

GCI Today

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA
AUTUMN 2015

Celebrating
THE RESURRECTION

New eyes,
new discovery

Review
**Religion
for Atheists**

Postcard
**From the
Caribbean**

Refreshing

WELCOME



John McLean

RE-vision

A NEW YEAR IS upon us. A chance for refreshing our plans and our priorities, for re-examining our vision. For revisioning, if you like. Vision. We demand it of our politicians. And are often disappointed. Vision is increasingly in demand in all sorts of walks of life – business, sporting administration, not-for-profits, churches.

Usually what is meant by vision is foretelling the future. And this isn't surprising really, because the world we live in is changing at such a dramatically fast rate. Wouldn't it be nice if we could see into the future and know what was going to happen? If only. Some have tried this route with predictive prophecy – supposedly predicting specific events from obscure passages of Scripture open

Vision consists of at

least the dimensions of

foresight, hindsight and

insight

to multiple interpretations (in spite of the fact that these predictions have historically failed and proven demonstrably inaccurate).

Unfortunately one result of this demand for visionary leaders is a lot of burned out politicians, business leaders, and church leaders. And a lot of disenchanted people. More

than that, it has resulted in many who are afraid to "try", since they clearly don't see themselves as this kind of "visionary". Yes, some people seem more naturally inclined at looking forward, spotting trends, and thinking in terms of the future than others. But "vision" is much more subtle, layered, interesting and complex than this.

Vision consists of at least the dimensions of foresight, hindsight, and insight. Although the term is usually applied to the first of these, the other two deserve attention. In fact without the last of these, the first two are at best severely limited.

From a Christian perspective, the most important "insight" is about God. Who is this God revealed in Jesus Christ? What is his nature? How does he live? What is his desire and purpose? Key to this is the divine reality that God has indeed revealed himself to us in Jesus. In Jesus, we see the Father. In Jesus we see what the love of God is. This is without doubt the most important "vision" of all. The vision of God is central to any other discussion about vision. We see in hindsight and foresight, but we see best through the insight of seeing God. Or, in the words of the very ancient hymn, "Be Thou Our Vision". This informs all our hindsight and foresight.

This vision of God is always refreshing, re-energising, and revitalising. The starting point for all our plans and actions, for all our hopes and dreams, is our vision of God.

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Every life needs physical, mental and spiritual refreshing – and every life can be a gift of refreshing ...

"FEELING TIRED? STRESSED? Out of energy? Try Product X ..." We all have and we've all seen and heard advertisements extolling the virtues of drinks, tablets, supplements, wonder foods, exercise programs, and holidays that suggest they can refresh and restore weary bodies, minds and spirits.

Feeling refreshed is one of life's apparently simple pleasures. Waking up after a good night's sleep, enjoying a relaxing holiday, breathing in fresh air, or enjoying the flood of endorphins following exercise are all examples of refreshing experiences.

Because our bodies, our minds, and our spirits naturally get tired, fatigued and even distressed, we need regular refreshing to maintain good physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health.

Physical refreshing

Even the healthiest and most energetic of us wear down and tire. Every day, in fact. Our bodies need adequate sleep, exercise and healthy food to sustain our daily activities. Sometimes unusual levels of physical tiredness are helpful indicators of our need to adjust our sleep, exercise or diet.

There are also things we can do during the day to refresh ourselves physically. For example, if you spend a lot of time sitting it can be refreshing to stand up, stretch and go for a walk. Many people know the

refreshing effects of a power nap (aka the nanna nap), and taking up to a 20-minute nap at around 2pm has been demonstrated to increase alertness, boost productivity and improve mood. And if you work inside, taking a fresh air break – especially if you can find some trees, water or sunshine – will not only restore your powers of concentration, but also boost your immune system.

Drinking plenty of water is also a simple and effective way of physically (and mentally) refreshing during the day. Lack of water is possibly one of the most overlooked causes of fatigue and most ready means of refreshing. Our bodies typically lose about two- to three litres of water a day because we cannot store water, so we need fresh supplies of it every day to: sup-



**“Refresh” means to
revive or reinvigorate, as
with rest, food, or drink;
to renew by stimulation;
to fill up, replenish; to
enliven or freshen up**

port the health of our cells, maintain our bloodstream, regulate body temperature, aid digestion, and moisturise the skin and sustain the health of mucous membranes in the mouth and lungs.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the Scriptures talk about “living water”. In Jeremiah, God is referred to as “the spring of living water” (2:13; 17:13), while the Gospel of John records Jesus saying “whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (7:37) and “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were late to receive” (7:37-39).

Sometimes our need for physical refreshing requires longer and more significant changes such as a day off, a holiday, or a deliberate change in exercise or diet habits.

Mental refreshing

In his book *Brain Rules*, molecular biologist John Medina explains that our brains are built to deal with stress that lasts about 30 seconds. “The brain is not designed for long-term stress when you feel like you have no control,” he says. Given that our lives present us with many potential sources of long-term stress, it’s understandable that our mental resources become so easily depleted.

