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RISE inside

Welcome back to RISE



Thanks for your support during our trial period last year. The response to SA's only online cross-denominational magazine was simply fantastic! God willing we are back to stay and invite you all to keep

connected through this virtual church community. We hope this edition gets you excited about living life God's way.

New contributors in this edition include Bruce Burgess, national director of PeaceWise and Wendy McNeice, author of *Redemption Coming*.

We never cease to be amazed that, when we come to put an edition together, the articles often have a common thread. In this issue that thread is CHANGE. Our world is changing constantly and not always for the better. At times changes that are thrust upon us leave us in turmoil. The Easter message is one of redemption, but it is also one of transformation – of change. As Wendy McNeice points out, Jesus Christ changed the world forever through his message of forgiveness. How do we respond to a changing world? How do we become the change the world needs so badly?

SMART LIVING

TRANSFORMED BY CONFLICT, by Bruce Burgess, National Director, PeaceWise

Changes the way we look at conflict and shows us how and why we should seek to resolve our differences peacefully.

INSIDE OUT

CHANGE, by Wendy McNeice

In order to make a difference in our own life and the lives of others Wendy reminds us that we need to be on the right road. As the Cheshire cat said to Alice, if you don't know where you're going any road will get you there.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE NATIONS

IN THEIR STEPS, with Michael Chant

A group of 40 South Australians walk in the steps of Jesus Christ and other Bible characters, and reflect on the changing face of history impacted by Christ and his followers.

RISE People

A PASSIONATE PURSUIT, with Gillean Smiley

Recently appointed to the position of CEO of the Bible Society SA, Gillean Smiley tells how lives are transformed for eternity by hearing God's Word in their own language.

OFF THE COUCH

2009 is already shaping up to be an amazing year of events designed to inform, inspire and encourage all of us as we seek to live for Christ and live life to the full. This year, hear dynamic speakers such as Sy Rogers and ABC Managing Director Mark Scott; build your capacity to make a difference by attending a PeaceWise training course, or be an encouragement to others by contributing to a new book called "Out of the Wellspring". All this and more in RISE Magazine's 'Off the Couch'. Make sure you send details of your events and activities through to us at info@risemagazine.com.au so we can include them.

Enjoy RISE Magazine – be informed, inspired and encouraged. Contributions are always welcome.

God bless
Molly, Edi and Wendy
Editors
RISE Magazine

smart living

Transformed by Conflict?¹

Article by Bruce Burgess,
National Director, PeaceWise



When was the last time you saw someone remarkably transformed, for the better, by conflict?

For many of us, the very idea seems to border on the scandalous, as we reflect on painful times in our own lives,

and hurts we have witnessed others experience even in the midst of Christian communities. Our 'gut theologies' when it comes to conflict incline us to a tendency, recognised by secular and Christian writers alike, to view conflict as something inherently bad from which nothing good can come and that generally is best avoided or 'got over with' as soon as possible.² We see little of God in the midst of conflict, and rarer still do we actually contemplate that God may have purposes that he is wanting to achieve through a conflict, or, stranger yet, purposes he is wanting to achieve through us, through a conflict.

Armed with these gut level responses to conflict, our expectations about conflict are generally fulfilled. We expect it to be highly toxic and it is. We see little good could possibly come of it and it doesn't. We envisage relationships being injured and they are. We struggle to see a way to forgive and so we don't. We cannot see God glorified and he is not.

Such a gut theology presents an intriguing challenge for us, as it represents something of a disconnect between our faith as believed and our faith as lived. At an intellectual level, we sense that as Christians we somehow should be able to respond to conflict in ways that are readily identifiable as being seasoned with demonstrably more love, grace, wisdom, ownership of our own personal wrongdoing and willingness to forgive others for theirs than we see in the world around us.

