

FREE June-August 2014

# RISE

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## Parenting Revolution

by Robi Sonderegger

## Sexual Integrity

by Patricia Weerakoon



# Somalia's Hope

by Levi McGrath

LifeWell Conference Edition

[www.risemagazine.com.au](http://www.risemagazine.com.au)

# RISE

inform • inspire • encourage

## Publisher

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## Managing Editor

Wendy Rush  
info@risemagazine.com.au

## Graphic Designer

Kirstan Leane  
kirstan@kdesign.com.au

## Contributors

Dr Robi Sonderegger, Dr Patricia Weerakoon,  
Levi McGrath, Chelsea Pietsch, Dr Nick Hawkes,  
Paula Vince, Wendy Rush

## Advertising Enquiries

Edi Leane  
0412 073 167  
edi@joiecreative.com.au

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**Cover:** Musician Levi McGrath visited Somalia with  
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Parenting:

# Revolution

comes from Revelation

By Dr Robi Sonderegger



Hear more from Dr Robi at LifeWell Conference [www.lifewellconference.com.au](http://www.lifewellconference.com.au)

## *For many parents, having obedient children is all about achieving behavioural compliance and maintaining order in the home.*

Let's face it, when our children are doing the right thing it makes our job as parents easier. Parents naturally desire a home environment that's peaceful and quiet. Tired of the sibling rivalry, whining and complaining, we typically long for co-operative and polite children that are a delight to be around. However, all too often there is a significant gap between what we desire and what we experience. As frustration levels rise we seek behaviour management advice and attempt to close the gap. Yet despite trying the 101 'behaviour management' techniques recommended to us, we are not satisfied with the results. Many behaviour management strategies turn out to be little more than a tease. While the 'star-chart' and 'time-out-chair' initially seem promising, we quickly realise that any behavioural change is superficial and short lived. Too many parents are tempted to conclude, 'I've tried everything and nothing works!' At this point, we are ready to take our child back to the store and demand a refund!

No parent will argue the immediate benefits of managed behaviour. However, parents quickly discover behaviour management techniques do not typically transform behaviour. Rather, interventions only serve to 'manage' behaviour in the short term. In a way, behaviour management is like shovelling snow in winter. We wake up in the morning only to discover that it has snowed overnight. In order to get our car out of the garage, we have to 'manage' the situation. So we rug up, grab our shovel, and head out into the snow and start shovelling. After some time, we admire the progress we have made and determine that we can now back our car out of the garage. We have successfully managed the snowy challenge. However, as is all too typical of winter, it snows again and again. Regardless of how good a job we initially thought we did, when

we continually have to manage the same situation over and over our motivation wanes.

For some reason many parents have developed an ideology that good parenting is all about jumping at the opportunity to correct poor behaviour. However, if we have to continually tell our children to stop fighting, have another mouthful, or pick up their mess, we have become well entrenched in the frustrating process of behaviour management, with little or no long term effects. Investing our energy into repeatedly correcting poor behaviour doesn't bring about the desired transformation we seek. It's one thing to temporarily manage a child's behaviour; it's another to transform the driving force behind why they do what they do.

According to the book of Proverbs, "as a child thinks in their heart, so they become". To effectively achieve sustainable transformation in our children's lives, the heart connection we make has to be both deep and sustainable. Genuine

need to identify and communicate WHO our children are and WHO they have the potential to become. Identity transformation is like seasonal change. If it stops snowing, we no longer need to keep shovelling. Is it time to bring the blizzard of your parenting to an end? Are you in need of a little springtime: a fresh start and new beginning? That's what the Parenting Revolution™ endeavours to achieve.

The Parenting Revolution™ is part of the eCOUCH series (an intimate one-on-one Parent-Coaching simulation ~ facilitated via DVD vignettes and accompanying workbook) that has been rolled out in schools and churches worldwide with great success. The educational program takes the latest empirical evidence in child psychology and explains how to practically transform behavior in easy-to-understand ways. At the core of the Parenting Revolution™ lies an easy to understand approach to capturing the heart of a child through the love of a parent. It is simple, easy to follow, and highly effective... that's the revolution!