Whether it’s stress, prolonged concentration or boredom, mental fatigue can be

as exhausting as its physical counterpart. Which reminds us of the need for mental refreshing as part of maintaining a healthy life.

There are various forms of mental refreshment we can use. Meditation and deep, slow breathing have both been shown to help reduce stress and restore a sense of calm and clarity. (And many of us have noticed how our mental capacity reduces under stress as our bodies tense and our breathing gets shallow.)

Physical exercise is also excellent for boosting brain power. “Exercise increases oxygen flow into the brain ... an increase in oxygen is always accompanied by an uptick in mental sharpness,” says John Medina in *Brain Rules*. “Exercise also acts directly on the molecular machinery of the brain itself. It increases neurons’ creation, survival, and resistance to danger and stress.”

Mental refreshing is also about staying fresh, rather than allowing our minds to become stale and stagnant. And the good news of recent years is that cognitive decline is not inevitable. Due to something called neuroplasticity, we now know that the brain remains capable of learning in later life – if we are prepared to present it with the stimulation required. This means engaging in some form of continuing, lifelong learning.

Part of this process of mental stimulation seems to require variety (reflecting one of John Medina’s brain rules “the brain doesn’t

pay attention to boring things”). So just doing crossword puzzles or reading probably won’t do it. A range of mentally stimulating activities is good for mental refreshment. So you might include things like watching (or participating in) debates, playing mental games, learning a musical instrument, or learning a different language. But there are many other simple everyday things we can do to keep ourselves mentally flexible, including breaking routines and doing things differently (taking a different route, shopping at different stores, even using your non-preferred hand to brush teeth or dial a phone number).

One of the most stimulating and refreshing things we can do mentally is to expose ourselves to a new environment, a new idea, a new experience or a new perspective. While the newness of such things can challenge us and cause some discomfort, it’s that challenge that actually stimulates us mentally. And the more accustomed we are to such experiences the more flexible our mental processes become.

So, mental refreshing can mean taking a break to switch off briefly or stepping up our mental activity to learn something new.

Spiritual refreshing

Refreshing the spirit can mean different things to different people, but perhaps the common element is the sense of purpose and meaning we experience in our lives.

Spiritual fatigue is inevitable given life’s unavoidable challenges and disappointments. Lives dedicated to doing good are rich, rewarding and satisfying – but can also encounter frustration, exhaustion, doubt and burnout. Lives that regularly focus on divine, are nevertheless experienced in the physical. Lives filled with hope still experience disappointment.

Such experiences are not signals of failure or weakness but reminders that even though our hearts may be guided by the spirit, our bodies are still physical and our minds can naturally become fixated and frustrated on what we are unable to achieve or understand. Spiritually rich lives are not lived in a separate domain, but in the often mundane everyday realities of the temporal.

Refreshing the spirit is a personal experience – and one that may take different forms at different stages of life. For some, experiencing the energy of community will renew and reinvigorate; for others experiencing the peace of solitude may be what’s needed.

Some find refreshing in the words of Scripture, perhaps drawing comfort and renewal from Jesus’ words: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:38-39).

Refreshing can also be found in music, prayer, meditation, stimulating discussion, and in acts of service.

Taking time for gratitude, appreciation and thankfulness is perhaps one of the simplest ways to refresh the spirit because it reminds us of the good we are surrounded by despite any apparent failings, limitations or setbacks. Life is not perfect and will not be, but that does not take away the many things for which we can give thanks. This includes appreciating and acknowledging what is going well.

Being refreshing ...

Physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually, we have probably all experienced the powerful refreshing experience of another person. It may have been their words, their example, their talents, their manner, their perspectives, or just their presence.

There’s no doubting that often the refreshing we experience in our lives comes through other people. Which naturally invites us to, firstly, appreciate the people who bring this gift into our lives, and, secondly, to consider ourselves as sources of refreshing to those around us. In our everyday words and deeds, and even in the simplicity of our presence, we have the opportunity to bring physical,

mental, emotional and spiritual refreshing to those with whom we share our lives – at home, at work, at school, in community.

Our ideas, our perspectives, our words, our manner all offer daily opportunities to be “a breath of fresh air” to someone who may be fatigued. And perhaps there is no greater joy than having someone say of our presence in their life, “how refreshing!”



THE REFRESHING POWER OF NATURE

In a 2013 article in *The Atlantic*, Adam Alter wrote about “How nature resets our minds and bodies”.

