

# Common Theology

Volume 1, number 4, Pentecost 2003 — \$3

ISSN 1447-3615



A Quarterly Journal for Australians

**INSIDE: AUSTRALIA'S PROPHETS • JUST WAR • HOW THE WEST  
LOST ITS WISDOM TRADITION • SPIRITUALITY IN ISLAM**



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Front cover: GETTY IMAGES

Published by HelassInk  
PO Box 117, Sandgate, Qld 4017  
Technical Production  
— Clare Nolan, Clockwork Communicators  
Administration — Anne Bucetti, Doing Data  
Artwork — Peter Kirkpatrick  
Printed by Rural Press, Dubbo, NSW

## From the Editor

A diligent examination of our front page image will reveal that several nations are represented amongst the Sisters, who are captured in a moment of . . . , naughtiness? Sin? Failure? Liberation? That depends on one's point of view. Certainly the image dismantles a stereotype of the Church, and humanises its subjects.

This edition of *Common Theology* reflects a Church in conflict, which — some would assert — is a healthy environment for growth.

Drew Hanlon's scholarly survey of contemporary Australian spirituality tackles the Church's communication problems with an emergent consciousness of the Sacred in Australian society.

*Forum* in this edition — and the next one if the response is good — undertakes an interpretation of Just War theory for our times. It comes from a two-year study made by a commission in South Africa during the height of Church conflict with the apartheid regime, as part of the Church's moral response to the problems of modern warfare.

One of Australia's 'human shields', Ruth Russell, who camped beside a grain silo during the bombing of Baghdad, adds her eyewitness account and experience of Australia's most recent war.

John Bales contributes an informed explanation of Muslim spirituality, as a practical aid for the Church's nascent dialogue with Islam, which must progress at every level if the world is to find peace in our time.

A thousand years ago the Church made a fatal decision, John Thornhill posits in his thesis on how the west lost its wisdom tradition. The Church eschewed partnership in the discoveries of the Renaissance — thus forfeiting renewal, and depriving science and philosophy of their native moral foundation.

Cameron Taylor's review of *Matrix Reloaded* goes some way towards diagnosing why the Matrix trilogy is a box office triumph and has become a cult amongst young people. It bears witness to how famished people must be for spiritual nourishment, that they flock to watch a pastiche of every available mystical tradition fighting for truth and love in cyberspace. At bottom the movie is a discussion about becoming human in a dehumanising environment.

A review of David Toolan's new — and alas, last — book *At Home in the Cosmos*, gives clues to the magnitude of the theological quantum leap which lies ahead if the Church is to close the gap between an anachronistic world-view and the truly marvellous revelations of modern science.

Finally, Muriel Porter explores some Home Truths which point to the possibility that the Church's current problems relate less to sex, than to power.

This is, I believe, an optimistic line-up of talent which offers hope to a Church in crisis, and liberation from the social stereotype of church as 'good' — for only God is good. Christ's Church, at its best, is the fellowship of failure, as the prophets and martyrs attest.

# Finding Australia's prophets

By Drew Hanlon

*We are about to experience what could be called a 'second enlightenment', a postsecular enlightenment, where religion and spirituality will return to centre stage and where secular materialism will appear out of date and anachronistic. However, with this new religious enlightenment, the sacred will be experienced in radically different ways from the past. The new awareness will not champion premodern religious categories but, rather, will introduce new and altered concepts of the sacred<sup>1</sup>.* (David Tacey)



Photo courtesy of Portland Observer & Guardian, Photographer Kate Hill ©

Spiritual life in Australia seems to be going through something of a period of revitalisation. The forms of spirituality that are manifest may not be ones that the Christian Church has traditionally recognised but they are a reflection of the human desire for the Numinous<sup>2</sup> and its presence in our lives.

Popular writings such as those produced by John Shelby Spong, or books like *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran and *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, the growth of various forms of New Age movements, the attraction to mythical narratives such as those created in *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*, interest in Eastern spirituality and philosophy, the popularity of the work of Michael Leunig, the desire for alternative forms of therapy and healing, and Mind-Body-Spirit festivals show that spirituality is not out of fashion in Australian culture.<sup>3</sup>

Although these are diverse forms of spiritual expression they have a common element in that

they are predominantly experiential. While it can certainly be argued that there is intellectual credibility in these movements, the experience of the Sacred is the pre-eminent concern.

Australia is a culturally diverse country and our culture is providing us with an eclectic variety of responses to the Sacred. Many factors have contributed to this eclectic mix, not least people coming from many countries, for many reasons, to make up Australia's population.

These factors sit alongside society's increasing awareness of the significance of the spirituality of Australia's indigenous peoples, the need for reconciliation, the movement(s) described as post-modernism, and a disenchantment with the 'good-life'.

It is also arguable that our landscape and history have shaped our spirituality<sup>4</sup>.

From my experience and research, I would argue that spirituality in Australia has an anti-authoritarian streak, tolerates little pious rhetoric and is earthy.

Put in recognisable Christian terms, it is radically incarnational and highly contextual. Tacey highlights this yearning and this uncomfortable place that we find ourselves in.

"How we conceptualise spirit in Australia is still beyond our imagining. And this spirit appears to be "waiting" for something to happen, waiting for some transformation or transfiguration. But of what? And of whom? It may be that Australian spirit is presently beyond our imagining because it is non-dualistic, non-otherworldly, and deeply linked to physical reality. As such, it could be "unrecognisable" (Eliade) from the point of view of the old Judeo-Christian dispensation, with its transcendentalist and dualistic character. This is perhaps why the churches have not been able to identify the spiritual renaissance in Australia, nor offer leadership in this spiritual discovery."<sup>5</sup>

1 Tacey, D., (2000), *ReEnchantment: the new Australian Spirituality*, Harper Collins, Sydney, p.7.

2 The words Numinous, Sacred and Spirit are used interchangeably in this paper to represent the reality of God. However, it should be noted that language such as Spirit refers to an abstraction that arises in Gebserian terms from the Mental – Rational consciousness.

3 For a fuller list of manifestations and expressions of spiritual renewal

in a variety of forms, groups, movements, artists and writers see Tacey, (2000), pp.3–4.

4 In particular see, Veronica Brady's "Called by the Land to enter the Land" in Hammond, C., (1991) (Ed.), *Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime*, Sydney, Millennium Books.

5 Tacey (2000), p.98

Tacey is a committed Christian and is concerned to show that there is a strong movement of the Spirit in this land at present. Significantly for those in the Church there seems an incapacity to respond in a creative way.

In our society the diverse of forms of spirituality that one may participate in at present suggests that our response to the Spirit is in a state of flux. There is no cohesive or unifying narrative that is the all-encompassing expression of our response to the Sacred.

Perhaps, for the moment, we might suspend judgment on the depth and substance of our current spiritual landscape. It may very well be argued that, in some ways, this might be a delight to the Church, even though the Spirit might not be 'blowing' in ways that we feel it should, or is moving in ways that are perplexing to those of us who remain in the traditional forms of the Christian community.

Clearly, within the Church there is much disquiet and concern about the "watering down" of the Gospel in such a cultural milieu. Spirituality in such a context arises because of the cry of the human heart for roots that go down deep and provide the grace to let us know who we truly are, both as individuals and as a community.

Liberals and conservatives<sup>6</sup> are often fighting with one another about what is central to the content of Christian faith. These debates seem superfluous to many outside the Church in Australia, not least because these arguments seem predominantly concerned with ideas that are divorced from the reality of everyday experience. Therefore, these concerns further remove the significance of the Christian narrative of existence from the lives of many people, as the Church does not seem to offer an experiential narrative that is vibrant for their lives.

I do not believe that these are necessarily uniquely Australian problems, but possibly concerns of the overly rationalised world.

To summarise what the Christian narrative has to offer our society is to be in danger of trivialising the

tradition. Nevertheless such articulation is required if the Church is to engage with society effectively.

The Christian tradition has a narrative of "reality" that tells us we are not alone, that we are upheld by an infinitely creative God, who is profoundly and radically intimate with the creation, is redemptive and loving, relates to us individually and communally, seeks justice, compassion and mercy, and knows the cost of existence in the person of Jesus.

The question arises for those grounded in the Christian tradition — "how might we maintain the integrity that we ascribe to our personal and communal narrative while remaining in open and honest engagement with others in our society? How might we maintain integrity within our tradition and at the same time be called to experience "reality" in new ways?"

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One way of addressing these questions is to look at the very framework that we bring to our experience, our questions and answers about the nature and description of 'reality'. This may be necessary for the Church to make a significant contribution in this polylogue, but may also be of great benefit to the society of which we are a part, as the spiritual wisdom of this tradition can provide depth and balance to new insights. As Tacey suggests —

"The religious spark has been rekindled in Australians, but how are we to tell the genuine spark from all the new age fires currently burning in our towns and cities? The truth is, we are completely unprepared for the spiritual renaissance which is currently upon us"<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> I certainly do not use either of these words pejoratively, but rather inclusively to describe the groups of responses to the Christian tradition. It might be argued that both of these responses, when taken to an extreme position, become divorced from our individual and communal experience, the treasures of our tradition, and most significantly stifle the possibility of transformation by the Sacred, as these responses are couched in fear of real engagement with the Sacred. For those manifesting extreme forms of liberalism there appears to be the consistent deferment of engagement with the Divine through an unwillingness to state anything specific about the nature of this reality, possibly arising

out of fear of intimate connection with the Sacred. For those bearing an extreme conservatism there appears to be a desire to overly control the understanding of the nature of the Divine through legalistic and dogmatic formulation that is prescriptive. In other words there is a predetermined understanding and interpretation about the Divine and how the Divine engages with humanity. Such ossified interpretation is protected by such believers through particular understandings of revelation that are self-enclosed and self-referring in the construction of understanding the relationship between God and the world.

<sup>7</sup> Gebser, (1985), p.530.

A thinker who might help provide a framework to appreciate this process a little better is Jean Gebser (1905–1973), a Prussian born cultural philosopher.

Gebser looked at the unfolding of consciousness in the human condition. He did not believe that there was a predetermined pattern to this unfolding, but rather that the human being and his or her culture were required to respond to the latent structures of consciousness within the awakening human condition.

Gebser argues that humanity is utterly dependent on the Sacred<sup>8</sup> but there is also the capacity within humans to respond to the Sacred in different ways<sup>9</sup>. Different ways of responding arise because of differing structures of consciousness. Those bearing a different consciousness experience reality in a radically different way to those bearing other structures.

At the heart of Gebser's work is the belief that humanity stands on the threshold of the emergence of a new structure of consciousness<sup>10</sup>. He highlighted differing structures through the history of humanity and suggests that much of the turmoil that humanity has encountered in the last couple of hundred years is the result of the deficient manifestation and consequent breakdown of the mental structure of consciousness, which he technically calls the 'rational' consciousness.

