

# Common Theology

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## **INSIDE:**

- Is religion genetically encoded?
- New light on the purpose of anger
- What is the status of holy orders?

A Periodical Journal for Australians



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*Common Theology* is a periodical journal serving a community interested in emergent Christianity worldwide, and based in Australia. This publication is not a commercial venture but is funded by its sponsors and subscribers. It is intended to help build a participatory community sharing information about a new world order from a theological perspective.

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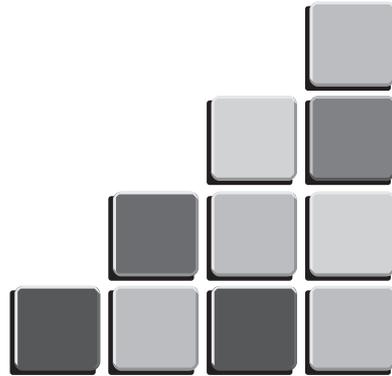
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**Cover photo:** A sand sculpture, widely used on the Internet, whose provenance is unknown. The graphic has been used to illustrate anger, although despair and oppression are equally well expressed here.

# all theologies



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## *From the Editor*

**T**he human genome project continues to unveil unexpected vistas to science and ethics. Our lead writer, Dr Tom Calma has come up with an interesting speculation that morals and religious belief are genetically encoded, as also could be Indigenous peoples' attachment to land. Such conclusions could augment current stresses on Christian doctrine and possibly affect common law with respect to land. This is the ebb and flow of the new world order in which we find ourselves, and very confusing and upsetting it can be.

So Karol Misso's thesis on anger might come in handy, to help navigate these dangerous straits in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He points out that behavioural sciences in the past fifty years have given us new insights into the physiological and cognitive-behavioural dimensions of anger, which throw new light on the biblical witness to this emotion – both God's anger and our own. Being angry, it appears, is not necessarily a bad thing, but is part of our human inheritance.

The forum in this edition opens up the can of worms which is the unfrocking of priests in response to sexual abuse scandals, which have occupied the news media for the past twenty years. The question has arisen whether it is appropriate for the church to compromise its own doctrine and ethos in order to placate the, rightly, enraged public over incidents of sexual abuse, by deposing clergy from holy orders.

As Bishop Kevin Manning comments in PostIts, the church is shamed and humbled by these scandals, but a humble church can preach the Gospel more convincingly. It is an opportunity to witness to the less popular Christian virtues of humility, courage in trials, and forgiveness. Personally, I don't believe the church will do itself any favours in the public awareness in the long term, by shooting its own wounded. Restoration is the necessary corollary to retribution, in terms of justice.

In all these areas – our basic DNA, our emotions, and thus our understanding of issues of divine grace – we are being invited to move out of former modes of dualistic understanding, and acquaint ourselves with a new world characterised by mystery and necessary confusion. It is a world where faith and hope are indispensable characteristics for a flourishing life.

**Maggie Helass**

# Is religion and culture in our DNA?

Tom Calma is an elder from the Kungarakan tribal group whose traditional group lands are south-west of Darwin, and a member of the Iwaidja tribal group whose lands are on the Coburg Peninsular. He is a member of the Ethics Council of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. He was formerly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. This is an edited text from his address celebrating the Centenary of the Melbourne College of Divinity last year.



The symbiotic relationship between Indigenous Australians and their land is often discussed in this country as being axiomatic. So much so that it has almost become something of a platitude glibly stated, often forgotten, acknowledged with tokenism and not really deeply understood. But if this is the case, and has become a platitude, it does not necessarily make it either untrue or irrelevant and I'll explore this a little later.

I am not a practising Christian, though I'm generally not opposed to Christianity or any religious or spiritual belief. I was raised a Catholic while at the same time I was taught about my Aboriginal heritage and spirituality and belief systems.

My life circumstances and exposure have directed me to follow my Aboriginal heritage and over decades I've been charged with the responsibility of holding ceremonial information and knowledge on behalf of Kungarakan people.

I've enjoyed the privileges of working and living across the width and breadth of Australia, India and Vietnam. All of these life experiences have exposed me to a plethora of different religions, belief systems and practices.

There are just over half a million Indigenous Australians comprising both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. We represent about three percent of the population and our numbers

are only about sixty per cent of what they were estimated to be prior to colonisation in 1788.

We comprise over a hundred distinct language groups and sixty per cent of our people live in urban or regional areas. We now only manage roughly twenty per cent of the Australian land mass, and archaeological evidence identifies that we've lived in Australia for upwards 40, 50, 60 – it varies – thousand years. We are the longest surviving continuous culture in the world.

In traditional Aboriginal society and for many Indigenous peoples the world over, spirituality is a part of every aspect of life. The Dreaming is commonly used to describe Aboriginal spirituality within the English language.

While the activities of the Dreaming occurred at the beginning of the world, in a sense they are present now. It is not possible to talk about Dreaming without talking about land or country. Land, sea and sky are the core to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and relationships. The whole of the landscape is conceived as having been formed through the activities of ancestral spirits. They laid down the roles to be undertaken by men and women in matters such as sacred rights, economic affairs, marriage, child-bearing and burials.

we are the longest surviving  
continuous culture  
in the world

The landscape shaped by the ancestral spirits is therefore the source of life and of law and that's both the law and the lore. Traditional Aboriginal spirituality does not distinguish between the physical and the spiritual realms. The country is dotted with significant sites associates with stories where the spirit-being first emerged, where they performed their ceremonies, or where they died and re-entered the earth. The entire Australian continent is criss-crossed with the tracks of ancestral spirits and in one sense all the land is a sacred site.

Christianity has influenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality in a variety of ways since the first missionary presence in Australia, the Wesleyan Missionary Society who arrived in 1821.

Some Aboriginal people rejected Christianity and maintained their own traditional practice and belief and many others took the new and combined it with their traditional knowledge and spiritual practice thereby synchronising beliefs.

From this basis the missionary practices spread throughout the whole continent so that by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there were church settlements throughout Australia. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Pentecostal Churches all established missions in Australia and have attempted to convert Indigenous communities and peoples to their religious beliefs.

