

Common Theology

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INSIDE:

- Eating is an agricultural act
- Australia's homegrown terrorist
- That healing little word – “sorry” business

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



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From the Editor

The event of the Summer for *Common Theology's* constituency was, arguably, the Federal Parliamentary apology to the Stolen Generations of the Aboriginal people of Australia.

Church leaders' responses to the apology were surprisingly muted, guarded, almost grudging. It was as if church leaders had been arguing the social justice corner for so long they had forgotten how to make a pastoral response to what was quintessentially a pastoral situation.

A later, more considered response is in this edition's Home Truths, from Anglican Primate Phillip Aspinall.

A review in these pages of the autobiography of that most gracious of plaintiffs, Aboriginal Elder Uncle Bob Randall of Uluru, puts the apology into a personal perspective.

On Wednesday 13 February, in Canberra but broadcast throughout Australia, the words of the apology itself had a liturgical rhythm; the faces of speakers and hearers wore a gravitas rarely seen in Australian parliamentary life. Bob Randall pointed out that by the simple protocol of a smoking ceremony admitting the Parliament to the land for the first time, the colonisers had now become guests of the original owners.

In *Eye Witness*, Bernard Spong, an old campaigner against apartheid, pens a salutary reminder that the process of reconciliation has only just begun, with an update on what is happening in South Africa.

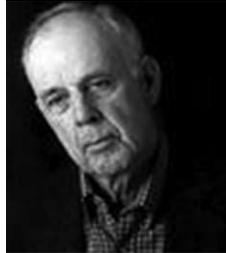
This edition begins with a reflection on food from the veteran essayist Kendall Berry. Moves are afoot to reunite our alienated senses to a more holistic pilgrimage in the world. An important study of the senses in a theological context, T J Gorringer's *The Education of Desire*, reintroduces us to the foundations of our life in the world, and is reviewed in this edition.

This year looks set to focus on multi-faith issues and the threats of religious fundamentalism. A short piece from Jeff Sparrow marks the mooted discovery in March of the gravesite of Ned Kelly - that most famously executed Australian terrorist of the 1870s.

Maggie Helass

Eating is an agricultural act

Wendell Berry is the author of thirty-two books of essays, poetry and novels. He lived and taught in New York and California before returning permanently to his native Kentucky River region, where he farms on 125 acres. He has received numerous awards for his work, including, most recently, the T S Eliot Award.



By Wendell Berry

Many times, after I have finished a lecture on the decline of American farming and rural life, someone in the audience has asked, “What can city people do?” “Eat responsibly,” I have usually answered.

Of course, I have tried to explain what I meant by that, but afterwards I have invariably felt that there was more to be said than I had been able to say. Now I would like to attempt a better explanation.

I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act. Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth.

Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture. They think of themselves as “consumers”.

If they think beyond that, they recognise that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want – or what they have been persuaded to want – within the limits of the old household food economy.

But one can be thus liberated only by entering a trap (unless one sees ignorance and helplessness as the signs of privilege, as many people apparently do).

The trap is the ideal of industrialism – a walled city surrounded by valves that let merchandise in but no consciousness out.

How does one escape this trap? Only voluntarily, the same way that one went in – by restoring one’s consciousness of what is involved in eating; by reclaiming responsibility for one’s own part in the food economy.

One might begin with the illuminating principle of Sir Albert Howard’s *The Soil and Health* – that we should understand “the whole problem of health in soil, plant, animal, and man as one great subject”.

Eaters, that is, must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used. This is a simple way of describing a relationship that is inexpressibly complex. To eat responsibly is to understand and enact, so far as one can, this complex relationship.

This means reviving the arts of kitchen and household

What can one do? Here is a list, probably not definitive:

Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it.

Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertiliser.

Only by growing some food for yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and around again.

You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life.

Prepare your own food. This means reviving in your own mind and life the arts of kitchen and household.

This should enable you to eat more cheaply, and it will give you a measure of “quality control” – you will have some reliable knowledge of what has been added to the food you eat.

Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home.

The idea that every locality should be, as much as possible, the source of its own food makes several kinds of sense. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, the freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence.

Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist. All the reasons listed for the previous suggestion apply here.

In addition, by such dealing you eliminate the whole pack of merchants, transporters, processors, packagers and advertisers who thrive at the expense of both producers and consumers.

Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can of the economy and technology of industrial food production.

Farming, animal husbandry, horticulture, and gardening are comely arts

What is added to food that is not food, and what do you pay for these additions?

Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.

Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species.

The last suggestion seems particularly important to me.

Many people are now as much estranged from the lives of domestic plants and animals (except for flowers and dogs and cats) as they are from the lives of the wild ones. This is regrettable, for these domestic creatures are in diverse ways attractive; there is much pleasure in knowing them.

And farming, animal husbandry, horticulture, and gardening, at their best, are complex and comely arts; there is much pleasure in knowing them, too.

It follows that there is great displeasure in knowing about a food economy that degrades and abuses those arts and those plants and animals and the soil from which they come.

For anyone who does know something of the modern history of food, eating away from home can be a chore.

My own inclination is to eat seafood instead of red meat or poultry when I am travelling. Though I am by no means a vegetarian, I dislike the thought that some animal has been made miserable in order to feed me.

If I am going to eat meat, I want it to be from an animal that has lived a pleasant life outdoors, on bountiful pasture, with good water nearby and trees for shade. And I am getting almost as fussy about food plants.

I like to eat vegetables and fruits that I know have lived happily and healthily in good soil; not the products of the huge, be-chemicalled factory-fields that I have seen, for example, in the Central Valley of California.

The industrial farm is said to have been patterned on the factory production line. In practice, it looks more like a concentration camp.

The pleasure of eating should be an extensive pleasure, not that of the mere gourmet.

People who know the garden in which their vegetables have grown and know that the garden is healthy will remember the beauty of the growing plants, perhaps in the dewy first light of morning when gardens are at their best.

Such a memory involves itself with the food and is one of the pleasures of eating. The knowledge of the good health of the garden relieves and frees and comforts the eater.

The same goes for eating meat. The thought of the good pasture and of the calf contentedly grazing flavors the steak.

Some, I know, will think it bloodthirsty or worse to eat a fellow creature you have known all its life. On the contrary, I think it means that you eat with understanding and with gratitude.

A significant part of the pleasure of eating is in one's accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes.

The pleasure of eating, then, may be the best available standard of our health. And this pleasure, I think, is pretty fully available to the urban consumer who will make the necessary effort.

I mentioned earlier the politics, aesthetics, and ethics of food. But to speak of the pleasure of eating is to go beyond those categories.

Eating with the fullest pleasure – pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance – is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world.

In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.

