seen by the Champions' parents and carers, doctors, nurses and counsellors running the HIV clinics Champions come from. Young Champion leaders are arising and showing their tremendous potential and they are being empowered and equipped to reform society and transform their fellow Champions.

The Champions are experiencing the good news talked about in Isaiah 61:1-4 – they are having their broken hearts healed, they are freed from negative thinking and negative emotions, they are being comforted in their losses, they are glowing with crowns of beauty instead of the ashes of mourning, they are laughing with the oil of joy instead of weeping, and they are clothed with rich garments of praise instead of despair and hopelessness. They are becoming strong and durable oaks in their character.

At the end of 2009 I went back to Zimbabwe after spending a month there 3 years earlier on a medical elective to meet these 'Champions' myself, and deepen Hope Zimbabwe's relationship with them. I spent time with the CFL team and also the individual Champions, each a precious jewel in God's crown (Malachi 3:17).


Sitting in the car on the way to a Christmas BBQ for the senior Champions, I was blessed to become friends with Amanda Madyadi. She was 16 at the time. Her story in short was that she was born in a house where her parents were often absent working, and she had to oversee a lot of the house duties, including caring for her younger siblings. She told me of being raped as a 6 year old, subsequent disbelief from those around her that this occurred and then the gradual decline of her health over the next ten years until she was comatose for three months secondary to meningitis. When she recovered from this she was informed that she was HIV positive. During this time of great sickness however she came to know Jesus. Amanda told me her gruelling story with hope shining in her eyes,

'I know God loves me and has given me a testimony of His healing power and I have a responsibility to share my story because it's His story...when I grow up I want to be a doctor.'

During that day I also met Gugu. This Champion was faithfully helping to serve us all day preparing a scrumptious feast. I talked very little to her that day, but observed her humble servant heart. About a week later, when I had returned home I heard that she had died secondary to bad pneumonia that her compromised immune system could not overcome. What I did not know is that she was one of the first Champions in 2005 when the program started and in 2008 Gugu was selected to speak at the World AIDS Meeting at Mexico City on the topic of "Transitioning from adolescence to adulthood as a young person living with HIV". I was told that, 'Gugu told her story of overcoming the enormous obstacles in her life, whilst doctors and scientists wept and she was perhaps the only person at the conference who acknowledged the Lord Jesus.'

Children come into the Champions family bruised, broken, battered, thinking that God doesn't love them and that He gave them HIV or gave their parents HIV and caused their parents' death. They have suffered with many fears and rejection. However, what I encountered amongst the older Champions was a freedom, joy and LIFE in Christ that I rarely see amongst teenagers in Australia. They had experienced the power of God in their lives for salvation of their souls and healing of their bodies and they knew how to dance in the freedom that Christ had brought for them. They have not just been ministered to in the dust and ash heap and left there, but lifted up out of their cycle of poverty and given hope and a new courage in life, knowing in Jesus they are not alone they are now part of the family of God's redeemed Champions.

I left Zimbabwe in 2009 with a burden. A fellow brother in final year dentistry named Freebee who had worked tirelessly with CFL, said with deep conviction after a large Champions' celebration day, "They have had a great day today, but we are sending them home and many will not be going to school...we need to work together on this, do you and your friends in Australia think you can help?" From here Hope Zimbabwe has worked together through IMPACT conferences and Hope Zimbabwe dinners to raise support for these children. Amanda is one of the children who now is doing her final year of high-schooling thanks to the generosity of many. Of course there is much more work to be done to see these Champions lifted from the dust and ash heap and walking in the inheritance that our dear Jesus bought for us on the Cross.

Please contact us if you would like to be involved in any way including receiving newsletter updates. 

Email address: hopezimbabwe.cmdfa@gmail.com
Website: www.hopezimbabwe.org
HealthServe website: www.healthserve.org.au
Celebrate International www.celebrate.org

A Theology of Stigma in

In September 2003, I asked a question at the International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA) in Nairobi Kenya, "What is the link between the traditional Christian concept of stigmata and the challenge Christians now face of HIV stigma?" I have struggled with this question ever since.