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## *It's one thing to temporarily manage a child's behaviour; it's another to transform the driving force behind why they do what they do.*

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transformation requires heart surgery, with unconditional love being the chief surgeon. You can't get to the heart through the mere correction of behaviour. Genuine transformation takes place from the inside out.

When we are deeply entrenched in managing behaviour, we often lose sight of the real reason why we should 'train our child up in the way in which they should go'. Behaviour management requires us to constantly tell our children WHAT they should and shouldn't be doing. However, to achieve behavioural transformation, we

The Parenting Revolution™ teaches parents and teachers:

- How to inspire, nurture and capture children's hearts
- The value and importance of working as a team
- Strategic order of rules and relationships in the home or class setting
- How to eliminate destructive attitudes and behaviours
- Ways to cultivate and sustain positive behaviour
- Ways to create and achieve family or class goals.

*Dr Robi Sonderegger is a Clinical Psychologist renowned for taking psychology from the frontline to the home front™. He is best known as a compelling, passionate and highly entertaining presenter. As a devoted husband and father of three children, Dr Robi dedicates his life to 'celebrating the value of family' and 'being a voice for children whose cry goes unheard.'* **www.drrobi.com**





# SOMALIA'S HOPE

by Levi McGrath

'The children here....they need milk', were the words echoing in my mind after talking with a village elder outside his makeshift home. Surrounded by the driest of deserts, with huts made from sticks and torn clothing, no running water, power or even a useable toilet; for him this was the most important thing. Milk.

I had visited the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) settlement just days into a two-week trip to Somalia, visiting World Vision projects in the country's famine-affected northern region. Years of prolonged drought had resulted in what the UN had labelled a 'catastrophic lack of food and water' for the entire Horn of Africa.

I had been chosen as one of World Vision's Artists to learn about their work in the field. After an eighteen hour journey to Kenya I boarded a noisy 12 seater UN plane carrying journalists, aid workers and government officials. We flew over what seemed like an eternity of red, cracked earth, which seemed more like a lunar landscape from a Hollywood film set.

Arriving at Hargeisa International Airport looked more like arriving at a local footy clubroom. Stepping off the plane could be described as walking into an oven, then turning the heat up! In the terminal there was a distinct lack of technology. Everything was done with pen and paper. There was no food court, gift shop or car hire agency to be found.

Out on the road an eight-foot tall camel startled me, standing in front of our Toyota Land Cruiser as we wound our way down unsealed roads to the high walled compound. Prickly cactus bushes broke up the tan coloured sand and rock. Goats casually emerged behind rows of dust covered, crowded market stalls selling pocket radios, oil and flour.

Boys were playing soccer on a football pitch with no grass while girls in black hijab's (head scarves) walked home from school along the roadside with books under their arms. Elderly men sat on wooden stools in the shade of acacia trees sipping camel milk tea, staring out at the weather. Women in colourful dress laughed secretly at my blonde hair and burning pale skin.

Amidst my excitement witnessing this new culture there was an unusual feeling of dormancy in the air; a forced intervention of nature bringing productivity to a grinding halt. There was a sense of restlessness, particularly amongst the men. It was coupled with uncertainty and frustration. No-one knew how long the drought would last.

The more I began to understand the situation – in which farmers had watched their camels starve, goats die of thirst and crops fail, while also unable to feed their children – the more I realized the severity of the famine. People here needed basic items, like milk, to survive.

I heard stories of escape from civil war and violence in the south. Frightened families bravely walking over twelve hundred kilometres only to find a lack of food, water and shelter when they arrived.

In a tiny village of only ten huts I met a woman and her seven children. The youngest, a boy, came to greet me. "Wow, he looks healthy", I recall saying. My interpreter explained that his stomach was bloated from malnutrition and that he had become anaemic.

I asked his mother if he could get medical attention. She told me the nearest clinic was a good day's walk away and that she couldn't leave her family behind to go there. She told me she could take a bus but didn't have the money to pay for their transport, let alone the medication for her son. When I asked

her to convert the costs into US dollars I was shocked. Five dollars would provide food, a bus ticket as well as medication for this boy.

On the bumpy road back to the hotel that night I remember thinking how simple it was and how little it could cost to save a life. I thought of the things I'd spent five dollars on back home that I didn't need. At the same time I was reminded that when we stop giving, stop responding, we stop saving lives too.