Gebser's dense theory of consciousness is explicated in his *magnum opus* — *The Ever Present Origin*. In brief, he highlights five distinct and yet overlapping structures of consciousness: archaic, magic, mythic, mental and integral. These structures can be latent — that is 'dormant', or manifest — that is 'active'.

Through the intensification of consciousness, the experience of reality — the spiritual — becomes transparent.

Put another way — through the manifestation of the integral consciousness the individual and the community experience the diaphanous nature of reality.

Each structure of consciousness can be manifest efficiently or deficiently. That is, the efficient experience gives the bearer and society the full benefit

of that particular appreciation of reality. When working deficiently, the structure dominates the consciousness to the extent that it does not allow the bearer to appreciate the insights and experiences of other structures<sup>11</sup>.

For Gebser there is no sense of superiority of one structure of consciousness over another. Indeed, each structure is borne by the individual and the society, whether or not they are manifest.

Hierarchical interpretations or valuation of one structure over another is an interpretation arising out of our dominant structure — with linearity, objectivity and hierarchy as defining characteristics.

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construction of doctrine is**

Each structure “must be lived commensurate with their constitutive values if we are to live a whole or integral life”<sup>12</sup>.

Gebser's work is not idealistic but begins with the evidence before him of “present-day weapons of destruction”<sup>13</sup>.

The breakdown and destructive influence of the rational consciousness<sup>14</sup> and emergence of a 'new' consciousness is understandably one that provides a time of crisis for humanity, not least in our relationship with the Sacred.

Some images will live on, others will be transformed and experienced in new ways and other imagery will not depart from our consciousness other than by a process of painful death for the individual and communal consciousness.

If we take Gebser's theory and our contemporary experience of Australian spiritual life seriously, we might imagine two roads. One is life giving and full of uncertainty but leads to an intensification of the Sacred. The other is a road to the ossification

8 These different ways of responding arise from different structures of consciousness. Gebser provides an overview of the evidence for these differing mutations, their manifestation and the way that the bearer appreciates the world through each structure on pp.36-115 (1985).

9 Gebser (1985), p.xxvii-xxviii.

10 Gebser (1985), p.3-4.

11 Gebser (1985), p.155.

12 Gebser, (1985), p.5.

13 Such manifestations can be seen in the overly rationalised and fragmented approaches to academic disciplines, economics, health sciences, international relations, isolated individualism, egocentrism and dualism.

14 Feuerstein, G., (1987), *Structures of Consciousness: the genius of Jean Gebser*, California, Integral Publishing, p.166.

of the Spirit in our lives because of the reified and de-contextualised rational interpretations of the Sacred's relationship with humanity.

It should be noted here that Gebser's theory of consciousness is not gnostic, because it is not concerned with hidden knowledge, but rather with the latent and manifest structures of experiencing reality that unfold through the experience of existence:

"...Gebser does not subscribe to the belief that individual intention and effort alone can bring about the new reality. The spiritual is "larger" than the personal and follows its own incomprehensible laws."<sup>15</sup>

Gebser's theory is useful for the Church because it throws light on the different modes of constructing and reflecting on the reality of the Sacred in the context of culture. His theory is not idealistic or lacking evidence. It is an invitation to become aware of the manifestation of the spiritual, and the cost of responding to it.

"The Grand and painful path of consciousness emergence, or, more appropriately, the unfolding and intensification of consciousness, manifests itself as an increasingly intense luminescence of the spiritual in man."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the difficulty the Church has in communicating its wealth of spiritual wisdom is not so much about the content of its message, or perhaps even the presentation, but about the assumptions that we place on the stories, and consequently on the Sacred.

Perhaps as a society and as Christians we might be called to experience the luminescence of the Sacred in our lives in an intensified way. This is potentially dangerous ground.

Gebser's theory provides one way of giving us direction, and raising difficult questions about the nature of the spiritual life of Australia at this time. His work gives a unique way of looking behind the questions and concerns that face many people

in contemporary Australian life, not least in terms of our spirituality.

I believe this process enables us to look with our own eyes, to see life through the eyes of others and to begin to understand the multiplicity of spiritual paths in Australia and the movement of the Sacred in our time.

**G**ebser's theory of consciousness might generate some of the following implications for the Church and its tradition of faith, as it engages with Australian society.

- The bearers of integral consciousness may have many perspectives on our tradition and society. They may at one and the same time be able to sit within a particular tradition and yet explore the deep well of ecumenical wisdom and spirituality.

**the difficulty that the Church has with the Gospel as a way of providing life-giving, world-transforming life-maps**

- Those who bear an integral consciousness will not be relativistic or reductionist in their approach to the Christian tradition, but will be aware of the vibrancy and limitation of this tradition<sup>17</sup>. Neither will they try to create a false homogeneity that conflates and over-simplifies differences and experience.
- The bearers of the integral consciousness may have a critical appreciation of the potential and concrete reality of the unfolding of the Sacred which their tradition conveys. For example, parts of our tradition such as the Exodus and the Resurrection become manifest time and again, concretely showing the experience of and response to the Spirit in human consciousness.

15 Gebser, (1985), p.542.

16 Relativism is related to reductionism in the sense that a relativistic perspective does not value the depths of the tradition but rather reduces it to a lowest common denominator. Such a process arises out of the 'logic' of the mental rational consciousness and the bearers' determination to make sense of the world in a clear and logical interpretation. Consequently, a false homogeneity is created. Likewise, for those bearing the mental rational consciousness who are convinced of the superiority of their perspective there may be an inability to listen to other patterns of experience because their view of reality places pre-determined and unconsciously assumed logical constraints on their interpretation of their community's narrative. Therefore both reduc-

tionist and relativistic responses to reality find their basis in the mental rational consciousness' 'need' for clarity, logic, linearity rather than the interdependent complexity and transparent simplicity that is reflective of the integral consciousness.

17 In this context this seems to be one of the few words that are applicable. It refers to the experience and reality of the shining forth of the Sacred through all and in all. It also applies to the awakening of our consciousness to this reality in which "we live and move and have our being". For Gebser this is the awakening of our consciousness to the luminescence of the Ever Present Origin who is our beginning and end, Gebser (1985), p.542.

- The bearers will respect and experience the importance of the tradition in which they are grounded. They will be critically appreciative of their own tradition and of others and yet allow humanity's traditions and narratives to 'speak to' and 'read us' in a conversational manner, aware of the differing traditions' wisdom with respect to the unfolding of the Sacred.
- The bearers of this consciousness may experience the uniqueness of a given tradition in an intensified way because of the tradition's place in the plurality of perspectives. In this intensified milieu the tradition can be brought into relation with other narratives without sectarian or tribal defensiveness or bias. There will be a genuine exploration of diversity and unity.
- The bearers of integral consciousness may be expansive in their exploration and interaction with other disciplines, and with what these disciplines say to people about the Sacred, and the sacred nature of reality.
- The bearers of integral consciousness have an awareness of the self's dependence on, grounding in and diaphanous experience of the Sacred which permeates and is explored in all dimensions of existence.
- The bearers may realise that the Sacred is profoundly and concretely experienced, but can also be illuminated beyond our grasp. Our tradition points to, remind us and takes us further into the experience of the Sacred, sometimes confronting us, surprising us by a 'new' awareness, and also making humans aware of its presence in the concrete reality of existence. In this consciousness there is no domestication or trivialisation of the Sacred, as the bearer does not rationalise the Sacred — rather existence is re-sacralised.

The diaphanous reality of the Spirit means that the Sacred is transparently manifest and concretely experienced. Those bearing this consciousness may be aware that myth is a vehicle, or a tool, just as the mental construction of doctrine is, but that it is not a container of the Sacred, so much as a mediator.

The diaphaneity of the Sacred, as experienced in the integral consciousness, brings about a radicalisation or intensification of commitment to the world. In such a context the Christian experiences the Sacred drawing humanity into a deeper commitment to compassion and justice, through being

in interdependent relationship with the rest of creation. This experience gives the bearer a commitment to the transformation of the self and the world, which promotes the desire for mutuality, wellbeing, and benefit of the other.

Furthermore, in the mutually interdependent play and dynamism between the bearers of integral consciousness and the Sacred there may be an ever more intensifying manifestation and interaction, by which the Sacred and the bearers of integrality become more manifest to each other.

Resistance and fear exhibited toward such a shift in our consciousness by those bearing the overly rationalised perspective may highlight some of the difficulty that the Church has in presenting the Gospel as a way of providing life-giving, world-transforming life-maps for individuals and communities.

**How do we as Christians respond to the possibility that our Mental Rational conceptions of the Sacred may be anachronistic?**

Those who have an integral appreciation of reality may need to face the ego-based defences, within themselves and others, against the Sacred and each other that have been set up by rational constraints, not least a dominating sense of control and logic.

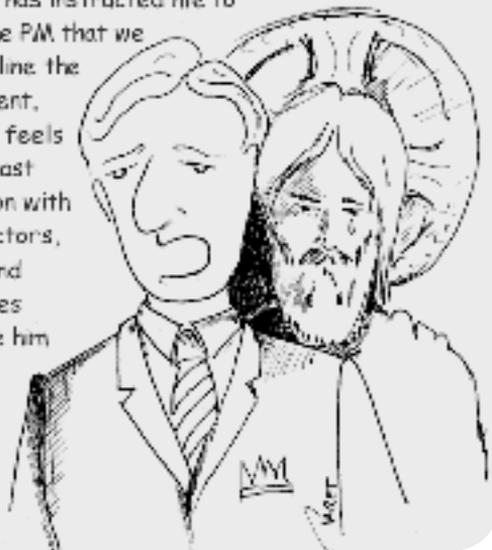
Such people may also need to face the intellectual empires that have been built upon discrete, non-communicative and sometimes combative disciplines and ways of interpreting reality.

Nevertheless, such exploration is inspired by an awareness of the emergence of integral consciousness, and the bearers are able to address and discuss concerns that are of vital importance to open and inquiring mental consciousness.

Understanding the limits of our previous ways of 'knowing' and articulating 'reality' may help the Church to encounter our culture, concretely experiencing the intensification of the Sacred, and enabling the Church to provide society with the opportunity of entering into the mystery of Grace as presented in the Gospel.

## Paquet's parable

My client has instructed me to inform the PM that we must decline the appointment. My client feels that his past association with tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes will make him ineligible for the position.



As a Christian priest, I believe the Church has much to contribute to this sacred journey. The Church may need to look at the assumptions it holds about the nature of the Sacred, and the shape and colour of its own glasses — through which it approaches this reality — if it is to effectively engage with society. This may raise the eyebrows of some and the ire of others but it may very well be a way of participating in what appears to be a shift in our consciousness and an intensification of the experience of the Sacred in our society.