When I think of the meaning of food, I always remember these lines by the poet William Carlos Williams, which seem to me merely honest:

*There is nothing to eat,
seek it where you will,
but the body of the Lord.
The blessed plants
and the sea, yield it
to the imagination
intact.*

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Common Theology

A Journal for Australians

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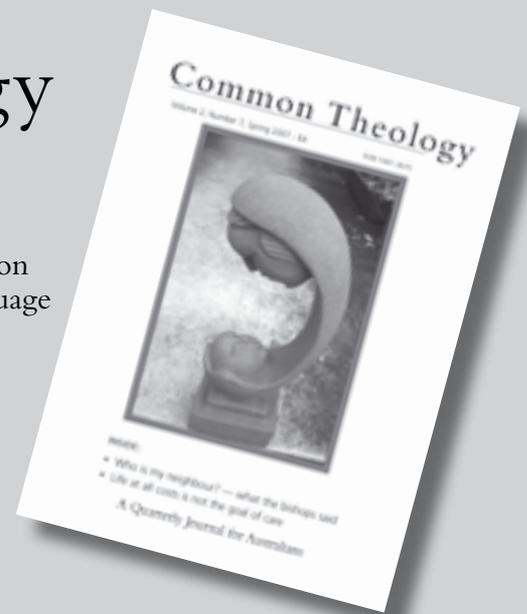
Karol Misso
Zillmere Qld

Common Theology comes like a breath of fresh air and I open every issue with a sense of anticipation. It's good to be in touch with thoughts from 'Down Under' again.

Pauline Swenson
Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, UK

Congratulations on yet another interesting and helpful Spring issue. I found the article by Fr Frank Brennan, Lyndal Irons, and the Bishop of Ely particularly helpful and interesting.

E A Lanham
Toowong Qld



I appreciated all the articles in the current issue – the review by Dean Grimshaw especially.

Dr David Wetherell
Geelong Vic

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Roots of bitterness endure

By Bernard Spong



Many people have asked for my comments on the recent feud, acrimony and resultant changes in leadership in the African National Congress (ANC).

I spent a lot of time searching for some way to explain the basic reason for the demand for change in the ruling party. One day in February it literally stared me in the face.

That day saw the results of the matriculation examinations come out. Thousands upon thousands of young people who took that end of schooling examination in the various subjects of their choice would know whether they had passed, what grades and, therefore, what chance to enter a university.

The local newspaper, *The Star*, had two or three pages of photographs of the top achievers. There were one hundred and two smiling faces – five of them were black African! The vast majority were white with a minor smattering of Indian and Coloured. That said it all.

We have changed everything to keep things the same. We have a new democracy and a superb constitution. We have a democratically elected government where the vast majority of faces are black, with one of the best proportion of women members in the world.

We no longer have separated education departments based on race. Hospitals do not bar you because of your colour. Every opportunity is open to everyone. There are even Black Empowerment regulations that should make it easier for black people to advance and secure skills and positions.

The finance markets do well and figures about growth and productivity, profits and expansions are given every day on the news.

But for the majority of people life is just like it was in the old days of colonialism

eye witness

and apartheid. The schools in the townships remain under-staffed with a lack of facilities, while suburban and, more especially, private schools offer everything necessary in the way of education. Private hospitals offer top world class medical services but public hospitals groan under the weight of the demands and the lack of resources to meet them.

The colonial masters have changed. The Dutch came first to build the original symbol of separation – that hedge in the Cape to keep the settlers separate and safe from the indigenous;¹ we had the British to claim the riches beneath our soil for Queen and country and proclaim a land act that gave the majority of the people the right to own – in their own country, mind you – the minority of the land; we had the rulers of apartheid to cement discrimination even further. We now have the colonialism of globalisation that talks of free trade and, at the same time, creates its hedges of privilege in trading practices.

Assisting more black people to live on the “right” side does not remove the hedge

To be sure, in South Africa today there are more people of substance than before and many black people, especially in the cities, are able to seize the opportunities of skill learning and decent employment. Every day I see signs of new possibilities for people. I rejoice in living with neighbours of different races. I am proudly South African and have lived to see so many changes in structure and systems of government that give the possibility of equality.

1. In the 1660s an almond hedge was planted by shipwrecked French refugees, to form a boundary for the Dutch settlement – and probably to prevent theft of their cattle. Sections of this hedge are still visible today in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens

But I also see remaining poverty; I see people whose opportunity of seizing those possibilities is nil; I see poor service delivery for the people who need it most; I see that assisting more black people to live on the “right” side of the hedge does not remove the hedge itself.

And now I see a movement of people saying – as we did in the final days of apartheid – “Enough is enough!”

Many of us have talked about the requirement of a second revolution to follow the toppling of apartheid. The huge change that swept through the leadership of the ANC is not that revolution but it is a symbol of the need.

That revolution may never happen. I am enough of a realist to realise that – the hedges of the powerful are very thick and very strong – but the ANC party elections were an indication of a bitter frustration of many of its members with the status quo of present day South African political life and leadership.

Worthy of celebration is the fact that it could happen. The changes were made by the members of the conference through an open-for-all-to-see voting system. There were all the influences of electioneering and peer pressure but no vote rigging. There was a lot of speculation and talk about payments and promises for votes but in the end the numbers said it all, it was time for change.

The dynamics were many and I am not privy to the inner workings of the party, or politics in general, to recognise them all. Some, however, were obvious.

There was the dynamic of the two major personalities – Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma.

Thabo Mbeki does not believe, as he has since said, that he is “aloof”. A lot of people perceive this to be so, however, and many see his presidency as losing contact with the masses. Those who are part of that presidency are tarred with that same brush. They are seen to have become a group of wealthy elitists who say what is good for everyone and make sure that, first and foremost, it is good for them.

I have heard from more than one person since the dramatic vote that they are amazed that the ‘Mbeki camp’ could not see what was happening long before that vote actually took place and that this lack of foresight is a symbol of the huge

gap between them and the vast majority of the people.

Jacob Zuma, on the other hand is recognised by many – those who are against him becoming President as well as his supporters – as a charismatic personality who knows how to please the crowd, whichever crowd he is with at the time. That seems to be his strength and, when you go deeper into it, his obvious weakness.

His supporters shrug off the charges of corruption against him and the manner of his dealing with the rape charge he faced some time ago. There seems to be an air of “so what if he did take money from those who have it and were ready to give it to him? Don’t say that it doesn’t happen in politics the world over and, anyway, the charges are just a political plot by the Mbeki camp to try and get rid of him”.

A business friend of mine said his major crime was to be found out! And, no matter what stupid things he said in his defence, he *was* acquitted on the charge of rape.

The talk of equality and a better life for all people remains a myth

There were some signs of the dynamics of tribalism. Thabo Mbeki and Nelson Mandela before him come for the Xhosa Eastern Cape. A majority of ANC leaders have come from that area. Even if there are significant numbers of people in the cabinet and leading positions who actually come from other groupings the perception is that there is favouritism and patronage. Isn’t politics about perceptions?