By the end of my Somalian adventure I didn't feel like I'd helped in any great way. I didn't feel a sense of achievement or satisfaction. I didn't feel like I gained anything. Instead I felt like I lost something. I lost my complacency.

For me Somalia was uncomfortable, hot, exhausting and at many times upsetting. But I was given an incredibly rare first person view into life-saving aid work in one of the world's most neglected regions. And through the smiles on the faces of the people I met I saw what World Vision had brought to Somalia. It was hope.

*From working with former child soldiers in Uganda, to his role as Assistant Music Director for The Choir of Hope and Inspiration (comprised of Melbourne's homeless and disadvantaged) Levi is committed to music and social justice - and he wants to motivate and inspire a new generation of people who are willing to stand up and make that difference.*

Levi is the special musical guest at LifeWell Conference [www.lifewellconference.com.au](http://www.lifewellconference.com.au)

Listen to Levi at [www.levimcgrath.com.au](http://www.levimcgrath.com.au)



# Sexual integrity in a sexualised world

By medical doctor and sexologist, Patricia Weerakoon



We live in a culture soaked in sex. From sexy clothes for children, medicalisation of sexual desire, genital reconstructive surgery and pornography, we have sexualised, objectified and commodified our bodies and our sex lives, and some would say our very souls. The very tools that provide us with information and relaxation feed our brains with a diet of varied, perverse and outright dangerous sexual mores and values. Our brains pick up the world's seductive siren call and allow it to direct our behaviour.

## Sex sells-and how!

We are entertained by TV screens, video games and the internet. In Australia<sup>1</sup>, children aged five to 17 years spend 1 ½ hours per day watching TV and over 30 minutes a day using the internet for non-homework purposes, not counting time on their iPhone. The data is not much different for adults, who spend an average of 13 hours a week watching TV<sup>2</sup>. So what? You may ask. It's just for relaxation. But stop and consider. Collected sex scenes<sup>3</sup> (16 minutes) from one of the most popular TV series today contains every form of sex - from full frontal nudity, to voyeurism, rape, incest, homosexual sex and violence. In fact, at least six former porn stars act in series three<sup>4</sup> of this blockbuster. Family shows on TV normalise homosexual sex, premarital sex, extramarital affairs and incest.

What about the internet? Cyber-communication and ease of internet access has resulted in a generation of digital natives. Information on anything and everything is available literally at our fingertips. Living in a global cyber-village, friends are counted by Facebook contacts, and identity is an on-line profile or avatar. Knowledge is available 24-7 and mates and acquaintances only a click away. This burgeoning arena of technological prospects comes with a dark side - porn.

<sup>1</sup> Are screens keeping kids on the couch? (2013) Australian Bureau of Statistics. Media release <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4364.0.55.004Media%20Release12011-12?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4364.0.55.004&issue=2011-12&num=&view=> cited on 10th April 2014

<sup>2</sup> Australians spend one month a year sitting watching TV (2013) Australian Bureau of Statistics. Media release <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4364.0.55.004Media%20Release22011-12?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4364.0.55.004&issue=2011-12&num=&view=> cited on 10th April 2014

<sup>3</sup> Huffington Post Video <http://videos.huffingtonpost.com/entertainment/game-of-thrones-sex-and-nudity-the-complete-collection-517397015> cited on 10th April 2014.



The porn industry generates \$13 billion each year in the US. The average age at which young people first view pornography is said to be between 11 and 13 years<sup>4</sup>. The negative effects of porn use on sexual attitudes, values and behaviour of both boys and girls have been clearly documented in Australia<sup>6</sup> and internationally<sup>7</sup>. Added to this is the constant bombardment of sexualised images, videos and advertisements.

Whereas this super-sexualisation of our teens and even our children is recognised<sup>8</sup> and reacted to with abhorrence<sup>9</sup>, parents, teachers and the church community feel helpless and often hopeless to counter it. We abrogate the sex talk to schools, but, although well intentioned, sex education in schools is undergirded by individualistic rights-based values of self-gratification, where self-control and purity are non-existent. Where does that leave us?