“What is it that sets natural environments apart from others? Why shouldn’t a quiet streetscape have the same effect as a quiet natural landscape, for example? Architecture has its own beauty, and some people prefer urban environments to natural environments, so why does nature alone seem to have such powerful restorative effects? The answer is that natural environments have a unique constellation of features that sets them apart from man-made locations ... Nature restores mental functioning in the same way that food and water restore bodies. The business of everyday life -- dodging traffic, making decisions and judgment calls, interacting with strangers -- is depleting, and what man-made environments take away from us, nature gives back. There’s something mystical and, you might say, unscientific about this claim, but its heart actually rests in what psychologists call attention restoration theory, or ART. According to ART, urban environments are draining because they force us to direct our attention to specific tasks (e.g., avoiding the onslaught of traffic) and grab our attention dynamically, compelling us to ‘look here!’ before telling us to instead ‘look over there!’ These demands are draining – and they’re also absent in natural environments. Forests, streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans demand very little from us, though they’re still engaging, ever changing, and attention-grabbing. The difference between natural and urban landscapes is how they command our attention. While man-made landscapes bombard us with stimulation, their natural counterparts give us the chance to think as much or as little as we’d like, and the opportunity to replenish exhausted mental resources.”



Celebrating the Resurrection!

PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES/ RICARDO REITMEYER

by John Mclean

Resurrection and relationship

THE DOORS WERE tightly locked shut. Inside the room that Sunday evening, the occupants shifted nervously in their chairs or paced the floor. Nerves were frayed. Emotions were stretched to breaking point.

The despair had been hard to bear. All their hopes and dreams had been cruelly shattered. Not just an intellectual argument lost, or a Scriptural interpretation defeated, but a brutal, sickening death by execution had ended it all. What they had come to believe in – *who* they had come to believe in – was gone.

The One they had hoped was the Messiah was dead and buried. The One who they had looked for to save Israel from their sins was no more. More, their close, much-loved friend had been horribly maimed and killed. Death – the ultimate, tragic, final end.

Memories

They remembered with startling clarity their last night and final meal together. He had washed their feet! The job of the most menial servant. He had specifically told them “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”. He had said, “Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 20:19-20). What did that mean? He had left them. He promised to send them the Comforter (verse 16). Well, they were in sore need of comfort.

And he had promised them peace. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you” (verse 27). Right now, that seemed a very long way from their experience. Had it all been a mistake? Had he let them down? Where were those promises right now?

He told them over and over that night to love one another. He said it was a new command, to love one another as he had loved them. They weren't feeling the love.

Further, he told them that as the Father loved him, so he had loved them. Wow, that was a whole lot of love – love beyond measure – to be talking about. He told them to abide, remain, or make their home in this love (15:9). His prayer was that they would be “one”, as he and the Father were “one” (16:11) – whatever that meant. Well, they were one in grief, sadness and loss, but apart from that it all didn't make much sense.

Threat and confusion

And then they had realised their own safety and survival was under threat. Anxiety and worry blossomed into heart-pumping stress as they thought of all the powerful forces that had come together to destroy Jesus. The High Priest, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who had been set on killing Jesus. Would they be next? Why would they be left free to wander around now that their leader had been killed?

And if that wasn't enough, now there was an element of confusion entering their group. Mary had ran crying to Peter and John that Sunday morning and told them they had taken Jesus' body out of the tomb, “and we don't know where they have put him!” she exclaimed (John 20:2). Mary, Joanna, and the other women who had gone to the tomb had then told all of the apostles. “But they did not believe to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11).

Nevertheless John and Peter had run to the tomb to find out what was going on. John got there first, looked in, saw the linen and the empty tomb. Peter ran up and went straight inside. John followed him in. Peter bent over and peered intently at the strips of linen, then went back “wondering to himself” (Luke 24:12). Something stirred deep in John. He went quiet. And “believed” (John 20:8). Yet as a group, they did not understand or comprehend. “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead” (verse 9).

As they were thinking through all these things, their heads about to burst with contradictory thoughts and emotions, Mary came back to the assembled disciples and announced that she had actually seen Jesus – the risen Lord. What were they to make of this?

Relationship and Mission

Still in a state of fear that Sunday evening, suddenly Jesus appeared in their midst. It was true. He was alive, risen, resurrected. He stood among them, and his first words to them were “**Peace** be with you!” (verse 19). Here was that peace he had promised. Not just the absence of trials, suffering and difficulties. But peace in the midst of whatever life throws at us. Not just peace in a worldly sense, but “my peace”, as he had promised them. We actually share in the peace of Jesus himself. Not our worked-up peace, but his generously given

and shared peace.

Because Jesus isn't just a dead Saviour. He is a living one. He hasn't just done his work, the work of Atonement and the work of the High Priest (the whole book of Hebrews), but he has an ongoing, continuing ministry. A ministry to us, and one in which we are invited to participate. Jesus ascended back to the Father, sharing the glory they have had since before time, and continues his ministry and mission through the Spirit.