The major dynamic remains that a huge mass of people believe they have not had a fair deal from the present leadership. The gap between the rich and poor gets bigger, the number of unemployed remains astronomically high and the talk of equality and a better life for all people remains a myth.

For me the most symbolic vote of all at that conference was the vote for Winnie Madikizela Mandela as number one to head the list of the eighty-six-member strong ANC National Executive (NEC). She was placed right there at

the top of the list. She collected more votes in that Conference than anybody else, including Jacob Zuma. This is a strong sign of the ordinary grass roots members choosing people whom they feel remain close to them and understand the needs of the ordinary working/unemployed masses. She may have been out of the leadership list of the ANC elite, but she was never out of the minds of the people. She kept her contacts and her interests at grass roots level.

I do not see this vote and what it portrays as an idealistic event. I have enough scepticism in me to expect that most people voted for change so that they could be better off – get to the other side of the hedge as it were. That is how people vote in democracies.

I was at a talk given by a well known struggle (against apartheid) participant recently where he said that once upon a time you joined the ANC knowing that it could lead to detention and torture and that nowadays you joined the ANC knowing that it could lead to wealth and position. Ah well, it happens!

The idea of Jacob Zuma as President of the nation does not thrill me at all. I have to confess, however, that I am glad I did not have to make a cross on a ballot paper at that conference.

The next weeks and months will be very interesting. Mbeki remains President of the nation but Zuma is leader of the official ruling party. What changes will this bring to the cabinet and government policies?

Some of the present cabinet are not on the NEC of the ANC any longer. They will surely be axed? I look with great interest to see if the Minister of Health keeps her post. I am one of those amazed – and if it was not so tragic, amused – by her actions or lack thereof on the AIDS pandemic. If she is axed, whoever can claim credit for that will gain support from many ... but, on the other hand, she is one cabinet member who was voted on to the NEC and maybe that indicates that she is not as much out of step with the masses as our newspaper media would have us believe.

That for me is going to be a symbol equal to the vote on Winnie. It will be a helpful indicator of where the power lies and what priorities are to be chosen in the coming months.

What do I want? I want to see a government that puts more energy into rooting out the hedges that separate us one from another in this nation. Rooting them out, not trimming them down a bit here and there. And I want a church or collective religious leadership that participates more rigorously in speaking to issues and presenting and, more importantly, illustrating alternatives to the present priorities of society. Now those are idealistic!

But then, that is who I am and I have lived long enough in South Africa to have had my ideals watered and fed sufficiently to keep them alive. I remain a prisoner of hope.

Bernard Spong, a native of Manchester in the UK, went as a missionary to South Africa in 1963. His interest in communications led him to organise and direct an ecumenical communications programme and finally become Director of Communications for the South African Council of Churches. He is now retired and living in Johannesburg.

Life is complex



“Now let me see. Am I a public or a private emergency?”

Nothing new under the sun

By Jeff Sparrow

A small group of bearded young men commit an outrageous multiple murder. The youths belong to an immigrant community that perceives itself under siege from the police; they practice a minority religion regarded with suspicion by much of the population. In self-justification, they talk about the persecution inflicted on their co-religionists overseas; eventually, they commit themselves to the creation of a homeland here in Australia.

In the midst of a full-blown panic, the Victorian parliament passes draconian laws drastically curtailing civil liberties, and the police launch indiscriminate raids on ethnic minorities.

The bearded men make a suicidal final stand; most of them are killed, without a chance to surrender, by a special police squad, and the leader is taken into custody and executed after a dubious trial.

Ned Kelly has been a Rorschach test for so many generations that, with the news that his bones may (or may not) have been located at Pentridge Gaol, it seems appropriate to remix his story for the Age of Terror.

Kelly, of course, identified as Irish and Catholic rather than, say, Arab and Muslim but the relationship of those identities to the mainstream was not so dissimilar. Rather than an inner city posse, Ned belonged to the “Greta Mob”, a gang of flash youths who stole horses rather than cars and signalled their identity by wearing their hat straps under their noses in a nineteenth century equivalent of the reversed baseball cap.

His outlawry might have been sparked by clashes between police and his family but he also saw himself as fighting for something much bigger.

Ian Jones, the pre-eminent Kelly historian, claims that the gang planned, after the Glenrowan confrontation, to declare a Republic of North-Eastern Victoria. Not quite the Caliphate but not so very different, either.

“It will pay the government,” Kelly explained in his *Jerilderie Letter*, “to give those people who



are suffering innocence justice and liberty if not I will be compelled to show some colonial stratagem which will open the eyes of not only the Victorian Police and inhabitants but also the whole British army”.

It’s the kind of message that these days features on Al Jazeera.

The government response sounds equally familiar. New laws allowed the Kellys to be shot on sight, and gave the police the power

to raid houses without warrants and prosecute anyone withholding information.

In January 1879, some twenty men went to jail for “having given information to an outlaw and his accomplices, contrary to the fifth section of the Outlawry Act and for “withholding information relative to the Kelly gang”.

As for Kelly’s trial, it might not have been a military commission but nor was it full and fair: Kelly’s barrister lacked experience; key witnesses were never presented; Redmond Barry was clearly biased.

Of course, historical parallels are never identical. Kelly was neither Osama bin Laden nor Che Guevara nor Chopper Read; his story needs, ultimately, to be understood on its own terms. But the comparison still bears thinking about.

In the wake of 9/11, we were told the world had changed for ever, that this was a situation with no antecedents, and thus we couldn’t even debate the extraordinary measures put in place.

It rather changes matters to consider an Australian icon as a terrorist of the 1870s.

Jeff Sparrow is the Editor of *Overland* magazine. www.overlandexpress.org

Climate remodels the Earth

By Maryanne Loughry RSM

A significant group of people who pay the price of climate change are those displaced by the effects of climate change.



In most instances – while resilient – they are the least resourced to manage the effects of climate change and are presently without any international agency mandated to protect and defend them.

I returned in March from Syria from a mission that was assessing the protection needs of approximately a million Iraqi refugees who have been displaced to Syria due to the conflict in Iraq.

The Temporary Protection Regime (TPR) has been applied to all Iraqi nationals in Syria upon the consent of the Syrian authorities. With this protection the Iraqis are considered as refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a representative in Syria – currently the biggest UNHCR operation in the world.

Because the Iraqis in Syria are considered to be refugees they have a number of entitlements – they are accorded international refugee protection, receive some material assistance, and the UNHCR is seeking a durable solution for this case load (resettlement, local integration, voluntary return).

At the same time, it is estimated that there are more than two million Iraqis¹ who, because of the events surrounding the conflict in Iraq, have fled their homes but have not yet crossed international borders. They are still in Iraq and are called the internally displaced.² Because they

have not crossed an international border their plight receives less international attention.

