

# Environmental and Social Responsibility Tools to Extend Financial Reporting

By Adrian Dolling

If we are to live our testimonies today, we need to be aware of the changes in our world since they were formulated in the 1650s. Our testimony of *truth* means that we must be open to new knowledge or understanding. We must seek out the truth, and that is the spirit in which this note is written. At the spring Western Half-Yearly Meeting in Sorrento in May 2004 a small group of us examined some corporate responsibility reports, and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). I agreed to express our recommendations in *The Canadian Friend*.

During the past eight to ten thousand years, since early settlement and domestication of animals, there has been a gradual evolution of property rights. Encoded in both custom and law from earliest Judeo-Christian writings (Abraham asked to buy land to bury Sarah; the Ten Commandments' injunction to not steal), by Jesus' time there existed a well-developed system of exchange, accounting, banking, and coinage. In the "Parable of the Talents," Jesus encourages followers to look after other people's wealth by putting it to work, or banking it in exchange for interest. The theory and practice of property, borrowing capital at interest, and limited risk premiums, has been long established. In Greece, around 300 BCE, the normal annual interest rate was ten percent, increasing to twenty or thirty percent for risky lending, such as backing shipping.

During the Renaissance in fifteenth century Europe, property rights were extended to the ownership of ideas – the benefits of innovation to society traded for an individual's opportunity to benefit from creative

labour. The first popular English translation of the Bible was published early in Elizabeth's reign in 1560. Economic growth after the early plagues stimulated innovation, exploration, technology, and the arts.

Along came George Fox and the Quakers in the mid-seventeenth century, freshly benefiting from the newly accessible Bible, questioning the clergy amid growing divisions in Christianity, arising in a country in the midst of a governance experiment under Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth. Influenced by Biblical

study, early Quakers quickly developed testimonies on truth, equality, simplicity, and peace. Some of these testimonies drew early Quakers into conflict with the rest of their society (e.g. by not doffing caps in greeting, not taking oaths, and not wearing swords).

We are now better equipped to understand the world through the natural and social sciences. Key to this discussion is the discipline of econom-

ics, founded by Adam Smith in the eighteenth century. Developed by other titans such as Ricardo, Keynes, and Hayak, we now have a very good understanding of global economic interactions.

Modern microeconomics deal with individual people and organisations and the rationale for decision-making. Since the crises of the 1930s, financial statements and accounts have gradually become more standardised, to support more consistent and comparable reporting. There are many aspects of an organisation's existence, known as externalities, that fall outside its boundaries and are normally paid for by taxes. They represent the use of air, disposal up smokestacks, or the

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payment for health care or education. However, these externalities can suddenly become internal to a company — as smokers obtain compensation for injury, or regulations change, so it is important for companies (and investors) to include these three domains – financial, environmental, and social – in decision making, and therefore in their internal and external reporting.

Enabling such trustworthy *triple bottom line* sustainability reporting is the intent of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, with information at: «[www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org)»). Started in 1997, the GRI is making impressive progress, with United Nations backing, and over 500 organisations reporting their corporate social responsibility performance. The GRI 2002 guidelines can be adopted by any organization,

including national, provincial and municipal governments, non-profits, and corporations. There are various levels of compliance, and the effort required can be significant.

The GRI is strategically consistent with the Earth Charter, which Canadian Yearly Meeting endorsed in 2004. At Western Half-Yearly Meeting in May 2004, a small group of us examined several corporate reports, and the GRI. We recommend that Canadian Yearly Meeting Trustees consider adding GRI reporting to the list of criteria by which investments are managed. ☺

[Please note that a documented version of this article is available by email: «[adrian.dolling@channel.bc.ca](mailto:adrian.dolling@channel.bc.ca).»]

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# What Would You Want Me to Do If He Was Your Son? By Joy Newall

He was nineteen at the time of my first visit to the jail, where he was serving time for his crime: robbery, and threatening a police officer. He had been in and out of jail since he was about nine years old, when he was caught at the “job” he was doing: delivering packages of dope from one young adult to another in the affluent suburb where he lived.

This young man had the brightest mind I had come across since my university days. He stood about an inch short of six feet, dark hair, bright blue eyes ... handsome in a cinematic way. He saw himself as small, he told me one day in a rare moment of introspection.