A second time he said to them “Peace be with you!” and then he said “**As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you**” (verse 21). He sends us to be a part of his mission from the Father, of love and service to all mankind. Of “loving one another as I have loved you”. Of humbly, graciously and faithfully being Christ to all we meet, to those in our circle of friendship and acquaintance. Caring for the lost, lonely, hurting and marginalised. Helping the broken and needy. Sharing practical help, hope and encouragement as we spread the love and life of God. As we participate in Christ's peace, we participate in his mission. (We don't have to panic and stress about our sending – we rest in Christ and his peace and ministry.)

And then Jesus says a third thing to the assembled disciples that night. He breathed on them and said “**Receive the Holy Spirit**” (or, in a direct play on words, “Receive the Holy Breath”) (verse 22).

This peace, this love, this sending, this mission is in and through the Holy Spirit, the promised Comforter who would be with us and in us. This is how we are one, as the Father, Son and Spirit are one. Through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension back to the Father, Jesus continues the Father's mission on earth – in us, and through us.

By Jesus, through the Spirit, we are made sons of the Father, adopted as much loved children. We are included in that circle of life and love that is our Triune God. Paul could say “we are raised with Christ” (Colossians 3:1). He could even say “God has raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus”, to show the richness of his grace and kindness (Ephesians 2:6). This is the new life of the new covenant, resurrected life, shared life with Jesus. Life in relationship with the Triune God and one another.

Peace. Spirit. Sending. Participation. Relationship – for ever. This is why we joyously celebrate the resurrection of Jesus this Easter time. ☺



GCI CHURCHES AND WORK IN The Caribbean

Charles Fleming is the Missions Director for the Caribbean region. Within the region, the desire is to see each congregation become missional – joining other GCI congregations as well as Christians from other denominations in sharing the love of God with those around them. Here are three values that shape who we seek to become.



1 Mission is personal service. Experiencing God's patient yet insistent determination to set our denomination free from self-imposed legalism has left us with a desire to patiently, but persistently serve others with the hope that they too will come to know the life-changing love of God. We wish to partner with those who understand that mission involves entering into personal relationships with the people we serve.

2 Mission is part of life's daily rhythm. Recognizing that Christ's life was a life on mission, we wish to make mission a natural part of the rhythm of our lives – individually and as congregations. We wish to partner with others for whom a mission is a sustainable part of their own life-rhythm.

3 Mission is joint-effort. Having experienced the way the diverse gifts of the Spirit come together in the Body of Christ to express God's love, we welcome opportunities to do ministry with committed Christians of different denominations.

We have 23 congregations in 15 of the 27 nations that make up the region.

In **Trinidad** our campus has become a service centre to the larger body of Christ. Dozens of Christian groups – from a wide range of denominations – along with para-Church agencies – rent the facilities for seminars, retreats and celebratory activities. The campus is one of the official training centers for Evangelism Explosion and for Kids' EE. It is also the base for the United Methodists 'Walk to Emmaus,' a retreat weekend committed to strengthening the discipleship process of local churches. It is also a site for training persons involved in Prison Ministries. There is a major effort to serve economically challenged families in a nearby community, addressing family needs and providing educational opportunities.

In the **Bahamas** a summer school program started in the summer of 2004 as a tutorial program that catered to church youth and the children of the local community. The program runs from

Monday to Friday from 9am to 1pm and including teaching the children about our Awesome God. The children are given a meal at the end of a busy day filled with games, crafts and different activities, along with messages of the gospel. About 130 children took part in the program last year. ☺

NEW CONTENTS

International Postcard is one of several new features we are including this year in *GCI Today*. The others are our *Review* feature on pages 8 and 9 which will review books, film, television and other resources; and *What's On*, appearing on page 12, which will highlight GCI events.

PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES/INGRAM PUBLISHING

Easter in the Church

The death and resurrection of Jesus have been the central events of the church's faith confession since it was founded (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). It's not surprising that the Lord's crucifixion and rising to life should become the focal points of communal Christian worship and remembrance.

THERE IS EVIDENCE that the apostolic church celebrated Jesus' Sunday morning resurrection in its worship gatherings on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). The Lord's death was remembered in the bread and wine communion that was probably part of Christian fellowship meals (Luke 22:19-20).

The "Easter" festival begins

At some point in the first two centuries, it became customary in the church to have a yearly celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection called "Pascha." It is the same word used for "Passover" in the Greek version of the Scriptures. Our Easter' season has grown out of the old Pascha celebration. In time, the Pascha became observed throughout the church.

The early church saw the direct symbolic continuity between the slaughtered lamb of the Passover and the crucified Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. When Paul speaks of Christ as "our Passover Lamb" (Greek, pascha) in 1 Corinthians 5:7, he is affirming that the God who acted mightily in ancient Israel's release from Egyptian bondage, typified by the Passover, is the same God who has acted in Christ to free us eternally from all spiritual prisons of sin and death.

Originally, the great Paschal celebration of the church was a unified commemoration of the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord. Only later were the events divided into separate commemorations, with the ascension observance being moved to the 40th day of the Easter season.