We see the results in the mental health and behaviour of our youth. There is a dramatic rise in hospitalisation for self-harm<sup>10</sup>. In a Mission Australia Survey<sup>11</sup> 42.1% of girls and 14.4% of boys indicated body image as their number one concern, with a consequent increase in eating disorders and unhealthy dieting practices<sup>12</sup>. One in four young people aged 16-24 years (26%) have a mental disorder and, overall, 40% of young people that age have experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives<sup>13</sup>. Globally men and women seek medication and plastic surgery to enhance and modify their body and genitals to some pornified image of 'perfection'<sup>14</sup>.

How do we as Christians - whether young or old, single or married, parenting or members of a church nurturing youth, lead lives of sexual integrity in a sexualised culture?

The foundational need for a life of sexual integrity is the development of a Bible-based rather than world-based sense of identity, including sexual identity. Building on this is an understanding of God's plan for a redeemed model of sex and sexuality, and the ability to understand and critique unhealthy world views on sex. It is then that we can live a life of sexual integrity and demonstrate it to a fallen world.

## Identity based on the Word and not the world

Our society surrounds us with challenges and role models of perceived perfection. 'Be like me!' the idols of the world scream out to us. 'Look at me - I am the super athlete, the mega millionaire businessman, the catwalk model, the movie star, a self-sacrificial charity worker. Desire what I have, what I am - now work at being and doing what I portray. It will surely make you happy and fulfilled.'

And so we try to work harder at looking good, getting more, even being better, more moral and giving more to charity. We build our identity and self-worth based on performance and possession. But wait a minute. Everyone around us is doing the same thing. So, to be truly significant and stand out in the crowd, we have to be better than and/or have more than the other person. We achieve something; get something; feel proud of who we are and what we have. Then realise that there is always someone who has more or is better than we are. This strikes at the very core of our identity and self-worth. We end up disappointed, frustrated, hopeless and depressed.

The Bible offers us an identity that is not based on our performance or possession. Not even on our goodness - however virtuous that may be.

The Bible tells us that we are created by God in his image - as embodied and gendered male and female (Genesis 1, 2) and known by him (Psalm 139) for the fallen, sinful and imperfect people we are (Romans 3:10-18). God knows our inmost thoughts and desires. The ones we act on and the ones we keep hidden from our friends and even family. God knows our history and our hurts. He understands the pain of sexual abuse and neglect; the struggles with porn and the grief of same sex desires.

And in Jesus' death and resurrection we see God's solution. Our self-worth and our identity as redeemed people is a free gift of grace.

Romans 3:23-24 *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

That is an identity worth having - one that makes us children of God and adopted brothers and sisters with Jesus (Ephesians 1:2-10, Romans 8:15).

How do we live out this redeemed Christ-based identity in our sexualised world?

## The need for a redeemed model of sex

A sexualised culture assumes that sexual satisfaction is a pre-requisite for a normal healthy life. It takes for granted that an individual has the right to define what it means to 'be sexually satisfied'. Therefore no-one, least of all 'God' or 'the Church' has the right to decide how a person should desire, feel or act sexually - other than him or herself.

This is narcissistic individualism-hedonism on steroids. Anyone who tries to stop me from achieving sexual satisfaction - whatever that means for me - is at best old-fashioned, and at worst downright oppressive and evil.

Sexual desire, the testosterone driven appetite for sex<sup>15</sup> is perceived a 'natural' need that must be met - not controlled. Pornography, fetishes, paraphilia, same sex attraction are all normal - so why should I not fulfil my desires, even if it results in compulsive porn use or infidelity? The only things that prevent the fulfilment of my 'natural needs' would be legal and moral limitations - and sometimes not even that - resulting in sexual abuse and rape.

What about falling in love? That cosmic dopamine fuelled thrill of limerence<sup>16</sup>? Love is seen as equivalent to lust. So "I love you" means "I want to be sexually intimate with you", I want to possess your body for the orgasmic thrill I get. It would be good if you enjoy it too. But what is truly important is my enjoyment - my feelings. Sexual gratification is detached from committed, monogamous heterosexual relationships. This means that I will move on when I no longer have the feeling, because I have to

4 At least six current or former porn stars have appeared in Game of Thrones <http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/tv/at-least-six-current-or-former-porn-stars-have-appeared-in-game-of-thrones/story-e6frmyi-1226877865387> cited on 10th April 2014.