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This is an edited version of an article entitled *Spirituality in Abundance: diversity and Integrity in Australian pilgrimages, a Christian Response* that first appeared in 'Integrative Explorations Journal: Journal of Culture and Consciousness', March 2003 Vol. 7 & 8.

To address the eruption of desire for the Sacred in Australian society we may have to ask some deep questions.

- How do we as Christians respond to the possibility that our Mental Rational conceptions of the Sacred may be anachronistic?
- How does the Church respond to the possibility that there might be a shift in consciousness that causes people to be less concerned about particular mental constructions of the Sacred that they are required to believe in? Particularly when these constructions are predominantly representations of the Sacred from a structure of consciousness that is no longer efficient? Indeed at their worst these constructions might be seen as a significant inhibitor to the experience of the Sacred.
- How do we respond to those who believe and experience the Church as a place that stifles the desire for the Sacred?
- How do we encourage community in such an environment?
- What does an integral consciousness mean for the Church's "mission"?
- Can we assume that we are the only ones with a mission?
- What might be the culture's mission to the Church?

## forum

## Justifiable war?

When Nelson Mandela was still in gaol on Robben Island in the 1980s the Church in South Africa was forced to re-evaluate the Just War theory. The study was undertaken in the context of modern warfare and the apartheid era, when young white males in large numbers were resisting conscription, with penalties of up to six years in gaol, and a huge contingent of black youth was in exile, some engaged in armed resistance against apartheid. An Anglican commission, chaired by Bishop Michael Nuttall, published the results of a two-year study in 1985. Excerpts are reproduced here.

Christians have always been confronted with a perennial question — “How can one live and work in a world where the use of force and violence appears unavoidable?”<sup>1</sup>

In their desire to limit violence and to seek lasting peace and freedom some Christians have taken part in wars by appealing to the notions of a ‘just war’ or ‘just rebellion’. These are concepts which state that some wars are permissible as a means of settling disputes, though only entered into as a last resort as the lesser of two evils and in penitence for failure to resolve the dispute by peaceful means.

It is not possible to find proof-texts in the Bible for the Church’s just war tradition. This tradition does, however, have a bearing on the biblical understanding of justice and love. It is an attempt to limit and control war according to those standards.

It is impossible in the light of the New Testament, to glorify war or treat it as a crusade, no matter how just the cause may seem to be. Often the Church has erred in this respect (as with the so-called Crusades in the Middle Ages).

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, said in 1940, “The spirit in which we fight matters more than our winning. If we keep charity alive with courage our victory will be a boon to mankind and our defeat would be a redemptive agony.”<sup>2</sup>

The mainstream of the Christian tradition has held that, given the conditions of a fallen world, (this) stewardship does include the use of force. This is the assumption behind Romans 13:1-7.

The just war concept is not in origin and in itself a Christian concept. It was taken over in the first instance from Greek philosophy and Roman Law. St Augustine added a specifically Christian element in teaching that purity of motive and love must govern the actions of a Christian soldier.

Augustine’s famous remark, “What are unjust kingdoms, but robber gangs on a grand scale?”<sup>3</sup> points to the origins of the concept of just rebellion. Thomas Aquinas developed the concept further and approved the overthrow of a tyrant under certain conditions. There is an important strand in the mainstream Christian tradition which recognises this position. The Lutherans at Magdeburg in 1550 developed a theory of armed resistance by which the “electors could resist the emperor if he violated his oath”.<sup>4</sup> It is well known that Calvin in his political ethics recognised the possibility that circumstances might arise in which it would be justifiable for the normal understanding of legitimate authority to be re-assessed in a way which sanctioned resistance to the emperor.<sup>5</sup>

This teaching underlines the fact that governmental or state authority can never be absolute. No authority can claim more than a conditional legitimacy. It is conditional upon the fulfilment of the purpose for which it was ordained by God.

When conditions exist in which the previously accepted or assumed legitimate authority is set in the direction which is radically undermining the very principles of justice on which that authority is based, then the just rebellion version of the theory becomes applicable. To reject this assertion would lead to an absolutising of the status quo which would be contrary to the principle and intention of the traditional just war theory. The Christian Church ought to recognise in the same way the

1 Violence, Non-violence and Civil Conflict, p.9 WCC, Geneva, 1983

2 Quoted in L A Harper A New Look at the Chaplain’s Role (Vol 14, No 2 of *The Chaplain*)

3 Davis J G *Christian Politics and Violent Revolution* SCM Press, London

1976, p 78

4 Bainton, R *Christian Attitudes towards War and Peace* Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1960, p 96

5 Bainton, Op Cit p146

right of rebellion in extreme circumstances in which people have been subjected to prolonged and violent oppression. Even then all the just war criteria need to be rigorously applied.

It is sobering that even Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged a certain validity to this possibility (of just rebellion) -

“I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. ... I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.”<sup>6</sup>

The fact remains, however, that in the just war

**No war, however noble its aims, can be seen as good in itself.**

tradition of the Church there is an important sense in which all Christians are pacifists in that they acknowledge that the use of violence is *prima facie* wrong. Thus concerning war, all are against it, abhor it, and wish to see it stopped and prevented. The question, however, remains — how is the conflict to be stopped and prevented, as the case may be? It is at this point that the ethical agonising commences. Some might consider the use of force to be necessary in order to lessen or prevent violence. This does not mean that they cease to be pacifist in terms of the conviction that violence is *prima facie* wrong.

In view of the strong moral presumption against violence in the just war theory, it is clear that the term ‘just’ is not the most apt. It could give the impression that once a war has been judged ‘just’, it thereby becomes ‘good’. No war, however noble its aims, can be seen as good in itself. It might be better to replace the word ‘just’ with ‘justifiable’ or ‘permissible’, as war can never be fully just.

One of the main criticisms of the just war theory concerns the problems of measuring and applying the criteria. For instance, who deter-

mined that a cause is just in the absence of a third party as an arbitrator?

The problem of measurement ought not to invalidate the usefulness of the just war theory, (for it) provides a useful tool in the analysis of conflict in relation to the principles of Christian justice.

One of the concerns which Aquinas had in mind when formulating the criterion that a war can only be justifiably declared by a legitimate authority was the need to avoid giving any basis for an anarchist ethic which would justify an individual taking up arms in a personal and individual cause.

Insofar as Christian tradition holds to a positive view of the function of government in society, it is that God in his providence intends there to be a structure of government for the ordering of the body politic for the common good of all.

There are therefore two crucial factors to be considered when assessing the claim to legitimate authority by any government.

- How is the government constituted; to what extent is it accountable to the citizens in whose name it governs?
- How does the government use its power in practice?

The concept of legitimate authority is therefore essentially conditional.

In terms of international law, a distinction is made between *de facto* authority and *de jure* authority.

Recognition by the international community is not the only criterion of legitimacy. Equally important is the internal recognition of the citizens of the state in question.

It is generally accepted, for example, that Hitler’s Third Reich began as a properly constituted government. This did not however mean that his regime had legitimate authority to invade neighbouring states and send Jews to the gas chambers. It is possible for a government properly constituted to forfeit what legitimate authority it may have had, when it becomes guilty of wars of aggression and ongoing violations of human rights.

There was a time when the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings was accepted orthodoxy. Central to this doctrine was the assumption that the king was responsible or accountable to God alone. He alone was the source, under God, of

<sup>6</sup> Gandhi M All Men are Brothers – The life and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as told in his own words UNESCO, p104

legitimate authority in the realm. This doctrine is now thoroughly discredited.

(T)he legitimacy of the authority wielded by government is dependent upon the extent to which that government remains accountable to the community from which its authority is derived.

Legitimacy is grounded... in accountability to the community of citizens.

It is generally accepted that the modern phenomenon of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war have caused an important shift in the debate over the ethics of war. This point was made very emphatically by the Second Vatican Council in the document *Gaudium et spes*.

It was in response to this call for a fresh appraisal of war that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of

**People should not have to justify their refusal to participate; rather it is those who opt for the contrary position who need to give an explanation.**

the USA issued a lengthy pastoral Letter in 1983 on the subject of war and peace in a nuclear age. In their Letter the Bishops state that –

“No previously conceived moral position escapes the fundamental confrontation posed by contemporary nuclear strategy... We must refuse to legitimate the idea of nuclear war. We do not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear warfare on however restricted a scale can be morally justified.”<sup>7</sup>

It might appear that the logic of the above quotation(s) would lead to the conclusion that the just war theory can no longer have a meaningful place in the circumstances of a world dominated by the threat of nuclear war... This would be a faulty conclusion for two important reasons.

Firstly, it is precisely on the grounds of the just war theory that the bishops develop and establish their case against nuclear war.

Secondly, it is an oversimplification of the social and political realities in the world today to assert that all war means nuclear war.

It is important that the Church should encourage and assist people to become critically aware of the nature of the situation in which they find themselves. This requires a courageous honesty and openness to the truth, which is only possible through an ever-deepening surrender to Christ. People must be helped to examine the nature of the conflict, its history and causes, and to examine various views held. Clearly the way these situations are perceived will have an effect on a person's ethical response. There are those who adhere to what may be called a 'universal pacifist' position and who consequently may regard an examination of the nature of the conflict as having no relevance for their ethical decision. For the vast majority in the mainstream Christian tradition, the way people feel called to act is greatly affected by their understanding of the nature of the conflict.

The Church will therefore seek to ensure that people do not become blindly and uncritically involved in conflict. Instead they must be encouraged to examine their actions in the light of the Gospel.

(P)eople should not have to justify their refusal to participate; rather it is those who opt for the contrary position who need to give an explanation. All Christians should refuse to take up arms unless there are very weighty ethical reasons indicating the contrary.

According to the mainstream Christian tradition these 'weighty ethical reasons' are most fruitfully tested by the just war criteria. The Church in its pastoral and prophetic ministry should encourage and help all caught up in the conflict to apply these criteria to the specific war situation in which they have become involved, or are liable to become involved.

The Church upholds the primacy of conscience, while being fully aware that individual conscience is fallible and often misdirected. The Church therefore has an important pastoral duty to give guidance and help members in the formation of conscience.

The right and duty of the Church to 'pass moral judgments' on matters relating to the political order in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of individual Christians, but provides

<sup>7</sup> *The Tablet*, 4 June 1983, p526

both guidance and challenge in the formation of conscience. In this sense it is appropriate for the Church in its pastoral ministry to issue a clear word, where this is needed, concerning the nature of particular conflicts.

The ministry of Christ is essentially one. Too often certain facets of his ministry have been presented in almost opposing form. This is not to say that there are never difficulties in working out the relationship between the prophetic and pastoral aspects of ministry.

