

August 2009

Dear Friends

For my holiday reading I chose to bone up on the issue of Fear and Risk!



Dan Gardner looks at ways in which our society calculates and exploits risk, sometimes reasonably but often from a perspective of control and self interest. He examines the emotional nature of fear and observes that though it is often a protective measure to help us deal with emergencies where our rational systems are inefficient, we rarely contextualise these risks, occasionally jumping from the fat into the fire. For instance, following the 9-11 disaster, thousands of people stopped using commercial flights and took to the roads. As a consequence, 1500 died (half the number who died in the twin towers) using this less safe mode of transport.

Last week we learned that candle fumes infinitesimally contribute to cancer. (Now we know how all those Saints died!) No mention of the greater likelihood of being burnt by fire.

The management of risk is one of those 'buzz ideas'. Every conceivable scenario is reduced to a probability and consequence measure. Since few activities are absolute zero risk, a case can be made to further reduce those numbers, sometimes legitimately, sometimes driven by disproportionate sales pressure.

For centuries Christianity has used fear, the risk of hell and eternal damnation, to motivate repentance and financial donations, and at times quite successfully. What are the alternatives?

My main thesis is: that Fear and Trust are complimentary responses. Fear recognises risk and recoils from action, by contrast Trust recognises risk, overcomes fear and judiciously facilitates confident behaviour.

The scripture is quite clear: "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" – truly our God is an awesome God. He who has the capacity to create and destroy is fear-worthy even beyond respect. Yet, the first words of the "the Comforter" to Christ's shocked disciples were: "Let not your heart be troubled..." our God is Trustworthy.

Our choice is clear: Fear mongers or Trust Builders.

Thank you for again taking up the challenge in this new season for witness.

Your truly

*Victor*