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be true to myself. And so we have casual sex, one night stands, hook-ups, friends with privileges, booty buddies, premarital sex, cohabitation, de-facto relationships. The age of first intercourse is dropping, with 80% of year 10-12 students sexually active in some way and about a quarter of year 10 and half of year 12 students reporting that they have had sexual intercourse<sup>17</sup>. Many young people say they were coerced and regret having sex early<sup>18</sup>. Further, research indicates that cohabitation as a 'try before you buy' model of marriage is unsuccessful with a higher divorce rate, more dissatisfaction in marriage and marital dysfunction<sup>19</sup>.

What of marriage? We are told that marriage as a one man one woman, committed, lifelong relationship is an outdated institution. We can make marriage what we wish because it is about love. Infidelity is good for a relationship<sup>20</sup> and we should accept that monogamy is outdated and learn to accept 'monogamish'<sup>21</sup> relationships.

Where does this leave Christians? How can we live by the Biblical view of sex, love and marriage in a sexualised world? And what is God's pattern anyway?

To do this we need to turn our focus away from a world view and explore the Biblical word view of sex. We need to develop a new vision of our sexuality and a pattern of living that reflects the blessing of sex given to us by God. Sex is a wonderful and precious gift to be treated with care and honour when single, and enjoyed in marriage and, like all parts of our lives, used to bring God glory.

To do this, firstly, we need an evangelical, theological understanding of sex: a perspective on what it means to be sexual and behave sexually; one that is soaked through with the gospel of Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

Secondly, we need to be empowered to take on the world view and live our lives as the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 2:12:

*"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

### God's pattern for good sex

In a Biblical model, the "I want" of sexual desire is good – when co-ordinated with the other aspects of our sexual function. It's meant to operate in harmony with falling in

love with a particular person. Sexual desire is powerful: Three times in Song of Songs (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) we read:

*"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."*

It is also purposeful: It goes right back to creation, where God gave man and woman a command and made the fulfilment of the command a delightful experience. In Genesis 1 we read:

*"...in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number...'"*

And in Genesis 2 we see Adam's excitement when he meets Eve:

Genesis 2:23 *"The man (Adam) said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man'"*

Research tells us that what we feed our brain, especially in the developing teen years, will affect what we desire and value in life<sup>22</sup>. Any wonder that the apostle Paul emphasises the importance of what we feed our brains. In Philippians 4:8, he writes

*"...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."*

So God's pattern for dealing with desire, including sexual desire, means feeding good and pure things to our brain from early childhood; turning away from that which is impure whether it be TV, internet or porn and soaking our thinking in God's word for life and sex.

But what of the argument "If I am created with specific desires, I can't help but live them out"?

This assumes that humans are emotion and pleasure driven organisms, powerless to refuse to act on a desire. But we know this is not true. Humans are not Bonobo Monkeys or Chimpanzees. We are created with a cerebral cortex capable of integrating impulses, comparing it with past experiences and making executive decisions on actions. We choose how we respond to our desires.

The Apostle Paul speaks of self-control as a fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-24

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*

The ability to turn away from self-gratification and crucify our passions and desires does not come easily to us. It is God's grace that enables us to be sanctified. It is the will of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable"*

The ultimate desire of the human soul, body and brain is a relationship with God. The desire for earthly relationships and intimacy is a reflection of this. And so we enjoy our sexual desire in the context that God gives us - a one flesh marriage relationship.

What about love? In God's plan, love is not a narrative of self-expression and self-realisation. It is not about finding a soul mate who "completes me," in which I assume that who "I am" is a given, and that you love "me" authentically only if you respect me exactly as I am, as if "I" is somehow sacred. Rather, love is a way to focus the energy of sexual desire towards the other person. So that the "I love you" means I honour you and care for you. It is an intimacy based on total vulnerability and ultimate trust of body and soul. In Genesis 2:24-25, we read:

*"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."*

### How would this work out in a couple's life?

Dating and engaged couples would seek to honour rather than possess the lover's body, building non-sexual intimacy as they train for a lifetime of being a trustworthy spouse. Marrieds would demonstrate love in action accommodating another rather than expecting the other to accommodate self. Sacrificing, and often forgiving, in grace.

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19 Kevin Andrews (2012) pp 208-218 "Maybe I do" Conner Court Publishing.

