

# F.A.C.S. REPORT

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"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)

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## SACRED AND SECULAR

### Establishing Biblical Standards of Success

by Ian Hodge

Over the years I have made reference to the idea that in Christian theology there is no division between the sacred and secular. Too often the sacred (religious) life is seen as superior to the secular. There is a growing number of Christian authors who have expressed similar ideas in far more detail and with far better skill than I have. But so far, there are some unanswered questions in the sacred-secular debate. In this essay I want to explore what I think are some of the implications of the idea of work when the sacred-secular division is taken away. In particular, I want to explore the idea of success, success in the home, church, or business.

The dividing line between the idea of work in the sacred-secular division has been the idea that the former is a "spiritual" work while the latter is work of "the world." This division implies there is a Christian way to work as well as a non-Christian way to conduct business. And so there is. But the question is *how* are these to be determined? They can be determined the wrong way, by classifying ideas as "spiritual" or "worldly", or they can be classified as ethical, in terms of right and wrong.

It has been popular to attempt to build the Christian idea of work on the non-Biblical idea of spirituality. This expresses itself in the idea that we are to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and

only undertake those things that He has instructed us. This idea is appealing to many, partly because it contains an element of truth in it. As Christians, we do seek guidance from God in all our activities. But saying this does not tell us *how* we are guided in particular activities. Until we know *how* God gives us instructions we cannot be certain that we are the recipients of those directions. Because Christians don't know *how* God instructs them, there is a crisis in decision making and knowing the will of God for their lives.

#### Breaking Down the Barriers

Garry Friesen, in his book *Decision Making and the Will of God*,<sup>1</sup> explores what he considers to be the fundamental error in contemporary Christianity concerning decision making. The "traditional view" (as he calls it) argues that God has three wills: God's sovereign will, His moral will, and His individual will. However, Friesen does not accept this division. His concern is with the so-called individual will. This is the idea that God has a particular plan for each individual that the person can know and find out (through prayer, meditation, etc.) before taking a particular course of action. While this idea has a lot of appeal, since it lets the individual abscond from decision making in order to discover God's apparent plan for his life, for Friesen the idea is completely

### Them and Us: The Mess We're In

In a fascinating book on the American economy written in 1992, businessman Harry E. Figgie Jr. claims that unless the course of events is altered, by the year 1995 the *interest* on debt in America will exceed all government revenues. (*Bankruptcy 1995: The Coming Collapse of America and How to Stop It*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1992.)

The author has some interesting credentials. He is Chairman, Chief Executive officer, and founder of Figgie International Inc., a Fortune 500 company. He was nominated and served on the Grace Commission, a co-chairman, in the early 1980's. This is where he discovered the depth of America's financial dilemma.

The Grace Commission, named after its chairman, Peter Grace, was a commission established under President Reagan to find ways to reduce government expenditure. In January 1984, after two years of investigation, it suggested 2,478 recommendations for cost-saving. The "Commission found that one-third of all U.S. tax dollars were consumed by waste and inefficiency in the federal government alone" (p. 46). Like most sensible recommendations, the Commission's recommendations were ignored. By 1992, Mr Figgie was sufficiently disturbed at government inaction to attend to the debt problem, that he went into print with his book, hoping to awaken people to the nature of the dilemma.

Curiously, in 1985 the American Congress passed what became known as the Gramm-Rudman Act, designed to reduce the Federal debt by limiting the spending power of the government. Thus, while appearing to attend to the problem, Congressional members and bureaucrats worked to make sure government spending was not reduced. Use was made of "off-budget" expenditure items, and many expenses were not classified in this area.

1. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980.

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wrong. According to Friesen, "the idea of an *individual will* of God for every detail of a person's life is *not found in Scripture*."<sup>2</sup> Friesen then discusses his claim under the headings that are used to support the view with which he disagrees.

