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A Change of Priorities: Witness

By A K Whitehead

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Brought up an active Catholic, a number of things went wrong in life shortly after being married. Nothing to do with the relationship between my wife, Iris, and myself. But I blamed God, either directly or indirectly for what happened. Of course, blaming God for things soon turns into doubt about God, and doubt is then the second step into unbelief.

So for the next twenty-plus years I found myself without any real belief in God. I was not an atheist. I could not say that God did not exist. But I could not say that he did exist either. For all that time I was really an agnostic. But I continued going to church – just as insurance! In case he did exist. I thought I would then be okay. Both a foolish and illogical position, but...

Without any belief in God my values became determined by self interest. I began studying again and then went to university for three years, to read economics. That was followed by a years Postgraduate Certificate in Education to qualify for teaching. I moved into university level teaching and worked for a Master of Philosophy, a research degree. So I became almost totally focussed on my career as an academic.

All that mattered was making a reputation, promotion, publishing learned papers, earning more money and so forth.

After a piece of prolonged research, I felt that I needed a temporary change and knocked-off for a short while. Suddenly, after years and years of having my mind preoccupied in sorting out academic problems of one

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sort or another, my mind was free. But all these mental problems had been rather like a hand holding a ball down below the surface of water – as soon as the downward pressure was taken off the ball shot to the surface. The "ball" was the problem of God's existence.

The problem had always been there but I had never allowed it to get in the way of all the other things to which I had given priority. In Mass one Sunday, one of the Scripture readings included Luke 11:9 where Jesus tells his disciples to: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you".

It was as if I had never heard this before. Perhaps I never really had.

But then, of course, the reading went on, because Jesus added that "everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened".

It seemed to me that, if God did exist, then these promises should be worth all that they claimed. So I said to God, quite literally: "Okay, I'll take you at your word. I will seek, and ask, and knock. But if I don't find you, it will not be my fault. It will be yours, because you will not have kept your promises. So you will not be able to take me to task for not doing what you wanted".

My first problem was: how do you find God, find whether he exists or not? As a Catholic, the first thing that occurred to me was to begin going to Mass each day. I did that surreptitiously, without telling Iris. She had always had a very close relationship with God and I felt a bit self-conscious about what I was trying to do.

What else? It occurred to me that I had never actually read the Bible through from one end to the other. So I decided to do just that. We were coming towards Christmas and when my two sons asked me what I wanted as a present, I told them, "A Bible". They thought it was hilarious that I should want a Bible! I suppose they did not consider me to be quite the bible-reading type. But I began reading it at night when everyone else was in bed.

I sometimes had a strange experience in the New Testament part. I would read and, although not understanding much of Paul's letters, for example, nonetheless it was as if my mind took over and began to explain to me what I was reading. How that happened, I did not know.

Two and a half years after I had begun this search Iris developed a serious illness: emphysema. Her lungs were filling with fluid and, because

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of other conditions, the doctors could do nothing. They gave her six weeks to live.

On the Friday of Pentecost a nun from our parish persuaded us to go to a healing service at a Catholic church about twenty miles away. We went and my wife was instantaneously healed from the emphysema when she was prayed over by the parish priest, Fr Lenard May. She "fell in the Spirit" and was down for about half-an-hour. It was as if all the excess fluid in her body was evaporated away for, when she got up, one could see a damp outline of her body on the floor around where she had lain. Our doctor was staggered by the event: it subsequently led to his own conversion.

It was an amazing event, but it was not my own personal experience and did not change my agnosticism. But it did something, and we continued going down to this church every Friday evenings (as it turned out, for the next five years or so without missing once).

A few weeks later I saw a five day conference advertised for August on the church notice board. Much against her better judgement, because she felt we were not ready for a full five days of praise and tongues and all that went along with it, I persuaded Iris that we should book.

The conference turned out to be interesting and entertaining but by Wednesday we were both somewhat disappointed. We had both gone with our own very specific questions. Iris was asking the Lord what the meaning and relevance of this outpouring of spiritual gifts was about; and I was still asking if there was a God. Halfway through, neither of us seemed to be getting any answers.

But that afternoon was given over to the youth – a prospect which did not exactly fill me with enthusiasm. So I groaned inwardly and slid down in my seat when one of the two youths who were to speak fell up the steps to the stage. Which of a thousand better places could I have been at?

But the answer to that was soon apparent: no better place existed for me at that time.

I was completely stunned at the witness these two lads gave as to how God worked in their lives. It had never occurred to me that God would ever use any "ordinary" person in this kind of way. Then, towards the end of their witness, I felt something almost physical sweep over me from the two young men on the stage. I can only describe it as waves of sanctity, washing over me again and again. I went out of the hall in tears, hanging on to Iris' arm because I could not see where I was going.

