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INSIDE: A portrait of self-destruction • FORUM—God and the Judge • Costing the Human Factor—future dilemmas

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Front cover: Reproduction of an illustration in *Aboriginal Suicide is Different*, by Colin Tatz

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From the Editor

The most important job of the western Church today is recovering the vernacular of the public. Without this the Church is speechless. A first step was taken when Latin ceased to be the everyday language of the liturgy. Since then, while the Church has been casting around for liturgies that ‘work’, society has set sail across the straits between Gutenberg and Marconi—from the press to television, from the pen to the computer, from reasoning to doing, from dialectics to action.

If you doubt this, try having an argument via SMS. It is a different conceptual world.

Secular society’s chief gripe with the Church is that it is long on theory and short on practice. But I think this criticism misses the point that the churches are speaking another language—or at least another dialect.

In this edition of *Common Theology* federal politician Lindsay Tanner writes that determining the essence of humanity is set to become a new frontier of global political conflict, and asks for the churches’ perspective. Are our theologians equipped to join this dialogue?

Certainly, in his ‘Diary from Jerusalem’, Greg Jenks appears to be getting down and dirty with the politics of the Middle East. Ciaran O’Reilly writes home from Dublin prior to his Central Court prosecution for disabling a warplane in the cause of truth. No shortage of meaningful engagement there. But, as Don Palmer remarks in his letter, ordinary folk are not required by their Christian faith to undertake such action.

Ros Kidd shows us a portrait of self-destruction in her review of a new study on Aboriginal suicide. She writes that until we read the portrait with new eyes and culturally relevant concepts we cannot know the environment of Aboriginal youth suicides, and without that knowledge we cannot work to prevent them.

The same might be said of good liturgy. Liturgy is ‘the work of the people of God’, so the litmus test of good liturgy must be what is ‘done’, the point of engagement, the moment of realisation. Without that experience we cannot work at all.

Maggie Helass

A portrait of self-destruction

By Ros Kidd

Dr Ros Kidd's PhD thesis was based on unprecedented access to church and government files, and investigated how successive governments controlled Aboriginal lives. In 1997 she published *The Way We Civilise*, now in its fourth reprint. Here she reviews an important new study, *Aboriginal Suicide is Different*, by Colin Tatz.



An unexpected fact emerged from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), which investigated the deaths of 99 Aboriginal men and women who died in detention between January 1980 and May 1989—not only were 37 per cent of deaths from natural causes, but a further 34 per cent were self-inflicted, mostly people under 24 years of age.

During that period Colin Tatz was looking at links between Aboriginal delinquency and the availability of sport to young people, and his attention was already drawn to the spate of youth suicides. By 1991 he recognized they were much more prevalent in freedom than in custody.

In his book, *Aboriginal Suicide is Different*, Tatz applies his considerable forensic thoroughness to elucidating why this should be so. From his research terrain of 55 communities in New South Wales and the ACT and seven locations in New Zealand, Tatz harvested almost 400 in-depth interviews from family members, community personnel, police, psychiatrists, coroners, and agency and institutional workers.

He concludes that Aboriginal youth suicide is radically different from youth suicide in mainstream society, and that this holds also for suicides among young Maori, American and Canadian Indians, whose circumstances provide illuminating comparative context in this four-year study.

Australia has the fourth highest rate of male and female youth suicide. Aboriginal youth suicide,

according to Tatz, is now perhaps treble or even quadruple that rate, being both under-recorded and under-reported.

While Tatz concedes there is room for debate (as always) when dealing with statistical extrapolations, there is nonetheless an abnormally high rate of suicides among Aboriginal youth, and the tendency to suicide and suicidal behaviours is becoming more prevalent.

Yet thirty years ago Aboriginal youth suicide was a rare occurrence. Indeed there is no comparative word in Aboriginal mythology, although the concept is prevalent in Maori culture. In the period 1984 to 1994, suicide among Maori youth doubled, particularly while in custody.

Although there are several commonalities in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal suicides, Tatz claims that the dramatically higher rates do not reflect a variation in intensity. Rather, Aboriginal suicide is a distinct phenomenon grounded in the unique social and political consequence of decolonisation—

- total institutions now defined as ‘communities’ but without social cohesion
- self-management without contingent training
- self-determination in a policy vacuum.

He argues it was the removal of longstanding tight controls which triggered the present climate of disorder, exacerbated by the confusing diffusion of responsibility.

The former he finds ‘ironic’ and the latter he describes as an unintended outcome of government’s often contradictory and ambiguous approach to the democratisation of Aboriginal policy.

And there is a causal link, he says, from ambiguity—via frustration, alienation and withdrawal—to community breakdown and personal violence and self-destructive activities.

Here I would differ from Tatz. Frustration and violence stem less from the (confused) democratisation of Aboriginal policy than from an intensification and individualisation of bureaucratic interventions.

Where previously there were a few control figureheads on the missions and reserves now there are hundreds of personal surveillances, reportages and substantiations demanded of those whose lives

and communities are enmeshed in short-term welfare and grant constraints.

Aboriginal Councils in Queensland currently exercise functional responsibility for 59 local government operations, (compared with only 34 for mainstream councils), necessitating an unsustainable complexity of requirements—currently there are at least 15 different health programs, 200 education programs and numerous economic development schemes.

This is not democratisation but suffocating disempowerment.

And financial disempowerment—an outcome of generational confiscation of wages and entitlements—more directly destroys self-respect at a personal level than the conflicted rhetoric of egalitarianism.

A widespread legacy of acute distress that can only be understood through an approach more anthropological and political than psychological and sociological.

Either way, the outcome is a widespread legacy of acute distress that Tatz argues can only be understood through an approach more anthropological and political than psychological and sociological.

Suicides and attempted suicides in Aboriginal communities rarely stem from mental illness. Disturbed, stressed, aggressive and delinquent behaviour is the norm, as is substance abuse.

And Aboriginal youth suicides simply do not fit conventional (westernised) paradigms of predominant underlying depression, sudden life changes, lack of community status or social isolation.

As Tatz argues, the mainstream medical-psychiatric approach, which proclaims at least 90 per cent of suicides are associated with psychiatric or addictive disorders, is fixated on mental health, family dynamics and personal social problems and sheds little light on the problem of Aboriginal youth suicide.

He argues for a separate Aboriginal suicidology in order to comprehend the new wave of violence and self-destruction.

On many communities risk-taking and dangerous behaviours are the norm among Aboriginal youth through the disinhibition of alcohol and drugs—running in front of trucks, provoking police to physical retaliation, and also refusal to seek medical assistance or to take essential medication.

Some estimates number non-fatal suicide attempts at six to eight times those that succeed. On some communities suicidal behaviour has become patterned and ritualised, perhaps even contagious.

Perhaps, as one liaison officer suggested, it's not so much that Aboriginal youth exhibit scant fear of dying, rather that they have a fear of living.

Perhaps self-destructive behaviour is not so much an egotistical cry for attention as an existential cry of pain.

Perhaps it's a 'political' attempt at power in the knowledge that the death will command a degree of accountability from authorities who are otherwise indifferent.

Perhaps the death will motivate respect at funerals that was lacking in life

Perhaps suicide is the ultimate proclamation of power over self.

Perhaps, more prosaically, some suicides stem from a tiredness with life, a dearth of physical and mental stamina, an 'easy' solution to an insoluble dilemma.

These are all subjects for the broader fieldwork which Tatz argues is vital if we are to 'liberate' Aboriginal suicidology from mainstream biomedical centred approaches.

Until we read the terrain with new eyes and culturally relevant concepts we cannot know the environment of Aboriginal youth suicides, and without that knowledge we cannot work to prevent them.

Tatz tells us he began his journey into suicidology with no preconceived notions, no hypothesis, no moral or theological position, and no particular medical or psychiatric knowledge. This 'portrait of self-destruction', as he terms it, is a journey of discovery for us all.

Aboriginal Suicide is Different, Colin Tatz, rrp \$33.00, published by Aboriginal Studies Press. www.linksdisk.com/roskidd

God and the Judge

forum

Justice Michael Kirby of the High Court is one of Australia's most distinguished jurists and our second longest-serving judge. In a speech in Sydney in March he spoke candidly about his Christian faith, his coming to terms with being homosexual, and his life as a judge, and he argued that rationality and belief must sit comfortably together in our search for truth. This is an edited text from his speech which was broadcast on ABC National as an *Encounter* Program in March.



In kindergarten, at Mrs Church's school attached to the Anglican Church of St Andrew at Strathfield in Sydney, between the plasticine and interminable concerts, I was introduced to God. Generally speaking, we have been on friendly terms ever since.

In the coloured illustrations Mrs Church showed us God was portrayed as a Middle Eastern potentate with a beard and a turban.

Eventually, when I grew old enough, my parents gave me a Bible, which I still have. Many a judicial oath of office I have taken on it, which I certainly did not foresee back in the 1940s.

I took this Bible (the *King James* version naturally) to Sunday School at St Andrew's. At Sunday School I learned of Jesus and his love for us all. It was a wonderful discovery.

Since then, I have never felt parted from that love. Most of us, brought up in the Christian tradition, have felt the great power of this discovery.

God was not, after all, an angry grandfather with a beard. He (and in those days it was certainly a 'he') was a very loving presence—rather like our parents. It is a blessing of my life that I have always been surrounded by love. I am not in the slightest embarrassed to talk about it.

When I eventually grew old enough to attend Morning Prayer in Andrew's Church, it was like moving into the Big School. It was then that I found that, almost certainly, God was an Englishman.

Above the altar (or did we call it that in the Sydney Diocese?) hung the Australian flag. But in pride of place was the Union Jack. This, after all, was the Church of England. In the 1940s the word 'Anglican' never crossed our lips.