It is not my purpose here to discuss the merits of Friesen's arguments; I think he proves his case admirably. But the dualism of sacred-secular that is paramount in so much contemporary religious thinking leads to the idea that Friesen's concept of decision making is fine outside the church but inside the church we should still operate in terms of the traditional viewpoint. Outside the Christian church — and by church here I mean the institutional church — we can accept the idea that God has no individual will and we must therefore plan and act as rational human beings with only general guidelines offered by God through the Scriptures. Inside the church, however, prayer meetings are still held in order to determine what is God's will, either for an individual person or for the group.

These ideas, however, are inadequate when we break down the sacred-secular barrier and see that the church, as an institution, is just one aspect of man's life on earth, just as the family or the political state are other aspects of life. If the sacred-secular distinction is no longer valid then we have one of two directions we can go when it comes to decision-making.

Contrast a business enterprise with the way in which the local church is run. Historically, one is considered a worldly activity, the other spiritual. One is governed by rational planning and business acumen, the other too often demonstrates a lack of rational

planning, and entrepreneurial skills are not part of leadership requirements. One is governed by principles of business management, the other is noted for its lack of management. How many churches are governed by a business plan, that is a plan of activities for the next year? And we dare not ask how many have a five year activity plan!

While there is a growth in the number of people applying sound management principles to the church, there is so far very little evidence of its fruitfulness. One of the reasons for this failure lies within the ministry of the local church itself: too many pastors don't know the first thing about management, or what we might prefer to call leadership. Some pastors, for example, have gone from school or university straight into the ministry, with little or no practical experience in business management. Others, though they have worked at other jobs, have not usually worked their way up in the corporate hierarchy before they head off for the ministry. It is an underlying assumption of this essay that the management expertise of the business world is badly needed in the church.

#### Total Quality

No business enterprise is perfect. Those with a long term plan for the future are often committed to continuous improvement. Businesses are run by imperfect people who need to improve their skills and their commitment to those who pay their wages. Ultimately, that is the customer.

If the sacred-secular division is no longer valid, then neither are both methods of running human institutions. Either the church should adopt business management principles, or else business should abandon its approach to rational planning and adopt the church's current method of poor planning or no planning at all. If businesses were to do this, however, it would spell the death of most of them, just as it has spelt the death of many churches.

Herein lies the reason for the death of many churches. Without proper planning for ongoing growth and development, it is little wonder that so many churches are closing their doors. The emerging principles of church growth, however, are a sign that the church is slowly abandoning its former practices. Unfortunately, progress is slow.

Japan has amazed the world in its business growth and development. However, what is not so well known is the fact that this Japanese revolution

All the tricks of the bureaucrats are listed by Mr Figgie.

Once the situation arises, calculated by Mr Figgie to occur in 1995, that the American government can no longer meet its interest payments on debt, then the collapse of the American dollar is imminent. If it occurs as he describes it, many Americans will be hurt in the financial wash out as foreigners refuse to do business in American dollars. After all, someone has loaned all that money to the American government, and the only hope they have of paying their obligations is either to raise taxes or print additional money — the hidden tax of inflation. Either way, the American economy will enter a severe depression.

President Clinton has made no effort to change the course of events. Thus, it appears that Mr Figgie's predictions will eventuate. His timing may well be out; but what will happen when lenders to the American government don't get their interest cheques? Think of all the holders of government securities, many dependent in their retirement years on the full faith and credit of the U.S. Congress. They will be disappointed. And what about foreigners who have loaned money to the U.S. government? What happens when their interest payments, not to mention repayment of the principle amount, cannot be met? The last place any American would want to have his money invested is within America. And if the U.S. dollar is about to collapse, then it would be wise to have funds invested off-shore in foreign currencies.

## A Report to Remember

It is somewhat comforting, on the other hand, to read the Budget Statements for 1993-94 circulated by the Australian Federal Parliament. These form part of the budget statements. It is evident that the Labor Party and Federal Treasurer, Mr Dawkins, are having some problems with this year's budget. But at least our federal debt is not in the same league as that of the American Congress. Or, at least we hope it isn't.