Stigma is defined as 'an attribute that is significantly discrediting' (Goffmann 1963), and 'an attribute used to set the affected person or groups apart from the normalized social order, and this separation implies a devaluation' (Gilmore and Somerville 1994). Stigmatization refers to a process of devaluation, where certain attributes are foregrounded and regarded as discreditable or unworthy.

Stigma is central to the fight against the global HIV pandemic. Stigma continues to fuel the continuing spread of HIV and AIDS. The complexity of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is matched by the complexity of stigmatising social forces.

Context

A theology of stigma is based in the context of a HIV epidemic that continues to wreak havoc uninvited in the lives of countless individuals and communities. Our context is described in the following comments.

'It is now common knowledge that in HIV/AIDS, it is not the condition itself that hurts most (because many other diseases and conditions lead to serious suffering and death), but the stigma and the possibility of rejection and discrimination, misunderstanding and loss of trust that HIV positive people have to deal with'
(Byamugisha, G. 2001).

The most powerful contribution churches can make to combating HIV transmission is the eradication of stigma and discrimination
(Patterson, 2002).

Theological language needs to be re-visited so that it is applicable and relevant to the HIV/AIDS context. There is need for a language of compassion, dignity and love that is inclusive and not exclusive to those who are affected and infected with HIV/AIDS. There is a need to address human rights, gender inequality and social injustice in addressing stigma and discrimination. The linkages between these three concepts in the context of HIV/AIDS need to be clearly understood by religious leaders, as personal behavior that contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS must be seen in the context of social dynamics (ICASA, 2003).

God is present with the vulnerable and, in a special way, with stigmatized people. We need to reclaim (and also to communicate to Christian believers) biblical images of God that are grounded not in punishment but in divine love, so that stigma can be reduced (UNAIDS, 2003).

Communities of faith are challenged to deal appropriately and speedily with stigma as they play their part in responding to HIV and AIDS (Ackermann, 2004).

Origins of the word

Let us look at the origins of the word, stigma. Stigma is a mark branded; a mark of disgrace, (pl. stigmata) mark(s) corresponding to those on the body of the crucified Christ (Onions, C.T, 1966).

Stigma, a noun, is a mark of disgrace or shame. In 1596, it was used as a special mark burned on the skin of a slave or criminal. Earlier, probably about 1400, in the Anglicised form stigma was borrowed from Latin stigma, from Greek stigma (*genitive stigmatos*) where it referred to a mark, spot, puncture, brand, especially one made by a pointed instrument. This was derived from a root word from stig – root of stizein to mark, tattoo. The figurative sense of a mark of disgrace or shame is first recorded in English before 1619. The plural form stigmata, in the sense of marks resembling the wounds on the crucified body of Christ, is recorded in English by 1632.

To stigmatise as a verb, as used in 1585, is to brand, tattoo; and is borrowed from the Middle French *stigmatiser* (1532), and directly from medieval Latin *stigmatizare*, from Greek *stigmatizein* mark, brand. The figurative sense of set a mark of disgrace on, reproach is first recorded in 1619 (Barnhart, 1988).

People began to use the word 'stigma' as a generic term for any kind of sign. In this way the plural of the word stigma, stigmata, which originally meant only 'signs', became almost unintentionally the most prevalent name for the wounds of Jesus when he was laid down from the cross.

The word 'stigma' itself (in the singular) began over time to have a negative connotation and 'signs' began to mean 'prejudices'.

A Theology of Stigma

A theology of stigma, as a response to the above challenges, is a contribution that seeks to reflect and iterate with the modern crisis of HIV and its associated stigma. It sees stigma as sign or mark. Yet Christians are people that bear a sign or a mark – the mark of God, in two primary ways. We are made in the image of God, and we are grounded in relationship with God and others by the sign of the

a



Time of **HIV** and **AIDS**

cross. How do we relate and order these various categorisations of marks, signification or stigma?

A theology of stigma is placed as emerging from the context of the HIV epidemic. This bears a similarity to liberation theology. Each is a response to the challenges and the necessities of a social context.