Missions, in cooperations with government, controlled the language Aboriginal people spoke, their housing, their labour, their wages, their education, their movement to and from their communities, their relationships, their expressions of sexuality, their religious practices, their marriages and their children.

## spirituality is threatened if land ownership is not secure

A number of strategies were prevalent in the missionary era during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to convert Aboriginal people to Christianity and these included the translation of the Bible into Aboriginal languages and restrictions on the speaking of Indigenous languages.

The mission schools became the centre of Christian indoctrination and was the focus around which much missionary work revolved. However on many missions the missionaries brought a sense of clarity, a sense of certainty, a sense of order, direction, security and discipline as well as the practice of expectation and reward. The missionaries were, and some are still, regarded warmly and with loyalty by Aboriginal people. I should also include Torres Strait Islanders there.

Yet nearly all missions established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century actively participated in the separation of children from their families. Some missions were used as a repository for children said to be neglected. But while children often were in need, they were more frequently removed simply because they were Aboriginal children of mixed descent.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today exhibit a diversity of religions and spiritual beliefs. What is most clear is that it is misleading to try and separate Indigenous religious experience from other aspects of life, culture and history. In traditional Indigenous religion the sacred and the profane are not separate. Indigenous economic, physical, social and emotional well-being are interconnected with spiritual well-being. Spirituality and culture are not separate entities and an assault on one is likely to impact upon the other. Therefore freedom of religion and spirituality is threatened if land ownership is not secure, if Indigenous culture and language are not preserved, and if good health and well-being are not achieved.

Now how this might best be achieved is at the heart of reconciliation in Australia today, both symbolic and practical.

Let me now turn to another of the perspectives I mentioned at the outset – that what science tells us about the age of our planet and human evolution is fundamentally true. Now, while I believe it is unlikely that there are any creationists amongst us here today, I'm conscious that this speech may later be read by those who are or might be contemplating creationism. With this in mind I want to observe that such a view is not, in my own opinion, antithetical to religion. Indeed I'd argue that such a view is irrelevant as to whether God exists or of the rightness or wrongness of various religious traditions and beliefs.

Noted palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin was a Catholic priest who, in simple terms, held that faith and human physical evolution are not or were not incompatible. Indeed that faith and science could be reconciled.

As many of you may recall at the parliament of the world's religions held in Melbourne late last year, some delegates defended the sciences by stating that since, in their view, God is eternal, omnipotent and benign, any passage of time even billions of years, is irrelevant. That is, time is a

meaningless concept to an eternal deity who uses natural powers of planetary formation and subsequent human evolution to effect agency in human lives and to achieve their ultimate purpose.

If, then, we are able to accept that the sciences are generally true, what does this actually tell us about what it means to be human? In answering this first question I draw on a recently published paper by Nicholas Wade, 'The Faith Instinct: How Religion Survived and Why it Endures'. Now, this work and particularly in the early chapters is really an extensive literature review of the current evidence about humans, evolution and ethics.

Wade makes no claim about whether religion is true or false or whether some religions are good or bad or whether God does or does not exist. I particularly want to emphasise that point. I don't have time, of course, to discuss this in detail but there are two issues in the book that are particularly interesting and relevant to me in terms of our discussions here today on why Indigenous belief systems and relationships to Mother Earth are so important.

First, that humans did not evolve socially in the same way as the ape society functions – that is, that a group is led by an alpha male. On the other hand, over millions of years, humans evolved in complex, increasingly sophisticated, hunter-gatherer social groups that functioned, and survived, collectively.

In the long process of natural selection, the better the group functioned as a group the more likely it was to survive. This group functioning was

ensured by a shared sense of loyalty and identity. The better the individual members could protect and contribute to the collective, the more likely the group would survive and adapt.

Many bonding behaviours evolved as a result. But amongst the most important were the shared cultural beliefs, rituals, language and moral practices that are often entwined and inseparable. Indeed some cultures, beliefs and rituals came from enormous costs in terms of time, effort, knowledge, even self-harm to which its members were expected to contribute.

So this begs the question: why bother? The answer seems clear. The beliefs and rituals are binding. They provided a powerful group coherence that gives its members both an unbreakable sense of belonging but also a willingness to sacrifice everything to group survival.

morals and religious belief have,  
over time, become genetically  
encoded

Many scientists and anthropologists now believe that morals (and this can also be understood as incorporating religions) became integral to natural selection. In short, the more efficient and effectively the group or tribe could be held together the better its survival chances. Morals, values, even early forms of religious belief and practices, became necessary in this process and indeed the more moral or religious the tribe, the greater their collective survival advantage.

This suggests that morals and religious belief have over time become genetically encoded in human minds. Morals are not just relative or based on preferences. The human mind is not born, as has commonly been described, as an empty slate. Rather moral and religious thinking are universal and help define what actually it is to be human.

The second point that Wade made that interests me is that social anthropology and evolutionary psychology now help to paint the picture of human evolutionary history that is inferred from what we now know of remnant human cultures.

Three of these cultures are cited in detail; the Koong, the ancestral people of the Andaman



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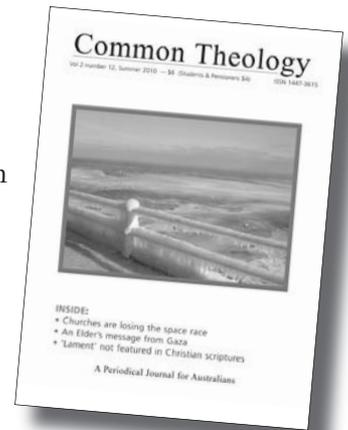
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# Common Theology

## A Journal for Australians

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### Readers' views

I believe that this journal is a very important lay ministry, because from my point of view it addresses a wide range of up-to-date questions in society, from a theological perspective. I guess it is possible to go to a good Christian bookstore and try to find books that address similar issues but I find *Common Theology* is an essential starting point, rather than going into the bookstore without much direction.

I was once told that we are all theologians in our own right, whether we think of it in those terms or not, the point being that theologians don't necessarily need to have lots of academic training, nor are their areas of interest just about traditional scripture. It seems to me that *Common Theology* has a culture of promoting broad theological thinking and so has an important role to play in helping people in all walks of life to do this.