In recent years, you might be surprised to know that the number of refugees in our world has been decreasing. At the same time however there has been a large increase in the numbers of internally displaced.

There are many reasons for these variations, including the nature of the modern conflicts and the restrictions states place on people trying to cross borders and seek protection.

It is presently estimated that internally displaced people now outnumber refugees by two to one.

As there is no single UN agency mandated to protect and assist the estimated twenty-five million internally displaced persons UNHCR has joined with other UN agencies, the intergovernmental organisation IOM, the ICRC and International non-government organisations to share the responsibility for assisting and protecting those displaced within their own country. For UNHCR this has required a large institutional shift in focus and capacity.

As the plight of the twenty-five million internally displaced persons has become apparent there has been considerable international effort to develop some guiding principles, which, in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, set out the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of IDPs in all phases of displacement: providing protection against arbitrary displacement; protection and assistance during displacement; and during return or internal resettlement and reintegration³.

The reasons why people flee their homes are always complex and again in recent times we have seen attempts to restrict peoples' access to protection by arguing, for example, that some people are economic migrants and not 'genuine refugees'.

and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.' (Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Introduction, para.2)

3. See the website <http://www.internal-displacement.org/> for more details

1. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Website. Accessed 3 March 2008. <http://www.internaldisplacement.org>

2. Internally Displaced Persons are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters,

To try to separate economic factors from political has been increasingly difficult. You only have to look at our own political landscape to appreciate this.

The conflict in Darfur is often characterised as an ethnic conflict, pitting Arab militias against black rebels and farmers. Interestingly, the majority of the people in Darfur are actually IDPs, Sudanese displaced within their own country, but for reasons too complex to go into here they are of concern to UNHCR and are commonly referred to as refugees.

However, in June 2007 in an article in *The Washington Post*⁴ the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, wrote: “[a]mid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change”.

Here Ban Ki Moon is unpacking some of the complexity of why people have fled in

Climate change refugees are outside the mandate of international protection

Darfur. This move to explore the underlying and historical factors is similar to how explanations of conflict and genocide in Rwanda shifted from a narrative of ethnic conflict between Tutsi and Hutu to a much more complex analysis centring on colonial powers and access to resources, education and political power.

The refugees in Darfur ‘fit’ within the classic international framework of forced migration because the situation has evolved from drought and lack of access to traditional grazing land, to conflict, displacement and encampment.

By 2010 Anke Strauss, of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), predicts that the world will see an additional fifty million ‘environmental migrants’ which she defines as “persons or groups of persons who, because of sudden or progressive changes in the environment affecting adversely their livelihoods, have to move from their habitual homes to temporary or

4. ‘A Climate Culprit in Darfur’ Ban Ki Moon, *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2007, p.A15
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061501857.html>

durable new homes, either within their country or abroad”.⁵

At present this population falls outside of the two principle tools for providing international protection, assistance and advocacy to the forcibly displaced – the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Guiding Principles for the Internally Displaced.

New patterns of migration and displacement are rapidly emerging and they are not addressed by the current instruments of international law.

Those moving because of climate change and environmental degradation are outside the mandate of any of the present international recognised instruments and mechanisms for protection and assistance.

Very recently,⁶ the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, wrote that there are three main causes for people moving:

- ◇ Poverty
- ◇ Climate change and environmental degradation
- ◇ Conflict and persecution

He wrote that the international community was ill-equipped to deal with these movements, and urged civil society, media and the private sector to engage in all these areas, especially in the area of advocacy.

Focusing on the effects climate change, Guterres acknowledges that while discussions about climate change are taking place there is still no real strategy for how to cope with it.

In October last year I visited Kiribati, a nation state in the Pacific formerly known as the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands. Kiribati, consists of thirty-two low-lying atolls and one island. It has a population of approximately 92,000 people. It is one of the nations most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Kiribati is amongst the nations that emit the lowest levels of CO² but it is at the forefront of experiencing the devastating effects of these emissions. The water table has been inundated with salt water and there is infrastructure damage to roads and sea walls.

5. Anke Strauss, Address to the High Level Segment of the Fifteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, 9 May 2007.

6. ‘The nomads of no-man’s land’ Antonio Guterres. *The Advertiser*, 1 March 2008.

The people of Kiribati are often characterised as a 'conservative' people, unsure of the science of climate. They frequently attribute the changes that they are experiencing to the actions of God.

Without adaptation Kiribati could face economic damage of up to 34% of its 1998 GDP due to climate change and sea level rise.

The President of Kiribati, Anote Tong, has said that many forms of climate adaptation are possibly too late for his nation and that now is the time to be talking about the ultimate form of adaptation – migration.

While climate change is now firmly on the political agenda, high costs are currently being paid by those already affected. Arguably these

people, while resilient in spirit, are the least resourced to meet the costs of climate change.

It is important that we anticipate the needs of people who are already experiencing the effects of climate change.

Australia needs to plan now for how we as a nation will assist those affected and displaced by climate change, especially our neighbours.

Dr Maryanne Loughry RSM is Associate Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, Australia.

This is an edited version of her lecture at this year's Jesuit Lenten series entitled *Climate Change: Who pays the price?*

Letter to the Editor

The most recent issue of *Common Theology* (Spring 2007) to reach me contained an arresting article by Professor Stephen Sykes, 'Can these bones live' – an assessment, in his role as the Bishop of Ely, of the ongoing viability of so-called Anglicanism.

While demurring from the materialist "–ism" ending to connote any part of the Body of Christ, for the moment one uses the term for ease of argument. 'Anglican Christianity' would be more accurate and preferable.

The aspect of his apologia for traditional 'Anglicanism' which astonished one, was the mere passing reference to her Eucharistic worship.

As a person who was reclaimed from a desultory sort of agnosticism, by an encounter with the Holy Eucharist through an Anglican priest in the unpropitious surrounds of a South African political jail, I have viewed the frequent share in the celebration of the Eucharist as a hallmark of the Anglican Communion and the principal means of Grace.

The then Bishop of Pretoria, Edward Knapp-Fisher wrote to me, after the laying on of hands, that the "knowledge of the Resurrection life was made known in the Communion of Saints, supremely in the Eucharist".

This was enormously reinforced by the liturgical revisions and the more intense invocation of the Holy Spirit in South Africa in the past twenty-five years.

In the light of this claim which is shared by a great many as staple fare, it is disconcerting to read an otherwise lucid exposition of our faith and practice which plainly omits or forgets the distinctive catholic roots that have sustained the Anglican Church in the twentieth century – at least, to redemptive effect, especially in the African context. It is doubtful whether any vital segment of Bishop Sykes' statement could have been edited out.

The terminal 'crisis' in the Communion is referred to as one stemming from "a new view of the possibility of life-long non-celibate partnership between people of the same sex", and that this challenges the cohesive unity between liberal and conservative wings of the Communion.