The powerful use of signs is fundamental to relationships, communication and to attributing meaning.

There are three categories of stigmas or marks that exist in this world. Two are from the Creator; one is attributed by the created. All people bear the mark of the creator in whose image they are created. Christians also bear the mark of the crucified Christ.

The third category, the stigma of the world is seeking hegemony over the two primary divine markings. The stigma of the world is the attribution of marks to the individual that seek to supplant or diminish the two primary markings. All bear the first, Christians alone bear the second. The bearers of the second have the task to defend the dignity of the Creator and his fundamental attributions. To seek to diminish the first and second marks is to relegate the Creator to be less than Creator. The proclamation of the gospel calls people to identification with the first and then welcomes them to participate in the second. This proclamation affirms and foregrounds the two divine markings, and diminishes and insubstantiates any lesser markings or attributions.

A Space to Act

The space for Christians to act is the place of stigma. Stigma is not to be opposed or driven out. Stigma defines where we as Christians are to act (Hebrews 13:13). It is our place of manifestation of the will of God. We, as the body of Christ, bear the

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marks of that body in our lives. We are foolhardy if we wish to separate ourselves from the body of Christ by separating from its distinctive markings. We share in the suffering of Christ by bearing the consequences of those marks into the world we live. This is our life work. We are not to be apart from those marks. Those marks define our linkage to the Christ and also give us our place of work. As the body of Christ we are inscripted with these marks.

There is fundamentally the notion of primary inscription of people as made in the "image of God", bearing the mark of the creator. This primary attribution is to be the individual as marked as being made in the image of God. Jesus was not misled by lesser attributions such as tax collector, leper or Samaritan. He carried out his ministry in the locus of stigma. He carried out his ministry in the locus of attributions applied by others.

Jesus was at home in the locus of stigma. His task was to reaffirm the primary attribution of made in the image of God as hegemonic to lesser attributions from inscripting agencies such as political or religious groups. Our power is related to our ability to name or inscribe. We misuse that power when we seek to supplant the primary attribution of the creator with one of our own. The stigmatisation of those with HIV is fundamentally in conflict with the inscription placed upon them by their creator. There is a conflict between the primary attribution



A Theology of Stigma in a Time of HIV and AIDS

of the creator, and the lesser attributions from those who are the created. The created seek to usurp the position of the creator by seeking that their inscription will be hegemonic to the inscription of the creator.

There is also a notion of the marks of service and compassion inscribed on the body of Christ as represented in the person of Jesus, but also on the body of Christ as represented by the community of believers. The Suffering Servant bears those marks (Isaiah 53). We are to have the body of the suffering servant. Authentically that is also our body. That is our mission to identify with the crucified and risen Christ. We are also to work in the contested locus of attributions by the created.

“The right to health and dignity of the individual is based on this premise of each made essentially in the image of God.”

All have a right to dignity as they bear the mark of the Creator. All have a right to health as they bear the mark of the Creator. All have a right to health and dignity as they bear the mark of the Creator.

Throughout history, Christians are recorded whether figuratively or literally with bearing these same marks on their bodies, the stigmata.

People are made primarily in the image of God. This is primary categorisation, the primary marking of all. A second line or third line attribution that supplants this primary marking is out of keeping with the life of Jesus. Jesus related to people based on the primary description of people made in the image of God. That is the primary inscription. Human rights affirm the individual worth and dignity of the person where the primary inscription is an inscription that requires respect of the dignity of the individual.

A theology of stigma links to the body of the crucified Jesus. His body bore the signs of his life, his station – the crown of thorns, his fear, his anguish, and his imminent death. We are called to follow Jesus and be like Jesus. Many Christians have learnt these items since childhood. Now in the time of AIDS we see our current world continuing as troubled, isolating and eager to stigmatise.

The mask of modernity that has promised eternal progress with greater and greater separation from pain and death lies discarded, the script has moved on and new themes and actors are needed. Modernity lies rusting like another train carriage that has passed its time, is rusted and ill suited to the present world, as we globalize and virtualise. Yet suffering remains too real.