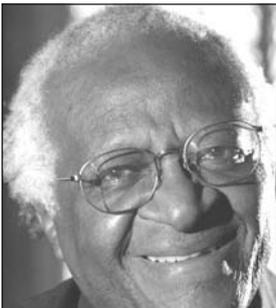
**John Bourne**  
Uraidla SA

It was interesting reading your description of journalism that is 'freed from a purely commercial foundation and sponsored by philanthropy.' I am a subscriber to various journals/publications that would fit that category. They give the opportunity for different points of view to be heard; perspectives that are often drowned out in the more mainstream media. That is no doubt part of the reason I support *Common Theology*. I also like that it is local, and so provides a chance to hear some voices that are a bit closer to home.

I also have a preference for print media, and believe that some of the things in print need to be supported to ensure they continue. I find the trend towards e-journals, especially those that are simply links to other pages, a lazy form of journalism. Those who take the time to put something into print, with thought given to presentation, deserve the time given to reading, and I believe they should be supported.

**Fr Adrian Sharp**  
St Mary's Catholic Parish  
Oxenford Qld

"*Common Theology* is food for God's 'little people'. I enjoy it very much."



**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**  
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

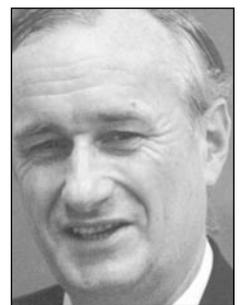


"*Common Theology* is ecumenical with an Australasian focus and embraces current affairs — light years

away from the 'god spots' of religious journalism in the past."

**Kay McLennan**  
Veteran Religious Affairs  
Journalist

"*Common Theology* is significant to the Christian community and beyond because it avoids the twin dangers facing theology today — that of being populist, trivial and even sectarian; or of being too academic, remote and specialised."



**The Revd Prof James Haire**  
Professor of Theology Charles Sturt University;  
Exec Dir Australian Centre for Christianity and  
Culture; Director Public & Contextual Theology  
Strategic Research Centre.

Islands in the Indian Ocean, and Indigenous Australians. Anthropologists have concluded that while these cultures manifest enormous differences they also illustrate remarkable parallels, particularly those that prove, over humanity's millions of years of evolution, the following:

- Our fundamental grouping and binding in close social relationships.
- Our necessary attachment to the in-group with which we relate and which gives meaning to our lives.
- Our correlating rejection of out groups to which we do not belong and that threaten our survival.
- Our inherent, if not genetically determined, need for culture, faith and morals.
- Our inevitable connection to the environment in which we have evolved.

Although Wade does not discuss this, I ponder about where this science may ultimately take us. For example while natural science theory may offer many explanations about group survival and the moral impulse, are there any important gaps that science is still to fill? Now I'll give you a quick example of what sits behind this question.

Indigenous peoples such as the Yaghans of Tierra Del Fuego have distinct physiological features but they've only lived, and therefore adapted, to that remarkably cold climate in the southern tip of the Americas for approximately 10,000 years or so. That's just not enough time for natural selection to shape a variant human physio-genome. If that's the case, does a form of neolamarckism occur, meaning, can physical change within a single human life actually establish inheritable characteristics?

If this proves to be true evolutionary theory may have significant consequences – moral, political and legal consequences for the indigenous peoples of the world. But even if we only consider the works of scientists interested in cultural and evolutionary anthropology and psychology, there are particularly important issues for indigenous peoples.

Firstly, even if we leave aside the critical human rights issues, the Indigenous peoples of the world have a particular collective value as holders of living heritage about the planet, humanity's relationship to the environment, and the actual meaning of what it really is to be human in relation to the natural world. This is known as “intangible cultural heritage.”

There is a legally binding international treaty that protects this form of special knowledge and

heritage as well as the non-binding declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Secondly, and this moves to the realm of my personal hypothesis, understanding human evolutionary origins may offer critical explanations as to why and how Indigenous peoples feel the way we do, and how we relate to the land even if there has been a long period of dispossession or even across generations or through mixed marriages or mixed parenting.

If humans are shaped by long, long histories of collective social adaption to an environment, and this is a genetically imbedded process, then it seems logical to me that Indigenous peoples may well also have genetically imbedded associations with land and to all the cultural, moral and religious connections to that land.

As we now know, humans are not born as blank slates. We do have inherent knowledge, intuitions and values and this applies to all humans. Given this is equally the case with Indigenous Australians, our religions, our culture, our association with land and our social networkings may be much more than the issue of politics, of control of assets or our inherent human rights.

## Indigenous peoples may well have genetically embedded associations with land

These may be connections so profound and complex that there is needed – as so many Indigenous activists have claimed without evidence and in the face of contempt from Indigenous rights-objectors – a genuine connection of spirit, morals and symbiosis between being an Indigenous person and our land.

We have an evolving scientific evidence base to illustrate this is not fictional, it's real. Not only does this have significance for Indigenous peoples because it is significant to us, it is therefore also significant for all humans.

As argued by UNESCO over many decades, humanity cannot be separated from the total ecology. Human culture and human development is reliant upon sustainable heritage and sustainable

growth and population maintenance. Not only have cultures evolved and formed around environments so, it would seem, have religions. This means that if we destroy an environment, we destroy a culture and if we destroy a culture we are committing a form of genocide. This is a moral and a human rights issue. For example, as the World Bank has recently reported, Kiribati will disappear soon because of climate change. Indigenous peoples in south-east Asia have lost their traditional lands due to man-made flooding particularly from dam building, and traditional lifestyles are disappearing as the Amazon rainforests are cut down.

In this sense as environments are lost, cultures are destroyed, the quality and the meaning of human lives are devalued. It is likely that we will see this happen again and again across the world but on an even grander scale as anthropogenic climate change escalates.

## a hybrid... undeniably consistent with core Christian beliefs

These are critical moral issues of our age and they are also issues that can be illuminated and amplified by understanding what we are discussing today: land, faith and future directions for humanity.

So, what of Indigenous Australians' human rights and the contemporary church? As I've illustrated, Australia settlement history illustrates a fascinating history of engagement between Indigenous faith and Christian faith and I've already alluded to it as being a story of the good, the bad and the ugly. Many missionaries gave their lives to work in the community in what was often described as remote and alien locations, sometime a surprising tale of endurance, commitment and compassion.