And it is right that we should sense these things in our spirit, as this reflects our knowledge of biblical principles well familiar to us, which exhort us to...³

- * love one another, even as Christ loved us
- * seek to demonstrate grace in our own lives, even as we ourselves are saved by God's grace;

- * not be wise in our own eyes, but to draw our wisdom from the fear of the LORD
- * be better at identifying the logs in our own eyes than the specks in others
- * bear with each other and forgive as Christ forgave us
- * value personal reconciliation with others even above our own worship of God
- * be peacemakers, with the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts as many members of one body living in unity together

When our minds present us with such an internal checklist, and our hearts call us to live this way, but at the same time we struggle to do so in practice, the question that arises is why this should be so?

The Why? question is answered at two levels. On the one hand it is a reflection of the age-old wrestling match with sin so poignantly captured for us by Paul in his description of striving to do the 'good he wants to do', failing, and ultimately only being rescued by Christ from this situation.⁴ So it is that for reconciliation, when it occurs, it is ultimately God (and his Holy Spirit working within us) who is the author of the heart change that leads to such wonderful redemptive scenes taking place in our lives. This is why deep and fervent prayer remains such a central part to all reconciling endeavours.

The second answer to the Why? question is that the whole area of how to respond with both a right theology (what we think about conflict) and a right praxis (what we are called to do in conflict) has not historically been an area of focus for the Christian church. We have not generally been well taught what to believe about conflict, and so our gut theologies (often derived from painful personal experience) guide us. And when it comes to what to do, we largely wing it based on our instinctive responses.

But there is a better way! We need to learn that conflict itself is not inherently sinful, but rather neutral; the question is more whether our responses to conflict will be sinful and destructive, or will they be seeking to glorify God and constructive. We need to learn to ask questions like:⁵

How can I please and honour God in the midst of this conflict? Is God seeking to change me in some way through this conflict?

Is God wanting to use me in this conflict to bless others? (for example by lovingly forgiving them or perhaps even by lovingly confronting them in a way that leads to genuine repentance and reconciliation)

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smart living

Transformed by Conflict?¹ (continued)

Coupled with these questions, we also need to learn the skills of how to deal with conflict in real life – the ‘how to’s’ of confession and forgiveness, and heart examination and having difficult but redemptive conversations and loving confrontations.

When we ask questions such as these, and we seek to learn these life skills that perhaps we have never been taught, we open ourselves up to God working miracles of such transformative majesty and redemptive power in our lives that we would say – such things are possible only through God. Broken relationships are healed, unhealthy patterns of behaviour sometimes built up over a lifetime are changed, people’s relationships with God himself come back to life and the witness to Christ shouts triumphantly into secularism’s challenge to be any different to the rest of the world at all.

If you would like to learn more about how to respond biblically to conflict in your life or the lives of others, we encourage you not to miss the wide range of training offered by PeaceWise, a national cross-denominational ministry organisation dedicated to Promoting peace and reconciliation in relationships through biblical principles and the power of Christ.

For full details and to book online, see www.peacewise.org.au or see RISE Off the Couch

¹ An earlier version of this article first appeared in the October 2007 edition of Summa Supremo.

² See for example secular writers Dukes, Pisolish and Stephens’ observations in Reaching for higher ground in conflict resolution, 2000, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, p.20 and the Christian writer Hugh Halverstadt’s reflections in Managing church conflict, 1991, Westminster Press, Louisville, pp. 2-3.

³ See for example John 13:34, 2 Timothy 2:11-12, Ephesians 2:1-8, Proverbs 3:7, Matthew 7:1-5, Colossians 3:12-17, Matthew 5: 23-4, Matthew 5:9, Ephesians 4: 29-32.

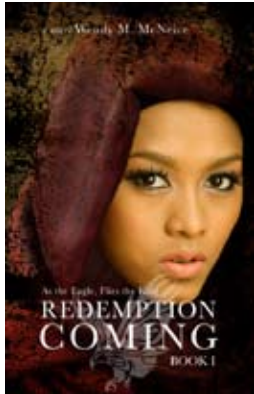
⁴ See Romans 7: 7-25

⁵ These questions are found in Ken Sande’s The Peacemaker 3rd ed Baker Books, 2004.