I was not quite sure whether I preferred the somewhat cold and haughty God I found at this stage, to the angry prophet from the desert. True, this English God was not so angry, he just seemed to be remote—up there with the King, the Queen, Queen Mary the Queen Mother and all the members of the Royal family for whom we prayed each Sunday.

The rector was the Reverend Cecil Dillon. He had been an Army chaplain. In those post-war days, he wore a line of military ribbons in proof of his war service. He was a kind and gentle man. He taught me to understand the power of the beautiful liturgy of *The Book of Common Prayer* in lifting the mind from pedestrian to spiritual thoughts.

I began to have direct conversations with God. They were helped along enormously by Cramner's beautiful English words.

The talk of "assaults of our enemies" in the Collect had a resonance with the great English hymns that we sang to God. Come back in your minds to those days. England which—with the dominions—had stood alone against the godless fascists and Nazis, had come through the war triumphant. In the words of the hymn—under God England still had 'Dominion over palm and pine'.

At that time the British Empire still flourished. On the school map a quarter of the world was coloured red. We felt pretty sure that God looked on British subjects with special favour. White British people had a civilising mission. But we did

not really want Asians or black people in White Australia. We wanted to remain pure white—just like the images of God’s Son shown in the stained glass windows. God was certainly not Asian or Black. If he was not an Englishman, at the very least he was white like us.

At about this time I also came to know that there were unfortunate people who lived outside this calm and beautiful English church where God dwelt. Some of them were Roman Catholics. It shocked me to learn that they had a bigger church. Of course, somehow it was always on the top of the hill. At noon and at six o’clock their bell rang out for Angelus. On 2SM, Norman Thomas Cardinal Gilroy intoned the prayers. There was a lot of talk about Mary, described as the “Mother of God”. All of this was alien to my beliefs.

At about this time I discovered that God was Protestant. Actually, he was not English after all.

So, at about this time, I discovered that God was Protestant. I would return home from school to tell my mother, over the ironing, what I had learned that day. About the Tigris and the Euphrates and the beginnings of civilisation. About all the gods of the ancient world. And then the birth of the notion that there was just one God. And actually, he was not English after all. He was Jewish! But he was still Protestant!

My mother’s father had come to Australia from Belfast in Ulster. Prompted by my questions, my mother (somewhat reluctantly I felt) would endeavour to explain the differences between the mistaken beliefs of Roman Catholics and the highly rational approach of us Protestants, who had cast superstition and ignorance out of the temple. It is hard to imagine now, but mid-century these were still times of sectarian conflict. Overwhelmingly, the people were Protestants, like the English themselves.

At this stage I had not read Foxe’s *Martyrs*,¹ describing how Queen Mary I had burned

(1) J Ridley, *Bloody Mary’s Martyrs* (London, 2002). 128.

Crammer and hundreds of other Protestants at the stake for their beliefs.

Strange isn’t it how, in the matter of God, we like, even as children, to get into the winning team? We like to look down on those in other teams. The Roman Catholic Church might be the biggest Christian denomination in the world. But it was not so in Australia or most of the settler dominions of the British Crown. With Kipling, we in the Church of England could say, “We have the men, we have the guns, we have the money too”.

As a young boy on the brink of my teenage, I was pretty comfortable that I had the inside running in the matter of God.

Even as a boy I knew that Protestant truth had given me a hotline direct to God. Ultimately, I did not need the intercession of bishops and priests. I could speak directly to God. He was always with me. There was no confession to a human being. Simply a direct dialogue with God—always there, always listening, always watching.

We were sure that Roman Catholics would one day see the light and embrace the Protestant reforms. Generously, God and I accepted them as Christians, although in an earlier, more primitive, state of development. Little did I realise that the Second Vatican Council was just around the corner. And that many of Martin Luther’s changes would be embraced by the blessed Pope John XXIII—a Christian leader that could be loved by us all.

For a time, I broke away from the Church of England. I attended the Wesley Methodist Church in Concord. This was no great theological conversion. God did not tell me to become more Protestant or to learn new and better hymns. It was just that Parramatta Road, ever more dangerous, stood between me and Anglicanism.

We knew that the Methodists were really Anglicans with more money. But this Wesleyan interval reinforced my view that God was rational. That we humans had been given intelligence to read, think and talk about him. Nowadays, the Wesley Church in Concord is packed with Korean Australians. As in 1950, they sing Wesley’s great hymns with fervour and speed.

I returned to the fold of the Church of England at Fort Street High School. That great preacher, Dr Stuart Barton-Babbage, taught Scripture to the huge Anglican class. He presented me for confirmation at

St Andrew's Cathedral. That is where my relationship with God might have been arrested.

It was a solid, competent, somewhat prideful superiority of mixed racial, cultural and religious beliefs. It was not a bad grounding for a spiritual life, but it kept God in a proper compartment.

The English were never obsessively religious and neither was I. In a sense, surrounded by love at home with parents and siblings and close relatives, God was an other-worldly phenomenon of the same type of love, extended universally.

But then a very strange thing happened to me. I reached puberty.

When I realised that my sexual attraction was to people of the same gender—and did not change—I knew that this was not looked upon as a good

At school, the occasional denunciation of 'poofers' led me to know that I should treat my sexual orientation as something very bad.

thing.

My knowledge did not come from the Reverend Dillon. If ever he read the passage from Leviticus², I must have missed it, and all the other strange injunctions appearing there. Nor did it come from my family. But at school, the occasional denunciation of 'poofers' led me to know that I should treat my sexual orientation as something very, very bad.

The newspapers would occasionally report on famous people entrapped by the police and tried for crimes. The Police Commissioner, Mr Delaney, was always going on about it.

At first, I shed a few tears. I felt embarrassed and ashamed about myself. But I got on with my studies, kept speaking to God, and continued with life in a state of denial.

This, presumably, is what was expected of me by religious people. So far as I knew, my own Church said nothing about the subject. Perhaps that was because former supreme governor King George V had declared, "I thought people like that shot themselves"!

But other churches were not so reticent. The Catechism of the Catholic Church³ declared, "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered'. They are contrary to the natural law! Under no circumstances can they be approved".

The late Cardinal Winning of Scotland, before his death, reminded an audience of those far off days⁴: "[T]he threat to the Christian family is very real. I would ask you to cast your mind back to the dark days of World War II. The parallels with today are striking. In place of bombs of fifty years ago you find yourself bombarded with images, values and ideas [of an active and militant homosexual lobby] which are utterly alien".

Not to be outdone by the Roman Church, Evangelical Christians increasingly became more noisy as I was growing up.

It was not all that surprising that some interpreters of God from the Jewish religion should join in this denunciation. After all, the passage in Leviticus appeared in the Holy Book they had shared with other religions. A former Chief Rabbi of England, Lord Jakobovits, described an ultra-orthodox Jewish view of God's will to the House of Lords⁵: "'Gay', 'partner' and 'homophobia' are all terms to whitewash what is morally unacceptable to the vast majority of the citizens of this country and elsewhere. We should not aid and abet this use of language. [A] tiny dissident minority of under 5%—perhaps under 1%—cannot demand that the other 95% or 99% must accept and treat as equal violations of the moral code which, after all, has distinguished civilised life for millennia. [V]iolations of the laws of God; cannot endure in the long run".

(2) Leviticus, 19, 22. The reference is to the prohibitions in Leviticus on the wearing of garments made of mixed wool and linen, the eating of pork and crustaceans, the position of slaves, etc.

(3) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No 2357 (Part, 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 6, II. The vocation to Chastity). See Online. See generally R Wintemute, "Religion vs Sexual Orientation - A Clash of Human Rights?" (2002) 1 *Journal of Law and Equality* 125 ff.

(4) K Sengupta, "Cardinal: Gays 'as dangerous as wartime bombs'", *The Independent* (24 January 2000), See Online.

(5) House of Lords, *Hansard*, (22 July 1998) at 949-50 (Lord Jakobovits). See Online.

It might seem passing strange to hear a Jewish leader talk in such percentiles. After all, the Jews had been but two per cent of Hitler's Germany.

We have it on the authority of Miranda Devine in *The Sydney Morning Herald*⁶ that Osama bin Laden's 'Letter to the American People', published in 2002, demands conversion of Islam. But also to putting a stop to "homosexuality, intoxicants, gambling and trading with interest"⁷. In the holy Koran, homosexuality is linked with the biblical story of Lot and is mentioned on five occasions. Homosexuals are included amongst those who specifically incur the wrath of God⁸.

It is therefore wholly unsurprising that the Criminal Code of countries like Iran provide for the death penalty for homosexuality⁹. Indeed, it is not so long ago that we had severe punishments in our own legal system. More people were hanged in London in 1834 for homosexual offences than for murder.

When I reached law school I learned of the stern punishments meted out for "the abominable crime"¹⁰.

For an adolescent, full of hope and spirit, these were very frightening times. Especially because you were frightened into silence about your deepest feelings, even with those family members closest to you.

Do not think that these times have passed in sunny Australia in a new millennium. Violence against people for reasons of their race, gender and sexuality are daily occurrences. Youth suicide is extremely high, especially amongst boys and young men. Last week I learned of the funeral of a highly talented young scientist of 31, rejected by his Italian Australian family because of his sexuality—driven to suicide. At his funeral, after all the prayers and the music, all that could be heard was muttering, "It doesn't matter. He was just a poofster".

So how did my relationship with God survive this experience of self-discovery?

First, I never doubted for an instant the surrounding love of my parents, my brothers and sister. I knew, in my heart, that they would always love me as I was. For years we did not confront the subject verbally. We did not really need to do

so. When we did, it was exactly as I expected—no big deal. Not everyone is so lucky.