The pastoral and prophetic ministry of the Church to those involved in war must be all-embracing in its range. To take an extreme example from World War II, a young German soldier ordered to capture Jews for the purpose of deportation to a concentration camp needs more than comforting in the dilemma he may experience. Pastoral responsibility for this man requires that he be helped to understand the enormity of what he is involved in. In this way the dimension of challenge must be seen as an essential part of the pastoral ministry.

There is a great variety of categories of people caught up in the conflict. There are conscientious objectors of all kinds, volunteers on either side of the conflict, those conscripted and all others caught up in the conflict (e.g. the bereaved, and ultimately every member of Church and society). Very often these categories represent radically different perceptions and convictions about the nature of the conflict and the demands of the Gospel in relation to it.

Bishop Michael Nuttall chaired the Church of the Province of Southern Africa's commission on the Just War 1982–1985. In his preface to the commission's report he described the Just War theory as "a difficult as well as a delicate area of Christian ethics". Bishop Nuttall also chaired the committee responsible for *An Anglican Prayer Book*, which provides some courageous prayers of intercession and thanksgiving forged in the context of the Church's conflict with the apartheid government.

See book review *Number Two to Tutu* on page 26.

## Just War Criteria

### Criteria for *jus ad bellum* (the right to make war)

- It must have a just cause — for example, the restoring of rights wrongly denied, re-establishing a just order, or defence against unjust attacks.
- It must have a just intention — for example, the ultimate object of war must be to achieve a just peace.
- There must be a careful weighing of means in relations to ends — the probable good must be weighed against the probable evil which may result. The prospects for success must be considered in order to avoid action which results in much additional suffering without achieving the just end intended.
- It must be a last resort — all other means should be seriously tried first.
- It must be declared by a legitimate authority — it is not a private citizen, but only an appropriate authority that may initiate a just war.

### Criteria for *jus in bello* (conduct in war)

- There must be a careful weighing of means in relation to ends. This concerns the use of weapons and methods which are subject to restraint, and the avoiding of wanton violence and atrocities.
- There must be discrimination in terms of targets. This criterion concerns the need to avoid injury being done to innocent non-combatants wherever possible.
- There are some means which are prohibited altogether. Many would regard the use of torture and nuclear weapons as coming under this criterion as well as the first two.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Geneva Protocols of 1977 are attempts to translate these standards into International Law.

# A woman goes to war in Baghdad

**Ruth Russell**, a mild-mannered Adelaide woman with a grown-up family, went to Baghdad and camped beside grain silos during the bombing of Iraq, so that 75 million people had food to eat when the war was over.

Other cities in Iraq, without Human Shields, did not fare so well, after their water and power installations and food dumps were disrupted or destroyed by the coalition forces.

Still in shock, two weeks after her return to Australia on Good Friday, Ruth explained why she did it, and how the experience changed her for life.

Fourteen years ago Ruth Russell was studying history at university. “There is this principle. In history there have always been people who — no matter what the personal consequences — will stand up and say it is wrong. And I wondered on an intellectual level if I had the guts to stand up, if I ever had to. What’s the use of living unless you live to create a better world? So I made that decision, on an intellectual level, many years ago.”

Human Shields came from all over the world, most, like Ruth, paying their own way. Key installations where they were billeted were classified by the United Nations as *bona fide* humanitarian sites.

Ruth shows her video footage from their adventure, still rough-cut and bearing marks of the chaos of warfare.

“Baghdad was buzzing because there were people from everywhere. These are the Buddhists who came! Chap from Portugal! Japanese people! There’s the big bus that came from London.

“This is the water treatment plant where they had 16 beds in the one room.”

“These are the meetings of the Human Shields, every night — organising. Because we had a lot to

eye witness



organise. An Australian went out every night,” to decide where the Human Shields would be billeted on the nine classified sites.

“Fifty-two nations came on this street demonstration in the beginning, before the war started. It was a huge international movement.”

Ruth moved to the food silo during the war, in the worst time. The Iraqis gave them a beautifully furnished house, and the Minister of Trade gave them a garden full of pot plants as a gift.

“People thought we were in dire straits — and we were, potentially — but here we were, beautiful new blankets they brought, the Iraqi people and the food silo manager! And look at the food they gave us every day! We were just fêted — they were so honoured we came to stand with them.”

“We were on the roof every day waiting for bombs. It was 30°C — it was really hot. So I decided I’d put up an Aussie shield (a tarpaulin).”

They could see the bombing of the city from the roof, and listen to the BBC on the radio. “Because they bombed everything else. It was the only news we had... They bombed day and night for three weeks”.

Ruth’s breathing is audible on the video as an explosion rocks a natural gas facility adjacent to the silos. “If that’d gone up we mightn’t have been around still!” she remarks bluntly.

There was one Iraqi guard for the whole site, which was backed by subsistence farms growing vegetables with complex irrigation systems, and with poultry and donkeys. “It was a horrible sound when the bombs came — donkeys screaming!”

“They burnt tyres and oil all over so that the satellites couldn’t see so easily. So the whole city was covered in this black smoke.”

Anti-aircraft gunfire rumbles from the tape. But Ruth matter-of-factly points out that the guns were useless against the high-flying B52s.

People from the surrounding settlement moved into the silo compound during the war, because they felt safe with the Human Shields there.

Ruth believes that Baghdad’s key installations were not bombed because of their presence. “Because they bombed the sites in Basra — food



sites — food, electricity, water. That's why they've got cholera now — because they bombed the water treatment site and sewerage."

There were no Human Shields outside Baghdad. "We didn't have enough. Because we had to support each other as well and keep a track of everybody."

"We'd go in (to the city) every day and visit the hospitals, and talk to the wounded people. And that was really important, that we could comfort them. They didn't have medicine.

"We said 'We're from Australia but we don't think our government should be doing this'. And it was comforting to them."

"We had a bus and drivers to take us anywhere we wanted, from 'Friendship, Peace and Solidarity' — a group who hosted all delegations who came, whether Human Shields or not."

"They would negotiate on our behalf with the Iraqi government, and the Iraqi government made us have a minder with us all the time. Sometimes we weren't allowed to film places — like military bases. They would keep a track of where we went, in case we were spies. That was fair enough."

The tape shows a bombed out restaurant. "That's what a bomb does — pretty amazing really. This was a bomb that went astray and bombed the market place." Sixteen civilians were killed and 30 injured.

Ruth didn't see the statue of Saddam Hussein fall — the icon of the coalition victory. "We were bunkered in, we couldn't leave, because we were 20km away and there was a 'shoot to kill' policy, and you couldn't get out. It was like a curfew 24 hours a day... David (a professional photographer) crept out one morning to film and he got shot at four times... He didn't want to take me. He thought I'd be a nuisance!... It was important that David filmed civilian deaths after the Americans took over."

"The Iraqis buried their tanks and weapons all along the road outside our silo. So there was a massive tank battle on the Sunday before the Americans rolled in. That was when their 'shoot to kill' policy was on."

"If you didn't have a stockpile (of food and water) you'd have to go without."

"Oh and here's a body, burnt to death. And there's another one. They probably tried to escape,

to get out — just got shot. And there's the body of a child, completely burnt. And that is a soldier, just their knees — all that's left. They were letting people out to bury all the civilians."

Six Human Shields left the silo when the bombing was over. There were ten originally. The video camera captures a blur of city streets "Unfortunately we were going quite fast. The driver had worry beads."

"The Americans — as soon as they saw we were American, Australian and British — they thought we were wonderful. They gave us VIP treatment. They only searched the car to make sure there were no bombs."

And so it was that some of the most remarkable footage of the invasion of Iraq made it back to Australia.

**I**t was a changed Ruth Russell who returned — one who is still coming to terms with a traumatic experience. But her shell shock has more to do with her new perspective on her own culture, than the stench, din and horror of warfare. This cultural earthquake began before the bombing.

"Iraqis were doing a candlelight peace ceremony down on the river, and they invited the Human Shields to go to it. We had about five full busloads of Human Shields.

"We get down to the river and there were hundreds of Iraqis there... They had these women with trays of a beautiful leaf, and everyone was given a candle. You'd light the candle, take it down to the river, and you'd make a wish for peace and sail it out.

"They wanted the Human Shields to go first. We were so honoured. They were so pleased after 12 years of sanctions — no one caring about all their suffering — to have people come and actually see what was happening... I hadn't understood how important it was, because they had been suffering alone, nobody knowing their stories."

"I sailed mine off. After that the Iraqis started singing songs. Then the Human Shields would sing a song. It was all spontaneous. Then maybe a French person would sing a song. I joined in with an English folk singer and we did 'We shall overcome'...and he had a guitar. And we were crying — it was really quite moving".

“Then all of a sudden these two Iraqi women grabbed me by the hand and sort of pulled me along, and we went out past the huge crowd... I thought ‘where am I going?’ because you can’t speak Arabic...! They took me down the street until we got to this mud building beside the river, and it was all dark, just a few candles.

“It turned out to be a women’s prayer room. They took me in and they gave me what I now understand to be a blessing... and then they asked me to hold out my hands and they gave me the red henna, which is really very special for them.”

“It felt so right to be there (in Iraq). I’m still a bit fragile though, because they were such gentle, but very honourable people in themselves. They were gracious. And it made me look at our society, and look at how crass and arrogant we are, and how often people think we know better. And we don’t!

“Our systems aren’t better than theirs. They have got a very strong respect for people — their dignity, and we don’t have that. We are just me! me! me! Our individualism has gone totally rampant.

“I have really struggled, coming back to Western values. Even their dress code! It was rather refreshing not to see belly buttons, cleavages and bums.”

“I’d meet lots of women with real integrity and intelligence. I went to the Federation of Iraqi Women meeting, where there were dynamic, very intelligent women in high places in government... women who were fulfilled and enriched and well-educated, well informed. Women microbiologists were working in the silo — not our perception of women as they are in perhaps, Afghanistan, where women have no opportunities to contribute in their society at a high level.

“There were women working for Friendship, Peace and Solidarity, who were diplomats. So they had a respect in their culture for women, not only women who were well educated (everybody gets educated there for free), but even the women who were mothers. They value mothers, whereas we don’t. We devalue a lot of the roles of women in our society.”

“They don’t have homeless youth. They don’t have youth suicide. They don’t have lonely old people. I said I wanted to go to an orphanage, and they said, ‘but we don’t have orphanages’.

“Their social structure is still based on the family, and their state system was a socialist state. Everything was run by the state, and if you took Saddam away — who was keeping himself in power through killing and intimidation — underneath that was a very, very efficient state system.

“That is why the tragedy is so massive for them now, because they have lost all their employment, because everyone was employed by the state.”

“I went to the United Nations, and wanted to find out from UNICEF what was actually happening, and they said, well, this is just the most wonderful food distribution system... They are well organised, educated, qualified.

“Baghdad had fantastic buildings. Fantastic houses — there were rich people there, who would have been the Baathist party, which was the bourgeoisie of their society. They will resent the Americans coming in and giving all the jobs to the Americans.”