You see, the problem in Australia is that no one knows just how good or bad our financial position really is. We have the word of the Auditor-General on this score. In a report on the Financial Obligations of the Federal Government entitled, *The National Bankcard: Who Will Pay the Piper?* the Auditor-General makes

2. Friesen, pp. 82-83, italics in original.

was essentially a reformation of management practices brought to Japan by some enterprising American businessmen. Among those, the name of W. Edwards Deming stands out, essentially because he is one of the leaders in the commitment to total quality management (TQM).

What is not so often recognised is that the principles of total quality are closely associated with ethical considerations. Contemplate a manufacturing company. Sales staff will usually have common complaints concerning the operation of the business: poor quality of goods, untimely delivery, or mistakes in orders. Each of these issues is centred around a moral principle, in this case, the Eighth and Ninth Commandments. If the firm delivers quality less than the buyer expects, there is a case of dishonesty over the description of the goods and, possibly, overcharging for the goods supplied. If there is untimely shipment, it is again promising one thing and delivering another, just as a wrong delivery is also a clear case of promising one thing yet delivering another. When these events take place, they are usually handled in terms of bad attitudes, poor controls, or simple errors. They are almost never seen, or explained, as matters of moral concern.

When a man and a woman stand at the marriage altar and promise faithfulness to one another until death parts them, they should be aware that they are making certain commitments of a moral nature. It is also a moral issue when a customer is promised goods at a particular time. "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matt. 5:37 NKJV). While it may not be the *intention* of a supplier to mislead his customer on delivery, it eventually betrays trust, destroys relationships, frustrates everyone, and creates dissatisfied customers. If the delivery is for goods in a manufacturing environment, then it can affect an even greater number of customers, and so on down the chain of economic activity.

We do not yet live in a perfect world, and every business must solve these and similar issues. But so, too, must the local church. How often does a local church fall into the trap of delivering a poor quality service, or an untimely service, or perhaps even delivers the wrong goods altogether? Then just like the manufacturing plant, it has a problem with its quality control program. Most probably it has no program, let alone one with inbuilt quality control procedures. Does the church have a commitment to its customers? In fact, does the church have custom-

ers? If so, who are they? Are its customers the members of the church or those outside the church? And if it does have customers, what is the service (or services) which it should bring to these customers, and when should they be delivered? Late delivery, quite often, can be equivalent to no delivery.

Until the institutional church determines who are its customers it will be difficult to reform the church. There can be no commitment to a continuous improvement program because there is no program to begin with. In short, the church appears to exist for itself alone. Little wonder that despite all the rhetoric in the churches, the number of people attending church in this country hasn't changed much in recent years. Australia is at a spiritual crossroads because the church is at a crossroads, and until the church determines its future direction the nation, by default, drifts further into paganism.

In this context, I'm suggesting that the failure of the institutional church in this country is a failure of church management or leadership. In other words, it's a failure of the elders and leaders of the church to provide *rational* planning and management for the growth and ongoing work of the local church. This failure is not necessarily culpable, since we must all learn and grow. But it is clearly evident that a revival in the church will come from a revival of church management. That revival must come from two sources: the laity, the church leaders, or perhaps both.

How often have church elders stepped forward with a plan for local growth and evangelism only to find that the congregation is little more than warmly enthused by the ideas? How often have local churches failed in their evangelistic task because there is no clear leadership in what must be done? How often have lay people been discouraged by elders who have no vision and plan for taking the glorious Gospel to those in the community? There is a problem here because there is no plan developed and agreed to by those involved in the decision making process.

A large portion of this problem revolves around *management* issues. There is no mechanism in the church for either the leaders or the laity to come together, to work together, to share a common vision and goal in their community. This does not happen by chance. It is the outcome of mutual planning and involvement.

There is a cartoon that goes around many offices which says, in essence, when you don't know what to do, hold a meeting. The cartoon is meant to be derogatory about meet-

this comment: "Funding decisions taken by the Government lack the benefit of the information that would normally be available in any well run company which manages the level and impact of its obligations on future cash flows, costs and investment decisions so as to protect its future viability and maximise its return to its shareholders" (p. ix). I apologise for any difficulty you might have in understanding that sentence, but it was written by a government employee. But in case you missed the point it's this: *the Government doesn't have the necessary information to make correct decisions about the future.*

In an expansion of this point, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report has this to say:

"The ANAO considers that the information currently provided is deficient to such an extent that the Parliament and the taxpayer is (sic) not in a position to assess the Government's management of its obligations and whether, in the management of programs, the Government has considered the impact on the level of obligations and the consequences to both existing and future taxpayers.