Secondly, I was greatly blessed by having many loving friends and companions, homosexual and heterosexual. Especially in finding a loving partner, Johan. He is not here tonight. He has very little time for religion and churches. He has often said to me, "I don't understand how such an intelligent person can take seriously religions that all oppress women, people of colour and gays".

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He prefers to be out there helping his Ankali. He volunteers to clean and cook and scrub the toilet-bowl for a patient living with HIV. That is his religion. He has utter contempt for what he calls "the bishops in their frocks, spouting words of hate".

For thirty-five years—despite the impediments of the world—we have been together. Not everyone is blessed with such relationships. Not everyone wants them. But they are not evil or disordered—just loving, kind, loyal and mutually supportive. To deny humans such love is truly disordered, unnatural—some may even say evil.

Thirdly, I was lucky with the timing of my life. My life has coincided with the great advance of science in the study of human sexuality. At the same time as Commissioner Delaney and the odd Bishop or two were having their say, the press in Australia was bringing reports of the research of Alfred Kinsey and all of his successors who researched human sexual diversity. We were living through a great age of science. We knew we were in the atomic era. We saw Sputnik in the sky. We witnessed the advent of jumbo-jets, the computer, the human genome. We knew that the churches had modified their beliefs about the Creation story following Darwin's revelations.

(6) M Devine, 'Terrorism leaving us no place to run', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 2004, 13.

(8) Sura, 26:195:166. See C Puplick, "Homosexuality and Islam" (2003), unpublished, 10.

(9) Art 140. See Puplick above n 10, 12-13.

(10) Crimes Act 1900 (NSW), s 79.

(7) *ibid*, loc cit.

My generation had complete confidence that science would reveal more truths. One of them concerned a minority of human beings with a sexual attraction to their own sex. We knew that if this reality existed everywhere in nature it could not be evil. It had a purpose. Ultimately, as in the past, the most sacred Scriptures would need to be re-examined. New interpretations would need to be found. Lawyers know that this has to be done all the time with ancient words.

Truth is a tremendous weapon. It is the truth that sets us free. First, a small group, then more, and eventually most citizens came to know the truth that some people are homosexual. To deny them love and companionship is just plain cruel. To deny them equality as citizens is unjust. To punish them for private adult conduct is oppressive.

I was fortunate to live through a time when these truths became gradually, increasingly and overwhelmingly accepted in Australia and other civilised countries.

Fourthly, I was greatly strengthened in my approach to these issues by my religious upbringing. The Anglican Church in Sydney has its faults, as we all have. But it is part of a denomination that grew out of the Elizabethan settlement in England. After the terrors against Catholics of Edward VI and against Protestants of Mary I, it was imperative to establish a Church of many mansions. Thus, in Sydney to this day, we have the Cathedral, the Church of St James and Christ Church St Lawrence. They represent the low, middle and high church traditions. There is always a space for diverse opinions.

It is not, I think, coincidental that it is the Anglican Communion that has witnessed not only the worldwide move to the ordination of women (an absurd exclusion from the ministry of God), but also the ordination of openly homosexual priests, and the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson as elected Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire. The Uniting Church in Australia has also played a part in this gradual movement. So have other religious groups. It will not happen overnight. There will be storms ahead. With Osama bin Laden as an enemy, we cannot be entirely relaxed and comfortable.

But out of the essential diversity of these beliefs has come gradual progress towards enlightenment. Eventually, if our species survives, rationality will embrace all religions everywhere. Rationality,

truth and science must be the modern companions of spiritual belief.

Fifthly, I have never been cut off from God. Never in the darkest days of secrets, fear and alienation have I felt removed from the loving presence of God. Not for an instant did I feel cast out of the temple. It may be a presumption, but I never felt myself “intrinsically evil”. I never felt guilty of “grave depravity”.

To be brought up in a spiritual belief with a personal God is a mighty comfort. It helps you get through the problems of life. God was with me in bereavement and in moments of pain and of success. To be brought up in a Church of Jesus is especially comforting for minorities.

As Bishop Spong said from this pulpit—Jesus was actually a revolutionary. The universality of his church was a new message for religion to that time. His instruction to love one another, to

**Never in the darkest days
of secrets, fear and alienation
have I felt removed from the
loving presence of God.**

forgive enemies and to seek reconciliation is one especially relevant to the dangerous contemporary world. His New Covenant undoubtedly extends to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, intersex and all queer minorities. In fact, it extends to everyone.

Thinking about God in the current age cannot be divorced from scientific knowledge. Staring at the endless universe, looking at the twinkling stars and pondering the infinitesimally tiny atom of matter, or the gene that makes us up, helps to put issues of religion in true perspective.

My notion of God has little if anything to do with Osama bin Laden’s opinions. Nor, for that matter, with those of Cardinal Winning, Rabbi Lord Jakobovits or others of like opinion. Their anthropomorphic, contorted, nasty little view of God is totally incompatible with my notion of the enormity of God’s presence as the universal being.

The notion of God as a bearded prophet or as an Englishman or as a Protestant or Catholic or as an Islamic, Hindu or other human possession is, frankly,

absurd. But the notion that around us—“immortal, invisible, and divine”—is a loving God is one that millions of humans cling to and believe in. It is a notion that is not incompatible with science.

Certainly, that notion is incompatible with cruelty and unkindness to one another. There has been altogether too much of this in the name of God. For centuries people of all religions just accepted a contemptible, little view of God. But now, in our age, a new and larger vision is emerging. As this vision gains strength, many of the human cruelties of the past will be seen for what they were. Then Jesus' injunction to “love one another” will take on a new meaning. Trivial doctrines will be discarded. We will all be closer to God—not just to some creation that humans have fashioned in the image of our own prejudices and selfish conceptions.

In the millennial year 2000, the Pope prayed, “Let us ask pardon for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitude sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions”¹¹. To that prayer, I would say Amen.

But I would add, “Let us ask pardon for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards women, towards people who are different from ourselves and towards sexual minorities, who are a full part of God's creation”.

Justice Kirby was foundation chair of the Australian Law Reform Commission. He was the youngest man appointed to federal judicial office in Australia, and is the second-longest serving judge in the country. He has been heavily involved in legal, human rights, ethics and AIDS activities in Australia and in prominent international arenas. He's a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, a Companion of the Order of Australia, and in 1991 was awarded the Australian Human Rights Medal.

Full text available on the ABC Radio National website.

(11) See Online; and “Pope apologises for church sins” (12 March 2000).

Poster offer



A poster-size copy of John Bayton's original artwork for 'The God Who Sang' in the Summer edition of *Common Theology* is available to subscribers on request from:

**The Editor
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Lost Soul of Sex

by Barry Paterson tssf

I am grateful to Thomas Moore for his stimulating contribution to the Summer Edition of *Common Theology*. He raised many issues that have been ignored or shut out by the Church since Augustine used his own experience to put a particular negative interpretation on sex that has endured in both the Catholic and Protestant wings of the Church ever since.

One wonders how healthy Augustine's sexuality was when he dumped his partner of twenty years and the mother of his son Deodatus because his mother, the saintly Monica, felt it was time for him to get on with his career.

This tradition has led to a particular emphasis in the use of the confessional. A close friend of mine once, as a teenager, confessed to the sin of gluttony. This enraged the priest who told him not to be a fool and to get onto the sins of the flesh.

There is one point that Moore makes that I would like to reflect upon. He quotes DH Lawrence, when Lawrence says, "The future of religion lies in the mystery of touch".

I think Lawrence is right here. However the Church's attitude towards sexuality over the centuries, and the current secular concern with abuse and particularly sexual abuse, has led to the "mystery of touch" being viewed with great suspicion.

One of the great crises in the Anglican Church of relatively recent times was the introduction of the "Peace" into the Eucharist. Here members of the congregation were invited to share a greeting of peace with their neighbours.

Thank goodness the Liturgical Commission did not call it the "Kiss of Peace" as in the ancient traditions.

I know I was shocked the first time I experienced the 'Peace'. I had been away in Papua New Guinea while this was going on, so when the man in front of me in the Anglican Church at Toukley turned to greet me in a very friendly way you can imagine my reaction to the invasion of my personal space.

And yet when I worshipped at St Paul's Wokingham in the UK a year or so ago I missed the healthy fel-



lowship of our Australian tradition. I could have walked out of the Church and dropped dead—nobody would have been any the wiser.

I think we have to get our minds clear on the very real difference between the intimacy of a hug between friends and that of a sexually oriented embrace.

Perhaps visiting a very rare word these days provides a key. The word is 'chastity'.

The Rule of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis says that when we have the spirit of chastity we see others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfillment.

I believe this helps us to clarify the difference between a hug of peace between friends, male and female, and an embrace between two people, which is sexually oriented and may be either appropriate or inappropriate.

I teach Theology at Wontulp-Bi-Buya College in Cairns. We are a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) set up to empower Indigenous Australians for leadership in their churches and in their communities. As an RTO we have to have a policy on abuse as every other organisation in Queensland does.

When the policy was discussed with our students it caused great consternation and distress—especially amongst the women. They were angry that people would see Christians hugging one another as some how sexual in nature. They see hugging as an expression of Christian agape with one another.

It took me a long time to see what they were talking about. Touch was not an issue in my Church or in my family for that matter. It just did not happen.

As I began to get to know our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students better my reserve began to break down. I began to experience the 'mystery of touch'. Thank God!

Perhaps it is time for us to put some aspects of Augustine's theology aside and to form a new theology of the Human Person that includes a healthy view of sexuality empowered and liberated by the virtue of chastity that views others as belonging to God and not as objects of self-fulfillment.

This contribution has won a copy of Thomas Moore's book *The Lost Soul of Sex*.