On the other hand many Indigenous Australians accepted the message from the Christian missionaries and converted to the new faith. But as we so often see around the world, when new Christian communities are established, there are founded new unique expressions of Christianity. Often it's a hybrid, and a reconstructed belief that is undeniably Christian and consistent with the core Christian beliefs and principles yet may do so through the

maintenance or, if you prefer, transmogrification of other beliefs of ancestral spirits, forces or spirits of creation of meaning of connection with land.

So the final observation: what can the experience of Indigenous Australians, their flexibility, adaption and special relationship to land and the experience of the Christian pioneers, their determination, idealism and pragmatism, both say? What can they both say together to us today? This is a rhetorical question. I know few if any, of either missionary or convert background, who intend literally to say something to future generations of Australians.

But there is a legacy, a history, a new heritage, if you like, forged from these relationships, and we should always cherish the past, the labours of those who went before us, as well as their sacrifice for right or wrong causes, and what they learned through trial and tribulation.

In many ways if we don't respect and learn from the past or even learn from what exists today, their toil will have been in vain and we'll be destined to repeat the same mistakes they may have made.

I believe that what they speak of through a legacy we live with today, is this (not only can people learn from the past, they must) the importance of how humans relate to each other and find a place, a kind of social, cultural and ethical equilibrium, is critical to peace and reconciliation.

Human rights are vital. They are a contemporary way of conciliating between the conflicting beliefs, desires and expectations of peoples and groups functioning in society and they offer practical and ethical solutions to conflict. They are not a source of conflict.

Finally, land is everything. Whether you call this an inspired place, real estate or a fragile ecosystem, our relationship to the total environment is who and what we are. It is our future. It has, and will, shape us. It is culture. It is faith, and it defines our humanity.

**Dr Tom Calma** is currently the National Coordinator of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking project, a consultancy to the Department of Health and Ageing. His task is to lead and mentor the project's workforce and provide strategic guidance and policy advice on the initiative.

# The status of holy orders

Several priests and a bishop in the Diocese of Brisbane have had their orders revoked – defrocked in the old parlance. With a court case pending in Newcastle, calling into question the legality of deposing from Holy Orders, the retired Bishop of Melanesia, Dr Terry M Brown has written to Anglican Primate and Archbishop of Brisbane Philip Aspinall expressing his disquiet. An open letter to the Primate from the Revd Malcolm Bell has also been circulating during Lent.

In March this year Bishop Brown wrote to the Primate:

“Your action and that of the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) raises many questions, theological, legal and pastoral. The secrecy with which the whole process was followed is of great concern. “Star Chamber” and “kangaroo court” come to mind. I understand that similar concerns have been raised about the PSC process in the Diocese of Newcastle, which is now, quite correctly, being tested in a court of law. With time, I have no doubt that similar legal action will be taken against Brisbane diocese...

“Article XXVI of the Articles of Religion places deposition of a minister of religion in a context in which it was assumed that clergy (like all Christians) are not perfect and sometimes fail. That is the whole point (in the first part of the Article) of the strong defence of the sacraments (as sacraments of Christ) working *ex opere operato* apart from the sins of the priest. On the other hand, deposition from Holy Orders (discussed in the second part of the Article) is reserved for clergy who are “evil” in an ongoing and fundamental way...

“There is also the issue of the indelibility of sacramental character (St Thomas Aquinas) which for many Catholic Anglicans (myself included) cannot be erased by a certificate signed by an Archbishop, no more than Baptism can be erased by such a certificate. That is not to preclude permanent inhibition in the case of very serious offence. Deposition or degrading from holy orders is being used here to assert (as you seem to suggest in some of your public comments on this and similar cases) that all previous good work as a priest is now cast into doubt, that it were better the person had never been ordained and worked as a

## forum



Bishop Terry M Brown

priest. This is deeply insulting those who have benefited from (a priest’s) ministry and comes close to a denial of the gift of the Holy Spirit given in ordination (including the power of the Holy Spirit to bring good out of evil)...

“In no way do I condone sexual exploitation of minors or the use of ecclesiastical (or other) power to sexually

exploit those in vulnerable situations no matter what their age. Such actions need to be recognized and addressed and those responsible be disciplined. Both victim and perpetrator need counselling...

“Finally, I would only suggest that the excessively legal and juridical character that the Diocese now exhibits is not good for the life of the Church. It suggests a Church whose primary worry is the law and not being taken to court. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about so much more than this worry. Included in that Gospel are wisdom, kindness, patience, hospitality and forgiveness (even for priests who have skeletons in their closets).

“The Gospel cannot be made risk-free, as it is about risk. Jesus Christ’s unconditional love and restoration of human dignity to all, even to the worst sinner, remains at the heart of the Gospel.”

In February Fr Malcolm Bell, a retired priest in the diocese of Brisbane, had written much along these lines in an open letter to the Primate, adding:

“(I)t is not the institution of the church that bestows Holy Orders. Holy Orders are given by God’s grace, as the church properly recognizes in its Ordinal. The only way the church might be seen to remove Holy Orders is for a deliberate, authorized decision to be made that such God-given orders were not given, and therefore that the church made a mistake in believing that they had been.”

At the time of going to press Archbishop Aspinall had not replied to these letters.

# PostItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPos

**PostIts brings you some snippets of general media comment.**



## Acts of God

**A brief excerpt from Barney Zwartz' Easter essay in Melbourne's broadsheet.**

American historian Rob Zaretsky says (the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, which killed an estimated 100,000 people) is the moment God was exiled from public affairs.

Portugal's prime minister responded to the quake by saying "we will bury the dead and take care of the living". We have largely followed his example - we no longer turn inward in awe and turn outward with questions.

Instead we turn to computer models for practical solutions, and to the television for narrative resolutions. We mourn the thousands of lives lost. We also wonder if something has been lost in the technological gains that show us human torment in full and unremitting colour.