**F**or me now, the most important thing is to open the debate about why we did this, and why are we continuing to support a country like America (USA), that’s out of control — not following international law, not following the Geneva conventions, not accountable through an International Court of Justice.

“What sort of society do we want to have? Do we want to follow the American (USA) model of rampant individualism, where some people can be worth millions of dollars, and other people don’t even get paid at subsistence level?”

“I’m trying to pace myself, but you are only a one-minute wonder in news. People are Iraqi’d out. I am sure a lot of people don’t want to hear what I have to say. Because, they think, ‘We don’t want to reflect and analyse’.”

Ruth Russell is determined to ask the hard questions anyway. “Do we want homeless youth? What are we going to do with all these big issues, the suicide, the loneliness, the way we treat devalued people, the way we demonise people?”

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# The Fatal Decision — how the West lost its Wisdom Tradition

By John Thornhill



Today, a thinking person trying to find answers to ultimate questions concerning our human condition and destiny must contend with Post-modernism's scepticism concerning the possibility of finding *any* answers, on the one hand, and with the doubtful securities offered by the New Conservatism, on the other.

These two very different positions are in fact both reactions to a crisis within our Western cultural tradition, the causes of which can be identified with the help of historical analysis.

The French theologian Ghislain Lafont<sup>1</sup> suggests that our present problems have their origin in developments that took place at the end of the first millennium.

Europe's first 1000 years of our era were dominated by the spread of Christianity. In a very real sense the Church "ran the world".

The outlook that came to prevail was that of Christian Platonism forged by the genius of St Augustine. This Platonic outlook was characterised by a distrust of the material and bodily order, and an emphasis upon the spiritual.

"Purification leads to union" sums up its practical program. Penance and conversion were its constant concerns. And it saw the attainment of truth as the result of illumination "from above". In Lafont's words — "all genuine intelligible and spiritual knowledge descends on men and women by means of a light that both blinds and informs".<sup>2</sup> Compared with truth attained in this way, all other human attempts to express the truth were perceived as next to worthless.

As the second millennium began, and the chaos of the Dark Ages gave way to a more productive

situation which made possible the achievements of the High Middle Ages — the establishment of universities, the construction of great cathedrals, and political stability after the primitive arrangements of feudalism — the world-view of Christian Platonism was to face a radical challenge.

The doctrine of creation "from nothing" (*ex nihilo*) — which had come to be recognised as essential to Christian faith — gave the lie to an assumption of the mythologies of the world, that divine agencies at work in the world are a part of "Nature". The God of Christian faith, who creates all that exists *ex nihilo*, is utterly transcendent, "wholly other" than the nature which has been brought into existence by the divine omnipotence.

In the end, this understanding of the relationship between God and God's creation called into question Christian Platonism's key doctrine — that all life-giving truth comes "from above" by divine illumination; that creation must be recognised to have its own proper processes and intelligibility. Endowed by the Creator with intelligence, humans must find much vital truth for themselves, "from below" as it were.

What was lost was the understanding that God's creation has an authentic autonomy, which is to be acknowledged by Christian faith<sup>3</sup>.

As medieval society made its first awkward claims for a legitimate autonomy in its relationship with the Church, the Church faced a momentous decision. It could acknowledge and welcome the new developments, and seek a new relationship with an evolving Western cultural tradition, or it could turn its back on these developments, refusing to acknowledge that the Dark Ages had ended — a situation in which the Church "ran the world", and in doing so had made an invaluable contribution to the preservation of Europe's cultural tradition.

Though the nature of this decision is clear enough to us today, it is not surprising that the

1 *Imagining the Catholic Church*, Liturgical Press, 2000

2 *Ibid.* p.39 — "the epistemology of illumination".

3 cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 41, 55, 56, 59; and especially n. 16: "In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of

humanity in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships".

churchmen of the time found it impossible to recognise the momentous nature of the cultural development that was taking place<sup>4</sup>.

As Lafont points out, the Church's response to this challenge had far-reaching consequences both for the Church itself, and for the cultural tradition of the West. No longer sharing in the ongoing human quest for the fullness of life, the Church found itself more and more living in a world apart. And our Western tradition had to set out upon the challenging path that opened up before it deprived of its proper heritage of wisdom — which had become so much identified with the life of the Christian Church.

The divorce which we have described had immense influence upon the culture of Modernity,

<sup>4</sup> The attitude of churchmen was greatly influenced by Pope Gregory VII's campaign, in the 11th century, to stamp out abuses that had developed during the Dark Ages — especially lay interference in Church affairs. Gregory's success canonised what Lafont has called "the Gregorian form". A Church culture "tied to an earlier political theology" established itself, with "three supporting elements ... the primacy of truth as it relates to salvation ... The primacy of the pope ... And ... a holy and continent priesthood". This form thus established itself upon foundations belonging to the "realms of truth, power and the sacred" (Lafont, *Imagining*, pp 37-38).

which was to succeed that of the High Middle Ages.

No doubt it contributed to the fact that the founding of Europe's universities, that promised so much, led instead to a decadent scholasticism, turned in upon itself as it adopted a sterile formalism and traditionalism that were the very opposite of the creative spirit of inquiry needed, if the questions our Western tradition faced were to find satisfactory answers.

The cultural mood which emerged after the Middle Ages was one of reaction to the shortcomings of late medievalism. 'Emancipation' and 'Enlightenment' were to become the defining themes of Modernity — emancipation from the dead hand of tradition, and enlightenment to rid the world of obscurantism.

It is a proven historical fact that the founders of modern thought had little knowledge or appreciation of the intellectual achievements of the High Middle Ages. They saw themselves as called to apply their genius to the establishment of a new basis for intellectual inquiry.

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Key figures in this project were René Descartes (d.1650), with his model of science, as essentially concerned with the quantified — to be understood through mathematics — and directed to a practical outcome; and John Locke (d.1704), whose “social contract” (a compromise of self-interests to establish social order) was to provide the model of Modernity’s “democratic society”.

As the modern period progressed, the economic system of Capitalism exerted a far-reaching influence upon all aspects of life in our Western culture. It was to give rise to the critical analysis of Karl Marx (d.1883), and the influential sociological analysis of Max Weber (d.1920).

It is possible to look back and recognise the shortcomings of the project of Modernity.

Alienation from the wisdom resources of the Christian tradition was a serious deprivation<sup>5</sup>.

Beyond that however, the methodology which it came to canonise — concerned exclusively with the *quantified*, considering issues of *quality and value* to be subjective and outside the scope of properly scientific discussion — made it impossible to raise questions absolutely basic to our human existence. It ignored the purpose of human life, the value and dignity of the human person, the nature of knowledge and love, even the nature of science itself!

Why were these shortcomings not recognised?<sup>6</sup> The successes of the scientific method were so dramatic (greatly improving the health prospects of humanity, and giving rise to a technology with astounding achievements — revolutionising transportation and communication, and the production of consumer goods) that little attention was given to the inadequate presuppositions of Modernity’s project.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, it seemed that an ever-ascending “progress” would eliminate the age-old problems of humanity.

The conflicts and upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, were to bring a terrible disillusionment. Two world wars involving unprecedented carnage, the development of weapons capable of

devastating the entire planet, the apparently insurmountable ideological divide caused by a militant Communism, the resentment caused by unbridled Capitalism, as the gap between privileged and impoverished nations became entrenched.

Deprived of its wisdom tradition, our Western tradition during the “Modern” period we have just considered, was greatly influenced by ideologies. An ideology is a cognitive system, which shapes the consensus of a particular historical group. Its effectiveness, however, comes not so much from critical reflection as from the fact that its propositions further the interests and securities of the group. It was Karl Marx who highlighted the place

**That there has been a great deal of “Sir Humphreyism” in the tactics of the world’s oldest bureaucracy is hardly surprising.**

of ideology in the social process (in his analysis, the ideologies of class conflict).

Disillusionment with the project of Modernity has led to critical reflection upon the ideologies that shaped the world of the 20th century.

- Ideologies of political power (Fascism, Communism, and the host of less virulent varieties which shape the politics of modern societies).
- Ideologies of class, gender, religion and race.

‘Deconstruction’ is the name given to a critical analysis of the ideological influences of intellectual positions. Since even the most worthy ideals — even those of Christian faith — will always be championed with overtones of group interests and securities, the findings of Deconstruction have led some influential thinkers to question the possibility

5 Wisdom adds to human experience an existentially satisfying interpretation. While the potential for wisdom derives from the resources of a cultural tradition, it is a personal achievement, and does not advance cumulatively as knowledge and science do. While knowledge and science can be abused, wisdom can never be abused. See my *Modernity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000, ch 5 “Without Wisdom a Culture Disintegrates”.

6 The thought of Max Weber reflects the inherent problems of the presuppositions of modernity. Weber acknowledged that religious convictions have had immense influence, and he regretted the “dis-

enchantment” with religious themes taking place in the culture of the West. But he considered the evaluation of such themes to be the concern of “prophets”, and outside the ambit of his scientific inquiry. He saw the creative forces of the West as concentrated upon “instrumental rationality” — the efficient adaptation of means to ends. Within this on-going project, the development of capitalism made “economic rationalism” (Weber’s phrase) one of the West’s principal preoccupations. Weber feared that our cultural tradition would end up imprisoned in “an iron cage of bureaucratic rationality” of its own making. (See my *Modernity*, pp 29-31, 42-43).

of any ultimate interpretative system, or “meta-narrative”, which is truly disinterested and objective.

At the level of popular awareness, the intellectual climate of Western culture has entered into a period of uncertainty, distrustful of any claim to more than a tentative opinion concerning ultimate meanings and values.

The New Conservatism that has developed in our Western culture — and in the life of the Church — is a very different response to the situation produced by the failure of the project of Modernity. It seeks to fill the vacuum by a reaffirmation of old certainties in an uncertain world.

While we must sympathise with this concern, the obvious danger is that this reaction will adopt a fundamentalist approach (i.e. an approach which turns a text or formula of the past into an ideological slogan, based more on the need for security in the face of doubts, than upon an intelligent interpretation of the true meaning of the formula or text).

We see this taking place in various forms —

- the Religious Right of the USA
- nationalism with a religious garb, in non-Western traditions threatened by our immensely influential Western culture
- the political fundamentalism of influential USA figures, who confuse the flawed Lockean model of democratic society with authentic political freedom, and seek to impose their American model on other peoples.

It is not difficult to recognise that both of the reactions we have considered — Post Modernism and the New Conservatism — are reflected in the contemporary media, in particular in the views of columnists.