"As an example, the Parliament and the Australian taxpayers are not provided with comprehensive information to assess the future costs and implications of government policies. Budget papers provide projected expenditure levels, including the cost of servicing borrowings for four years ahead, however, no information is available to allow an assessment of the impact of government policies on Australia in five, ten or twenty years time. The true obligation in respect of these programs is not currently measured nor reported in government financial statements."

Well, there you have it. *No information is available to allow an assessment of the impact of government policies.* Knowing all this is bound to give you a great amount of confidence in the government of the day. Thus, when Treasurer Dawkins claimed that his 1993-94 budget would provide "jobs in the medium and longer term" we need to ask what is long term and what is medium term. If the ANAO report is correct, and there's been no denial from the Government since its release in May this year, then long term means four years. And that can only spell disaster for the Australian economy in the real longer term, the next 10-20 years.

Why this disaster in the Australian Federal Parliamentary ac-

ings. On the contrary, it tells us a plain truth: when you don't know what to do, get together with all those concerned and talk through the issue.

A meeting that has no agenda, no objective, no plan, is certain to be a waste of time. But this is not a problem of meetings *per se*. This is only a problem of those attending the meeting, or those running the meeting. Without a clear goal that is discussed and agreed up front as the *objective* of the meeting, the meeting will, in the long run, frustrate those who attend. Meetings, to be beneficial, must be action oriented. They are not ends in themselves; they must be made to serve a very valid purpose.

### A Plan for Action

One of my favourite book titles is *If You Don't Have a Plan, Stay in the Car*. It deals with sales and marketing management issues. As the title suggests, if the salesman has no plan of what it is he is trying to achieve when he goes to see a prospective client, he has little or no chance of making a sale. This should not surprise us, but it is surprising how many sales people forget this.

I can tell when it's quiet in the computer industry: I begin to get phone calls from computer salespersons wanting to do business. Yet I am constantly amazed at how many of these callers have no plan of action. They want my business. So I ask a single question: Give me a good reason why we should do business with you instead of our current supplier, and I'm greeted with immediate silence. The salesperson often hasn't thought of the question. Some have so they offer cheaper prices. My question then is: Why should I buy at your cheaper prices? Too easily, the sales people forget that price and value go together, and there is no advantage to buy at a cheaper price if the quality of service is lower at the same time. They forget, in other words, that people buy *value*, and value is not always to be obtained in the cheapest price.

If this lack of rational management and planning is the problem, then there are several steps to be taken in the local church. *First*, the pastor and elders or deacons must see themselves as the senior management team. The church leadership does not operate as a Board of Directors; they are the senior management team there to carry out the instructions issued by the Board of Directors. Since we have clear instructions given to us, then clearly the problem in the contemporary church is one of management, not one of direction. It has its instruction manual; it is simply failing

to implement an intelligent action plan, establishing achievable goals for all concerned. Our problem is not a lack of firm directions but rather a lack of firm proposals to implement those things we know we must do.

*Second*, the senior management team must learn to manage, not dictate. People do not perform their best when they are told what to do. One of the great secrets in life is how to get people to be their best in whatever they do. This is the challenge of the classroom teacher as well as the manager in a business firm. It is also the challenge to the local church and its leadership.

The biblical pattern for leadership is almost the exact opposite to what has been the accepted view. Read carefully this rather long sentence from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ; from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

The biblical model is thus not dictatorial but oversight. It does not require leaders to run the local church, for example. It rather requires the members of the local congregation be equipped in such a way that they become productive citizens for the Kingdom of God. This means that the focus, while it includes the local church, is far wider than this one area of life.