20 Our cheatin' hearts. SMH October 2nd 2010. <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/our-cheatin-hearts-20101001-160i4.html> cited on 14th April 2014.

21 On love and marriage and why monogamy is bad for you. SMH October 26th 2013. <http://www.smh.com.au/national/on-love-and-marriage-and-why-monogamy-is-bad-for-you-20131025-2w771.html#ixzz2ynaslsfs> cited on 14th April 2014.



The one flesh loving becomes other-focused, sacrificial action. It is a cruciform reaching out to the other - sometimes when the other seems unworthy of our love.

Christ laid down his life for the church to make her holy, an act which the apostle Paul analogizes to the love of a husband and wife and the husband's call to wash his wife with the word (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Marriage in God's plan is a covenant. One in which we live - till death part us. It is not some ideal we aspire to. Making love in marriage is a sacramental act - one in which we remember and celebrate the covenant commitment. A covenant to which God is witness (Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14).

Researchers tell us that the crazy brain intoxication of love lasts for 18-24 months. If we stay together, and are sexually intimate, the levels of bonding hormones (oxytocin and vasopressin) rise in our brain<sup>23</sup>. This binds the two lovers together. The more intimate, the more the bonding. God graciously gives us a brain mechanism for a one flesh relationship for life.

Sexual desire, falling in love and marriage lived according to God's plan is good for us individually, as a couple, our church and for society as a whole. Living God's way will sometimes be hard. As the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 4:4:

*"They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you."*

We recognise that we can't do it on our own. But we recognise the immensity of the God we worship and live our lives to bring him glory. Doing our best and resting on his grace - continuing to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who works in us to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose (Philippians 2:12b-13).

The word of God written in the Bible and incarnate in his son Jesus gives us hope for our sex life. Whatever age we may be, or whatever stage of life we may be at. Whether we are sexually inexperienced, sexually active or even sinned against. It is a hope we can rest on while we live our lives here on earth. But finally, it is the wonderful hope of a new creation of perfect untainted relationship with our creator God and his son Jesus.



Hear more from Patricia at LifeWell Conference  
[www.lifewellconference.com.au](http://www.lifewellconference.com.au)  
[www.patriciaweerakoon.com](http://www.patriciaweerakoon.com)

<sup>22</sup> The teen brain: Still under construction. [www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml) cited on 14th April 2014.

<sup>23</sup> 11 interesting effects of oxytocin <http://www.livescience.com/35219-11-effects-of-oxytocin.html> cited on 14th April 2014.



# What is religious

# freedom?

*Chelsea Pietsch explores what religious freedom – a term commonly used but often misunderstood – actually entails.*

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right recognised by international human rights documents, and one which is integral to our human dignity. It enables people to live in accordance with deeply held views about what it means to be human. The right is safe-guarded by placing certain limits on government with regard to interference in the public and private exercise of religious freedom, and by ensuring that the government does not privilege one belief system over another.

The best articulation of religious freedom is, arguably, found in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”). Article 18 reads:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents, and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 18 communicates the fact that freedom of religion is not just about respecting an individual’s right to hold private beliefs behind closed doors, but also to live out those beliefs in the public square. It also recognises that religious freedom extends beyond the individual and involves the protection of religious communities ie the right for believers to congregate in order to live out their shared beliefs together. This communal aspect of religious freedom is commonly misunderstood due to the influences of individualism in our western culture. However, it is inherently connected with freedom of association and the rights of cultural and religious minorities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Article 22 and 27 of the ICCPR.



Article 18(3) also provides helpful guidance on what constitutes an appropriate limitation on freedom of religion. Freedom of religion can only be limited in very restricted circumstances, namely where its expression threatens public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. Any limitation on religious freedom must be strictly necessary, and therefore justified only in very serious cases.

Despite international legal recognition of religious freedom, the reality is that threats to religious freedom are becoming more frequent across the world, including Western democracies. Christians in particular face an increasingly hostile environment, which arises from a particular view of secularisation that involves a strong rejection of Christian morality.