During the Modern period, Catholic culture — living in a world apart from the on-going project of our Western tradition, with a sense of being “under siege” — developed what we could call a Counter-Reformation fundamentalism. An outlook that relied too exclusively and uncritically upon the teaching of the Council of Trent, and the Neo-scholasticism that systematised that teaching in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It was inevitable that the massive shift called for by the renewal program of Vatican II would pro-

voke a strong reaction. Most major cultural shifts are followed by a period of reaction and nostalgia for old securities.

The reactions of the Roman Curia are to be interpreted against this background. That there has been a great deal of “Sir Humphrey-ism” in the tactics of the world’s oldest bureaucracy is hardly surprising.

It is enlightening and encouraging to compare the attitudes of John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger against the historical background we have reviewed.

Cardinal Ratzinger proudly declares himself a follower of Augustine. His attitude to a dialogue with the world’s cultural traditions — in which believers are open to important truths coming to light “from below” — is completely negative.

John Paul II, one of the architects of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes*, champions dialogue with the world’s cultural traditions (often quoting *Gaudium et spes*, n.16 etc). A follower of Aquinas, he has an optimistic understanding of the human condition — “God does not despair of humanity; neither must we”.

He extends the principles of Aquinas, however, by developing a *personalism* that points to a way in which the vacuum left in popular culture by our Western tradition’s estrangement from its proper wisdom tradition can be filled. “(D)epth is the essence of the person”; the life of persons is ruled by “the law of giving” whereby we avoid “using” each other, as two genuine freedoms meet each other without reducing the other to an object to be manipulated; “different cultures are different ways of facing the question of the meaning of human existence — at the heart of every culture is a distinctive approach to the greatest of all mysteries, the mystery of God”<sup>7</sup>.

Like Paul VI he advocates “the evangelisation of cultures”<sup>8</sup>.

Though the culture of Modernity has no wisdom tradition, sociological analysis has shown that wisdom is rated as highly desirable by most people. Our evangelisation should take this into account.

Abstract proclamation and lectures will obviously run into difficulties from both groups we have considered. They must be reached through a

<sup>7</sup> See my article, “Creative Fidelity in a Time of Transition”, *Aust. Catholic Record*, 79(2001) pp 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> In a remarkable paragraph of *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Paul VI anticipated the approach taken by John Paul II: “... evangelise human culture and cultures, in the sense of *Gaudium et spes*, taking the person as starting

point, and always coming back to relationships ... the building up of the Kingdom must borrow elements of human culture and cultures ... the Gospel can permeate cultures without becoming subject to any one of them ... cultures have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel” (n.20).

more concrete approach — the approach that has always been the best form of evangelisation.

Witness — a sharing of conviction which resonates with existential discovery and commitment — has always been the principal form of evangelisation. “Faith is caught, not taught”, as they say.

Eamon Duffy, the gifted historian who gave us the television series ‘Saints and Sinners’, is not alone among informed observers of the Church’s present situation in judging that the “coherence and depth of the liturgical life of the community” constitute an essential component of this witness — “in a world as diverse and pluralistic as ours”<sup>9</sup>.

This witness must be centred, not in doctrinal abstractions — however necessary they may be in the life of the Church — but in the person of Jesus, met through his story in the gospels. We must evangelise by leading today’s seekers after life and truth

to follow the journey of discovery and enlightenment made by the first followers of Jesus — what theologians call “an ascending Christology”.

John Paul II suggests that the Church should see itself as “the community of the Lord’s disciples”. Shared discipleship, as the ideal and norm of life in Church communities, is a simple and accessible way of putting these proposals into practice.

<sup>9</sup> *Priests and People*, Oct 2000, p.378).

John Thornhill is a Marist Father with an international reputation as a writer and lecturer in theology. For several years he was a member of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II).

# An Apple off another Tree

## — spirituality in Islam

By John Bales

In a pluralist world it is important for us as Christians to understand something of other religions but also, and perhaps more importantly, of the people who adhere to other faiths.

Islam is in the news these days due to its expansion in the Western world and to the activities of Islamic radicals (often called fundamentalists or Islamists).

Among Christians there is a wide range of opinion concerning Muslims. Some see Islam as evil and power hungry, opposed to freedom and oppressive of women and minorities. Others view Islam as a religion very close to Christianity, sharing beliefs in God, the prophets, God’s revelation to humanity and his demand for holiness of life and justice.

Within the Muslim world there is also a great variety of interpretations of Islam and ways of living as a Muslim. Many are nominal in their practice, others fanatical, some are philosophical, devout, mystical and many mix Islam with animism.

In this article I wish to look at some aspects of Islamic spiritual life to help us understand a bit more about the way Muslims practise their faith.

The ‘Shahadah’ or confession of faith — “I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the apostle of God” is a simple and clear summary of Islamic teaching. Anyone who enunciates this confession becomes a Muslim.

The word ‘Muslim’ means ‘one who submits’ to the will of God. Thus to become a Muslim requires only an act of will in accepting God as Lord of all and that Muhammad is the final, decisive medium of God’s communication with the world — no other rite is needed. This confession brings the believer into the community of the faithful and into a life of seeking to put God’s will into practice.

The name ‘Allah’ is Arabic for ‘the God’ being a contraction of two words ‘al’ = ‘the’ and ‘ilah’ = ‘god’. The oneness of God (‘tawhid’) is the basic and most important belief of Islam. It means that God is Lord over all, all powerful, knowing, seeing, Creator, Provider and finally Judge of all.

God determines the daily events of all people, predestination being one of the fundamental

beliefs of Islam. The converse of this view of God is that men and women are His slaves.

The word used for worship ‘ibadah’ means ‘service’ coming from the root ‘abd’ meaning slave or servant (the same Semitic root as the Hebrew ‘ebed’ used in the later chapters of Isaiah for the ‘servant of Yahweh’).

As God is Lord and above all human or worldly understanding there can be no relationship between God and the creation, no partners alongside Him. The Quran is opposed to any conception that God could be a Father or have a son.<sup>1</sup>

This means that prayer is seen not as child speaking to a heavenly Father but as a slave honouring the Master.

The prayers, said five times daily, are formal and set. Each round involves bowing, prostrating with face to the ground and recitation of fixed statements and verses from the Quran. Each set of prayers includes the opening chapter of the Quran —

“Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful  
Sovereign of the Day of Judgement!  
You alone we worship, to You alone do we turn for help.

Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favoured,  
Not of those who have incurred Your wrath,  
nor of those who have gone astray.”

(Surah 1 Al-Fatihah)

Muslims see spiritual benefit in prayer, fasting in the month of Ramadan and visiting Mecca for the pilgrimage (Haji). But in essence these are performed in obedience to God.

According to Islam God has ninety-nine “beautiful names” most of them mentioned in the Quran, including the Merciful, the Great, the Lord, the source of Peace, the Protector, the Compeller etc. Many Muslims memorise these names and recite them with the help of a rosary. One book listing these names suggests recitation alone at night in a clean place. Ritual washing should precede the recitation and no meat eaten that day.

The Quran is the most important text for Muslims, containing the collection of ‘revelations’ given to Muhammad between 610 and his death in 632CE. However many of the practices of Islam are not taken directly from the Quran but from the

practices and sayings of Muhammad. These were collected during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and are called the ‘Hadith’ or ‘Sunnah’.

From these texts rules are laid down for the whole of life — the times of prayers, rules for fasting, how to drink and what to eat, marriage, etc. Islam is a comprehensive system of directions for life, as all of life is to be lived in submission to God.

This means that Muhammad is the model *par excellence* for human life. He has been exalted in popular Islam to being more than human, sinless and of perfect character and speech. Popular poetry extols his virtues and prayers are made to him.

*A more perfect Prophet never can we find,  
Than thee, who, thank God, gave Islam to man-  
kind.*

*Ya Rasool-Allah! [Oh Apostle of Allah] my hom-  
age I make to thee,*

*Ya Nabi-Allah ! [Oh Prophet of Allah] my love I  
tender thee,*

*My life, my all, to thee I gladly give,*

*Thy divine messages shall with me forever live.*

(M J Majid, from a manual called  
*The Elementary Teachings of Islam*)

The philosophic mystics speak of the “Nur-Muhammadi” or ‘light of Muhammad’ which existed before the creation, and was the image used by God in creating Adam.

For Muslims the community (‘ummah’) is of great importance. All who confess faith in Allah as the only true God and the prophethood of Muhammad become part of the Islamic ‘Ummah’. This is expressed clearly in the common prayers in the mosques (in most places only the men gather for prayers) and especially in the Friday prayers performed on Friday afternoon, with a sermon.

There are two main festival days common to most Muslims — one at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan (Id-ul-Fitr) and the second (Id ul-Adha), during the pilgrimage time, in commemoration of Abraham’s willingness to offer his son (Ishmael according to Islam).

On these occasions the men gather for special prayers and families meet for celebrations. The second Id includes the sacrifice of an animal in remembrance of the sheep given to Abraham by God in place of his son.

This sense of a community united in submission to Allah is not only spiritual but also social

<sup>1</sup> “Say : ‘God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.’” (Surah 112, Al-Ikhlās).

and political. Unlike Jesus, Muhammad established a political state in Medina after the migration of 622AD, dated as 1AH — i.e. ‘after the Hijra’ (Migration). He grew up as an orphan and had a keen sense of social justice and the need to care for widows and orphans.

The Quran several times speaks of the task of Islam to “uphold the right and punish the evil.” This sense of political community led the early Muslims to conquer those around them.

Today, when many Muslims struggle with Modernism and secularism, there is a strong desire to re-establish Islamic rule as the God-given way to govern society.

One Muslim activist, Abul A’la Maududi, spoke of the task of Islam as “creating the Kingdom of God on earth.” Maududi’s was the founder of the Jamaat-Islami in Pakistan and his ideas have been very influential in the early days of 20th century ‘Islamist’ movements in the Middle East and elsewhere.

**Muhammad... grew up as an orphan and had a keen sense of social justice and the need to care for widows and orphans.**

After the early conquests of Islam, the court of the Caliphs in Damascus and then Baghdad became increasingly corrupt and extravagant. As theology and legal studies (Shariah) developed there was an increasing gap between the experts and ordinary Muslims. In this environment the Sufi movement began.

This was a reaction to the legalism of the scholars and opulence of the rulers. At first there were individual ascetics who spoke of the ‘way’ of renunciation.

Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. 801) was a woman born in poverty as a slave but freed because of her asceticism. Her reply to those who asked to help her was — “Truly I would be ashamed to ask for worldly things from him to whom the world belongs; how then, should I ask for them from them to whom it does not belong.”

Her passion was to know God — “O my Lord, whatever share of this world you bestow, bestow on your enemies; and whatever share of the world

to come you give to me, give to your friends. You are enough for me.” And again, “Oh my Lord, if I worship you for fear of hell, burn me in hell; if I worship you for hope of paradise, exclude me from there; but if I worship you for your own sake, then withhold not from me your Eternal Beauty.”