Control is often associated with the idea of leadership. In business managers want control in order to both manage and to be accountable. This, however, is a mistaken view of leadership. People do not need to be controlled, and most certainly not by those who think they have God's stamp of approval to control others, whether that is in the church, business, or any other activity. If one person must ask

counts? According to the Auditor-General, the information just isn't available to make a proper assessment of the impact of government policy. The ANAO report claims that "current accountability to the Parliament and the taxpayer is deficient, as:

- available data is (sic) not easily accessible and fails to highlight relevant benchmarks
- no federal agency has a responsibility to accumulate, monitor, manage or report on the total obligations of the Federal Government
- budget papers provide only a short term view on the impact of funding decisions, and
- practices adopted in the financial reporting of obligations, including superannuation, are significantly below the standards adopted in the private sector."

Just how bad will things have to get in this country before something is done about it? The report continues: "The Australian public is not provided with any comprehensive, readily digestible information on existing obligation levels nor the extent to which the costs of servicing these obligations are increasing over time. Information such as the fact that the cost of servicing central government borrowings is estimated to increase by 60% over the next four years (based on the assumption that nominal interest rates will remain at low levels), or that the superannuation outlays have virtually doubled over the past ten years is critical to the taxpayer in assessing current and future policy options."

By the year 2,000 it seems we will have three things in Australia:

1. A republic based on atheism with centralised government in Canberra;
2. The Olympic games in Sydney, and
3. A Federal Government that will no longer be able to service its own debt levels. Whereas the U.S. government will reach this point within a couple of years, *maybe* the Australian government has a little longer before it reaches flash point. That means, the Australian taxpayers have a better chance of getting out of the problem — if they act now!

Our very great problem, of course, is that we don't know how bad the problem really is. The Auditor-General's report indicates that no one knows the extent of the problem. Thus the budget papers put out by the government would appear to be unreliable.

Little wonder that just prior to the election the Government was selling investment certificates with a 13% cou-

another's permission in order to do something he thinks should be done, there is a wrong relationship already established. This idea of control has been deadly in the local church. People can't do anything without getting "management" involved, and "management" nearly always becomes a hindrance, a stumbling block to getting things done.

Control can also be seen in the processes of accountability. To whom is the pastor accountable? To whom are the elders or deacons accountable? If they are not accountable to the people *below* them in the hierarchy, then you have a top-down bureaucratic model. This pattern is not endorsed in the Scriptures at all. One has only to read the letters of the Apostle Paul to see how he held himself accountable to those to whom he ministered. While he knew it was his duty to teach them, to encourage them, to build them up in the faith, he never once assumed it necessary to take control in the manner in which the contemporary church is controlled by its leadership.

*Third*, the church needs to have a mission statement. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov 29:18a). This vision needs to be externalised into a specific statement. It must be given form and content. What is the vision of the local church? What do the members wish to achieve? How will they achieve it? What do they need in resources in order to have their vision become reality?

Now a mission statement should not be mistaken for a statement of faith. That is something else again. A mission statement in a business defines the goal of the business in relationship to all the stakeholders (or constituencies) in the organisation. Stakeholders in a business include the shareholders, the staff, and the customers. It is the customer who, too often, is the neglected stakeholder in the business. Too many people think the business is there to serve the needs of the proprietor, but this is an incorrect view of business; it is there for one purpose, to serve its customers.

Thus, the local church must think through its "mission" statement. It must determine who are its stakeholders. These will clearly be the members of the church, but it must also include "the customers" of the church as well. This will help the congregation understand that it is their most noble calling to serve others in whatever way they can.

*Fourth*, the local church needs to undertake a regular SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

analysis. It is from these analyses that the local church will understand and develop its abilities and be able to target its activities towards the "customers" it can serve best. For example, some church members have very good contacts with the poor and needy in the community. That church therefore has the opportunity to use its diaconate fund as a means of outreach. Some churches, on the other hand, find they are in a community where poverty is not a great issue. They will need to find other opportunities as a means of reaching out into the community. Others will have folk who are gifted at ministering to the sick in local hospitals, or even providing services to the elderly and infirm who are unable to look after themselves. The ladies in one church, for example, do the shopping for the elderly in a local old people's home.

