

Dick Wolff, minister of Temple Cowley and Collinwood Road URCS in Oxford, gives encouragement and hints on . . .

Navigating the Blog World

Increasingly my church members are venturing on to computers, if only to be able to communicate with family by email and occasionally 'Google-searching' things on the internet. Word processing, accounts, photo processing &c are, by comparison, more difficult. Many don't bother with them, and don't need to.

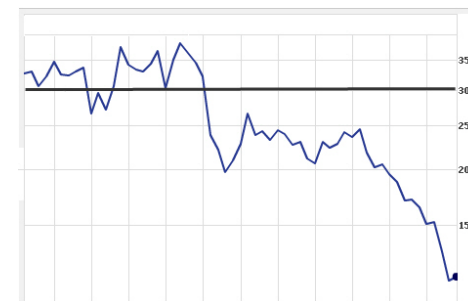
But, as Barack Obama's campaign revealed, there is a whole world of 'blogs' out there which are increasingly important in informing and shaping opinion, completely independently of the great media empires like Rupert Murdoch's. If you want to waste your time finding out that somebody you haven't seen for years has just done the washing up, or is feeling a bit tired – go on to Facebook. It's OK for sharing happy snaps, I suppose. But 'blogs' are a different matter altogether. Of course there is trivia there, too, but a good blog can offer pithy analysis of current events from people who really know their stuff, reviews of religious books that you'll never hear of anywhere else, discussion, short videos, links to worship resources and lots more. Where to start? You could do worse than take a look at my own blog at www.blog.wolffs.info – if nothing else, to get an idea of what a simple one can offer – follow a couple of recommended links from there, which in turn will recommend other links . . .

One immensely useful tool – a bit of free software you can download to your web browser – is **Google Reader**. If you find a blog or website that you'd like to keep an eye on, you create a (free) 'subscription' to its address in your Google Reader. Say you've set up twenty 'subscriptions' : they'll be listed down one side. When you launch 'Reader' it visits them all simultaneously, and highlights any that have been amended or added to since you last looked. A click on the 'subscription' throws up a list of what's been added to it, which you can glance through without having to go to the blog or website itself – like scanning the headlines and opening paragraphs. It's simple. Without it, I would probably never check most of them, and thereby miss some great stuff.

How do you get Google Reader? Well – Google it! And if all else fails, ask the kids to set it up for you!

You, Me and the Mess we're in

by David Wrighton



Everybody is bewildered by the current global financial chaos. No one knows when it will all end. But vast numbers of people worldwide are affected.

There was little sympathy for Lehman Brothers employees. Was it all their fault? Many highly talented people lost their jobs. Others did not "earn" their massive bonuses. They are still human and have suffered. Does it all go back to sub-prime mortgages? Bad decisions were made – but not in all banks. The Financial Services Authority did not do enough. Had they done more, would the Press have accused them of stifling the creativity of our financial institutions?

If you allow someone enough rope to hang themselves, it does not mean they have to do it. Bad management plays a part. But churches are not good at commenting on economic matters, particularly in times of crisis. We can talk about wealth and greed, how wealth is come by, how it is used, but should we have a theology of banking, of debt? Or is it stewardship?

Whatever happens, Many have already suffered or will suffer:

- Those who have made bad decisions which they regret.
- "Innocent" finance sector workers who have lost their livelihoods;
- Others who now face uncertainty.
- The long-term unemployed. Is work even further away for them?

In this uncertainty, we need to understand what has happened, learn for the future, and care for those who suffer – care for each other – now.

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