Costing the Human Factor

By Lindsay Tanner

Extracts from the book, *Crowded Lives* by Federal Labor's Communications and Community Relationships spokesman



Humankind is faced with a bewildering array of decisions about scientific advances which offer the prospect of major changes to our own species. At the heart of this debate lie fundamental questions about the nature of our own humanity and the relational bonds which combine us all into a vast interconnected web of human relationships.

The use of embryonic stem cells for experimental purposes and the possible cloning of human beings, the subject of recent prolonged debate in the Federal Parliament, are just a couple of items on a rapidly growing list of scientific innovations that challenge the understood boundaries of our humanity.

Work involving building computers with organic materials such as light-emitting polymers, creating new organisms that never previously existed, growing biopharmaceuticals in animals, altering chemical imbalances in the human brain, and connecting all computers into a giant information ecosystem, contains the seeds of fundamental change to human existence.

Scientists involved in robotics and artificial intelligence are already debating definitions for distinguishing human beings from robots, and questioning whether there is anything 'special' or 'unique' about human life that requires protection from unregulated scientific advancement.

Sun Microsystems co-founder Bill Joy, one of the great visionaries of the information revolution, even worries that the combined revolution in genetic engineering, nanotechnology and robotics could effectively make human beings extinct.

Decades earlier, Christian ethicist C S Lewis speculated that the advance of technology may ultimately lead to the 'abolition of man'.

The implications for the future of human life as we know it, lying beneath the possibilities opened up by science, go to the very heart of our concept of humanity. Our great challenge is that any decision to restrict or inhibit scientific and technological change almost inevitably establishes arbitrary and illogical lines that are unlikely to meet the test of time.

Soon we may face choices about cloning, choosing the characteristics of babies in advance, creating hybrids with other species like chimpanzees, implanting organically based micro-computers in our bodies, using genetic engineering to eliminate hereditary diseases and disabilities, and employing neuropharmacology to permanently alter our personality characteristics.

The prospect of dramatic improvement in the human condition will be offered through scientific advances that fundamentally change the nature of our humanity.

The universality of human dignity is threatened by the unimpeded march of science. If the bonds of shared humanity are loosened, notions of universal human equality will be undermined. The beautiful and the ugly, the intelligent and the unintelligent, the strong and the weak, all manage to co-exist in our society because they implicitly understand that each is that way through genetic chance. Where such human characteristics are artificially created, the divisions between those who possess them and those who don't may harden into faultlines of serious social conflict.

The emerging debate about the future of humanity reflects an interminable tension between two competing approaches to questions of human life and progress—the spiritual view and the utilitarian view.

This tension is at its peak in arguments around concepts like human nature and human dignity. These questions are explored with great insight by Francis Fukuyama in his recent book *Our Posthuman Future*.

Fukuyama argues that recent advances in biotechnology “mix obvious benefits with subtle harms in one seamless package”. The potential harm that most threatens us is acquiring the ability to re-engineer human life, to change the nature of our characteristics, personalities and how we relate to each other, and ultimately to change the nature of what human beings are.

Biology has shaped us, and changes in our biology will change us. Imagine a human society in which procreation no longer involves sex, or the maternal instinct is eliminated, or all people are of very similar height, and some of the possible consequences of changing our biology emerge.

Our legitimate goal of guaranteeing biodiversity for future generations should extend to our own species.

Already some fairly crude changes are in the system, waiting to take full effect. The deliberately engineered gender imbalances in some parts of China and India where, in some age groups, there are more than 115 males for every female, are a biological time-bomb.

I believe there are such things as human dignity and common humanity, and that they define and govern our relationships with each other. Our shared behavioural characteristics, even those which produce negative or antisocial outcomes, should not be tampered with lightly. Just as we have an obligation to future generations to ensure they inherit a sustainable environment, we also have an obligation to ensure that they inherit our characteristics as human beings. Our legitimate goal of guaranteeing biodiversity for future generations should extend to our own species.

The notion that the march of science is irresistible, and therefore all attempts to regulate or impede these scientific revolutions are ultimately futile, is misconceived.

Regulation doesn't need to be absolutely perfect to be effective, nor does it necessarily entail outright prohibition. To be effective, regulation will require the input and agreement of mainstream scientists in the relevant fields, who must

ultimately carry the responsibility on behalf of society at large of policing the activities of their less responsible colleagues.

The contribution to these debates from the churches should be valued, not spurned. Often the various mainstream churches themselves have different views on these highly contentious issues. Yet without the benefit of independent spiritual perspectives which focus on broader questions about the nature of human life, our society may drift into a mindlessly utilitarian position with potentially very serious and unpredictable longer-term consequences.

Even when we disagree with a particular religious contribution on these issues, that contribution should still be valued. The notion of an individual right to experiment or a freedom to reproduce in any way desired is a false one. All our notions of human rights and freedoms are based on our understanding of human nature.

Just as we restrict the right of an individual in order to protect other rights held by other individuals, it's only logical we should put limits on scientific inquiry or reproductive experimentation in order to protect other rights, including those of future generations.

Because it's not realistic to organise human society exclusively around either spiritual or utilitarian principles, the outcomes of future debates on these issues will inevitably be messy. Arbitrary restrictions will be imposed, illogical lines will be drawn and science will continue to advance haphazardly. Our most critical need is to understand the paramount importance of human relationships, and to ensure that the unique nature of how we relate to each other is not radically changed by scientific innovations intended to deliver other benefits.

Preserving the essence of our own humanity is set to become a new frontier of global political conflict, perhaps even transcending the global battle to preserve and protect our environment.

Our lives are built around our relationships. We define ourselves by our relationships. In many respects we exist for our relationships. In the world of stress, change and choice most of us now inhabit, our relationships are under great pressure.

We're working longer and harder, separating from our partners and children more, living alone more, moving more.

Many of us no longer live in a neighbourhood, a small world of strong interconnecting relationships built on trust, informality and respect.

Relationships are the missing piece of the political puzzle. As we struggle to adapt to the domination of the bottom line and to constant economic, social and technological change, the factor invariably omitted from the equation is human relationships. We've managed to insert the environment into our political calculations, but we still neglect the factor that drives and sustains our existence.

The shape of our future society will be determined by the health and strength of our human relationships. Our economic progress will depend on the relationships that sustain our economic activity.

**We must refashion
our entire approach to
organising our society, and
put relationships at its heart.**

Our society is wealthier than ever before, but we're still struggling to protect our threatened and abused environment and totally neglecting the health of our relationships. We must refashion our entire approach to organising our society, and put relationships at its heart.

While older struggles will continue, more and more our political attention will focus on the nature and content of human relationships.

The post-war wave of technological, economic and social change has completely reshaped the structures of human relationships in western society, and the emerging biotechnology revolution promises to alter even more radically the nature of who we are and how we relate to each other.

Virtually all politics reflects the tensions between the interests of society and the interests of the individual. With economic survival issues invariably dominant in political debate, relationship issues have not been prominent. Governments and political parties have largely ignored these issues, perhaps assuming that they are the responsibility of priests and psychologists.

This tendency to ignore the centrality of human relationships has sometimes led to government decisions that are actually harmful to relationships.

Decisions and transactions that carry economic benefits can also carry relational costs, which are expensive in the longer term and ultimately undermine social sustainability.

It is time for us to examine our society through the lens of human relationships. We need to consider how contemporary issues affect relationships, and develop approaches that strengthen our relationships with each other.

Government decisions, social and political institutions, work organisation and community culture are all factors that impact on our relationships.

Transport decisions affect our ability to visit friends. Telephone prices influence our capacity to stay in touch with loved ones. Shopping hours laws change the way we spend our weekends. Family laws govern how we relate to our children. Workplace rules dictate how much spare time we have to spend with family and friends. Entertainment options affect the way we form sexual relationships. Insurance rules impact on how our children play in the local park or on a sporting field. Yet we rarely examine political issues from a relational angle, and hardly ever systematically analyse the impact of our decisions on human relationships.

We've built a society in which we have less time for our children, less interaction with our neighbours, less involvement in the community, and less participation in collective activities.

Longer working hours, greater dispersion of families, more solitary entertainment options and more formalised links between government and citizen have all contributed to this pattern.

Until now, with public policy dominated by economic concerns, we've lacked a broader ideas framework to give form and substance to these issues.

By creating a set of ideas around the aim of building better relationships, we can reforge our public policy tools. Concerns about the impact of change on families, friends and community can be dealt with as essential elements in decisions, not external factors.

Rising affluence and advances in transport and communications have created social opportunities rarely seen in earlier times. We are now infinitely more mobile, meaning our social choices are less tied to the obligations of the past. People are more anonymous, and therefore less constrained by the threat of social disapproval.

Most of us inhabit a ‘mega-community’ of large numbers of people whose relationships with each other are transient and conditional. We interact with many more people than our forebears did, but we have fewer deeply committed permanent relationships and therefore a much lighter burden of social obligations.

Our new world is like a call centre where workers spend their time relating not to other workers a few feet away but to the voices of people they don’t know and will never meet. We are alone in the crowd.

Past attempts to introduce relationship considerations have struggled for credibility because they’ve been driven by a desire by conservatives to bring back traditional family values and attack the reform agenda of social progressives.

With this much wider scope for connecting with others, our relationships are more conditional, anonymous, and mediated through large institutions. The trust, loyalty and respect that tend to flourish in direct relationships become much harder to establish. With more and more of our relationships moving to a national and even international level, we’re losing the local intimacy of neighbourhood and slowly turning from neighbours into numbers.

Major political decisions should be informed by an analysis of their likely impact on human relationships. A proposal should be assessed against relational benchmarks as well as economic and environmental benchmarks.