The term "acts of God" entered the language of insurance not long after Lisbon. According to Reuben Aitchison, corporate affairs manager of insurance giant AAMI, the first reference was in *The Times* of London in July 1803, reporting the judgement in a court case: "By common law, owners are insured against any loss of property entrusted to their care except losses arising from the act of God or the king's enemies."

Although the concept survives in some countries, "acts of God" have disappeared from the insurance industry in Australia, which now covers many natural disasters it once did not.

But, as leading Australian philosopher Tony Coady points out, talking about "acts of God" this way is independent of belief in God. He says it is a shorthand way of suggesting no human caused a particular disaster, such as an earthquake, so no one can be blamed. The only result is that God gets a bad press: he gets blamed for tsunamis, but no one calls a marvellous growing season for farmers an act of God.

*The Saturday Age* April 22-23



## Humbled Church still has moral authority

**From a report by Bishop Kevin Manning on media attacks on the Roman Catholic Church.**

The attacks, in the main, were fuelled by the clergy sex abuse scandals. The media message was that sex abuse by clergy and subsequent covering up by some bishops meant that the Church had forfeited her right to comment on any topic of morality or, for that matter, any topic concerning the common good.

Of course, the sexual abuse of minors is a criminal act and it, and other forms of abuse of persons, is rightly abhorred. We know that some bishops and other authorities in the Church have let down victims by their failure to take effective action.

All this has left some lay Catholics, religious, priests, and I'm sure a few bishops, confused and wondering what to do. Should the Church tough it out, or should she refrain from public comment, adopt a low profile and go underground?

I suggest that it is none of those things. It cannot be business as usual because in addition to the pain of the victims, other Catholics feel that

their trust has been betrayed and many priests who strive daily to lead lives worthy of their vocation also feel betrayed by priest perpetrators.

The Church is shamed and humbled. But a humble Church can preach the Gospel more convincingly than one in whose halls abuse has been overlooked.

The Church is charged with preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that is why she cannot keep silent. She has a duty to teach doctrine to Catholics and to nurture their sacramental and liturgical life. The Gospel does not permit silence in the face of global injustice nor 'no comment' in the beginning and end of life issues where the sanctity of human life is under threat.

**Dr Kevin Manning is Bishop Emeritus of Parramatta.**

Published on Cathblog 10/11/10



## Penitentiary 'hell on earth'

**Bradley Manning, the US soldier held for ten months in solitary confinement on suspicion of supplying WikiLeaks with classified information was to be moved to less inhumane accommodation in April following public pressure. Here is an excerpt from Guy Rundle's report from online news site Crikey on Manning's detention without trial.**

Such forms of confinement are unquestionably torture, but they are torture of a very specific kind - a sort of paradoxical torture. If the aim of torture per se is to make the prisoner's body rebel against their soul - have animal pain and terror fill the consciousness until any principle, belief, or commitment is undermined - then the "supermax" regime is the opposite - it dissolves subjectivity by removing

# ItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPostIts

all that is most basically human, from diversion to human connection.

This is the point made most famously by Foucault: that the notion that neat antiseptic prison regimes are more humane than physical punishment is the founding conceit of modernity. In many ways they can be worse.

Solitary confinement and the microcontrol of a prisoner's behaviour are designed as a form of total annihilation, because they exert enormous energies in ensuring that the prisoner goes on existing, while depriving him of anything resembling life. That division of existence from purposeful life is effectively a standardised and routinised way of producing despair.

Not surprisingly, it is a particularly American form of human annihilation. The "supermax" prisons, and such total regimes, are the descendants of the first modern prison schemes, the penitentiaries established by the Quakers in Pennsylvania in the 1830s.

Where other prisons housed prisoners collectively in squalor as part of their punishment, the Quakers believed that this merely bred criminality. The object was to make a prisoner repent (as the name suggests) by developing a relationship with God - and the only way to do that was to deprive a prisoner of a relationship with anyone else.

Thus, prisoners in the penitentiary were ideally utterly isolated from anyone else - they even had separate corridors so they couldn't see each other. Eventually through their screaming isolation they would seek and find God.

The gentle and peaceful Quakers thought that this invention was a force for good; many of those who observed it, such as Charles Dickens, thought it was a horrifying nightmare.

But someone who never saw a problem with it was Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in*

*America* was based on the trip he took to the US to report on this marvellous new prison system, for the French government.

Much of *Democracy in America* was devoted to trying work out what the problems of the new American society might be. He never realised that the answer was the very thing he was sent to study - the penitentiary was the other side of American depthlessness, an indifference to the full humanity of others hidden from oneself by following correct procedure and affirming goodness of heart.

The penitentiary is bad enough when it's part of a God-centred culture; when part of one - even the US - where God is a shaky notion, then it's a literal Hell. Its deeply anti-human nature does achieve what the Quakers sought, since many prisoners become believers out of the sheer need for someone to talk to, but it's a counterfeit conversion, won through psychological warfare.



## Truth and Reconciliation for Côte d'Ivoire

An Elders' delegation has completed a two-day visit to Côte d'Ivoire to encourage reconciliation and healing. Their visit follows four months of post-election violence in which an estimated 3,000 people were killed and one million displaced.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan led the delegation - joined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and the former President of Ireland Mary Robinson.

Their discussions with the government covered a range of important issues for Côte d'Ivoire including security and disarmament, account-

ability and justice, the revival of the economy, youth unemployment and the empowerment of women.

President Ouattara and the Elders discussed the government's plans to establish a truth and reconciliation commission in Côte d'Ivoire.

Desmond Tutu, who chaired South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said:

"One of the lessons we learned in South Africa is that people must trust the reconciliation process and feel a sense of ownership of it. Issues that are overlooked today can become challenges later.

"A successful truth and reconciliation process requires wide consultation and ideally the commission plan should be approved by parliament.

"It is positive that the President has announced plans for a commission, but we urge him not to rush."  
2/5/11 [www.theelders.org](http://www.theelders.org)



## Dumbing Down Democracy

**A new book by former federal minister Lindsay Tanner has come under scrutiny by Greg Callaghan of *The Australian* who asked the politician a leading question:**

Callaghan: "With politician facing a daily media scrum, and getting caught up in constant micro-arguments, are the main political issues being lost?"