Gradually, in the early centuries of the church, with an increasing emphasis on Holy Week and Good Friday, Pascha took on its distinctive character as the Christian celebration of the resurrection. Good Friday commemorated Jesus' crucifixion and death. The feast

of the resurrection, which completed the whole work of redemption, became gradually the most prominent part of the Christian Pascha, and identical with our Easter Sunday.

Since as early as the 4th century, Resurrection Sunday or what we call "Easter Sunday" in the English language has been the center of the Christian liturgical year and calendar.

"Easter is a time when we can reflect on and contemplate the meaning of the wondrous events of our salvation."

When to observe Easter?

Before AD 325, Christian communities in different regions celebrated Easter on a variety of dates and on different days of the week, and not always on Sunday. However, the Christian Council of Nicea of that year issued the "Easter Rule."

Nicea decided, quite naturally, that the resurrection of Jesus should be celebrated by all churches throughout the world on the same Sunday.

The council standardized the Easter observance date so that Easter is the first Sunday following what is called the Paschal Full Moon (pronounced "pas-kul") for the year. Astronomically, it's too complicated to explain here. Suffice it to say that this means the date of Easter Sunday can range between March 22 and April 25, depending on the lunar cycle. In 2006, Easter fell on Sunday, April 16.

The Eastern Orthodox churches use the same calculation, but base their Easter date on the old Julian calendar and use different Paschal Full Moon tables. The situation is that the Orthodox Easter Sunday in most years follows the Western Easter by one or more weeks.

Discussions began in the last century in hopes of forging a possible worldwide agreement on a consistent date for Easter. Various proposals have been put forth by churches, Christian organiza-

Easter is a time when we can reflect on and contemplate the meaning of the wondrous events of our salvation

tions and clergy of various denominations. One idea is to disregard the moon altogether in determining the date of Easter. None of the proposals have been adopted by any church up to now.

Whatever change in the Easter date occurs in the future, it won't affect our worship. Christians do not worship days or "holy time." They use such days and seasons as opportunities to worship Christ. Easter is a time when we can reflect on and contemplate the meaning of the wondrous events of our common salvation — a pure gift of God in Christ.

May you have an inspiring and blessed Easter worship season each year. ☺

Footnote

1 Some claim the word "Easter" is "pagan" because it may have once been associated with ancient heathen gods. However, Christian churches were celebrating the resurrection of Jesus in spring long before the English word "Easter" was adopted by English-speaking Christians. The objection against "Easter" is irrelevant in other nations because a different word is used for the Christian spring festival. In most other languages of the world, the name for the festival is derived from Pesach or Pesah, the Hebrew name of the Jewish Passover. The holiday is called in French Paques, Italian Pasqua, Spanish Pascua, Scottish Pask, Dutch Paasch or Pashen, Danish Paaske, and Swedish Pask, to name a few.



Eddie Marsan stars as John May in *Still Life*

Still Life

Still Life is a movie about the life of an apparently very ordinary man who makes an extraordinary contribution to the lives of people who are strangers. John May (**Eddie Marsan**) is a council worker whose job it is to find the next of kin of deceased people in the council area. John is a solitary individual, a little strange in some ways, but someone who takes pride in his work and has a special devotion to treating people with dignity. A key part of his work is to identify any surviving family of deceased people who have died alone. His job naturally brings him into contact with a rich assortment of people, not all of whom share his concern for the departed. John is sometimes the sole attendee at the funeral of a person he never knew.

After 22 years, John's department is restructured – the work he does apparently an unnecessary luxury in the modern world of government service, and he is faced with redundancy. But he is allowed to close his last case – a neighbour called Billy Stoke. It is in this final case that he comes to life in new ways.

Still Life is a small, quiet, gentle, and beautiful story. Its apparently mundane pace is perfectly in time with John's life and approach. Among its themes are loneliness, connection, loss, and

the disconnection and callousness of much of modern urban life. But the story takes hold of the viewer in a powerful way and it will take you on a journey that is entertaining, poignant and affirming as you share John's commitment, his awakening and as you become aware of the powerful impact of his apparently mundane and simple work, made so by his humility, care and respect for others.

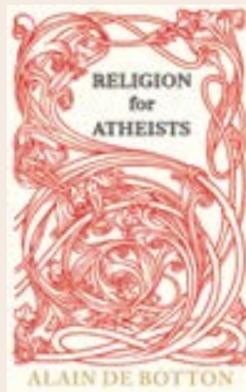
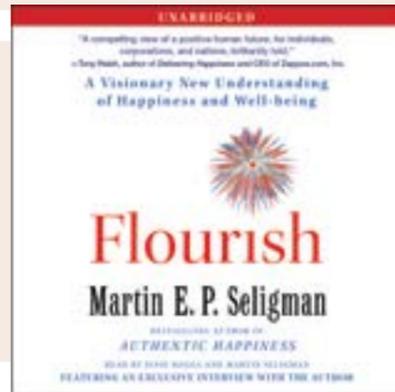
Still Life (2013). Directed by Uberto Pasolini

Flourish

For many years, **Martin Seligman** has been teaching people around the world about positive psychology. In *Flourish*, the author of *Learned Optimism*, *The Optimistic Child*, and *Authentic Happiness* updates his earlier work and looks at how the principles of positive psychology can and are being applied in a wide range of settings to improve well-being, develop resilience, improve physical health, and even improve economic performance.