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inside out

Change



*Author Wendy McNeice talks about her new book *Redemption Coming*, and challenges us to be the change the world needs.*

Alvin Toffler in his book *Creating a New Civilization*, says that we are now on the cusp of a new civilization and at the end of an old one. We are at a tipping point in history. Never before, with two exceptions, has

society had to face so many changes in such a short time. The exceptions? The industrial revolution and the liberation of the Israelites from Babylonian exile.

We've all learned how the industrial revolution changed the old farming economies forever. But consider the changes faced by the exilic Israelites. In just one generation, the Israelites knew freedom, a long march, slavery and finally, liberation.

Nebuchadnezzar took his captives after sacking Jerusalem, then proceeded to 'civilize' them in Babylon for another forty-plus years. What Nebuchadnezzar then created was a kind of cultural revolution such as Mao Tse Tung did in China, effectively annihilating a race of intellectuals. Nebuchadnezzar tried to shape a perfect race of slaves, from the Israelite royals down to the spinners and weavers.

Words scrawled on the immigrant quarter of old Babylon tell their story: "Fine craftsmen we may be, our own quarters we may have, but slaves we remain in a city of walls."

When King Cyrus (and his governor Guburu) released the Israelites from Babylon over forty years later, he created a God-anointed peace. A result of his mission was to create the first charter of human rights—the first true charter of peace—between the Israelites, the Arabs and the ancient Iranians.

When the Israelites were released from their long exile in Babylon it was one of those 'tipping points' in history, such as we are at now. The Israelites stood at a cusp. But which way would they go next? After gaining liberation, not everyone chose to return to their homeland. WHY?

Which would have been the harder decision to make? To trek across the desert for years and rebuild a burnt-out city for the sake of keeping your heritage and traditions, or to remain

under a foreign conqueror who, while offering peace, had assassinated a king and conquered half the known world?

What should we do when faced with a tipping point in our life—when one road may lead to easy parking but be full of dead ends, while the other has a goal worth striving for but the twists and turns look hazardous? As the Cheshire cat said to Alice, if you don't know where you're going any road will get you there. We need to be sure that we're on the right road. But what if we choose the one we think best only to find we feel we should do an about-face?

The heroine of my exile story *Redemption Coming* (Book 1) faces such a challenge. Her answer is written everywhere in many forms, in the Bible, but I love this verse in Prov. 3: 5,6. "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

Isaiah 30:21 adds to this: "And your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right and when you turn to the left."

Abraham and Moses didn't jaywalk! So if we're confused about which is the path we should take, perhaps it is because we haven't given ALL of our ways to God.

Isaiah called Cyrus God's Shepherd, anointed one. And of course in the usual spiritual double-entendre, Isaiah 45:28 also hearkens to the greatest shepherd of all, the Messiah who would change history—the one who came to give 'abundant life', the one who created the greatest revolution of all time with his message of forgiveness.

Every now and again, one person comes along and changes history for a time. But Jesus the Christ changed it forever with His teaching on forgiveness.

One of the women recorded in the Saints of the Twentieth-Century, Florence Alshorn, was an African missionary sent to a notorious college in West Africa. The directors of the college could not convince any staff to stay more than the required three months.

No matter how willing to learn, the inductees were continually opting out before any serious work could be achieved. The reason? A difficult supervisor.

Florence's policy—the one that changed the whole atmosphere of the college from one of repression and anxiety to one of forward thinking—was simply this: 'Christ's love forgives and forgives.'

continued on the next page...

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inside out

Change *(continued)*

We can all change history one person at a time, through simple acts of forgiveness that make changes like pebbles rolling down a hill. Eventually, rolling pebbles can become a landslide.

Are we going to make a commitment to be agents of change, as the Bible teaches and make a real difference?

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Rom. 12:22.

Note: To learn practical ways to bring change through forgiveness, book Wendy McNeice as your next conference speaker. Wendy's latest release, *As the Eagle Flies the King*, telling a dramatic narrative set during the liberation of the Israelites, is available now direct from Koorong or the publisher at: www.tatepublishing.com/bookstore/book.php?w=978-1-60604-339-4) and as an e-book and audio-tape, and from www.buyaustralianbooks.com and Vision Books, Mansfield, ph. 07-3849-8528. To contact Wendy visit her website at www.scribeofspirit.co or her blog: <http://scribewm.wordpress.com>.)