What we are trying to do here is identify people's gifts and abilities and harness those for the extension of God's kingdom. How many church leaders have stepped forth with a bold evangelistic plan, only to find that the congregation does not follow? This is because too often it is the leader's idea of what he wants people to do. Some people, though, just can't go door to door making contacts as some can. But just maybe they can make contact some other way with people in the local community. One minister I know, for example, has asked a local funeral parlour to provide him with opportunities to meet people in these special times of need. There are more opportunities available than we can cope with; what we need is the wisdom to find them and utilise them, since they are God's providential circumstances in which He has placed us to work for Him.

If we are not careful, it is easy to begin to blame God for the failure of our church growth. Some churches have opportunity to offer English classes to migrants, or a day care centre for working mothers. Through these activities they meet new people and win them to the faith. Christians in other areas don't have these same opportunities. Some say their pastor is not a church builder. In short, they have ready-made excuses for their failure. These excuses need to be stripped away. God has Providentially placed us where we are. To be sure, sometimes, like Lot, we need to move away from where we are. But we are called to be faithful in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

*Fifth*, just as a small business cannot provide goods and services to all potential customers, neither can the local church service the total commu-

pon rate. Why, you might ask, would the government be selling securities with an interest rate about double the current market rate, and in some cases almost triple the rate on recent government offerings? The only answer I can think of is that they are using this as a means to raise extra cash. In short, the Government is desperate for cash, and their scheme works like this. A Government bond that is sold at around the prevailing market rate sells for approximately its face value. Thus a \$100,000 10-year bond would cost about \$100,000 to buy. This price for the bond fluctuates with the move in interest rates so that the effective yield from a bond is always around the average current market rate of return. By putting a 13% rate on the bonds when interest rates are around 7%, the "price" of the bond increases, so that the effective yield returns to the current market rate. Thus, in the current market, a 13% bond was selling for around \$120,000-\$125,000. By such a mechanism, the government gets an "extra" \$20,000-\$25,000 from the sale of each bond certificate. Offer a couple of billion dollars of bonds, and the additional revenue from sales is quite significant.

It is important to remember that this extra cash will never have to be repaid all at once. The government has, however, significantly increased its annual obligations to pay the higher interest cheque on the bond. But now what about the repayment of the principle amount in ten years' time? Not to worry, we already know that no consideration is being given this far ahead as far as the national debt is concerned, and these bonds make up part of the government debt.

Thus it is easy to see that Australia is in not much better shape than the United States on this score. We may be in worse shape. Who knows? Even worse, who cares? Certainly very few people in Australia. Bread and circuses are more important; or, to use modern jargon, the dole and the olympic games are all that people care about. Fifty thousand people lined Sydney streets in one place alone to await the news of the olympic bid. You could not get 50 people out on the federal debt issue. While they have food in their bellies and entertainment that is offered as a means to help the economy, the people will continue to be misled.

Things, therefore, do not look well for Australia. The underlying economic problems point to a larger moral problem. There is little hope for this country while the moral is-

nity, especially while it is a small congregation. Thus, the local church needs to establish who will be its "customers."<sup>3</sup> Like any business, expect this "target group" to change over time.

Sixth, both the leadership and the people need something by which to measure their success. First and foremost in this will be their commitment to Scripture and whether they believe they have been faithful in their application of biblical principles. Secondly, however, it will also mean a *business plan* that sets forth the goals and activities of the church over the next few weeks, months, or years. At the end of the stated period, the people can sit down and measure their accomplishments against their goal, thereby measuring how well they have done during the period. This evaluation should be ongoing during the life of the business plan as well as at its end, when a new plan should be forthcoming. In fact, since life is not perfect, the business plan is open for change at any time. But there must always be a plan of some kind if there is to be any direction in the church's activities.

The business plan, together with the mission statement, must be "owned" by all the members of the congregation. It should be developed in consultation with the members, each having a chance to contribute. At the end of the development process, what should be achieved is a *unanimous* acceptance of the business plan from existing members.<sup>4</sup> Since the plan contains only those things that members have volunteered to undertake, the achievement of unanimous acceptance should not be an overly difficult task.