It’s common for Cabinet decision-making to include standard reference points such as financial and environmental impacts. Past attempts to introduce relationship considerations have struggled for credibility because they’ve been driven by a desire by

conservatives to bring back traditional family values and attack the reform agenda of social progressives.

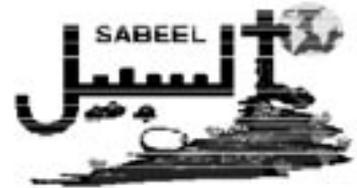
The partisan politics implicit in the *family* impact statement could be replaced by a politically neutral *relationships* impact statement.

Since the introduction of accrual accounting in the Federal Budget, a framework of outcomes assessment has been built into the Budget process. Though still new, this framework gives us the chance to build relationships impact assessment into the core of our decision-making. It invites us to consider the notion of outcomes literally, and examine the broader impact of government decisions beyond the narrow bottom line.

Placing relationships at the heart of our political and economic discourse will radically change the way we approach major issues.

A much broader political discourse, incorporating the true realities of people’s lives such as their human relationships, will help reconnect people with politics.

Friends of Sabeel Australia



Sabeel is an ecumenical liberation movement among Palestinian Christians. We strive to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, reconciliation for different national and ethnic communities.

The Australian Friends of Sabeel Inc. supports this work through programs such as education, advocacy, partner-to-partner projects and financial contributions.

Join us in building a network of Australians committed to supporting Palestinian Christians.

For more information contact Revd Dr Ray BarracloUGH

A Diary from Jerusalem

By Greg Jenks

Greg Jenks is an Anglican Priest at Forest Lake, a new residential community on the southwest edge of Brisbane, where he is also chaplain at Forest Lake College (an Anglican/Uniting Church school). He attended the Sabeel Conference in Jerusalem in April, which focused on the phenomenon of Christian Zionism—its historical and theological roots, its impact on the current conflict between Israel and Palestine, and strategies for non-violent resistance to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. The conference included a celebration of ten years' work by Sabeel (formerly known as Palestinian Liberation Theology).

A child is to be born. The mother is already with child. Her name is Israel, and the child is Palestine. Will the unborn child be aborted, leaving the mother scarred in body and soul? Will the child be abused before birth and come into life with handicaps that make her dependent on the mother forever. Will the child be brought safely to birth, supported through a healthy childhood and become a strong and independent adult who loves his mother?

A preliminary insight into the Israeli/Palestinian dilemma from Abuna Elias Chacour

On the first day of the conference we had excellent sessions on the history of Christian Zionism, and especially its British and US expressions. Did you know Napoleon was the first European ruler to promise the Jews a homeland in Palestine?

Stephen Sizer traced the phenomenon of Christian Zionism from its roots in British Protestantism (Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby) and its later influence on US Evangelicals such as Dwight I Moody and, of special significance, C I Scofield (whose *Scofield Reference Bible* shaped generations of Fundamentalists, including myself as a child).

Don Wagner from North Park University, Chicago (author of *Anxious for Armageddon*) extended the discussion into a detailed analysis of North American developments. His seven-point



outline of key beliefs in Christian Zionism is worth noting—

- Ultra-literalistic biblical hermeneutic, with a focus on futuristic interpretations of the Book of Revelation
- Jews are believed to be God's chosen people forever
- Jews are to be restored to *Eretz Yisrael* (land of Israel)
- Jerusalem is the eternal, and exclusive Jewish capital
- The Jewish Temple is to be rebuilt
- Antipathy towards Arabs in general, and Palestinians in particular
- Eager anticipation of the imminent end of the world.

On the second day I found Michael Prior, a Roman Catholic biblical and moral theology scholar, most stimulating as he addressed the issue of the “problem” of the Bible as a canonical set of texts that present violence and genocide as

religious obligations mandated by God. He posed the question of God's morality, and suggested Bibles come with a warning label—"reading this book may harm someone else's health!"

Jeff Halper, an Israeli academic and peace activist, was most insightful in his analysis of the new US policy, and the role of "international civil society" as the only counter-balance to unilateral US power. As a Jew, he was able to comment on the many Jews in the Neo-Conservative circle around President George Bush in the White House.

Gershon Gorenberg, a self-described religious Jew and Zionist, spoke of the danger of millennial politics. Gorenberg is a specialist in extremist Jewish groups, including the so-called Temple Mount Faithful.

We went to Ramallah on the third day, since so few local people could access sessions of the conference held in Jerusalem. We took seven busloads of people, and were given a remarkably easy passage through the checkpoints. We were only delayed for about half-an-hour, rather than the usual wait of up to three hours.

We met at the Friends Boys' School in Al Bireh, a sister town to Ramallah. Barbara Rossing, who teaches at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, developed the theme that Revelation is about opposing human empire with the divine empire, and that the climax of the book is not Armageddon but rather the coming of God to dwell (tabernacle) amongst us for the healing of the nations. This is an attractive re-reading of Revelation and was probably a helpful way into the text for those more inclined to make great use of this document.

Two presentations by indigenous speakers Jenny Ta Paa from Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Praful Buidwai, an Indian journalist offered very different but interesting insights into the issues here. Jenny spoke as a Maori woman who finds significant solidarity with the Palestinians. Praful spoke about the rise of religious politics in India, including the growing alliance between India and Israel.

Phyllis Bennis, an author and journalist specialising in Middle East and United Nations issues, asked what can be done to address the occupation, and especially the recent Bush policy changes. She took the "don't complain, organize" approach to the dilemma. She noted the way that 9/11 has empowered extreme militarist and imperialist dreams in both the US and Israel. Among her

wonderful one-liners were, "The US democracy is the best form of government money can buy", and (from Thucydides, 4C BCE Greece, reporting on the Athenian response to Melos), "For us democracy, for you the law of empire".

After the formal sessions, we were treated to a Palestinian cultural event with a troupe of local dancers, full of energy and life—a real celebration of what Naim Ateek calls "the beautiful face of the Palestinians".

We then went to the Muqataah, for an audience with President Yasir Arafat. To walk in through the destruction still there from the Israeli attacks of eighteen months or so back was confronting. Arafat spoke at some length in English, and then Hanan Ashrawi spoke very directly about the implications of the new US policy position. Ed Browning, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church USA, also spoke. I got to shake Arafat's hand and wish him well. He is a frail man in poor health.

On day four, Peter de Brul, a Jesuit teaching at Bethlehem University, drew on the 1980s movie, 'The Mission', recalling the scene where the soldier is climbing the Andean waterfalls, hauling his conquistador armor behind him. The natives eventually cut the ropes, freeing him from his violent past. Only his former enemies could free him thus. Only the Palestinians can release the Israelis from the violence of their past, and only the Israelis can free the Palestinians from their past.

I was struck, during this past week, by the absence of critical biblical knowledge in the case of most of the participants. The Bible is indeed taken as an historical narrative, and that creates many of the dilemmas with which people of goodwill find themselves wrestling. Folk here were shocked when Michael Prior described Joshua as a serial genocide and posed the classic question, "What kind of God is your sacred story describing?"

I have been made more conscious of how far to the radical left I am, in most persons' books, while also being too conservative for some of my friends.

Greg Jenks is Vice-President of Friends of Sabeel Australia, Inc, a network that supports the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. www.faithfutures.org/sabeel.html

'For the silence of the wise,

By Ciaron O'Reilly

eye witness

Ciaron O'Reilly has lived in Ireland for the past two years, but was raised and formally educated in Brisbane, Australia. He has spent his adult life as part of the radical pacifist Catholic Worker movement. In 1982 he co-founded a Catholic Worker community in Brisbane, and then spent thirteen years living and working with Catholic Worker and Ploughshares communities in the United States, New Zealand, England and Ireland. The Catholic Worker vocation is to comfort the afflicted and-afflict the comfortable, to serve the poor, and nonviolently-resist the war-making state. He has spent two years in various prisons as a result of his work.

My-longest-stints in prison have been for attempts to live out the prophecy of Isaiah "to beat swords into ploughshares". These included thirteen months in US prisons for the 1991 ANZUS Ploughshares disarmament of a B52 Bomber in New York on the eve of the first Gulf War, and five months in prison in Darwin for the 1998 Jabiluka Ploughshares disablement of uranium mining equipment in Australia's Northern Territory.

Along with Deirdre Clancy, Nuin Dunlop, Karen Fallon and Damien Moran, I am presently awaiting trial for the Pit Stop Ploughshares disablement of a US Navy warplane at Ireland's Shannon airport on the eve of the Second Gulf War.

We have been charged with US\$2.5 million "criminal damage" and face a maximum of ten years imprisonment if convicted. Ten thousand US troops a month continue to transit through Shannon Airport en route to Iraq, although Eire is officially neutral in the war.

My past twenty-five years have been an experiment in community building, acts of mercy and nonviolent resistance. I have stumbled in the footsteps of Catholic Worker founders Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day and Ploughshares founders Dan and Phil Berrigan.

My father, Garrett, is a native of Clara, County Offaly, Ireland. I am culturally of the Irish diaspora.

The three leading nations of the Irish diaspora—Britain, the USA and Australia—are represented amongst the Pit Stop Ploughshares Five. Karen Fallon (31) is Glaswegian/Irish while Nuin Dunlop (32) is a North American of mixed Cherokee/Dutch/Irish/Scots ancestry. Deirdre Clancy (33) is a Dubliner, while Damien Moran (23) hails from Banagher, County Offaly.

We are all committed peace activists and members of the Catholic Worker movement. Our action on February 3 last year was motivated by opposition to the then imminent US-led invasion of Iraq, which began some seven weeks later on March 20.

We poured human blood on the runway that has been servicing the US/UK military invasion. We then began to take up the runway, working on its edge with a mallet. We painted 'Pit stop of Death' on the door of the hangar housing the US warplane and effected entry.

