

The end is nigh?

Returning to Australia from another six weeks in India, I am overcome by the negative views being expressed about the world economy. Several economists are predicting a sustained depression and not a long recession. Some are claiming that they have been predicting this global financial collapse for some time and that the long term trends indicate that there is worst to come and recovery might only be apparent in the period from 2015-2020. There are a lot of “Doomsday” predictors having their share of media time.

From my perspective, I can acknowledge that the causes and circumstances of this recession are different to any other. My feelings are that it could get worse before it gets better, but then on the other hand, just as it happened so quickly, early signs of recovery might begin to appear soon. In other words, I don't know and can only express optimism that like the Asian economic crash of the late 1980s, Australians will get sick of the recession mentality, spend their savings, increase their credit and keep the Australian economy going with support from a Commonwealth government spending previous surpluses on infrastructure.

How should we as Christians and educators approach such economic issues which are likely to affect our income and wealth? Should we be players in the field of economics and politics to protect our own self-interest or altruistically the material welfare of others? Or, should we not store up “treasure on earth” and be focussed more on how we can use the resources God has given us, after all, during recessions the giving of Christians to church, missions and para-church organisations falls.

I found some useful thoughts on these matters in *Walking with the poor*, Bryant L Myers, Orbis Books, 1999. The focus of the book is *Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* and is primarily a Christian theology and practice for aid work. Around the theme of God's creation being “good, fallen and redeemable” all at one time Bryant develops a view of economic and political systems holding these qualities. *God at one and the same time “upholds” a given political or economic system, since some such system is required to support human life; “condemns” that system insofar as it is destructive to full human actualisation; and “presses for its transformation into a more human order. Conservatives stress the first, revolutionaries the second, reformers the third. The Christian is expected to hold all three.* (Page 45)

When I read this I questioned how I might locate myself within this view. I guess I had seen myself as mainly a reformer who sometimes acknowledged what was good and condemned what was bad. But now I am challenged to consider Paul's words in Romans 13 about all government being instituted by God and deserving support and by the myriad of references to upholding justice and condemning injustice. Holding all three is not simple and how does such a matter apply to the current economic recession?

In understanding the God of creation I might be able to better understand what is good, worth acknowledging and supporting. Such things might be aspects of economic and political systems that support those in need, that redistribute income from rich to poor, that provide fair pay for labour, that look after God's creation and provide common wealth.

In recognising the fallen nature of creation including humans, I may wish to condemn, expose and take action against bribery, excessive profits, scams, exploitation of workers, destruction of the environment, favouritism, and illegal business conduct.

As part of a desire to reform I may want to lobby politicians for change, protest, proposed change, assist those suffering injustice, challenge bureaucratic practices, engage the media on an issue, join a political party or participate in a social action group.

But in the current global recession we feel powerless. We feel more that it is being done to us and that it is out of our control. In any study of economics the key phrase predicting the future is expectations. As Christians, we know that our home and citizenship is elsewhere. Christian optimism can play a part in lifting community expectations which are at the heart of any process to improve economic conditions. It is important that Christians continue to give with a generous attitude towards what God has given them.

Recession is a time when some people in the community will be worse off, but others better off. In highlighting the needs of one section, political, social and bureaucratic reforms are possible and social change not thought possible in better times can go ahead. Christians should remain involved in such change and, especially for Christian educators, involved in the work around national curriculum. In this matter alone there is opportunity to uphold what is good, condemn what is not and reform what is possible.

The expectations of Christians alone might not be enough to start a world economic recovery, but for individual Christians “the end is nigh” brings no threat, just the fulfilment of God’s promises which we have held in faith. In difficult economic times, Christians need to be generous with the resources God has given so that others might experience God’s love for them and come to know the Saviour who is seeking them.

John Gore