### What Else?

The ideas outlined above represent a minimum list of items a church will need to properly evaluate its role and place in the local community. I am not suggesting here that these activities should totally replace current ones. Obviously, the local church also has ongoing ministry to build up the faith and the knowledge of the members. The local members are the church's present customers. Just as a business needs to service its customers on an ongoing basis, so must the local church look after its members in

a variety of ways. But the membership also is commanded by God Almighty to be involved in the extension of His kingdom, and it is this task that the modern church is not doing so well.

The above reasons are not the only reasons for the failure of the contemporary church in modern evangelism, but they are certainly an important aspect of that failure. Peter Gillquist, in his provocative book *Why We Haven't Changed the World*, offers an additional challenge. He says, "Our evangelistic enterprises in the late twentieth-century Church are not producing the change we all confidently predicted and expected. Yet that change *must* take place, if the world in which we live is to be significantly touched by Christ. Our evangelism has brought many decisions and some true conversions, but it has not even begun to slow the world down on its godless rush to inevitable self-destruction."<sup>5</sup>

What, then, is the problem? According to Mr Gillquist it is the lack of holiness and righteousness which is at the centre of the church's inability to make a major impact on the world today. Holiness in this context does not mean joining a monastery, which is what too many protestant churches have become. Rather, we are to be the salt and the light of the world by *applying* God's Ten Commandments in daily living.

One cannot read the history of the medieval period without being fascinated by the influence that Christianity had on the cultures of northern Europe. Missionaries brought change to the peoples of that region as whole villages and wider groups converted to Christianity. Today, most Christians cannot influence the behaviour of their neighbour next door, let alone change their town or suburb. With great enthusiasm but little success, others are trying to win the nation to Christ before they win their neighbour. This appears to contradict the biblical pattern, seeking a top-down transformation of society rather than a bottom-up change. While it is necessary to recognise the tremendous influence leaders could have for good and the cause of Christ, it is also necessary to remember that the involvement at the political level is often an excuse to get out of the difficulty of intimate relationships neces-

sary at the local level in order for evangelism to succeed.

sues are buried. It requires the Christian community to make the financial issue a moral concern, and they can't achieve this at the moment because of the confusion they have about the Bible and its injunctions against the use of debt.

Those without debt, who have cash and "hard" currency (i.e. real money such as gold and silver) at their disposal are the ones who will weather the storm best. The economic time bomb is ticking away. It is time God's people studied their Bible for wisdom, put their faith into practice, and prepared to come out of the financial debacle stronger in faith, more confident in their trust in God, and ready to build a better civilisation on the ruins of atheistic humanism. This is one obligation we cannot escape.

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### Conclusion

In Australia at the moment the Christian church is on the decline. While some in the pentecostal or charismatic groups claim enormous growth, that appears to be at the expense of the traditional churches. People are leaving the traditional church looking for a faith with more meaning and significance. While it is easy to pass this phenomenon off as a part of sinful man's seeking an easy religion, it should also be considered as possibly the response that should be expected from churches that do not teach the faith once delivered to the saints, or who fail to equip the people for godly living. They make Jesus Christ appear nothing more than a cosmic Santa Claus, to be brought out at Christmas time in the hope that He might give a present or two without making any demands for the rest of the year.

Reform will start among the people of God. We can sit on our pews holding endless prayer meetings waiting for the Holy Spirit to move us out into battle, or, like David, we can say, "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26) — then get to work trusting and praying that, with God on our side, victory is certain.

3. I should emphasize here that I do not consider there is a one-for-one similarity between a church and a business. But there are certain affinities which need to be explored. Thus, when I use the word *customer* to describe who the local church might begin evangelising, I'm not necessarily viewing the relationship between the church and its potential "customer" exactly the same as I would a business and its customers.

4. John Stott, *One People* (London: Falcon Books, 1969), especially pp. 30-36.

5. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1982, p. 17.