The celibate/non-celibate distinction, in one's view, adds or subtracts very little to an 'agape' commitment to Christian friendship, except perhaps for the ordained ministry, and in that instance one would like to refer the Bishop to an essay by Andrew Sullivan, a Roman Catholic journalist, an AIDS survivor, quoting Aelred of Rievaulx on hallowed friendship for his monks.

The upper room naming of his disciples as friends puts the whole dilemma for Christians in another perspective if it is seriously entered into.

Colin Lang (Dr CMF)
Knysna, South Africa

reviews

The Education of Desire – Towards a Theology of the Senses

By T J Gorringe

SCM Press, 2001. ISBN 0334028477

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Sensory malnutrition is as much a problem as obesity in the age of ‘supersize me’. Professor Gorringe ushers Christian spirituality out of the Middle Ages and into the culture of consumer capitalism with this 21st Century reassessment of the role of the senses in theology.

Based on a series of lectures delivered in British Columbia the book begins with a comparison of the 19th Century English painters Constable and Turner; and the question “Why a world? Why this material sensual place, this interweaving of quarks and gluons, which we inhabit? Why blood, bone, semen and faeces? Why senses?”

If that doesn’t grab your attention it is probably imperative to read this book.

If the creation is a foreshadowing of glory, Gorringe writes, then the senses are what allow us to explore it. For the Christian, salvation is bodily.

St Augustine, whose profound influence on Christian spirituality endures to this day, had a conflicted relationship with the body. I was particularly fond of the passage he wrote beginning, “When I love you, what do I love?” (*Confessions* 10.6). Gorringe deals that the coup de grace: “It is beautiful, but it is not the gospel”.

At the other end of Christian history, its ostensible enemy Karl Marx made a pertinent contribution when he wrote that the forming of the five senses was a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.

Gorringe’s thesis is that our senses are the means by which God chooses to explore materiality through us. The discipling of the senses, and through this the education of desire, is the work of genuine spirituality.

This is not a simple task because free will gives us choices about where to invest our desires.

Freud, for all his iconoclasm, highlighted the way in which we replace the God of the gospel with

the domineering God of the super-ego. A nightmare projection; a god which does not exist.

Gorringe remarks that Greece prioritized sight while Israel prioritized hearing.

Sound has to do with hearing, interiority, and hosts the voice of conscience and reason. Silence can be profoundly communicative, but it is defined by words.

Plato called music ‘spells for the soul’, and of course there are good and bad spells. The enormously successful visit of the New York Philharmonic to Pyongyang in February gives credence to the spellbinding ability of music having brought together traditional enemies.

Sight opens the soul to the material world. Gorringe makes a tantalising comment that gothic cathedrals reveal the metaphysics of light, but that few contemporary eyes can see it.

Touch is a neglected sense if the thesis that Christians are Christ’s hands and feet in the world is taken seriously.

God has given us leave to be delighted

Taste is perhaps the poor cousin of the senses when discussing Christian spirituality. But in the Oscar winning movie ‘The Diving Bell and the Butterfly’ Jean Dominique Bauby, although unable to move a muscle except his left eyelid, could remember the pleasures of taste and treat himself to a banquet in his imagination.

Smell, like taste, cannot be measured scientifically. It does not have a highly developed vocabulary – but a person can detect between 10,000 to 40,000 different odours, and this sense has a direct line to memory.

Through these senses, Gorringe writes, God has given us leave to be delighted.

Of course this raises the theological problem of ‘disability’ and healing. The author writes that it is not for those who are not disabled to colonise this discourse. He uses material written by people with disabilities.

From Helen Keller onward ‘normalisation’ guided approach to handicap. Today many disabled writers criticise normalisation as oppressive because it comes at the expense of the disabled person’s needs and rights.

Realising that ageing is disabling helps non-disabled people to see that people with disabilities are not ‘other’; and that they themselves are TAPs (Temporarily Abled Persons).

Impairment is given, Gorringer writes, but disability is socially constructed.

“It seems to me that in creating the conditions for freedom God has created a world in which randomness and chance play a fundamental part.” No malice aforethought, no testing of the human creature, as in Job, is involved.

The question of normality is briefly raised, and the fact that there is no satisfactory canon of normality; certainly not the idolatry of the young, fit, healthy body. Christians do not have an able bodied God as their primal image.

Independent adults who do not need help are themselves handicapped in the context of the dependence necessary to live in the image of God. The wounded healer tradition also challenges the notion of bodily perfection.

Succinctly – there are depths plumbed by difficulty which are not plumbed by ease.

Gorringer unpacks the fact that the body, through the senses, has become something of a scapegoat for the popular perception of sin.

He points out that *Sarx* (flesh) for St Paul is not rooted in sensuality – rather in religious rebellion in the form of self-righteousness.

Of the sins of the flesh – only two refer to the body *per se* – lust and gluttony.

Pornography is big business in Western society and therefore Gorringer includes a discussion of this phenomenon – with an interesting aside that women’s eroticism, unlike men’s, has more to do with touch than sight.

But pornography, he writes, is not centrally about women or sex at all, but about transgressing boundaries.

“Sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations.”

Our sense of hearing is subject to “a wind tunnel of gossip”; the press is a “gigantic maw of lying” (Karl Barth); and real lies – counterfeits which fully resemble the truth – are rife in the advertising milieu in which we live.

Gorringer points out that far from being the flesh corrupting the spirit, these breaches of the 9th Commandment are actually the spirit corrupting the flesh.

Touch brings us the blessing of the caress and the curse of the blow. Torture is the rule rather than the exception in the contemporary world, and is considered in the context of the relation of power and helplessness; the fragility of our ability to care, and the danger of our fantasies of omnipotence.

Gorringer’s discussion of the corruption of taste by gluttony and obesity is somewhat out of date, with new research revealing limitless vistas of new intelligence through the Human Genome Project.

Smell is an important social and moral indicator – references to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ smell permeates our vocabulary.

Bodily integrity is where body and soul work together as God intended

Finally, bodily integrity is where body and soul work together as God intended. “To live graciously is to seek the kingdom and pursue it, and that... is what we are called to use the senses for and it is failure to do so which is what we mean by that much misunderstood term ‘sin’, which never... refers primarily or above all to ‘the flesh’.”

“The body has become one of the idols we worship... But neither bodies nor pleasure are intended as ends in themselves, and when they are treated as such they become idols.”

Consumer capitalism possesses all the classical attributes of deity – omnipresence, omnipotence, infinite (it knows no limits).

However, it exploits the body by devaluing it in its natural state and using it in the service of Mammon, creating a narcissistic society of permanent adolescence.

Of course, consumer capitalism has given us clean water, an amazing diet, housing that would have seemed paradise to the urban poor of the 1800s as it would to the two-thirds world slum dwellers today. It has given us accessible transport, global communications and greater life expectancy.