Gradually the Sufis gathered disciples and formed schools of mysticism. This developed into philosophic systems which were influenced by Platonism and moved towards monism. Perhaps the greatest of the Sufis were the Persian poets of the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially Hafiz, Farid ud-din Attar and Maulana Rumi.

Ahmad Ghazali wrote of God saying — “The wisdom of My creating you is to see My vision in the mirror of your spirit, and My love in your heart.”

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273) is the most famous Sufi poet (and one of the most read poets in America today) —

*Everything is the beloved, and the lover a veil,  
Living is the Beloved, and the lover is dead.*

(Rumi, Mathnavi Book 1:30)

Union with God comes by God’s grace —

*With God is the best bargain:  
he buys from you your dirty fortune and gives in  
exchange light of the soul,  
He buys the ice of the perishable body  
and gives a kingdom beyond imagination.*

(ibid Book 6.880–81)

In much of the Muslim world Sufism is very strong today and is increasingly popular in the West. It has been condemned by the ‘orthodox’ but taken up and incorporated into Islam by the majority. At a popular level Sufism has descended into near animism.

The tombs of Sufi ‘saints’ are places where people — especially women — go to pray, receive charms and amulets for protection from spirits, jinn or the ‘evil eye’.

Many Sufi masters teach the esoteric path of devotion including the use of mantras and near-magical powers. However Sufism has given a devotional and relational side to Islam which at times had become sterile and legalistic.

One of the main themes of Christian theology is the doctrine of the Trinity. This evidences a plurality inside the nature of God which Islam denies. But for those who follow Christ this plurality is vital as it express the experience of Christians in meeting with God, personally in Jesus Christ. Muhammad claimed only to be a human vehicle

of God's revelation but Christ is himself that revelation, in classical terms the "Word Incarnate".

There is a great challenge for us in Islam — its devotion and sense of God's holiness, in the passion of the mystics and the desire for a just society. There is much that we will learn from each other. In a world where spiritual things and morality are often denied, there is much we will want to strive for together.

But in essence our paths will diverge as the Christian vision is of humanity brought to a renewed relationship with God by grace. The death of Christ as God's way to bring forgiveness is crucial. All this is denied and seen as unnecessary by Islam where the restoration to servanthood requires submission and obedience.

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## review

***Christ — A Crisis in the Life of God***  
— Jack Miles  
Heinemann, 2001. Price \$59.95

Reviewed by Alan Dwight

John the Baptist's description of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" was a novel idea to his hearers, who were more familiar with "the Lion of Judah" in Messianic prophecies. But in Jack Miles' thesis it is a very significant change.

The expiation of sin by the sacrifice of a lamb was part of the Levitical Law and played an important part in Jewish history. Miles shows how revolutionary it was for God to be pictured as a lamb allowing himself to be slaughtered.

In much of the Old testament Yahweh or Elohim is shown as a warlord — omnipotent, giving victory to his people, except when they deserved punishment. His power is shown in Egypt with plagues and the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red (Reed) Sea.

Miles identifies Yahweh as Christ ("I and my father are One" — John 10:30). He points out that when the babe is called "Christ the Lord", the word translated lord is *kurios*, which is also the Septuagint Greek word for Yahweh. He shows that Jesus is the Prince of Peace and Lamb of God rather than a warlord fighting for his people under Roman subjugation. Christ's signature teaching is "turn the other cheek", which "defines him didactically as the Crucifixion defines him dramatically".

The Old Testament Yahweh punished until the third generation (Ex 34:5-7) and loved thousands. Yahweh destroyed thousands of his chosen people during the forty years' wandering in the wilderness. And one cannot number the thousands of their enemies killed with the obvious intention of genocide relating the Amalekites.

Miles' thesis is that when Yahweh/Christ was obviously powerless, he changed his attitude to accept universal love. If the Lord "could no longer function as anybody's enemy, then he was necessarily everybody's friend". This is illustrated by the imprisoned John the Baptist's appeal to Jesus — perhaps remembering the Messiah's promise to set the prisoners free (Isa 42:7). Jesus only indicated for John's benefit his power to heal, leaving John to his doom.

Miles shows how "the Lion of Judah" (Gen 49:9) turns out to be "the Lamb of God" in the Book of Revelation where the Lamb is shown to have conquered the world. Miles sees the enthronement of the Lamb as a "supremely ironic outcome", not what the Lord promised Judah in the Old Testament. So Yahweh is shown "to win by losing". The expansion of his covenant with Israel is then made to include all the children of Adam.

Jack Miles presents an original thesis, which may shock some, but it is a convincing argument in its detail. Also he adds some novel insights into familiar stories.

A short review cannot do justice to the scholarly presentation of the Bible as "a literary reading rather than an historical exposition".

Alan Dwight MA studied for five years at a Seventh-Day Adventist college (now a campus of Newcastle University). Following a year as a minister in Adelaide he reacted against fundamentalism and became an agnostic. While at Sydney University (BA Hons DipEd) he became an Anglican and has served as a layreader licensed by the dioceses of Sydney, Newcastle and Hong Kong. He now lives in Tasmania.

## review

***At Home in the Cosmos* — David Toolan  
Orbis Books, 2001. Rrp \$47.95, pp 257**

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Toolan builds on the work begun by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the eco-theologian Thomas Berry, to review the findings of hard science over the past generation, and apply them to Western theology.

In this exhaustively researched thesis Toolan surveys the cognitive transition forced upon Western culture by the findings of post-Newtonian physics — that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century dream of scientific determinism is a delusion.

Darwinian evolution only explains our hard wiring, he writes, not how it is that we are aware or ‘minded’.

We require at least two languages to make sense of ourselves — the language of biochemistry to explain neurophysiological phenomena, and the language of selfhood or moral agency to account for the causal efficacy of our free choices.

The transition from a cosmology based on an absolute notion of space and time, to one based on a relational notion, brings home the awesome conclusion that the universe is radically interconnected — everything is internally related to everything else. The sci-fi intuition that a butterfly flapping her wings in Bali can precipitate a hurricane in New York, is not as far-fetched as it once seemed.

Matter-energy is profoundly social, Toolan writes. Communion, not isolation, is the rule. Nature — like the medieval sacramental universe — carries messages, consequently, the gap between nature and human culture has narrowed considerably.

Newtonian physics shattered the kind of communion with the cosmos that Francis of Assisi took for granted. Post-Einsteinian cosmology begins to restore that communion.

Toolan’s thesis is that science now invites the Church to review its theological relationship with the created order.

“We must recenter, reorient ourselves, to serve the earth and all sentient beings. The argument for ecocentrism and the intrinsic value of the biophysical world makes eminent sense if it widens

the horizons of our moral concern and is taken as a sharp rebuke to utilitarian short-sightedness and egocentrism.”

This complex and mysterious universe which spent 23 billion years bringing humankind to birth — with its “strange attractors”, thermal din and random energy — seems infinitely more marvelous to the modern psyche than the mythologies of Sunday School, and more consonant with the mystery of divine wisdom.

As for humankind, coming at the end of a vast chain of conversions of chancy energy, we are simply the last transformers and interpreters, the ultimate black box of nature.

This new cosmology has to make a difference to our conception of God, our prayer life, our work and action.

Humankind is given the chance to make comedy or tragedy of it all, to make sense or make a mess of it, by how we live, by what we do with our science and technology and culture. In short, it is our responsibility to keep planet earth running in good condition. “The quarks, the mitochondria in our cells are speechless. It is our responsibility, if I am not mistaken, to say what the purpose of earth shall be.”

But this is dangerous terrain, holy ground. A religious tradition, with creed, ethical code, and communal ritual is essential to map the territory, provide guides and critics, to set our neural pathways to the frequency of the Creator’s music — slowly. This is the work of the Church.

So where does Jesus come into it? In cosmic terms Jesus is a prototype of our species — the archetype of what the quarks and molecules, from the beginning, were predestined to become — one resurrected body.

Within this vision, salvation or redemption encompasses far more than humanity — it takes in the destiny of the whole natural order.

It follows that in such a dynamic, chancy universe, the Holy One cannot be the cuddly Super-Therapist proposed by New Agers. Spirituality acquires a new context. Spiritual practices are not undertaken out of curiosity or for private benefit, but for the sake of registering in our bones the primordial rainbow covenant — all is blessed; nothing is to be lost.

Like it or not, planet earth is largely under our management. We (in the affluent world) will

decide what the climate will be in this century, whether there will be any wilderness left, what the state of the soil, the air, the water will be, the health and variety of wildlife, the very conditions of life and survival on the planet.

Toolan's urgent message is that the Church can no longer distance itself from world affairs as if the taboo of the last few hundred years against identifying psyche with nature was still in place.

His warning is that too much is simply driven by a science that has become indifferent to whether it creates or destroys; that our experts may have forgotten the lessons of the humanities; the danger that they have become chilled, dehumanised, brutalised, effectively cut off from the anxiety and anguish that gave rise to the whole enterprise of understanding to begin with.

Theological reinterpretation of Creation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will render interdenominational differences trivial, and vying amongst the great faiths of the world an anachronism. For the future of the planet is in our hands; we have become the authors of ongoing creation; a great deal depends upon humankind. As God created this universe, said the rabbis, He exclaimed, "Let's hope it works!"

David Toolan SJ died last year and this book is his *magnum opus*.

Maggie Helass is Editor of *Common Theology*.

## review

### *Number Two to Tutu — A Memoir*

by Michael Nuttall

Cluster Publications. Rrp \$29.95 184pp

Reviewed by Philip Russell

Those words 'a memoir' are of fundamental importance, for they make it plain that this is not a history, nor a biography of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, nor an autobiography of his lieutenant, Bishop Michael Nuttall, but a memoir which takes a brief voyage into all these areas. *Number Two to Tutu* gives intimate insights into the life of these two Church leaders during the crucial years of South Africa's transition from apartheid.

Few people understood the conflict between Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party in Zululand, and the African National

Congress, which cost thousands of lives in the late '80s and '90s. Nelson Mandela wrote from prison: "In my entire political career few things have (so) distressed me as to see our people killing one another as is now happening". Bishop Nuttall, in whose diocese these massacres occurred, sets out the nature and shape of this conflict and attempts by the Church to mediate.

Then there were the terrible killings that took place in one of the hostels for migrant workers at Sebokeng, a small town in the Transvaal near Johannesburg. On that occasion the whole Synod of Bishops decamped from their meeting more than 400 kilometres away, led by Archbishop Tutu, and went to offer solace in Sebokeng.

These are but two examples of the context in which Archbishop Tutu and Bishop Nuttall worked together during the dramatic events of the transition from a racist tyranny to a new democratic dispensation. Abundant 'endnotes' give guidance to further reading into that turbulent era of Church history.