After disabling the warplane, we constructed a shrine to the Iraqi children who were to die, and decorated it with the Bible, the Koran, a rosary and Muslim prayer beads, Brigid's crosses, flowers and photographs of Iraqi children.

As we knelt in prayer around the shrine we were arrested by the Gardaí (Irish police) and imprisoned in Limerick Jail, refusing to co-operate with bail conditions.

We initiated a fast and called for mass non-violent resistance to 'Irish complicity in the war on Iraq'.

In response to our action the Dublin Government deployed the army and navy to secure the airport. Three US companies transporting troops to Iraq withdrew from Ireland.

While we remained in prison, more than 100,000 people marched down O'Connell Street in Dublin in a massive display of anti-war sentiment.

In the six months after the action at Shannon a string of bail and preliminary hearings took place at local courts in Clare and Limerick before transferring to the Dublin Central Court where very strict bail conditions on some of the defendants were considerably relaxed.

we as fools had to...act'



The Pitstop Ploughshares Five with US actor, Martin Sheen (second from left). Ciaran O'Reilly is pictured second from right.

We are still banned from a five-mile radius of Shannon Airport and required to report to a Gardai station twice a week.

Since November further preliminary hearings have taken place at the Four Courts in Dublin. Trial Judge Matthews has ordered the prosecution to provide information on the nature of four months of US military flights through Shannon, leading up to the invasion of Iraq. The prosecution has responded by initiating a judicial review of the judge's order.

Prior to these hearings we gather in vigil at the-Spire outside the GPO in O'Connell Street, we process single file-along the quays to the Four Courts where a peace vigil is held.

Amongst the supporters are always a sprinkling of Australians, Americans, British and people of other nationalities. People of various faith traditions share in liturgy and solidarity with those continuing to suffer in Iraq.

The initial gift of our freedom to prophetic truth has been returned a hundredfold. Thousands of others have brought their gifts to sustain this witness for peace—hospitality, song, funds, transport, solidarity actions, legal expertise etc.

We have confidence in our legal team, both technically and politically. One solicitor was instrumental in ensuring a referendum took place, instead of allowing the government to rush legislation (which would have compromised Irish neutrality) through the Dáil (Parliament).

Another solicitor worked on retired Irish Defence Forces Commandant Ed Horgan's action against the Irish State allowing the recent use of Shannon as a transit for US forces on their way to Iraq.

Martin Sheen of the 'West Wing' has given us a "Presidential Pardon", Kris Kristoffesen dedicated a song to us, and Archbishop Tutu gave us his blessing.

Five months before our action at Shannon, 1000 people attended a meeting in Dublin with Ploughshares founder Fr Daniel Berrigan SJ.

The Catholic Worker and Ploughshares traditions are more recognised in the USA, not so much in Australia or Ireland.

Public liturgically based non-violent direct action seems to be a shock to both the Irish church and to the secular-left/moderate anti-war movement. These radical faith traditions are relatively new here.

It seems that Ireland has modernised very recently and that the spiritual baby has been thrown out with the religious bath water to embrace the consumerism of the 'Celtic Tiger'.

But there are a lot of good folks around wrestling with the issues of peace and justice.

Ireland had a wonderful opportunity to send a message of peace, justice and sanity during the war hysteria of last year but the government, church and major cultural figures were too timid to seize it.

Such a message to the Irish in the diaspora in Britain, USA and Australia would have contributed significantly to anti-war opposition. So 'for the silence of the wise, we as fools had to speak and act'!

More information:

www.ploughsharesireland.org

www.plowsharesactions.org

www.catholicworker.org

readers' views

Your Summer issue (p29) carried an impressive cross-section of opinion concerning the re-scheduling of Kay McLennan's 'For the God who Sings' on ABC-FM to a late time slot on Sunday evenings.

The opinions came very noticeably from across the Christian denominations, and were unanimous in their support for returning the program to Sunday mornings.

It seems, then, that the age-old Christian symbolism of night-day, darkness-light, and death-resurrection is alive and well!

Why, then, has the singing for the God so universally associated with 'light' been relegated to the graveyard shift?

Kay McLennan has hosted 'For the God who Sings' on Sunday mornings since its inauguration in 1989.

Before that, she hosted 'Sacred Music' on Radio National for the best part of a decade, succeeding Neil McEwan and in turn Patrick Kirkwood.

So, the history of Sunday morning broadcasts of sacred music on ABC Radio appears to go back at least to the 1960s. Why the change after such a long and successful period?

No explanation appears to have been given.

Has there been a disastrous ratings survey?

Is there a deliberate policy of secularisation in the ABC?

Do the Religion and Classic-FM bureaucracies communicate within the organization?

Or has an innocent mistake been made?

Christians have always held that Sunday is a day *set apart*, and there are still numerous manifestations of this in the social order of our secularised society—Sunday newspapers, Sunday bus and train timetables, and distinctive Sunday programming (admittedly not all of it religious) in the broadcast media.

To put it simply: Sunday is *different*, and it doesn't need *yet another* Breakfast program that will make it the same as every other day.

The new time slot is not only inappropriate but it is also impractical.

The starting time now appears to vary according to the length of the preceding opera broadcast, and the program has even been cancelled on

occasion because of this—as it was on Pentecost Sunday, of all days!

How does the ABC rate the intelligence of its listeners to Classic FM? Are they reckoned capable of dealing with something different on Sundays? Could not a sizeable number of them even expect it?

Please let this program be restored to its appropriate and time-honoured place!

Dr Geoffrey Cox

**Director of Music, St Patrick's Cathedral,
Melbourne & Reader/Associate Professor,
Australian Catholic University**

I have been browsing in your Pentecost 2003 issue of *Common Theology*, specifically John Thornton's interesting article. I am unsettled by his reference to transcendence.

"Wholly other than the nature that has been brought into existence by the divine omnipotence."

I recognise that this expresses mainstream belief, but I think it can be misleading. I know we also believe in God's immanence, but this seems to mean a kind of 'spiritual vapour' that wafts around the discrete particles of nature—the ultimate subatomic particles, I suppose, whatever they are. There are about 1500 different kinds discovered so far.

There is a characteristic mindset in Western society which includes a classical dualistic theism based on the philosophy of Aristotle, Plato and other founding fathers of Western philosophy. It enters Christian theology in patristic times in the Hellenistic world of the Roman Empire.

The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* begins with the verb 'transcend'. Transcending is an activity. Then comes 'transcendent'. Again it begins as an activity: "surpassing or excelling, going beyond comprehension". It then refers to the Schoolmen who applied it to predicates that transcend the Aristotelian categories. Kant applied it to that which transcends his own list of categories—extending beyond any possible human experience. Only in theology does it appear as a property—specifically the property of being distinct from the universe.

But distinct does not mean separate or "wholly other". The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are

readers' views

distinct, but not separate. The Holy Trinity is transcendent to each of the three Persons, yet is absolutely one with all of them. I, as a whole person of flesh, electromagnetic energy and mind (psyche) am transcendent to every part of my physical body, but I am not separate or “wholly other”. (Wish I were sometimes!)

I shall be incarnate, in this body of matter, for only a few more years, but the question of how long God's incarnation is is transcendent in both the scholastic and the Kantian sense. As Christians we do not limit God's incarnation to the unnatu-

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rally short mortal life of a Galilean Jew long ago. John affirms that Christ is an eternal cosmic being. Paul introduces the concept of the continuing incarnation in human kind as the Body of Christ—the faithful. As devotional writers say today, Christ has no hands but ours, no voice but ours. The risen Christ is not just “up there” (?) but here. The cosmic Christ is implicit in Paul's writings, if not as clearly as in the *logos* of John.

Modern theologians have been slow to catch up with modern cosmology, and this has perpetuated a naïve dualism about the universe. We have tended to think of the universe, or “creation”, as a basically static and mostly inert collection of material objects. Most of us realise that the earth is a very small bit of the universe, and that self-conscious living organisms may be unique to this speck of solidified stardust. Or they may not.

Recent astronomic discoveries have made it quite clear that the universe is a living, growing evolving organism. This has been evident in our own little biosphere for more than a century. The cosmic process of evolution, diversification and complexification is now observationally confirmed beyond reasonable doubt.

The universe is sensate, intelligent, and possesses a rising level of consciousness—not in every part

taken in isolation, every star, every rock, but in its sensate members (humankind etc.) the universe possesses everything its human organisms possess it transcends everything in fact. In a million years time there will be beings, hopefully on this planet, with a higher consciousness than we now possess. This is what evolution means.

Cosmologists today also recognise the limits of science to know the universe. There is a permanent limit to how far we can probe into outer space. The limit is set by the speed of light and the rate of expansion of the most distant (the oldest) part of the universe. There is no reason to suppose that this is the real boundary of the universe. There is no evidence to suggest it is bounded either in time or space. As Rutherford said a century ago, nature is not only weird, it is weirder than we can possibly imagine.

I have no problem in believing that the ultimate reality I call God is transcendent to everything that exists, including the humanly knowable universe. But I also believe God is the source, and indeed the essence of all being. God made the world *ex nihilo*. In other words God has nothing but his own infinite being with which to live his incarnate creative adventure. God is the ‘raw material’ of the universe.

In and through the Second Person of the Trinity, the only begotten Son, are all things that exist. The infinite, eternal universe, of which we are part, yet know so little about, is God's incarnation, the cosmic Christ. The Holy Trinity is transcendent to that, but absolutely one in and with it.

As [Archbishop of Canterbury] Rowan Williams has wisely observed, this does not eliminate the quality of “alongsideness”. The Father is alongside the Son. All three persons are alongside one another in the divine fellowship of infinite love. God, in Christ, is alongside us, in an unequal relationship of love (God loves us infinitely more than we love God.) Because of the inequality, there is tension and dynamic activity. There is pain. Salvation is the process of equalization where we have to grow a terrible amount in consciousness and in love.