Of course the government has a duty to ensure that all people, irrespective of their sexuality, have access to aged-care facilities. The problem is that the previous government sought to achieve this end by prohibiting people who share in one faith, and share similar expressions of that faith, from choosing to live together in their old age. This was followed almost immediately by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Private Educational Authorities) Bill 2013, which seeks to prevent private educational institutions from being able to discriminate against its students on the basis of attributes relating to their sexuality or relationship status.

However, such a proposal fails to recognise that many private educational institutions are religious communities established with the object of professing, practicing and

about being “anti-gay” or “anti-anything”, rather it is about proposing a way of life, and seeking to establish a community that upholds this way of life.

However, threats to religious freedom don’t just stem from anti-discrimination measures. Limitations are also imposed by legislation that limits freedom of conscience and speech, both of which go hand in hand with religious freedom.

For example, the Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act (2008) requires medical practitioners who have a conscientious objection to abortion to provide a referral to another health professional who does not have such an objection. Tasmania has recently passed legislation with similar provisions.

There are also laws such as the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001) which, among other things, prohibits ‘conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion of, [an]other person or class of persons’.<sup>2</sup> While the intention of this legislation is praiseworthy, its subjective nature has already had the undesirable effect of stifling reasonable public discussion on the topic of religion.

The right to religious freedom is an essential component of a free and tolerant society. It goes hand-in-hand with freedom of conscience, speech and association, which serve as the means by which people can consider, discuss and debate important questions about human existence and morality.

**Chelsea Pietsch is the Executive Officer of an ecumenical religious freedom organisation called Freedom 4 Faith [www.freedom4faith.org.au](http://www.freedom4faith.org.au). One of the founders of Freedom 4 Faith, Professor Patrick Parkinson, will be speaking on the subject of religious freedom at LifeWell Conference 2014 [www.lifewellconference.com.au](http://www.lifewellconference.com.au)**

2 [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/rarta2001265/s8.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/rarta2001265/s8.html)

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## The right to religious freedom is an essential component of a free and tolerant society.

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The most obvious threat in Australia concerns changes to anti-discrimination laws across the country. There is an active constituency arguing to reduce or eliminate ‘religious exceptions’ to otherwise generally applicable anti-discrimination laws. These exceptions (sometimes called exemptions) are important to safeguard legitimate expressions of religious freedom. However, this constituency seemingly has little understanding of, or respect for, the rights of religious communities to maintain their identity.

For example, the Sex Discrimination Amendment Act, which was passed in the final days of the Labor government, was amended to remove exemptions for Commonwealth aged-care providers. As a result of this, it is no longer lawful for a Commonwealth-funded religious aged-care facility to preference a married couple over an unmarried couple – whether heterosexual or homosexual.

teaching a particular religious faith. This involves much more than including prayers at school or college assemblies, or mentioning God in the curriculum. Religious educational institutions are interested in the formation of the whole person, and often seek to establish a community that upholds the full teaching of the faith, including teachings on sex and sexuality.

Many religions, including orthodox Christian denominations, teach that sex is the celebration of a union between a man and a woman who have given themselves exclusively to one another in marriage. In fact almost every major Australian Christian denomination has a doctrinal statement to this effect.

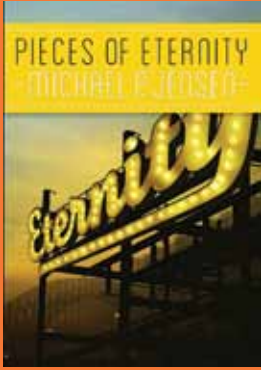
As a result of this, Christian educational institutions may expect their students to uphold particular standards in relation to sexual practice. This applies to heterosexual as much as to homosexual practices. It is not



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## Pieces of Eternity

By Michael P Jensen

I like it when articles which have been previously published in series for newspapers, magazines or blogs are combined to form one collection. In this case, they have been taken from several issues of Eternity magazine. While they are thought-provoking as stand-alone articles, bringing them together enhances their impact by enabling us to see how they complement and reinforce each other, something we don't always grasp when they are kept as single articles in different dated editions.

Observations from the secular world of media, politics and current affairs are arranged to verify the timeless words and precepts of the Bible. The author, Michael P. Jensen, an Anglican theologian and pastor, is a man clearly familiar with current trends of thought, including the work of noteworthy atheists. It's a pleasure to see his well-crafted writing reveal a God whose strong but subtle fingerprints permeates creation, including the world of work, where we don't necessarily think to look for him.