A theology of stigma sees our identification is with the marginalised, the stigmatised, those branded as unworthy. This is our communion with all people (Romans 3:23). This theology of stigma positions us as marked by the sign of Jesus – the blood, the water of baptism, the common meal, the oil of relief from suffering, the scars of service and engagement with a needy community.

The Christian as a follower of the Christ travels along a road of affirming the right and dignity of people who are being diminished by the stigmatisation of others. We need to reaffirm the primary marking of people as made in the image of God. And affirm that the community of Christians, individually and collectively seeks to bring about a renewal and maturation of this original marking. The projected and attributed markings of others are unworthy of those marked as of the image of God. Those marked with the stigma of the cross, like Jesus are placed to resurrect the person from other markings to that primary marking of being made in the image of God. All else is lacking authenticity relative to the primary assignment of made in the image of God. The right to health and dignity of the individual is based on this premise of each made essentially in the image of God.

A Lived Theology

Lets us now look more closely at those who bear the mark not only of the image of God, but also the mark of the cross. Essentially their place of marking is one of suffering and loss of hope, yet from this place there is resurrected hope. Hence the people of the mark of the cross are emblematic and embody the personal story of God's grace to transform and resurrect one to the original assignment of made in the image of God. The Christian marked by the cross lives an engaged life in the world of people and marks. This person, who is marked with first order markings, and hence is less vulnerable to the markings of others, finds unlovely situations and unlovely people as the context of his or her day. This is authentic living where the community of the cross lives in community with lives marked by the cross. Within the eternal shadow of the outline of loss of hope, symbolised by the cross, we are paradoxically overwhelmed by its joyfulness and hopefulness, and enabled to engage with the falsely assigned and affirm the dignity of those falsely marked.

In the context of HIV, stigma marks much heartbreak. Yet stigma is in essence a wrongful attribution of mark based on third tier attributions that characterize and reflect a world that has forgotten its authentic marking. By affirming the authentic divine mark of the HIV infected, as made in the image of God, the world is called to account for its superfluous attributions.

Within our modern Christian individual and community, leaders and members, the seemingly powerful and the seemingly less powerful, authenticate the power of the cross to change by affirming the primary importance of God's markings and not the stigmatising and isolating whims of others.

Within the context of this epidemic of proportions impossible to frame, the authentic place of Christian community is with those stigmatised so that we may reaffirm the authenticity of the primary markings of the person made in the image of God, and the hoped for marking of a life marked by the sign of

the cross. We are called to be in that place of alienation to assign and to affirm and to witness to the dignity of the individual as primarily made in the image of God. In doing this, the Church replicates the ministry of its founder. It replicates the correct assignment of marks. It affirms the order of the Creator, as the Creator engages repetitively and creatively and iteratively with the world within the salvation discourse. The Creator continues his project of salvation and marking and remarking.

The stigmatisation of the world directed towards those with HIV echoes the transience of fear, and the immanence of physical death. The marking of the Christian affirms and acknowledges the eternity of hope and the transcendence of new life. The stigma of HIV, both self stigma and externally attributed stigma, runs counter to the witnessed ministry of the Christ. Interestingly it bears striking parallels with the public discourses of the Pharisaic teachings, which Jesus directly and repeatedly challenged. Jesus associated with the stigmatised of his day, in a way that brought much criticism from his contemporaries. We cannot expect anything less.

This is our place of work, our task to affirm the markings of the Creator. To affirm and to act in good faith with these original markings and witness to the world the insubstantiality of projected markings of stigmatisation. As we live in accordance with our primary markings we also affirm the hegemony of these primary markings against the projected fear and stigmatisation of others.

For a Christian in this context our place is not to be separated from those marked by stigmatisation, nor fundamentally is it to fight stigma, but rather it is to iterate with a world where markings and labels struggle for hegemony. The Christian can demonstrate coherence with the primary markings of the Creator by a life based on those markings and not a life driven by fear or transience. Christians can do this by partnering and living with those who the many consider as stigmatised. Yet the Creator sees these people who are stigmatised as bearers of his mark or marks. The Creator does not see these people according to the transient attributions of those who fear.