For the first time in history human desires can be met and God hands us over to the power of our desires. (Rom 1.24) 86.

But following our desires does not fulfil us but actually enslaves us. The heart of the New Testament critique of desire is that it is a form of addiction which destroys our freedom to serve both God and our neighbour.

Both Greek and Christian traditions point to the need for discernment between real desire and desire posing as egoism. The critique of capitalism rests on a distinction between needlessly stimulated desires on the one hand and real needs on the other.

To the caveat that both desires and needs are socially constructed Gorringer replies that the peculiarity of a consumerist culture is the attempt to obliterate the distinction between them.

All high cultures recognise that the non-divine imagination needs training and exercise. This work is called education.

Freud's 'repression' is understood by both the classical and the Christian tradition to be discipline. It is not about denying the body, but about channeling its energies creatively.

The current problem is where the market – which is what we call society – has to infantilize us in order to survive. Instant gratification is the name of the game.

As a consequence we are faced with the epitome of idolatry – ecological forces are fair

set to destroy the idolatry of consumption. Only spiritual mastery of the greed itself can help us.

Given the atomization of Western cultures by capitalism, the re-establishment of a moral consciousness must be reconstituted, but this would involve the subordination of money.

The Christian ascetic tradition represented an attempt to realise what Freud called the 'reality principle' as opposed to the pleasure principle.

Holiness and grubby reality are not opposed but go together, as St Paul points out in the Corinthian correspondence. Asceticism was really about what liberation theology calls "the option for the poor" – the choice of voluntary poverty to put oneself alongside those enduring involuntary poverty.

Effective cultural change will involve a change of attitude to the body. What is needed is a movement for the liberation of all forms of desire, including eros, from the tyranny of consumerism.

We need a body-friendly ascetism.

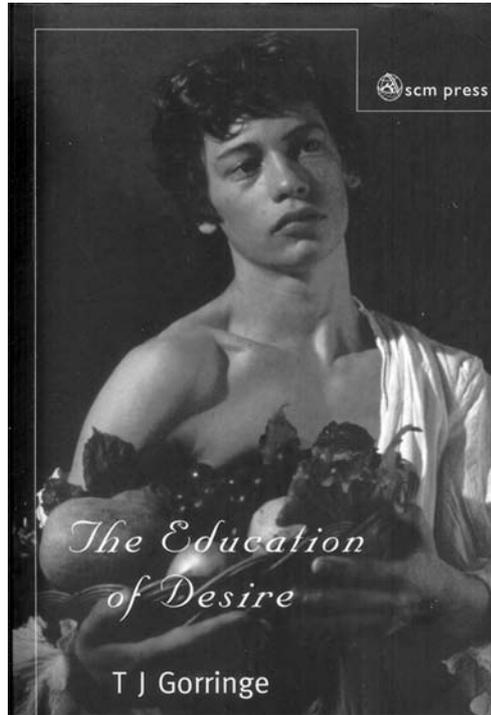
What is going on in the Church at the moment is a profound move beyond present structural boundaries – but we will continue to need boundaries. The church exists where human desire is educated, disciplined, by Word and sacrament.

In the context of the consumer capitalism in which we live it has to be both affirmative of the physical body, and of the earth, and *for that very reason* hostile to all forms of consumerism.

Christian resistance to torture, for instance, depends on having a visible social body in order to counter the discipline of the State.

The Eucharist affirms the body and therefore protests every attempt to colonise, patent and exploit it.

This precis of Gorringer's book I hope will at least stimulate reflection on his thesis, even if you don't read the book itself. He has taken on a crucial topic in the churches' struggle for 'relevance' to contemporary discourse.



Hugh's Books

By Hugh McGinlay

As many of you know, I see up to one hundred new releases every month. Obviously, I can't read all of them but I must confess that not only have I read Tony Campbell's new book, *The Whisper of Spirit – A Believable God Today* (Eerdmans, 9780802840424, \$19.95), I'm on to my second reading, such has it impressed me. He considers what might be the basis for faith in a world with God and focuses on the whisper of spirit that many feel – sensed in our experience of the world and ourselves. His reflections lead him to discuss a transcendent God and a God who cares deeply for human beings, and this prompts him to ask two questions: how do we support and nourish Christian faith in this God who loves us; what will be the shape of a future phoenix church that can nourish and sustain such belief?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth and one of the foremost religious and social thinkers of our day. His new book *The Home We Build Together* (Continuum, 9780826480705, \$45.00) is a serious reflection on multiculturalism and national identity. Although primarily concerned with UK society, his challenges to the concept of multiculturalism and its implications for the wellbeing of society are relevant to Australia and New Zealand. He warns of the dangers liberal democracies face and argues for what he calls 'integrated diversity' within a framework of shared political values.

Complementing Rabbi Sacks' book is *Conflict and Conciliation – Faith and Politics in an Age of Global Dissonance* (Columba, 9781856075770, \$27.95), a series of essays that considers how religious people from different faith traditions can seek creative new pathways towards inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation.

The latest in The Center for Religious Enquiry Series from Skylight Paths in the USA is *Talking About God* (9781594732300, \$34.95) which



invites us to explore the meaning of religious life with Kierkegaard, Buber, Tillich and Heschel. Author Daniel Polish uses Abraham as his "collective thread" as he considers the writings of these four major theologians and the focus of their teaching about religious life – the limits of human understanding, the language we use about God, the interpretation of religious symbols.

Mary Magdalene continues to fascinate. For informed and scholarly comment, we have *The Mary Magdalene Cover Up* by Esther de Boer, from the Kampen Protestant Theological University in Holland (Continuum, 9780567031822, \$17.95). Subtitled 'The sources behind the myth', the book brings together an impressive array of texts from the first to the sixth centuries, each of which is placed in its historic context.

A recent title from St Vladimir's Seminary Press is *Sweeter than Honey – Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth* by Peter Bouteneff (0881413070, \$24.95). The book is a general discussion about what Orthodox Christians believe and will be of interest to others wishing to understand and appreciate Orthodox doctrine, worship and life.

There was sad news about the sudden death of John O'Donohue, author of *Anam Cara*. His last book is now available: *Benedictus – A Book of Blessings* (Bantam, 978059305862, \$39.95). This handsome hardback volume is testament to his poetry, grace and wisdom.

Two new titles are here from DLT in the area of spirituality. *Thomas Merton – Master of Attention* by Robert Waldron (9780232527148, \$29.95) is basically an exploration of the famous mystic's life of prayer.

Arrivals and Departures – The Restless World of Henri Nouwen by Michael Ford (9780232527100, \$29.95) concentrates on Nouwen as 'foreign correspondent', tracing his many journeys throughout the world and offering new insights into the deeply spiritual yet deeply wounded personality of this well loved spiritual teacher of the last century.