Brother William SSF
Brisbane

readers' views

Dry sherry is better than sweet

When Sir Frank Woods was the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne visitors coming to his home, Bishops court, were often confronted with plastic buckets strategically placed to catch drips from the leaking roof. There were buckets in his chapel, buckets in the hall and even a bucket on the baby grand piano. He had a certain disdain for possessions and did not feel it appropriate that the people of his diocese should have to pay for a salubrious lifestyle for their Archbishop.

His lifestyle choices were often in marked contrast to the values pursued by other luminaries of the church. Indeed some are still taunted with the sobriquet “Chardonnay Christians”.

When the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane fulfilled the dream of becoming Australia's Governor General it was reported that he entered an environment which had more than seventy staff to meet his daily needs. The archbishop was widely known for his work for the poor early in his career, but he ended up with a lifestyle at the other end of the spectrum. Perhaps this is not surprising. It would really have been a surprise if he had chosen to live a life of simplicity, identified with the disempowered and disadvantaged.

This is not to say that the archbishop's choices were misguided, but they encapsulate values many Anglicans are familiar and comfortable with.

But does being a Christian call adherents to a unique set of values, or does it simply support individuals in the lifestyle preferences they have adopted?

Could an outsider observing the church and its members detect a way of living that is in any measurable way different to the social environment they inhabit? Has the church created a system which ordains those who will present no substantial challenge to ideas of lifestyle?

There has long been a close association between the Anglican Church and the corridors of power

in Australia. The roots are deeply embedded in its history. The church is still headed by one of the richest women in the world, who appoints the Archbishop of Canterbury!

Back on the ground in Melbourne one in-joke amongst clergy is that the Holy Spirit always blew in an easterly direction—from the poor parishes towards the rich.

Young, inexperienced clergy were sent to the western suburbs to minister among the less privileged. If they behaved themselves then the spirit would blow and they would be called to more salubrious suburbs in the east. This unspoken policy meant that communities which were most in need of experienced leadership were sent enthusiastic but meagrely equipped clergy. Those parishes with business acumen attracted the most experienced clergy.

One major church in Sydney's heart ministers to the homeless each Sunday. When Feast Day services call for canapés and champagne it is, ironically, the ministry to the homeless that is disrupted and re-organised. Sometimes, when the feasting lasts a little too long, the wealthy and powerful unexpectedly come face to face with the homeless lining up for their handout.

The experience touches a sensitive nerve. It is a conundrum, made flesh, which dwells uncomfortably in the corner of almost every Christian consciousness. Having the dishevelled hanging around a heritage place of worship affronts a sense of taste and Anglicans modestly pride themselves in being people of taste. They know a dry sherry is preferable to a sweet one, and they are eternally grateful that Jesus changed water into wine and not—as some Christians might have preferred—that he changed the wine into water.

The idea that Jesus led a life closely associated with the poor and disadvantaged raises disturbing questions about what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be a Church.

readers' views

To read the story of Jesus' life is to enter into a world where the marginalised are those he cherished most and where the upper echelons in society are sometimes a focus for intense censure. When he shared table with the wealthy he often challenged dearly held understandings of society and social structure.

So does being a follower, imitating his life, call adherents to make very serious choices about lifestyle? And if we find the courage to make such choices will it lead to the same result as it did for him? After all Jesus was not an innocent man crucified. He was guilty of many things—particularly subverting the accepted social order and spreading ideas which appeared to attack the very roots of organised society.

There have been many people in church life who have faced this challenge and stripped their lives of the trappings of prosperity, but such people are to be extolled and seldom imitated.

As for the writer, he left the priesthood in part because he did not have the courage to take the disturbingly radical path Jesus seems to have travelled and lived by, and the value systems exemplified in his life.

Francis of Assisi stripped off his clothes in front of the bishop and embraced Sister Poverty, but there is no record that the bishop was moved to do the same. The Church at the time knew exactly what to do—call a man a saint and his lifestyle choices become considered so extraordinary that no-one can be criticised for not following suit. Call a man the Son of God and we are all let off the hook—aren't we?

Don Palmer

Don Palmer served as an Anglican priest in Melbourne, Bendigo, St Albans (UK) and Bathurst. He has been a documentary film maker, television director and media trainer based in Sydney for the last decade.

review

A House of Praise: Collected Hymns 1961—2001, Timothy Dudley-Smith, OUP, Oxford, and Hope Publishing, Carol Stream, IL, 2003

Review by Gerald Charles Davis

Hymnody matters! Like good preaching and good praying, good hymnody is an intersection of biblical revelation, reflective theology, and contemporary life. Such intersections are the Christian's rich heritage.

Timothy Dudley-Smith, born 1926, matured into post-World War II England where so many ideals were in ruins.

The Edinburgh Missionary Conference's optimism had seen "the world for Christ in our generation"—but only a few years later that vision was overtaken by the lousy inhumanity of trench warfare.

With Hitler seen off twenty-five years later, a nuclear terror supplanted him.

Timothy Dudley-Smith, and a number of contemporaries, "struck a chord" in this time, as quirky in its way as the idea of a chord at all for this man who claims no musicality.

His very early 'Tell out my soul, the greatness of The Lord' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*)—a metrical Magnificat, written 1961—is probably the most widely published hymn since World War II. Yet, it "was not written as a hymn (at that time I believed that hymn-writing was closed to me because I lack all musical ability), but simply as an attempt to take the start of the New English Bible translation of Luke 1:46 as the opening line of a lyric, and go on from there". (Quoted from the extensive writer's notes on each of the 285 hymns in *A House of Praise*.)

If Timothy Dudley-Smith's launch into hymnody seems momentarily curious, the movement towards a new hymnody emerged as much wider, and we might see it as one of the major Spirit interventions in our time.

Christopher Idle, Michael Perry, Michael Saward, Brian Wren and New Zealand's Shirley Erena Murray—more perhaps latterly Graham Kendrick, Geoffrey Bullock, Elisabeth Smith (the latter two contemporary Australians) have emerged.

I understand the Methodist Fred Pratt, and probably Fred Kaan, should be on that rather careful list—I don't know them very well.

But Timothy Dudley-Smith (sometime Bishop of Thetford, suffragan title to Norwich) is the elder among them all.

'Name of all Majesty' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*) is another quite widely published hymn many will recognise in *A House of Praise*. Michael Baughen's fine *Majestas* tune seems synonymous with it. Malcolm Archer (who wrote a notable *Requiem* in 1992, barely known in Australia yet) has another tune, *Name of All Majesty*.

'Not for tongues of Heaven's Angels', 'Born by the Holy Spirit's Breath' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*), 'Fill your hearts with joy and gladness' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*), 'I lift my eyes to the quiet hills' (in *Mission Praise II*), 'Sing a new song to the Lord' ('*Cantate Domino*', in *Hymns for Today's Church*), 'Safe in the Shadow of the Lord' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*), 'Timeless Love, we sing the story!' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*), 'O Christ the same, through all our story's pages' (in *Hymns for Today's Church*, to a useful Kenneth Coates tune, although *Londonderry Air* fits if your choir and congregation have big lungs) ... all have been more or less widely published. The author gives us his notes of how each came to be written.

'Lord for the years Your love has kept and guided', written for Scripture Union's centenary in 1967, was commissioned for Sibelius' *Finlandia*, "because it was available with orchestral parts", for use in St Paul's Cathedral, London. It is almost universally linked today to Michael Baughen's tune *Lord of the Years*, and it well may have faded into the obscurer classical musical margins with *Finlandia*. One wonders what tune it will have a century hence.

The earlier hymns are the more exciting. 'When the Lord in glory comes', 1967, was written for *Youth Praise II*, when its editors were looking for items with a "youth idiom". It also marks an earlier instance of Timothy Dudley-Smith's productive friendship with Michael Baughen.

Baughen's tune, *Glorious Coming*, may reflect the "youth idiom" (whatever that is) better than Timothy Dudley-Smith's cataclysms of successive negatives, but it all works together—better with a band than a pipe organ, perhaps.

Many later hymns in this collection have not been published before, including a bracket of metrical Psalm and Isaiah canticles.

Retail distribution in Australia was difficult as I wrote this. If your best local efforts fail, try ama-

zon.co.uk, from whom I indented my copy for just under £25 air-mail.

Gerald Charles Davis was founding and managing editor of *Church Scene*, the national Australian Anglican weekly, from 1970-1995.

The Dance goes on

After a long illness and period of dementia, my friend the hymn-writer Sydney Carter is dead. He was 88 years of age. He died in the Maudsley Hospital, London, -where he had been for almost two years.-

He wrote-some that maybe would not be called hymns by some people-such as 'The Vicar is a Beatnik' and 'George Fox'.-And then there were many songs about life and people, places and people. His writing was creative and questioning.

I have a well worn copy of his book *The Rock of Doubt* which I treasure very much and dip into often, especially when my own doubts and times of darkness need a companion to lift me to the light.

I think he was a kind of modern times Jeremiah, with questions of people and God that many of us would be afraid to voice. He gave exhilarating expression to a faith that would not and could not be subscribed-by creeds,-dogma-and regulations,-but was an ongoing adventurous journey of discovery.

In his hymn/song 'Bird of Heaven'-the chorus is, "Ah! The bird of heaven! Follow where the bird has gone; If you want to find him, keep on travelling on".

And now he is able to dance again as he travels on into the freedom we call death. I am saddened by the loss but rejoice in the gift of Sydney Carter to me and many, many people.

Keep on travelling on!