In this book Bishop Nuttall helps us to glimpse something of the 'personal' Desmond whom he came both to love and admire. We see the part prayer played in the archbishop's life — his joy in being in his favourite room in Bishops court, the chapel. We see something of his personal courage.

In 1990, the Defiance Campaign against the apartheid government reached a crescendo, particularly in Cape Town, the seat of parliamentary government. Police violence against protesters was unrestrained and brutal, culminating on election day on September 6 when more than twenty people were killed in Cape Town's townships. Bishop Nuttall describes how this tragedy became a landmark in Tutu's career.

When the archbishop heard news of the deaths he broke down weeping and went to his chapel. He spent the evening alone and slept badly. He decided to call what was to be the first of the great protest marches headed by Church leaders through South Africa's cities. Thirty thousand people defied security police to follow Church leaders through Cape Town to the City Hall.

Archbishop Tutu's humour breaks out in this memoir — "One advantage of my skin colour is that it doesn't show when I blush!" While preaching in Australia he suggested to an audience of young people that they should applaud. "I then asked them

to celebrate who they were by clapping themselves. They gave a humdinger of a response. Then I said ‘What about giving God a standing ovation?’ Well, they really did their stuff; they nearly took the roof off. Then, without thinking, I said ‘Thank you’”.

Clearly it was not Michael Nuttall’s intention to write an autobiography, although I certainly hope that one day he will. He writes with great clarity, and one might add, charity, and makes a useful contribution to understanding the Church and its role in South Africa’s transition from apartheid.

He writes about his reasons for taking part in the Durban protest march in his own diocese. He describes how he became involved in the Charismatic Movement, and of the joys and benefits this brought him.

“This new experience was, I sensed, God’s way of reminding me that in essence I was still a ‘child’ with a capacity and a need to be childlike in the divine presence. I remember saying out loud, as I prayed in the new way, ‘This is ridiculous!’ yet I continued praying”.

I have touched on the historical, biographical and autobiographical content of this book. But why would I, a South African, encourage Australians to read it?

First, I am sure that it is good for any Christian to know as much as is feasible about how other parts of Christendom live. Archbishop Tutu is, of course, an international figure. (Incidentally, have you ever thought it interesting that apartheid South Africa should have produced two global figureheads — both black — Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu?) Michael Nuttall does not have the same high public profile. But when more than 800 bishops met at the Lambeth Conference in 1998, the Archbishop of Canterbury bestowed on him the prestigious Silver Cross of St Augustine — the Canterbury Cross — in recognition of his ministry.

Second, Australia has to deal with division within society, along with many other countries in the world, stemming from historical roots, culture and race. There can be few countries in which reconciliation in some form is not needed.

This book covers the years of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Archbishop Tutu. The commission was not a total unmitigated success, far from that, it is still being worked through, but Michael Nuttall describes it as “another key feature in the undoing of con-

quest — the inward aspect...” He writes: “The Commission has held out the picture of a nation of wounded healers, facing its past lest that past should come back to haunt it, looking to the future as a forgiven and forgiving community. These have been the essences of ‘truth’ and ‘reconciliation’”.

Finally, this memoir offers a perspective which is an important witness for the wider Church: “What is the role of the church in a situation of painful conflict such as this? It is a least threefold. Firstly there is the obvious duty to care for the injured and bereaved, and those displaced from their homes. There is an obligation to provide tangible relief, both material and spiritual.

Secondly, there is a duty to discern and declare truth about the violence as the church perceives it: to name the causes and to make this known without fear or favour.

Thirdly, there is the need to promote dialogue between the parties and to offer mediation in the interests of peace and reconciliation.”

Now that’s a tall order!

Philip Russell MBE is a former Bishop of Natal and was Archbishop of Cape Town from 1981–1986. In his retirement he engaged in ecumenical work in Southern Africa until his wife Eirene’s death in 2001. He now lives near his children in Adelaide.

## review

### *Matrix Reloaded*

Reviewed by Cameron Taylor

The central theme of the Matrix trilogy is that the perceived world is a machine-created illusion. This construct controls most humans by feeding them an illusion of liberty, whilst farming them for bio-energy.

Those few who notice the subtle failures of the construct, escape it through going beyond the boundaries of normal human achievement, or are guided out by some of the few free humans.

The human community, once released from the construct, is reminiscent of medieval warrior monks — existing in austere surroundings, with a demonised enemy.

There is a prophecy that a human — ‘The One’ — will come and be able to affect the construct directly, like the machines themselves.

*Reloaded* continues the story of Neo ‘The One’, his lover Trinity and their captain Morpheus. They have accepted that the prophecy has begun to be fulfilled, and are seeking to defeat the hegemony of the machines once and for all.

*Reloaded* expands the stunning imagery used to such acclaim in the first movie, making full use of cutting edge technology and art, matched with an inspired — if necessarily dark — vision. The story itself is expertly layered, with good cohesion even in the midst of complex plot lines. One feels a close sympathetic connection with the characters, although Keanu Reeves himself is overshadowed by his supporting cast at times.

*Reloaded* deepens the audience’s understanding of the Matrix world. At times the dialogue and ideas seem clumsily expressed — perhaps because of the speed at which the rest of the film is paced, as much as the complexity of ideas.

Many thrilling scenes involving large-scale conflict, such as a monumental car chase, are as good or better than in most movies. Expertly choreographed martial arts effectively reduce the combatant’s resources to the intense point where spirit is the only indicator of a battle’s outcome.

A profusion of mythological and mystical references create a background to what could otherwise be a formulaic cyber-punk action movie. These tap into cultural resonances and create a feeling that just beneath the tinsel there are some serious questions being asked.

Despite unavoidable similarities to other science fiction movies, this achievement of depth, as well as vision and pace, is perhaps the Matrix trilogy’s most significant contribution to the genre. It is these references that continue to feed the imagination once outside the movie theatre.

As *Reloaded* plays in, threats from the machines against the free humans are being progressed at every level. These attacks are targeted to remove the last anomalies from the construct, through attacking their source — Zion, the city of free humans.

Awakened or exceptional people are capable of causing significant changes to the construct through the power of free will, seen by the machines as an anomaly. *Reloaded* therefore quickly delves into the fundamental questions surrounding individual choice.

The machines have neutralised the power of choice in most situations for most people. The freed humans

outside this snafu must decide how to use the power their non-programmed choices give them.

Within the construct there are several rogue programs that have chosen to pursue their own goals. Even events not under their direct control have been anticipated by the machines, minimising the possible outcomes.

Maintaining each character’s integrity, *Reloaded* explores through character development the lines between programmed behaviour and free choice, and common good versus self-interest.

By the close of *Reloaded*, none of the characters are open to simple objective assessment. Machine intelligences seem to be helping the human cause, and a few humans seem to be working with the machines. Where the battle lines were clear in the first movie, *Reloaded* zooms in to reveal the hidden complexities behind and between any two conflicting parties.

Although an undeniable achievement in its own right, *Reloaded*’s unusual — and possibly hubristic — mix of action and philosophy will only be vindicated by the revelations of the final part of the trilogy, *Matrix Revolutions*, which opens worldwide on November 5.



Cameron Taylor is a Webmaster, resident in England. His interests include Martial Arts and the didgeridoo. He travelled to Arnhem Land early this year as part of his obligations to the ceremonial didgeridoo in his possession.

## home truths

# A canary in the mine

By Muriel Porter

For a recent edition of the English Catholic magazine, *Priests and People*, American Scripture scholar Luke Timothy Johnson has written an illuminating theological reflection on clergy sexual abuse.

Entitled ‘Jesus and the little children’, the article focuses on Jesus’ teachings about children in the



Dr Muriel Porter is a member of the Anglican General Synod Standing Committee, and the General Synod Doctrine Commission. A Melbourne academic, her book *Sex, Power and the Clergy* has recently been published by Hardie Grant Books.

context of the abuse of power that lies at the heart of all sexual abuse.

From an examination of Jesus' insistence that whoever welcomes a little child in his name, welcomes him (Mark 9:35), Johnson concludes that the way church leaders respond to children is "a measure of their response to God".

Rejecting children, including abusing or corrupting them, is tantamount to rejecting Jesus and rejecting God.

The true scandal of sexual abuse is not bad publicity or shame for the institutional Church, but the "church's willingness to protect the predators who destroy the lives of children".

Johnson's reflection is as rare as it is apposite. For all the frenzied activity in church circles unleashed by the current international sexual abuse crisis over the past few years, little of it has been primarily theological.

Church leaders have turned to lawyers, insurance personnel and public relations consultants to guide their responses to the crisis, rather than theologians.

Why? I believe it is because, at heart, most church leaders still believe sexual abuse is about deviant individuals, "rotten apples" who have somehow slipped into the ranks of the ordained and now must be dismissed with as little fuss as possible.

The numbers of allegations currently surfacing suggest there is more to it than that, so they quietly blame either media beat-up, or complainants greedy for monetary compensation.

But as Johnson and some feminist scholars have pointed out, the issue is fundamentally theological. And the key theological question is — why have some clergy, and those in authority over them, and indeed whole church structures, completely lost sight of Jesus' teachings about power?

Jesus' comments about children came in the context of a grubby little power play on the part

of his male disciples. Knowing they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest, Jesus pointed to a little child as the model of true Christian leadership.

Those who would be first must in fact be last, Jesus said, and the servants of all.

Later, he declared children — the little ones, the vulnerable ones, the people of no account — to be nothing less than models of the kingdom of God.

How far this is from the way churches operate, and have operated since the Constantinian era!

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, even with elected synods and diocesan councils, the Church is still an immensely hierarchical institution. Episcopal leaders are called shepherds, but dress in the purple of Roman emperors. From the humblest parish priest to the Primate, clergy are protected from true accountability by a quasi-feudal status, and the rhetoric of humble service.

And despite the ordination of women as deacons and priests in most places, despite some attempts at inclusive language, the institution is still overwhelmingly patriarchal.

Any wonder, then, that some male clergy and church workers have abused their power — not just in the trivial control games so common in parish life, but in actually destroying the lives of children, adolescents, and vulnerable women. They have destroyed trust forever in some of their victims — trust not just in physical relationships and words of endearment, but in God. Some have called clergy sexual abuse "soul-stealing".

The current sexual abuse crisis is the canary in the mine. It is signalling that something is deeply wrong in the institution, that there is a spiritual sickness that desperately needs healing.

Only authentic theological exploration in a spirit of humility and repentance will begin to plumb its depths and find some long-term answers.

There is no better place to start than with Jesus' teaching about children. In 2000 years, the Christian Church has barely begun to take that teaching seriously. If we do take up the challenge, however, we should be under no illusion. To adopt Jesus' teaching will mean a radical transformation of all our structures, all our preconceptions about the way formal ministry should work.

No wonder that in this instance, we prefer not to ask theological questions!

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