The period from there up to the healing Mass on Thursday evening passed pleasantly enough. When the prayers for healing began, there was an immense sense of the power of the Spirit present and some people were "falling in the Spirit" even before they got to be prayed with. I joined the queue in the aisle and when I was prayed over... experienced absolutely nothing! I felt deeply disappointed, but it was some years before I could admit to myself that I also felt jealous of what these others were receiving and I was not. And that let Satan in, albeit without my realising it, for I went to bed with just a sense of unease, yet sure it would be gone by morning. But it was not.

When I arose, it was still there and quickly became a deep, black despair. It was so black that, as I realised afterwards, the depression could not be natural. It stayed all through the two hours of praise during which I sat like the proverbial lump of stone. We then went into the chapel for the final mass. I remained in utter dejection. I had gone there looking for God and was now, so it seemed, further away from him than ever. I felt that I had to do something, make some effort at entering into the praise when the Mass began.

I steeled myself for a superhuman attempt and as soon as the entrance hymn began, made the effort. But the effort was taken from me as soon as I made

it, for it was as if someone lifted me onto my feet and my hands went up in the air. The great weight of depression fell away, just like a cloak falling from my shoulders, and I was praising God.

Then, it was as if I stood before God. Though without seeing him, he was, as it were, about twelve or so feet in front of me. The Holy Spirit. His love drenched and saturated me, quite literally, and it flowed out to others for days afterwards. It was indescribable. All that everyone had ever said about the purity of that love, its infinity, its all-encompassing nature, its complete endlessness was all so totally inadequate.

It changed my life completely, as it had changed so many lives before. And not one of those people could ever tell another what that love is actually like.

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Setting Your Financial Priorities

By Terry J. Rigg

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Whether you know it or not, you are always setting your financial priorities. Some may decide that a new stereo system is more important than this month's electric bill. This may be a little off the wall but it is still setting your priorities.

Anyone wanting to better manage their money would be wise to determine what their financial priorities are and stick to them. Of course, if you see that these priorities will not put food on the table and pay your bills then you will have to rethink your priorities.

Setting your priorities is simple. You just decide what is the most important aspect of your finances and put that item on top. However, if you decide on that stereo over your electric bill, you may find yourself in the dark with no need for a stereo.

There are basic priorities that pertains to everyone. These are simply a matter of survival. Here is a list of the basics:

Water
Food
Shelter

That was a tough one.

What does it take to ensure that our basic needs are met? The main ingredient is a source of income to pay the rent or house payment, pay the utilities, and buy the groceries. This is where you start setting your priorities.

Before you can spend another penny, you have to take care of what you need to survive. Don't put off the rent or house payment, utilities and don't skimp on your groceries and necessary health items. If you do you will start experiencing money problems much sooner than you would if you had delayed paying other bills instead.

What's next? If your source of income happens to come from a job, then I would say your transportation. You have to get back and forth to work so you can afford all of the other stuff.

This would include your vehicle payment, gas, insurance and

maintenance. If your source of income is not a job then go to the next step.

And Now? Naturally, this would be your other bills. You can even split this category a little further.

First, you have your bills that are secured by property. You should always pay these bills first.

Secondly, your unsecured bills which are probably credit cards.

The reason you should always pay your secured bills first is that it is much more likely that they can take the secured property and probably will unless payment is made. While credit cards companies are notorious for their threats, they very seldom follow through. I'm not saying not to pay them, just that they aren't as high a priority as your secured bills.

Next would be your savings. I really to hate to list savings as your last priority because having a savings can prevent the use of those dreaded credit cards and help in so many ways. If you have the money to cover all of your other priorities then you should always put savings at the top of the list. However, if you don't have enough money to cover your bills and expenses then your savings will have to be the first to go.

Just to recap. The below list is an example of what your financial priorities should look like:

1. Groceries and Necessary Health Items
2. Housing (Rent or House Payment)
3. Utilities
4. Transportation
5. Secured Bills
6. Unsecured Bills
7. Savings

Let's hope that you never get in the position to have to decide which of the above list will have to wait. But if you do, following the above priorities is absolutely necessary to ensure your survival.

Terry Rigg is the author of Living Within Your Means – The Easy Way <http://www.homemoneyhelp.com/ebookadpage.html> and editor of The FREE Budget Stretcher Newsletter and Budget Stretcher web site <http://www.homemoneyhelp.com>. He has 25 years of experience counseling individuals and families concerning their personal finances.



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