To learn how the Biblical and archeological evidence for Cyrus and Darius align, read all the discoveries in the introduction to *Redemption Coming*.

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spotlight on the nations

In Their Steps: from Mount Moses to the Garden Tomb



In March 2009, forty people accompanied Michael and Bronwyn Chant on a pilgrimage to travel 'In their steps' – following the lives and journeys of Jesus Christ and other Bible characters through the lands of Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Turkey and Greece. Supported by the Bible Society SA, the tour

was two years in the planning. Michael shares some of the tour's observations and experiences with RISE.

First stop on the journey was Egypt, with the group arriving in Cairo at 7 am and commencing the tour immediately with the view to helping participants acclimatise to the change in time zones. It wasn't long before the group had a taste of how harsh this land could be, as they found themselves caught in a sand storm by the Pyramids in Giza. The highlight of the Egypt leg was a visit to the Sinai desert. Rising at 1.00 am, they trekked to the top of Mount Moses to watch the sunrise.

"The previous two times I had conducted this journey we were the only pilgrims" said Michael. "This time we were joined by literally thousands of others! The word had got out. On the mountain was an endless stream of souvenir sellers, Coke hawkers, camel riders (offering a welcome respite on the back of their flea-bitten animals), professional walkers (to help us up the hard bits – for a fee, of course) and guides leading groups of struggling tourists just like us."

While the experience was one they will always remember, Michael observed that it no longer had any sense of majesty or exclusivity, as Moses must have felt. The Sinai landscape was bleak and inhospitable, and it seems a wonder, he says, that the Children of Israel wanted to stay more than a few weeks, let alone a few decades.

They then drove north to the border crossing with Israel. A visit to Israel can be a life-changing experience. "To walk where Jesus walked is truly spectacular." The group walked the Via Dolorosa, read the Beatitudes on the Mount of Beatitudes and took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee in a replica 1st Century fishing boat.

"We prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, shared communion at the Garden Tomb, swam in the Dead Sea and bought souvenirs in the bazaar of the Old City of Jerusalem."

Michael describes a number of highlights, such as visiting with wife Bronwyn the site of their wedding on Mount Tabor, restating their vows and sharing from the scriptures the story of Christ's transfiguration; walking the steps from Caiaphas' house – the very stones that Jesus himself would have walked on the night before his crucifixion; singing and dancing the 'Hava Nagila' on the boat on Galilee, and reading the scriptures together as a group in so many places where the actual events occurred.

"No visit to Israel" says Michael "can avoid the modern day political realities. Our visit to the Holocaust museum Yad Vashem, opened our eyes to the harsh events of the 20th Century that triggered the formation of the modern political state of Israel."

The soldiers, the armoured vehicles and most significantly the Security Fence built to restrain Palestinian activity were stark reminders to the tour group that true peace will never be achieved without Christ.

They had to cross through this Security Fence to travel to the Bethlehem Bible College, located within the Palestinian controlled territories, where they had the privilege of visiting with Arab Christians.

The next step took them to Turkey, where Australians generally go for only two reasons: to see some of the early church sites and to visit Gallipoli. They did both.

As they traveled south they visited six of the Seven Churches of Revelation, missing Laodicea due to inclement weather. "The sheer size of the remains at Ephesus is awe-inspiring, and the theatre of Pergamum (where this time it rang to the refrain of Waltzing Matilda) was almost too big to comprehend."

At Gallipoli they walked the beaches at Anzac Cove, observing the small size of the place and its impossible aspect. They held their own Anzac service, complete with flag raising, Last Poste, a minute's silence and national anthem. "No future Anzac service will have as much poignancy and relevance for us all".

Due to delays caused by the weather, they were not able to spend as much time in Greece as they had originally planned. The tour finished with a fast trip around the sites at Athens, and while they only managed to see the Acropolis and the Parthenon from a distance, the sites were still awe-inspiring.