Bernard Spong

Former missionary and chaplain with the South African Council of Churches

review

Reflections in Glass: trends and tensions in the contemporary Anglican Church by Peter Carnley, 324pp, \$35.

Review by Drew Hanlon

In my thesis I looked in depth at the controversy surrounding Carnley's article, 'The Rising of the Son' published in the April 2000 edition of *The Bulletin*.

Carnley's article looked at the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection in the light of his capacity to forgive the perpetrators of his crucifixion and how this capacity to forgive and be forgiven draws us into the power of the resurrection in our daily lives.

The event of the crucifixion and resurrection is not simply an event of 2000 years ago but an event

I met Sydney through the Christian Fellowship Trust, a Quaker programme that used to send British people to South Africa and South Africans to Britain during the apartheid era. He and his wife, Leila, became friends and we spent time together when-I was in London and kept in touch through the years.-He was a thoughtful, thought provoking, and much fun person to know.-

Sydney was a writer, hymn writer, performer-and poet. His most famous hymn is 'Lord of the Dance', followed closely by 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' There are many more such as 'One more step along the road I go', 'Judas and Mary', and-'Standing in the Rain'.

that we have the capacity to experience in the fabric of our lives. Putting it crudely, this event shows us that the divine life is caught up in the human drama of existence, and we have the capacity to be touched by the freedom of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Before Carnley's article appeared—along with the ensuing controversy—I was working on the living reality of myth and the problems of interpreting and experiencing mythic narrative in different ways depending on our predominant view of reality.

I had used the response to the mythology of 'Star Wars', created by George Lucas, and the thinking of writers such as Joseph Campbell, Bishop John Spong and Ken Wilber in relation to their treatment of myth.

Humans do not sit easily with mystery and consequently can respond out of fear—retreating to a clear and understandable construct.

I wanted something that would sharply expose differing mindsets in relation to the nature of myth. Alongside this I was keen to show that there were fundamentally different ways of experiencing and articulating the nature of the Divine—that there were differing world-views at work within the Christian Church that altered the way in which sacraments, narratives and beliefs are experienced, presented and conceived.

Carnley's article was a godsend because it highlighted these differing world-views. It also highlighted the significantly differing ways of experiencing and interpreting reality that are present in the Church, other religions and the world today. Peter Carnley sees the response to this article as critical to understanding the spirit of mainstream Christian denominations in Australia.

The response and controversy surrounding this article is where this book kicks off. Carnley gives us an insight into some of the assumptions and biases that are revealed at the root of conservative religious standpoints.

The author does not fall into the trap of reductionism that besets some forms of liberalism and con-

servatism. He calls himself a "progressive orthodox". By this he means, one who affirms that the language of our faith refers to an 'infinite mystery' (p27).

Our language about God arises from our individual and communal experience and refers to the reality of the Divine, but this language *does not define* the nature of the Divine.

According to Carnley, we necessarily speak in metaphors when we speak of the Ultimate Mystery because of the limits of words and, of course, human understanding.

Being a progressive orthodox, and wary of intellectual constructions, Carnley is uncomfortable with two overly rationalised faith positions.

Firstly, he rejects Don Cupitt's belief that our language about God has no reference to any objective reality. Carnley's rejection of Cupitt's work is based on an understanding that this mystery cannot be objectively identified and rationally constrained.

Secondly, and this is an underlying assumption in this book, the positioning of mystery as pre-eminent in the expression and experience of God leads Carnley to reject a faith that is predominantly concerned with a narrow intellectual assent to doctrine.

His criticism of an overly propositional faith is highly developed and well worth exploring for those who wish to have an insight into the fundamentalist point of view.

Carnley argues that a propositional idea, such as the penal substitutionary atonement theory, has become an idol in place of the Divine mystery. In other words, a rationalised construction becomes the predominant means of understanding the faith and therefore potentially thwarts peoples' *experience* of the Divine.

This appreciation of the limitation of our constructions is significant when analysing the theological constructions and assumptions behind popular and neatly stylised theologies such as those underpinning Mel Gibson's movie 'The Passion of the Christ'.

This film reveals a fascination with the suffering of Jesus and, arguably, has as its basis an understanding of atonement arising from penal substitutionary theory.

Carnley suggests that one of the reasons that this theory has been so popular is because humans do not sit easily with mystery and consequently can respond out of fear—retreating to a clear and understandable construct.

His warning suggests that we pause when we are tempted to make overly rigid theological claims. Carnley emphasises the possibility that such constructions can devalue human experience. There is a need to be aware of the limitations of our constructions when we speak of the Divine.

Thus, Carnley places mystery as pre-eminent in our discussion of the Divine, lest any of our constructions become stumbling blocks to experience of the Divine.

It highlights the exciting and potentially dangerous transitions that the Church as a whole is facing as the Christendom model of the faith crumbles.

The book's first five chapters, including the prologue, rely on the understanding that God is mystery "even when revealed in Christ" (p42).

The last couple of chapters face moral and ethical issues in our contemporary cultural milieu of differing world-views and diverse religions, as well as in relation to scientific exploration.

I found the areas of exploration in the initial and final chapters easier to understand and engage with than some of the chapters that deal with ecclesiology for the Anglican Church, such as the nature of leadership, lay and ordained ministry and women in the episcopate. These necessarily, as Carnley puts it, "involve a rather more legalistic and philosophical than theological treatment" (p181).

This book moves from the mystery of God, the nature of theology, the nature and purpose of sacraments, and legal concerns surrounding ordination of women to various aspects of history of the Christian tradition.

It provides keen insights into the state of a Christian Church in a first-world country today.

Furthermore, it highlights the exciting and potentially dangerous transitions that the Church as a whole is facing as the Christendom model of the faith crumbles.

Carnley's vision of the Christian Church includes the capacity to move beyond the fractious divide of both neo-conservative restriction

and liberal flimsiness, as both responses arise out of the human inclination to repress or fear encounter with the Divine mystery.

He offers hope for the spiritual landscape of Australia, contingent upon the churches becoming no longer afraid of vigorous debate, and having a willingness to move beyond God jargon and concepts that have little basis in experience.

Carnley suggests that for an article like 'The Rising of the Son' to generate such interest in Australia at this time shows that there is a genuine thirst for spiritual refreshment and sustenance, alongside critical and engaged thinking about how spirituality infuses everyday life.

The book could be a useful primer for discussion on the nature of God, community, leadership and how the faith is lived out in a world in which the loudest voice on the block is no longer ours.

The debates Carnley engages in show that the intelligent and engaging church leader is not an endangered species, but is still alive, and able to expound and apply the faith in many ways, while leaving plenty of room for debate.

Some may find parts of the book heavy going but it is well worth the effort.

Drew Hanlon is Senior Assistant Priest in the parish of Warrnambool, Vic.

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home truths

By Robert Braun

The Anglican Church got heavy treatment in the media over the American Church's decision to consecrate an openly gay priest, as assistant bishop in New Hampshire.



The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of the Anglican Communion advised against the appointment, but the American Church went ahead, amid cries that the move has impaired relations between the American Church and other national Anglican Churches around the world.

As the provinces of the Anglican Communion are independent churches, this action of American Anglicans cannot be prevented by their sister churches. We must live with our differences, or splinter into various unmanageable sects.

As many medical and psychiatric experts will tell us, the sexual orientation of a person is not something that can be changed at will, and the gay issue has no easy answer. From ancient times we have had homosexual clerics, doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers, candlestick-makers! However this seems to be the first time a bishop has openly affirmed his same-sex orientation, and life-long commitment to one partner.

Some would say he was an honest man, compared to all the hypocrisy of clandestine relationships and hidden lives.

The Church condemns promiscuous sexual behaviour. It upholds the sanctity of life-long marriage vows. But what of the gay couple committed to a life-long relationship? We are at least trying to come to grips with the complex issues of human sexuality, and not just hiding our heads in the sand. No doubt some will withdraw their presence from our midst as they uphold that most ancient of taboos—"The Bible says all gays should be stoned to death" (Leviticus 20:13).

Why are Christians so obsessed with sex? Parts of the African Church which have condemned the gay

bishop still practise polygamy and female circumcision, not to mention the subjugation of women.

The Roman Catholic Church—which has also condemned the gay bishop—continues to forbid artificial means of contraception in impoverished third world countries, and condemns the use of the condom in countries where vast numbers of people are dying of AIDS.

Just where do we draw the line in the sand, when it comes to ancient religious taboos, responsible behaviour, and Christ's law of love?

No doubt the Church will survive all these waves of fury and indignation. The Gospel tells us that "the Word of God became flesh" in the life of one man, Jesus Christ. The Word did not become a book of ancient rules and regulations. It became flesh, and God blessed our humanity and sexuality, and saw that it was good.

I am convinced that the true Word and Wisdom of God still dwells in Jesus Christ and his Church today. Those who make idols of either the Bible, tradition, or human reason lead us astray. But held in equilibrium, Bible, Tradition and Reason enable the Church to be the authentic presence of Christ in the world—even when we do question and struggle to discern his true message for the Twenty-first Century.

The Venerable Robert Braun OGS is Anglican Archdeacon of Brisbane. He was formerly Precentor of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane; Anglican Chaplain in Alexandria, Egypt; and Chaplain to the British Embassy in Bucharest.

Paget's parable



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“Excellent *Common Theology*, congratulations. I'm just about to finish an essay on guns and the piece about the Solomons gives some extra information.”

Harry Throssell, Journalist

“Many thanks for the last *Common Theology*. I thought all the articles were good, though I found James Haire's was the easiest to read—I think it was perhaps his clear style and the fact that it was only two pages in length. It is good that the ecumenical site (in Canberra) is now recognised as such.”

Archbishop John Grindrod

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