Mostly we talked about world history, but religion soon became a “safe” subject because, he told me, I had started our first visit with a promise that I was there simply to be his friend, not to convert him. We ranged far and wide in dialogues on ethics, morality, war and peace, and about his hobby – writing.

He wrote well, really well! I took some of the short stories, which he had given me to read, to some teachers, and they were amazed that they could come from “a prisoner”! One day, he showed me his newest piece, which was set in Paris, France. The details of the street and buildings for the scene

he set were so detailed and evocative that I thought he might have been plagiarizing someone else’s work. I called him on it by saying: “How could you know so much about Paris when you’ve never been outside Canada?” Quickly he found one of the few books sitting on a shelf in the small classroom where we had our visits. He slammed it on the table, flipped through the pages until he came to a tiny black and white drawing of a street in Paris. He described how he had studied that illustration, given it full colour in his imagination, peopled it with characters and voila! ... a very fine piece of descriptive literature.

He went out from the jail on parole twice in the years I visited there and, as he stayed in the city, I was able to meet with him a few times: once to stand with him as he opened his first bank account, coming out laughing like a kid who's pulled off a fast one, exulting in the fact that he was now REAL to the business world. Another time we sat and sipped coffee, looking over the fishing boats moored at the harbour, while he dreamed aloud of being a boater, a fisher, in charge, making a living. During one parole, he enrolled at the local university and got through almost a whole semester of journalism and history classes.

Each parole ended in failure. He seemed to keep returning because jail was his familiar abode, his room and board, his home. I asked him if that was so, and he looked at his shoes with a "maybe you're right." Finally he decided to stay put in jail until his entire sentence was finished so he'd exit without having to report to anyone. He hated surveillance.

Finally, his sentence was over. He asked me if I'd pick him up at the prison gate and take him to his first stop. Clutching his small bag of "stuff" that I'd kept at home while he was in jail, he waved goodbye.

Sporadically we heard from him by phone. He was with his mother, then his father, taking a marine course, living with his former girlfriend, quitting school, frustrated with no job, no quick fixes ... except the old devil itself, drugs. The dealers were everywhere they used to be in the "old days." He was

having a bad time fighting it.

Late one night, the phone rang and the plea was there: Could he stay with us temporarily till he got a job? He'd been "clean" for six weeks and couldn't go it alone. A short consultation with my husband and we said we'd pick him up at the bus station the next day. He was pale and thin, nervous and hungry! I couldn't make a meal big enough.


## **He seemed to keep returning because jail was his familiar abode, his room and board, his home.**

The timing could not have been worse as my husband was due for heart surgery. We called every contact we knew, trying to find him a job, permanent lodging, support people to make a team to help this desperate young man get free of his bondage. No one had any resources to offer except for one man who offered a temporary job cutting wood in the forest. The arrangement worked for most of a week. He loved the job, though he was not in physical shape to do such heavy labour. He got on well with the boss, came home, ate and slept. Friday was pay day. He asked if we'd mind if he went to see a friend he'd known earlier in our city. We hesitated, but what right did we have to detain him? He was a free man. We negotiated the next day's pickup time and were given a guarantee that he'd stay "clean". We picked him up jumpy, pale, tired and hungry.

The next day, work in the forest had to be cancelled. It was a terrible blow. Frustration oozed from his every pore. He had nothing to do, except hang around with us. I had an appointment downtown, my husband would be home with him.

When I returned home, I found my husband looking ill and shocked. He had just walked down to the mailbox, and in that short time our young visitor had helped himself to some of our credit cards and loose cash, and left the note with the politest of thanks for our generosity, confessing that he was "no good at good-byes," and that he'd had "to move along ..."

A few days later, my husband was in hospital. Our quick reporting of the theft to the credit card companies covered the cash withdrawals that had been made before we'd had time to blink. One of the churches I'd called for help invited me to speak to their outreach group on the subject of support for ex-prisoners. The prison chaplain and I are taking our first step together to try to kick-start the faith community into supporting the establishment of a halfway house, in a city famous for its NIMBY (not in my backyard) mentality. It is like pushing a peanut up a hill with my nose. But ... I did it, and I'd do it again. Might have to. I hear he's back in jail again ...

**What would you have done if he was your son? ...** 

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