Tanner: "What's happening is that the real information process is slowly diminishing, replaced by a mounting desire for entertainment. Put on a funny hat, compare someone with Colonel Gaddafi, make big accusations, behave outrageously in Parliament: these have become the bread and butter of the media and politicians have responded to this. Being frank and open doesn't serve."

*The Weekend Australian* 7-8/5/11  
*Sideshow: Dumbing Down Democracy* (Scribe, \$32.95) is out now.

# Anger in the Bible and now

By Karol Misso

**B**iblical scholars and Christian theologians have over the last two centuries progressively integrated advances in medical, physical and earth sciences; at times grudgingly and not without controversy. Tensions still prevail as evidenced in the current debates on Creationism and Intelligent Design.



However, some of our preaching, teaching and pastoral counselling reveals significant ambiguities when it comes to incorporating advances in the behavioural sciences.

It is not possible in this brief article to do justice to a comprehensive biblical and ecclesial theology of anger, or for that matter the psychology of human emotions with particular reference to anger.

I will however attempt to unravel some of the more popular Christian interpretations prevalent within our faith communities and the wider community who claim a Judeo-Christian heritage.

My intention is not to discredit or discount the biblical tradition but to seek to re-interpret it with a view to making it more congruent with human experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Hopefully this would offer new pastoral insights as we confront the awful destructiveness of human anger on the one hand, and face the challenge of how to use anger to fight injustice, oppression and the social ills of our day. Where immediate change is not possible, at least, in Don Camillo<sup>1</sup> style, to register an honest and fervent protest.

The Hebrew Scriptures are not reticent in portraying Yahweh's 'wrath' (*'aph*) nor do they attempt to discount it.

Any literal interpretation of the approximately four hundred references to divine anger would leave us with an enigma no less than that facing fundamentalist Islamic scholars as they try to explain the 'Jihad'!

I offer a brief summary of varying scholarly interpretations within the Christian tradition, as a backdrop to coming to grips with the re-interpretation of anger I propose:

- Reference to Yahweh's wrath is part of the anthropomorphic language used by writers of the Old Testament. It was a projection of their human rage on to Yahweh and this had a self-serving purpose.

- It is a post hoc attempt by writers and editors to explain devastating historical events while holding on to the sovereignty of Yahweh.

- The abusive, vengeful, destructive characteristics of Yahweh are the consequence of incorporating elements of a more primitive deity – 'demon of the desert' – on the path to monotheism. A fuller revelation of the divine had to await the coming of Jesus.

- Yahweh's wrath is always a response to sin. It is part of a very instrumental view of humankind as expressed in the Covenant. He demands a response and gets angry and punishes disobedience: even uses 'outsiders' as the 'rod of his anger'.

## a God of love who is also an angry God

- Yahweh's anger is always justified because he is holy and righteous; his wrath is just another expression of his love. One has to hold *'aph* and *chesed* in paradoxical tension. This has been a very popular theological interpretation, well expressed by CS Lewis – "God's anger is the fluid that his love bleeds when you cut it".<sup>2</sup>

- As a final resort we can maintain that Yahweh is without emotions and immutable by adopting a Marcionite solution – expunge all passages that are unacceptable!

No one explanation can contain all that might be said about a God of love who is also an angry God. There is an awesome destructiveness in Yahweh which goes far beyond anything which could be regarded as fatherly chastisement or testing of an individual's faith.

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1. Don Camillo series by Giovanni Guareschi (1964)

2. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm* (1963 p 97)

Yahweh does come across as willfully destructive, even at times seeking people out to destroy them. It is difficult to dispense with the ‘savage god’ of the Old Testament, says Alistair Campbell.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew Scriptures in their open acceptance of anger – human and divine – express the complexity of the nature of Yahweh and his attributes. There are approximately twenty-nine references to God’s anger, as well as that of Jesus, in the writings of the New Testament. In addition there are less frequent, but nonetheless significant references to human anger.

The Greek words *orge* and *thumos* are used interchangeably, the former referring more to indignation and the latter to rage.

Our Lord certainly expressed anger: at the religious leaders; with his disciples on behalf of children; anger in the temple; with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane; and with God on the Cross.

There are two streams of thought among New Testament scholars when it comes to the interpretation of Jesus’ anger:

The earlier tradition as portrayed in Mark<sup>4</sup> depicts Jesus, as part of his humanity, experiencing irritation, frustration, indignation and constant threats to his values; all correlates of anger. Here we see Jesus using his anger in the service of his love but also as a protagonist, fearlessly and with great passion challenging the legalistic religious system and social evils of his day. “Jesus’ radical exposure of the dominant systems of his day resulted in his inevitable condemnation and death at its hands.”<sup>5</sup>

The later tradition influenced by prevalent asceticism and reflected primarily in Matthew and Luke<sup>6</sup>, shows a reluctance to ascribe any expression of emotion to Jesus. It is not his active opposition that provokes conflict but his ‘servanthood’. He is portrayed as the passive recipient of all injustice. There is in Jesus a saintly resignation, a powerlessness; his life is one of total sacrifice in the cause of fulfilling the Father’s will.

If there is any hint of anger, it is on behalf of others, without any self-assertion. The picture we have is of Jesus engaged in a passive march to the Crucifixion (a precursor of penal substitution theories of the Atonement).

The most that can be said of the different gospel portrayals of Jesus’ character is that these texts are “to be used with care”. They are biased and reflect competing traditions that had grown up in the life of the Early Church. If we accept that the “word became flesh” and that Jesus “became truly human” then we must, without a shadow of doubt, accept that he experienced the full gamut of human emotions, including anger, although as I have said, there have been different interpretations of how he expressed that anger.

When we move to the New Testament portrayal of human anger we are confronted with significant ambiguity about the experience of anger on the one hand and how it is expressed on the other.

This is understandable given the writers’ limited knowledge of the physiology of anger and their inability to distinguish between thoughts, feelings and actions. The Stoic philosophers saw anger as part of human nature that should be disowned or brought under the rule of reason.