The thirty-six essays are divided more or less evenly into five subheadings:

The God Who Laughs and Loves  
The Order of Things  
The Book of the People, the People of the Book  
Watching the World  
Living in the Grit

It is not designed to be read superficially or quickly. I don't think we'd be able to do so if we tried. When a book designed to be pondered seriously and mulled over is read in the spirit in which it is written, it's bound to spark further reflections from each of us. I'm sure I'll return to these essays in the future.

*'Pieces of Eternity' is published by Acorn Press and can be purchased at [www.acornpress.net.au](http://www.acornpress.net.au) or from Koorong (also available in eBook format).*

Reviewer: Paula Vince

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by Nick Hawkes



## Evil, Morality and God

Christianity is thriving in China despite most of the Christian church being persecuted. However, sometimes there are reports of the Chinese government being so amazed at the difference being a Christian makes that they secretly study it to find out why.

One Christian industrial company they are watching is the Boteli Valve Group in Wenzhou. They make 5 million dollars' worth of engine valves a year. The manager of the company encourages his workers to become Christians and have Bible studies because he has discovered that the Christian faith makes people more conscientious.

The fact is, Christianity is a whole new way of living that changes people's character, causing it to become more and more like that of Jesus.

Maybe the West needs to remember this in its headlong rush to embrace secularism, other faiths and liberal ethics toxic to the values of truth, human worth and integrity, values derived from a Christian culture that has been the historical basis of our legal, medical and educational systems.

Nothing very good happens when authentic Christianity is abandoned. The complete absence of empathy, (that's to say, the ability to care about or identify with others) resulted in the torture and genocide of 6 million people in Nazi extermination camps. God, however, is passionate about justice, the plight of the poor and passionate about you. So, if you want to grow what is good, then come to God, embrace his character and allow him to transform you.

*For more see: 'The Bible on the Key Issues of Life', by Dr Nick Hawkes, available from bookshops. Nick has degrees in science and theology. He is a pastor, writer and broadcaster. [www.nickhawkes.net](http://www.nickhawkes.net)*





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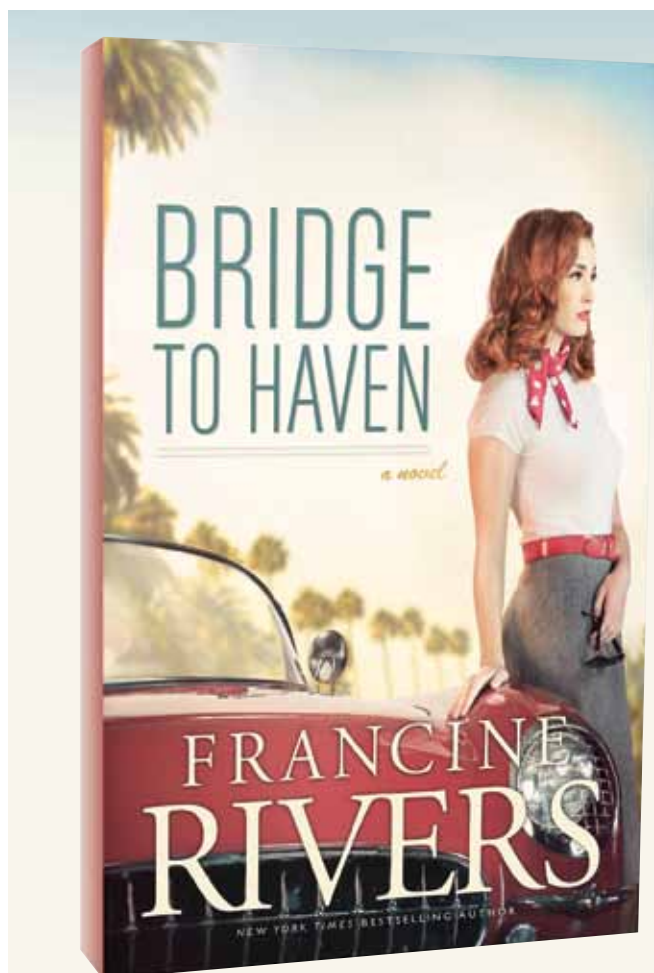
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