Seligman explains his PERMA model of wellbeing: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment. Together, he says, these enable us to "flourish" individually and collectively.

He describes a number of tools that can be used – exercises in positive psychology



that encourage authentic happiness and flourishing. These include "the gratitude visit", the "what went well" / "three blessings" exercise, and the signature strengths inventory.

In addition, *Flourish* describes various settings in which the principles of positive psychology and resilience have been taught, practised and evaluated. These include schools (including Geelong Grammar School) and the US Army (including working with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in soldiers).

While *Flourish* is not necessarily an easy read, it does provide a rich insight into the field of wellbeing as well as discussion of some of the practical tools and applications of positive psychology. A great resource for teachers, mentors and those in the caring professions.

Flourish (2011), by Martin Seligman. Published by William Heinemann, Australia

Religion for Atheists

"We are most of us lambs in need of a good shepherd and a merciful flock", writes **Alain de Botton**. De Botton is a philosopher, educator and prolific author. In his book *Religion for Atheists* he sets out what the secular, non-believing world can learn from religion – in particular, what the secular world is missing out on. At a time when the self-proclaimed "Angry Athe-

ists" have received so much publicity, here is a non-militant, thought-provoking book full of insights and wisdom for everyone, believer and non-believer alike.

The book provides a perceptive analysis of the problems, challenges and needs of contemporary society. With gentle good humour and an intellectual vigour, de Botton, explores issues such as the loss of community, loneliness, identity, the problem of suffering, kindness, finding lasting love, beauty, education, art and many others. For all of these matters de Botton, a non-believer himself, argues that religion has much to offer, and much our post-Christian society can learn from.

The book should come with a warning – the author acknowledges that it will upset fundamentalists of all kinds, both religious and non-religious.

De Botton even goes as far as recommending "secular church" for non-believers – a group meeting together, singing together, listening to a reading and an uplifting address, discussing the meaning of life and service to others, how to live a life well, and gathering around for coffee, sandwiches and sticky buns afterwards. Sounds familiar?

Religion, he says, has made significant contributions to our national institutions and mainstream politics, but



religion's "contribution to the problems of community are arguably never greater than when they depart from the modern political script and remind us that there is also value to be had in standing in a hall together with a hundred acquaintances and singing a hymn together or in ceremoniously washing a stranger's feet or in sitting at a table with

neighbours and partaking of lamb stew and conversation, the kinds of ritual which, as much as the deliberations inside parliaments and law courts, are what helps to hold our factious and fragile societies together". Amen.

Religion for Atheists, by Alain de Botton, 2012. Published by Hamish Hamilton (the Penguin Group).

***Still Life* takes you on an affirming journey as you become aware of the powerful impact of John's apparently mundane and simple work, made so by his humility, care and respect for others.**

RE-vision

Continued from inside front cover

University studies have concluded that far from foresight being a separate dimension from hindsight, the two are strongly interconnected. That is, those with the ability to see furthest into the future are informed with the ability to see furthest into the past. Forgetting the past can blind us to the future. Rather than two separate skills or talents, they actually go best together. The researchers called this result "The Janus Effect" – the ability to see in both past and future directions. (This is where we get the name for the month of January – the first month of the new year, as time to reflect on the year gone by and look forward to the year ahead.)

We welcome you to the first issue of *GCI Today* this year, and thank you for continuing the journey with us. We very much look forward to sharing the year ahead with you.

We continue into the future inspired by our hope in Jesus. And we do so together, developing our understanding and insight ever deeper into the heart and mind of our Triune God. This is a vision that encompasses the past, the present and the future. The most wonderful and generative, productive vision of all: who God is revealed in Jesus.

John McLean is Mission and National Director, Australia

Forgetting the past can blind us to the future

New eyes, new discovery

2 CORINTHIANS 5

by John McLean

"The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands but seeing with new eyes" wrote Marcel Proust.

AS A NEW year rolls around, it's a good time to reflect on our lives, and refresh our "views". What are we seeing? Let's leave aside notions of resolutions, lists of goals, piles of "To Do" lists for a moment and let's consider re-visioning our lives and relationships.

New eyes. A fresh perspective. Seeing anew. "It's not what you look at, but what you see", said Henry Thoreau. A new vision, or re-vision – a fresh, new look at our lives, at ourselves and others.