## perceived as the greatest threat to spiritual life

There are however some significant passages which can be legitimately interpreted as focusing on the expression of anger:

- It should be used in the service of loving your neighbour. Mt 5:21f
- Warning against anger that is harboured, nurtured and can fester and break forth in destructive behaviour. Eph 4:26
- Reference to the devastating effects of unreconciled anger. Mt 5:23f
- Drawing attention to anger that is allowed to go unattended in an effort to deny or suppress it. Eph: 4:31
- Expressed in ways that are life-destroying to both individuals and community. 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:19-21
- Being insightful when threatened so as to enhance awareness of why there is anger and how best to express it. Titus 1:7, James 1:19f

Apologists, scholars and theologians down the ages did grudgingly accept the human capacity for anger, as they experienced it in their own lives, but they overwhelmingly perceived it as the greatest threat to spiritual life, and therefore a target for expulsion.

3. Alastair Campbell, *The Gospel of Anger* (1986)

4. Mk 3:5, 10:14

5. S. Barrow & J. Bartley ed, *Consuming Passion* (2005)

6. Mt 12:12-14, 19:13f, Lk 6:9-11, 18:15f.

In the Pauline dichotomy of ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’, anger was ascribed to the former, as the early Christian writers were influenced by the prevailing Stoic philosophy.

Seneca said, “let us not try to regulate our anger, but be rid of it altogether – for what regulation can there be of an evil thing?”<sup>13</sup>

Augustine of Hippo and others were resolute in defending God’s holiness; He was therefore impassive, immutable and devoid of all human emotions.<sup>14</sup> They perceived the emotions as a weaker, less important aspect of human mental processes (*City of God*, S. Augustine tr 1993).

For the Church Father, Gregory, anger was a sign of alienation from the likeness of the Creator.

Augustine and Thomas Aquinas did justify what they perceived as “righteous anger” on the authority of Mt 5: 22. Virtuous anger they claimed was with cause and directed at the sin, whereas vicious anger was without cause and directed at the person. To seek vindication with the intention of banishing the sinner rather than abolishing the sin, is ‘to be angry with your brother’.<sup>15</sup>

For Calvin the passions are to be ‘repressed, bridled and chained’ and for Wesley anger arose from ‘inbred corruption of the heart’; if experienced, it should not be expressed

Although the dominant narrative was ‘anger-is-sin’, a minority did acknowledge the paradox of anger in terms of its power for good or ill.<sup>16</sup>

Basil, who said that “anger was a vice that makes a man (sic) wholly bestial”, could also say that “the faith does not forbid that anger be directed against its proper objects, as a medicinal device so to speak”, using Eph 4:26 as his authority.

Gregory the Great distinguished between “good anger prompted by zeal and evil anger caused by hastiness of temper”.

Martin Luther, following Augustine and Aquinas spoke of an anger that is “necessary and proper: an anger of love that wishes nobody any evil, one that is friendly to the person but hostile to the sin”.

When we move to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there is a surprising lack of engagement with the emotions (least of all anger) among theologians of the

caliber of Bath, Brunner, Niebuhr, Tillich, Kung, Moltmann and Robinson.

There are sporadic references such as Tillich’s comment that emotion and reason are equal partners, even though he also warns of “emotional distortions”.<sup>17</sup>

In the main, however, as these scholars were engaged in a process of logical thinking they perhaps saw the emotions as an unnecessary diversion. It is however the feminist theologians of more recent times who have come up with the most positive view of anger.

These writers would say:“(W)e Christians have come close to killing love because we have understood anger to be a deadly sin”.<sup>18</sup>

## legitimate to assert that anger is a gift of the Creator

In the light of the above analysis, it is possible to conclude that overwhelming evidence shows that, at the very least, the capacity for anger is rooted in our humanity. God experienced anger, as did Jesus in ‘taking flesh’.

As women and men created in God’s image we too share the same potential to experience anger. It would therefore be legitimate to assert that anger is a gift of the Creator with significant potential to contribute to our well-being.

Even those who have subscribed to the notion that ‘anger-is-sin’ have had to concede that it cannot be totally expunged from human nature. Seeing anger as part of our ‘fallen nature’, they have been consistent and unwavering in warning us of its immense power to lead us along a path of destruction.

It is to be expected that the preoccupation in teaching, preaching and pastoral care in past decades has been to see anger as one of the seven deadly vices, and if it cannot be eliminated from our behavioural repertoire, at least it should be contained and bridled. The mature Christian in whom the Spirit dwells should not get angry. If he/she does, it must not be expressed!

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13. Cited in A.D.Lester, *The Angry Christian* (2003 p 118)

14. Ibid p 117-133

15. Theological Studies Dec 2007, Vol 88:4 p 839-864

16. *The Angry Christian* (2003 p 117-133)

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17. P.Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol 1, (1955)

18. B.W. Harrison in C.Robb ed, *Making the Connections: essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (1985 p 14)

The behavioural sciences in the last half a century have given us fresh and exciting knowledge about the physiological and cognitive-behavioural dimensions of anger: the links between brain mechanisms, thoughts, feelings and actions.<sup>19</sup>

More recently constructivist theories have made us aware of the dominant narratives, both conscious and non-conscious that influence our perception of environmental stimuli.<sup>20</sup>

If we believe that ‘God still speaks’ it is incumbent on us to seek to integrate the biblical and theological perspective with this knowledge in an effort to confront the pastoral challenge of helping men and women manage God’s gift of anger and employ it in constructive ways.

However, it is good to be reminded that “anger survives because anger works”.

- Anger helps to hold others responsible and manipulate them;
- Anger endows us with power over others and enables us to control them;
- Anger derails communication;
- Anger justifies destructive behaviour;
- Anger encourages wallowing in self pity;
- Anger serves as an excuse for avoiding intimacy.

There are several steps that would facilitate a responsible and productive management of anger. Firstly, an acceptance that the capacity for anger is anchored in the doctrine of Creation not the Fall; that it is part of our emotional repertoire and a unique gift of the Creator who made us in his image.

We must have a Don Camillo<sup>21</sup> honesty about our anger, an openness which reveals the human face rather than the masks of social conformity.

The capacity for anger is not triggered automatically. We must not attribute blame to biological origins, intra-psychic forces or brain chemistry (except in the case of psychiatric conditions that impact on cognition or specific diagnosed brain damage).