Titles available at your local Christian bookstore or contact www.rainbowbooks.com.au

reviews

**White Christ, Black Cross:
The Emergence of a Black Church**

by Noel Loos

Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007

ISBN 978 0 85575 553 9. 256pp, rrp \$39.95

Reviewed by Robin Koning

What was going on in Christian missions to indigenous Australians? This is one of the underlying questions raised by Noel Loos' book. He addresses this question through an exploration of the Anglican Church's indigenous outreach, with a particular focus on Yarrabah in northern Queensland and the work of the Anglican Board of Missions (ABM).

This kind of detailed study of mission history is essential if we are to move beyond clichés about mission history and its effect on indigenous Australia.

Too often, generic statements about missionaries colluding with colonialism and destroying indigenous cultures are presumed to say all that needs to be said about this aspect of contact history.

Missionary attitudes were, in some cases, counter-cultural

On the other hand, some Christians can whitewash mission history, as though any injustice suffered was justified by the fact that people gained access to the saving Gospel of Christ.

Both these positions call for a more discerning account of concrete mission histories for two reasons – to do justice to indigenous agency in the encounter with Christianity, so that indigenous people are not presented as mere victims; and to do justice to the ways in which the missionary agenda was not only parallel with that of other colonial forces, but also diverged from it.

In Loos' book, we find the sort of case study that helps to offer this nuance. He shows how

missionary attitudes, while very much culturally conditioned, were also, in some cases at least, counter-cultural.

While not denying the view of many missionaries that indigenous peoples were only capable of being 'civilised' to the level of the British working classes, he notes also the firm conviction as to their fundamental humanity.

He points to the ABM's early awareness of the devastation caused by dispossession and of the responsibilities incumbent on those who benefited from this dispossession.

A major character in Loos' story is Ernest Gribble, a veteran of a number of Anglican missions, who, despite a reputation for being an authoritarian mission superintendent, played a key role in uncovering the Forrest River massacres, leading to a Royal Commission investigation.

Loos also offers a more nuanced picture of Aboriginal responses to missions, one which points to their active agency within the considerable limitations imposed on them.

Some indigenous people discerned something of value in what was being offered and made choices about how they would engage with that offering. Loos shows this especially by tracing the history of Aboriginal leadership within the Anglican Church, from early leaders like James Noble, through a range of lay evangelists, to significant milestones such as the episcopal consecration of Bishop Arthur Malcolm as the first Aboriginal bishop in the Anglican Church.

He also points to the more recent Christian revival at Yarrabah, led by Aboriginal people, interpreting their experience in ways that make sense to them, despite scepticism from some white church people. For some indigenous people at least, Christianity and mission history "is not an aberration in their experience; it is as central as the Dreamtime".

One point that Loos refers to only in passing requires further development. This is the area that philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan calls incarnate meaning — the meaning of a person or group or way of life.

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Mission studies tend to focus on two areas: the verbal communications of missionaries (what they said in their catechesis and preaching); and the social structures of mission life (how missionaries controlled indigenous life, as in the prohibition of local languages and rituals, or the creation of dormitories which separated children from their families).

But for all the ethnocentrism of the verbal communications, and all the destructiveness of the social control, there were also the missionaries themselves — their presence and the relationships they formed with the people.

At various points, Loos shows the deep respect indigenous people had for at least some of the missionaries — people who lived with them for long periods of time, who maintained contact and relationship with them, who shared the hardships of mission life, who persevered with little support from their own churches and culture, and who gave witness, in fragile earthenware jars, of a treasure they wished to share with indigenous people.

this book ends on a note
of hope... the growth
of a 'black church'

The tragedy, of course, is that these same people undermined this reality by various forms of collusion and paternalism.

This book, though, ends on a note of hope, as Loos outlines the growth of a 'black church' in which, out of a most ambivalent history, indigenous people emerge with a desire to continue to engage with Christ and to share his Gospel, not simply with their black sisters and brothers, but with the wider Australian Church and beyond.

Robin Koning SJ lectures in Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Jesuit Theological College. He worked for five years in the Kutjungka Catholic Parish based at Wirrumanu (Balgo). This review appeared in the online journal *Eureka Street* in January.

Songman

by Bob Randall

ABC Books, Sydney (2003)

Reviewed by Deborah Ruiz Wall

Aboriginal Elder Bob Randall's story is part of the rich tapestry of Australian history. Son of a white station owner and a Thungawa Aboriginal woman, stolen from his birthplace in east Uluru, raised in Crocker Island Mission, adopted by the Iwaldja tribe in Arnhem Land — this songman is well placed to be a bridge builder between black and white.

The book, *Songman* is not just an autobiography. It is a story about how a mixed-race man straddled two worlds during one of the darkest periods in Australia's history. It is also about spirituality.

Tracing the identity of his mother and father is a remarkable story in itself. But in the telling of his story, one gets a window into Aboriginal family structure — that a child could have a number of 'mothers', 'fathers', 'aunties' and 'uncles', 'brothers' and 'sisters' without strict reference to biological links.

For example, a mother's sisters are also a child's 'mother'. Sisters of one's wife are also regarded as 'wife' and the husband's brothers regarded as 'husband' to the wife, without having to assume that intimate relations necessarily occur. And since the culture does not recognise divorce, when one takes on a new spouse, it just means additional spousal responsibility.

It makes sense. Aboriginal culture is focused on the group, not on individuals. Uncle Bob explains: "In our culture we just continue to add family members and no one is ever eliminated".

One can see not only the extensive range of the Aboriginal family network but also their close-knit relations way beyond the nuclear family.

Furthermore, 'family' has a spiritual dimension. One of the things Uncle Bob learnt is when Aboriginal people make contact with the spirit world through singing, the songs indicate their relationship to the universe — that is, everything is part of the 'family system'.

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Songs in Aboriginal culture, writes Uncle Bob, play a vital role in teaching their people creation story, sacred sites, dreaming tracks of ancestral beings and the path of ceremonial knowledge which is passed on by ceremonial leaders to the young.

In other words, *ngura* (country, place, home) is central to Aboriginal people's spirituality, culture, origin and identity, and sense of belonging.

His life vocation of teaching and bridge building seems to have started with a song, "My Brown Skin Baby" dictated, according to him, by the spirit of his mother while he was travelling in a plane.

This song which refers to his being stolen bore much fruit. Two films were produced stimulated by interest in the story behind the composition, one of which, *My Brown Skin Baby They Take Him Away* won an award at the Cannes Film Festival. Another film about identity crisis entitled *The Mixed-up Man* was produced by the ABC.

Kidnapping of mixed-race children resulted in separation from their Aboriginal culture

Many songs later, the Commonwealth Government commissioned an inquiry about the stolen generation leading to a report in 1995, *Bringing Them Home*.

At last this Australian story is out in the open. Being confronted with the tales of 'stolen children' revealed varying perceptions.