Paul writes a central and radical notion of the gospel – that in Christ, we become a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In this context, he suggests four radical ways to "see" anew. What a discovery!

1 God. *"Christ's love compels us".* We see the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We no longer see and interpret God through our own vision and constructs, but we allow Jesus to show us the Father, who is love.

No more distant, aloof Being who is easily offended, upset and demands our worship to fill his ego needs. Jesus comes among us as one of us, and dies for us all. He takes on our sin and suffering. He does this not because he has to but because he chose to in love. He takes our sin, and he dies in our place, so we might share in the love and life of the Father, Son and Spirit.

No more angry accountant, who balances the divine books. God in Christ wants reconciliation, in his grace "not counting people's sins against them". No more divine spanner to fix what has gone wrong – Jesus himself shows us God, and makes goodness and righteousness from the mess of humanity.

2 Ourselves. *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation".*

We still get tired, hurt when the car door slams on our shin, cut ourselves on paper. We still suffer grief, illness, loss, hurt. Indeed, we still suffer. But in Christ, something is new, fresh. Indeed, a new creation. This creation may be unseen without new vision, but in Christ it is a divine reality. We are the beloved sons and daughters of God. In his grace, he expressed his unconditional love and acceptance to us. Our "worth" is not measured in success, material goods, popularity, beauty or brains. It is measured in our eternal acceptance by and relationship with God – our inclusion in the life and love of Father, Son and Spirit, in the circle of life that is the Trinity.

No matter what our upbringing, education, work, life situation – no matter what little voice in our head says "you're not good enough", or "it's too good to be true that God could love you" – the life of the new creation enables us to rest in Christ, and say in faith "Jesus loves me, this I know". We forever see ourselves differently.

3 Others. *"From now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer".*

We don't see Christ through our eyes – we see ourselves through Christ's eyes. We no longer see other people through our eyes, the eyes and expectations of our cultures and education, but through the eyes of Christ. That is, we now see all people as made in the image of God; we see all people as God's much loved children with whom he desires to share the joy, creativity and grace of the eternal relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. It's easy to criticise, to find fault, to see the flaws and eccentricities in others – the life of the new creation helps us to see one another's strengths, gifts, talents. We see our common humanity as the children of God. We see how God

loves other people as he loves us.

So we are free to drop our grudges, hurts, and offences. Yes, such things will happen, but in the new creation they don't need to be held on to. (In eternity, we will not be sitting around recalling to ourselves and one another past hurts, offences, betrayals and disappointments. Rather, we will be joyously and creatively celebrating the grace and righteousness of God.)

4 Response. *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.*

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors ..."

We see here our response to being part of this new creation. We are ambassadors – of reconciliation. This is our mission. We are not focused on sin-management (not counting people's sins against them), but on reconciliation, among all people. (And the problem of sin is resolved through reconciliation with God.) We see ourselves as God's children, and as ambassadors of reconciliation and grace to everyone. Bridge-builders, peacemakers, grace-givers.

This is our mission and our calling – to be ambassadors of reconciliation, not a cause of division and strife. Encouraging, not undermining. Edifying, not destroying. Encouraging, not discouraging.

An ambassador who brings people together, not drives them apart. A source of connection, bonding, relationship, love and care. The new creation of the Creator – an ambassador and reflection of the mutually indwelling, passionately loving interconnectedness of Father, Son and Spirit.

New creation. New life. New ambassadors. New eyes with which to see God, ourselves, and everyone else we come in contact with, and express the love and reconciliation of the new covenant to all. New eyes for a real, life-changing discovery. ☺

The life of the new creation enables us to rest in Christ, and say in faith "Jesus loves me, this I know". We forever see ourselves differently

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FESTIVAL 2015
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 Caloundra, Qld..... 27 September - 3 October
 Mandurah, WA..... 28 September - 5 October

Ulladulla, NSW..... 28 September - 5 October
Ulverstone, Tas..... 19-25 October
 More information can be found at www.gci.org.au/festivals

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There is a wealth of easily accessible resources available online at www.gci.org, and it's constantly being updated with new articles and videos. Here's a sampling ...

YOU'RE INCLUDED
 Dr. C. Baxter Kruger and Paul Young: *The Trinity and Evangelism*
 (30.95 minutes)

Watch Listen More You're Included

<https://www.gci.org/yi>

Mike Fezell interviews Paul Young, the author of *The Shack*, and Baxter Kruger, author and the founder and the president of Perichoresis, Inc.

Joseph Tkach continues his look at the lesson from *It's a Wonderful Life*. He notes how George Bailey had lost sight of the most important lessons we can ever learn: that we're created by God to live in relationship with him and with those around us.