Michael Chant is considering another tour of the Middle East in a year or two. If you are interested in joining him, you are invited to contact him at: tour@chants.biz

Read more details of the 2009 "In their steps" tour, which included visits to the Bible Society in Cairo, Bethlehem and Istanbul.

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RISE people

A Passionate Pursuit



RISE Magazine talks to Gillean Smiley, the first woman to head up the Bible Society in Australia since it was established in 1817.

Touched by the story of Mary Jones at a very young age, Gillean Smiley's life led her along a lot of pathways before she finally had the opportunity to work with the Bible Society. "Looking back over those

experiences" says Gillean, "it is easy to see God leading me down a path that prepared me for this role – not that I could see it then!"

Gillean's career as a secondary school teacher took her to rural and remote schools in NSW and SA. Moving on to the corporate world, Gillean's career has included roles with the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and the Adelaide Festival Centre. It has always been important to her to work in organisations aligned with her personal interests, however, she recently decided to pursue her growing desire to work in an organisation that is also aligned with her values and beliefs.

"For me" says Gillean "there is nothing more important or urgent than bringing the good news of God's saving love to people who are lost, hurting and without hope." Gillean believes that the Bible Society's work is vital, inspiring work of eternal significance.

Gillean's journey has not always been a smooth one. She lost her husband to cancer four years ago, and then her eldest child when he was just 18 years old. "It is in times of great sorrow and hardship that God holds us especially close. He certainly has been my shelter and comfort through these experiences".

In the CEO's role for just a few months, Gillean says she is both inspired and appalled by things she has discovered in her time with Bible Society so far. "I am inspired by the passion and dedication of the faithful donors and staff who continue to seek new ways of sharing God's Word and ensuring that people can readily access it. I am appalled, however, by the continuing struggle that many people have simply to get access to a Bible, and then to be able to use it effectively. While this may be more obvious in overseas situations where people live under oppressive regimes, or in extreme poverty, it is also true in Australia, where the entire Bible is still only translated into one Indigenous language (Kriol). Many Indigenous languages that are spoken as first languages by Aboriginal people in their homes have nothing more than a single Gospel, or even just the Lord's Prayer translated."

Gillean has a great desire to see all languages spoken as a first language in Australia with at least one Gospel available, and to also have an audio recording of the translated Gospel in each of the languages. She says that many of the Aboriginal people living in isolated and remote communities engage with the Word of God most readily through the spoken word. Gillean points out that simply providing them with a small, closely typed and relatively fragile book when they come from an oral culture, possibly have poor eyesight, limited education and live in harsh conditions is not always going to be the most useful means of sharing God's Word with them.

"For less than the price of one cup of coffee per week, people can help support the translation, production and distribution of Bibles both here and overseas, as well as assist with literacy programs and the production of audio recordings."

It is clear that Gillean has found her passion. A graduate of Sydney University and the Sydney Institute for Education, with experience in senior roles in the corporate and public sectors in South Australia, Gillean says "I am looking forward to building bridges to people – developing existing relationships and growing new ones. I will be working to make Bible Society SA known to all sectors of the Christian community and to all age groups, as a support to the Christian church in all its facets."

This passion, coupled with her corporate experience, will drive the development of clear strategic and business plans for the organisation, addressing the priorities that God has given, with Gillean's aim to ensure the organisation is being as efficient, well-run and accountable as possible – so that every available dollar goes towards those God-given priorities.

And there is plenty of work to be done. "I have heard stories from colleagues who have seen people sell all they have and walk for days to be able to buy as many Bibles as possible to take back to their villages so they can share them with family and neighbours. I hear regularly of people weeping as they hear the Bible read and taught for the first time in their own language. And I hear of amazing things God is doing all over Australia and throughout the world as people learn about Him through His Word, and then come to know Him for themselves."

Gillean offers us the opportunity to be involved in the Bible Society's significant work and we don't have to be experts in Indigenous languages, or travel to remote areas to help. When we order our next latte or flat white, perhaps we might be motivated to take up Gillean's challenge.

For more information on the work of the Bible Society SA go to www.bible.com.au or call 08 8292 4888.