Uncle Bob mentioned that some white people saw themselves as care-givers for mixed-race children who, they argued, were 'neglected, dumped and unwanted orphans'.

From an indigenous perspective, the kidnapping of mixed-raced children resulted in their uprootedness from their Aboriginal culture, untold suffering and maltreatment.

The government-sponsored removal of mixed-race children from their Aboriginal families stemmed from racist attitudes which left many Aboriginal children divided and confused.

The so-called 'half-caste' children were made to believe they were smarter than full-blood Aboriginal children.

Some mixed-race children explained their reluctance to associate with the 'full blood' – "We are coloured people, not Aborigines".

Uncle Bob's observation of the effect of this segregation reveals the Australian establishment's agenda-setting – one that would have created a class, a caste, or an informal apartheid system amongst Australians.

Fortunately for us, resistance from Aboriginal people such as Bob Randall ensured that such a system did not prevail.

Paradoxically, having been 'stolen' has enriched Uncle Bob's life experience. His life story is one big case study of Australia's race relations and of interactions between Christian and Aboriginal spirituality.

But it is one thing to talk about spiritual values, quite another to see how these values are lived. Based on his readings in the Bible, Uncle Bob recognised that Aboriginal teachings were similar to Jesus' teachings.

However, some missionaries did not practise what they preached. He saw that they had the best food and locked it up instead of sharing it the way their families would have done. They made huge profit out of the food supplies in stores sold to people in the reservation.

He saw certain contradictions like punishing boys who engaged in sexual activity while they themselves (some of the married missionaries) were having affairs with Aboriginal women.

On reflection, Uncle Bob arrives at the idea of a 'Oneness of Godness'. He sees links in the teachings of Christian, Aboriginal and Tibetan Buddhist spirituality.

He builds a bridge between spiritual learning and common sense. He asks himself, what is the purpose of learning? We have general knowledge, ceremonial knowledge, knowledge that you cannot talk about but only experience. What is it for? Is it for good or bad?

While we struggle with understanding the complexity of diverse cultures and spiritual practice,

Uncle Bob boils such questions down into something as practical as: “will it make things better?”

If one applies this idea of ‘lived spirituality’, Uncle Bob observes that it was initially the Quakers’ public awareness campaigns that mobilised recognition of Aboriginal people’s human rights, not the other churches.

He observes that the law that required equal pay for equal work done by stockmen on cattle stations worked against Aboriginal workers instead of improving their living conditions; that direct negotiations by traditional owners with mining companies, rather than going through government, had created an opportunity for them to be partners in projects that were mutually beneficial; that some of the difficulties Aboriginal children had in schools were related to hearing and eye problems such as trachoma – health issues tied up with their living conditions – and had nothing to do with them being lazy or intellectually inferior.

I see Bob Randall’s book, *Songman* as an attempt to tell his life story as he experienced it. He shows how events are viewed differently by white people and by Aboriginal people.

He shows what actually happened as he saw it and leaves readers to judge for themselves what the motivations and attitudes were of these ‘actors’ that shaped our Australian story.

In summary, it is a book that tries to show *walytja*, our connectedness with each other (the broader family system), how important *kanyini* (caring/responsibility) is in nourishing *kurunpa*, our collective spirit, how essential it is for all to understand our connection to *ngura*, land and our overall connectedness with *Tjukurrpa* which is associated with the Creation Story and the Law that governs us all.

It is a book both simple and complex for it serves multiple functions: storytelling, teaching culture, spirituality, history, politics and race relations – each of which touched the life of Uncle Bob Randall from about the mid-thirties to the present.

Deborah Ruiz Wall, a Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College graduate met Uncle Bob Randall at Linga Longa Philosophy Farm. She was shown his traditional land during her visit to Uluru in 2000. She later introduced Uncle Bob to Paul Newbury who became the editor of *Songman*.

Home Truths

By Phillip Aspinall

On Wednesday 13 February the Federal Parliament said ‘Sorry’ to the members of the Stolen Generations.

The event struck me as being gracious and moving. The faces of indigenous people both inside and outside the chamber as their stories were told and past injustices acknowledged and apologised for touched many of us deeply. I believe that this was a very important moment in our life as a nation.

There are many who continue to hold concerns about the Parliament’s symbolic gesture. Some indigenous people are calling for the gesture to be matched by action in the form of compensation payments to members of the stolen generations. For other Australians the very making of the apology itself sits uneasily. There are concerns that it is not appropriate to apologise for something that we did not personally do.

They want to know what the church can do to set things right

Parallels could be drawn between calls for an apology to the Stolen Generations and the church’s experience of sexual abuse reports over the last five or six years. I have spent many hours with people harmed by sexual abuse who want to hear me say ‘Sorry’ on behalf of the church for what happened to them.

They have told me that they have found it impossible to move on with healing without recognition and acknowledgement of their experiences. They want to know what steps have been taken to ensure that such abuse cannot happen again and they want to know what the



— that healing little word

church can do to set things right in their own situation.

In these cases it has not been me or other current church leaders who committed the acts of abuse. And yet it is our responsibility to set things right.

There are two meanings of the word ‘responsible’: the first meaning is, “I personally did the act that caused the harm”; the second meaning is, “I am in a position to help to set things right”. In the case of the Stolen Generations I have in mind the second meaning of responsibility.

The same processes as those I described in relation to the church’s response to sexual abuse are at work in our life as a nation.

The question is “What can we do to set right, as far as possible, the harm that has been done?” It is the nation’s responsibility to discover what will assist individuals to move forward and to achieve a measure of healing and wholeness in their lives.

I would argue that in this sense it is the responsibility of all Australians to take steps to set things right. Certainly as Christians it is our vocation to recognise injustice and suffering wherever they are found and, like the Good Samaritan, take practical action to care for those affected. The gospels teach us that whenever we minister to a neighbour, whether known to us or a stranger, in that same action we minister to Christ.

There are three important steps in the road toward reconciliation, whether that be Australia’s reconciliation with its indigenous people or the Christian’s reconciliation with God.

The first step is **recognition**. There must be recognition and acknowledgement of past wrong, injustice or injury.

The second step is **repentance** – turning around, facing in a new direction, embarking on a new way.

The Federal Parliament’s ‘Sorry’ to the Stolen Generation encompasses both of these steps.

The third step is **reparation**, a concept that I prefer to compensation because no amount of money can ever compensate individuals for

the hurt they’ve suffered or the grief they bear. Reparation looks to the future, focussing on how our actions now can help to set things right.

Through this momentous event in Parliament, as a nation we have recognised and named reality and we have turned to face in a new direction. Our task now, as a nation and as individuals, is to find constructive and effective means of making reparation.

That task is also our vocation as Christians. It is through the completion of this cycle of recognition, repentance and reparation that forgiveness and reconciliation may, with God’s grace, become real in our lives.

Archbishop Phillip Aspinall is Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia.

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