SPEAKING OF LIFE
 with Dr. Joseph Tkach
 Jesus Loves You More Than You Will Know
 (2:42 minutes)

Watch Listen More Speaking of Life

<https://www.gci.org/Sp0L407>

GConext sharing Jesus' faith, love & hope

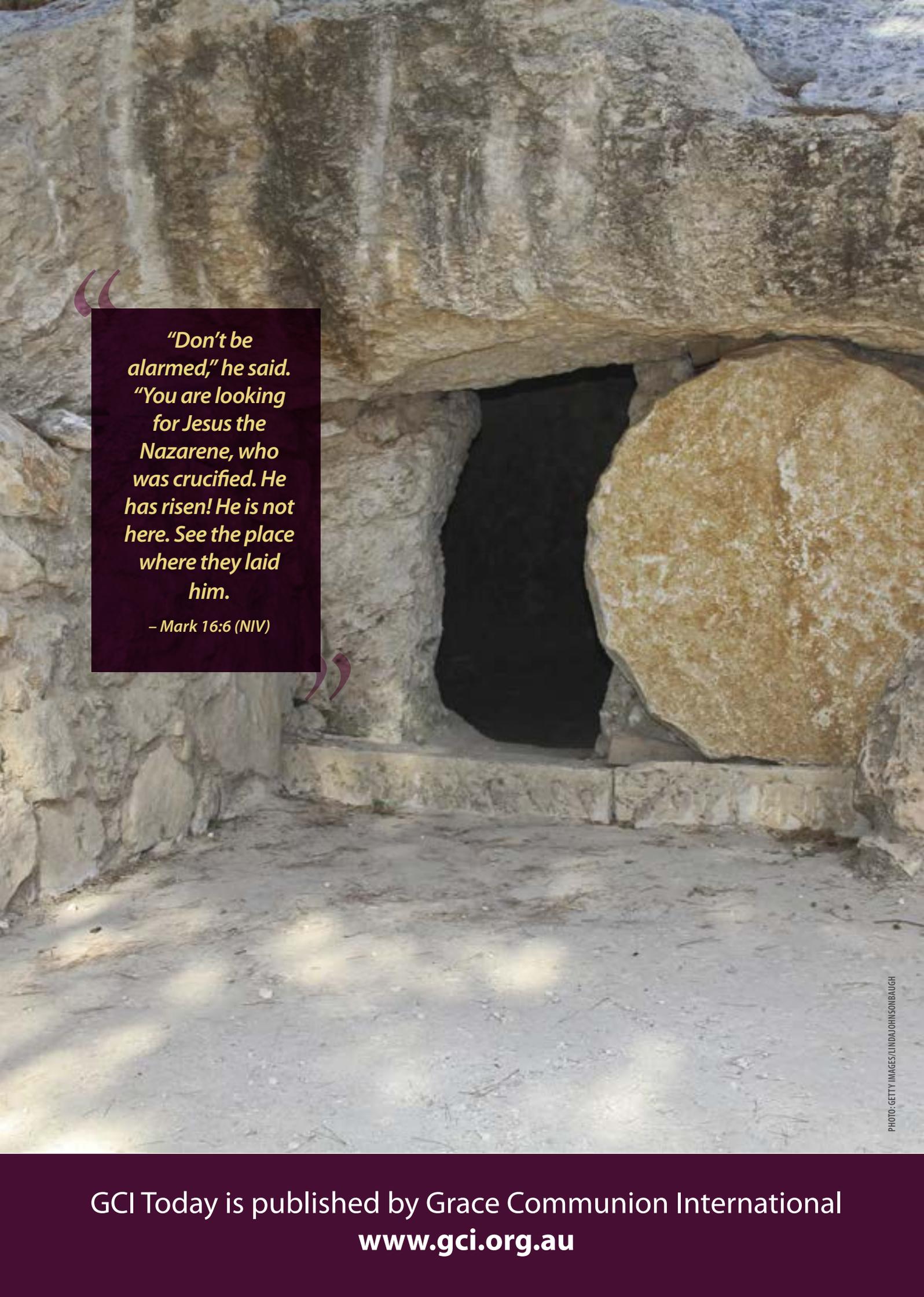
Media from the 2014 regional conferences
 Audio and video resources from the 2014 regional conferences can be viewed or downloaded at <https://www.gci.org/media/conference2014>

Why would anyone want to be a Christian?

In several nationals it is illegal to become a Christian. But people become Christians anyway - despite penalties such as threats of death. Thousands of people are killed each year yet more people become Christians. Christianity can spread even when it is persecuted. That is the way Christianity started - Jesus was killed as a political criminal. In the first 200 years after his death thousands of Christians were killed as the Roman Empire tried to exterminate this new faith. Millions of people become Christians each year. Scientists, farmers, historians and clerks - people from all walks of life - become Christians. **Why?** This article gives several reasons. You can see whether any of them make sense to you.

<https://www.gci.org/gospel/whyanyone>

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*“Don’t be
alarmed,” he said.
“You are looking
for Jesus the
Nazarene, who
was crucified. He
has risen! He is not
here. See the place
where they laid
him.*

– Mark 16:6 (NIV)