The Christians of our time can authentically witness to the eternal significance of the markings of the Creator by defying the stigmatisation of the world and fully engaging in lives of commitment to those who are called by God, but rejected by men and women of fear. By aligning and intertwining with those the world stigmatises we affirm an agenda of another time and place. We proclaim the gospel, a message of news of sure hope and life eternal. This is an agenda that is contrary to the transient and relates to the eternal significance of the Creator. This agenda affirms the right to health and dignity of all, not only the well but also the stigmatised.

This is a call for the Christian community to affirm the primary markings of the Creator, and not be misaligned by the opportune stigmatisation of those motivated by fear. We are called to iterate the actions of the ministry witnessed in Jesus within our current setting. The HIV epidemic is a powerful case in point where the Christian can authentically affirm the markings of the eternal Creator as against the superficial and transient markings of those who would stigmatise the individual who is infected by the virus that leads to AIDS.

A theology of stigma places Christianity as integrated with stigma and its challenges. It is not an external reality that

requires a pastoral theology, where we who are here need to engage with an external threat. This engagement may find us on a spectrum of engagement from tokenism to commitment. A theology of stigma sees that we like Jesus, incorporate the alienation of the marked and see in this, a state of transient separation, but in the context of a God who seeks to reconcile. The Christian God cannot stigmatise. He can mourn and groan at our alienation and separation from relationship but he cannot mark us as people cut off and without hope of his love.

Jesus becomes a curse and we are to be in solidarity with our Jesus. Jesus was marked, stigmatized; we are in communion with his marking and his journey into engagement with those marked by the signs of the world. We are marked and the Christian message is a message for all who are marked. To pretend we are separate from a community that bears the mark of the world is to separate us and diverge from the example of Jesus. Jesus enmeshed himself in the struggles of the people of his community. He engaged with the stigmatized. Our way also needs to embrace a theology of stigma where we too eat with the rejected, as Jesus did with Zaccheus (Luke 19), engage with dignity and respect those that are marked differently to us, as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman (John 4:9) and visit the home of those most stigmatized, as Jesus visited the home of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:4). These lesser markings pale into insignificance compared to those recognised as marked in the image of God, and also marked by the cross. And we can engage and celebrate with the prodigal son whose externalized markings are seen as insignificant in the story of the rejected and stigmatized son (Luke 15:24).

Conclusion

This is written as a contribution to the ongoing iterative process of an eternal Creator, a chosen people and a world of false markings engaged in hegemonic dispute over attribution of these markings. Christians need to ground their contributions within the discourses and markings of the Creator, and not be deceived by the transience of stigmatisation of a world that fears. By engaging strongly, creatively and powerfully with the current challenges of markings attributed to the HIV epidemic and its implications and consequences, we do no more than authenticate for our time the primacy of the markings assigned by the Creator, of all made in the image of God, and a smaller group marked by the cross. These markings are hegemonic over the transient markings of stigmatisation. This needs to be continually and publicly affirmed and lived. [U]

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- To present the claims of Christ to colleagues and others and to win their allegiance to Him.
- To provide a forum to discuss the application of the Christian faith to the problems of national and local life as they relate to medicine and dentistry.
- To foster active interest in mission.
- To strengthen and encourage Christian medical and dental students in their faith.
- To encourage members to play a full part in the activities of their local churches.
- To provide pastoral support when appropriate.

Origins

Its historical roots are in the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (IVF) and the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) that started in the UK. Along with similar groups being set up around the world after World War II, separate Australian state fellowships of doctors and dentists were established from 1949.

These groups combined as a national body in 1962 and the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia (CMDFA) became officially incorporated in NSW in 1998. In 2000 the work became centralised with the establishment of a national office in Sydney to assist with growing administrative needs.

CMDFA is governed by state branch and national committees elected at annual general meetings of its financial members. CMDFA is linked around the world with nearly 80 similar groups through the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) which includes Christian Medical and Dental Associations of the US.

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