Anger is not some primitive animal instinct erupting with uncontrollable, blind and selfish force. No person or thing makes someone angry. People make themselves angry – they choose to be angry. “You

know I have a short fuse”, may be a convenient excuse, not a valid reason.

We are responsible for examining our anger and exploring the underlying narratives, whether conscious or non-conscious, that make us vulnerable to threat.

Threat can come from numerous sources: objects and circumstances that pose a physical threat; people and situations perceived as risky; being criticized, ridiculed or rejected; psychological or sociological threats to our sense of self, our values, beliefs and integrity.

Sources of threat are highly idiosyncratic and initially experienced as a generic feeling of ‘arousal’ over which we have no control, before we attribute our own subjective meaning to it.

For instance, while driving your car another driver horns you from behind. You are aroused.

You look in the rear vision mirror and you see a strange face. You get annoyed, irritated, angry. You may say something uncomplimentary about the driver to another passenger, or worse still give him/her a rude signal.

## anger is anchored in the doctrine of Creation not the Fall

Alternatively when you look in the mirror, you notice that the other driver is a friend. You calm down, you smile and give him/her a wave.

You chose to interpret your arousal differently and that in turn had an impact on your behavioural response.

Managing anger effectively is about increasing our awareness of vulnerability to such threats. It is about making a conscious choice to re-configure, reframe or re-author dominant narratives – socio-cultural, familial or religious – that influence perceptions that work counter to responsible anger management

Not only are we responsible for the ‘self talk’ that makes us angry, we are also responsible for our behavioural response to our anger: how, when and where we choose to express it.

It is not in the emotion of anger that true malignancy lies but in the failure to manage the outcome of anger.

19. C. Tavis, *Anger: the Misunderstood Emotion* (1982)

20. Gergen, ‘The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology’ in *American Psychologist* Vol 40 p 266-275

21. Don Camillo series by Giovanni Guareschi (1964)

The hydraulic theory that anger is pent up emotion that builds up steam until it finally blows the gasket of the emotional pressure cooker is no more than an excuse for the destructive use of anger.

Giving vent to angry feelings, or getting it off your chest by kicking the cat, banging the door or dashing the dishes is not part of effective anger management. “The people who are most prone to give vent to their rages get angrier, not less angry”<sup>22</sup>

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that because anger is one of God’s gifts intentionally rooted in our humanity it does serve an important purpose in life.

Once we are able to normalize angry feelings and discern the subjective narratives that explain why we get angry, and cognitively restructure those that are counter productive, we are free to use our anger in ways that can vitalize and revitalize our lives and explore what loving compassionate anger can achieve. To quote Carol Tavris:

“I have watched people use anger, in the name of emotional liberation, to erode affection and trust, whittle away their spirits in bitterness and revenge, diminish their dignity in years of spiteful hatred.

“And I watch with admiration those who use anger to probe for truth, who challenge and change the complacent injustices of life, who take an unpopular position center stage while others say “shhh” from the wings.”<sup>23</sup>

To achieve the goal so explicitly expressed by Tavris we must have a pervasive hope that humans are capable of becoming masters and not servants of their anger.

On the contrary to discount anger, and perceive it as something to be deplored and inherently destructive of human nature, leads to hopelessness, which is contrary to the Christian gospel.

**The Revd Karol Misso** is a retired Anglican Priest in the Diocese of Brisbane. He is a Lecturer in the School of Psychology & Counselling at the Queensland University of Technology and a PACFA registered Counselling Therapist.

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22. C. Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (1982 p 129)

23. *Ibid* p 25

24. David Slavitt (2004)

## book reviews

**ROWAN WILLIAMS** *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*

Edited by Mike Highton, SCM Press, 2007, ISBN 9780334040958, pp 305, rrp \$76.95

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

‘Conversations’ is a bit of a misnomer in this title. I spent a year wrestling with Rowan Williams’ dense prose, chewing small bites with my *Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers* to hand (‘76 edition and not really up to the job). I also found *50 Key Concepts in Theology* handy and *Foyle’s Philavery* helped with such additions to my vocabulary as ‘sublated aporia’ and ‘agonic’.

The editor would have been advised to include a glossary in this book, and translations to help those readers without a working knowledge of French and Greek.

Rowan Williams apologises in his introduction for “any unnecessary obscurity or compression,” as the essays were written mostly for a specialist readership.

I found reading this book a humbling experience. Having tossed it petulantly aside because it was such hard graft, I later repented and applied myself to the text a paragraph at a time. This devotional-style reading gradually, surprisingly, revealed a splendid intellectual landscape through which I had unwittingly travelled since childhood (having grown up with a philosopher/theologian father).

Existentialism was my philosophy of choice during the 1960s, absorbed by osmosis as a teenager and shaping a preference for the apophatic way during adult spiritual formation.

History is, of necessity, only experienced in retrospect. This collection of fourteen essays spans the period from 1979 to 1998, effectively Rowan Williams’ academic career as an Oxford don.

It is of course published in the context of his current position as Archbishop of Canterbury. It is now the day job of this Welsh prince to combat the heresies of his day and he makes forensically searching examinations of his subjects.

Essays include ‘Lossky, the *via negativa* and the foundations of theology’; ‘Hegel and the gods of postmodernity’; ‘Balthasar, Rahner and the appre-

hension of being'; 'Barth, war and the state'; 'Girard on violence, society and the sacred'; 'The suspicion of suspicion: Wittgenstein and Bonhoeffer'; 'Simone Weil and the necessary non-existence of god'; 'Religious realism: on not quite agreeing with Don Cupitt'.

Together they constitute a précis of important developments in theology and moral philosophy-in-the-making by a writer who clearly takes sober joy in the intellectual process.

His own take on this collection is that "the point of all of these pieces is to understand a little better what other theologians want to say about the simplest yet most inexhaustible of all subjects, the life upon which all life depends and the embodiment among us of that life in a human life and human words, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth".

## Hugh's books

Reviewed by Hugh McGinlay

**Falling Upwards – A spirituality for the two halves of life, by Richard Rohr, Jossey Bass, ISBN 9780470907757, rrp \$27.95**



Most of us think that the second half of life is largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of life, but the message of this book is exactly the opposite. What looks like falling down can largely be experienced as "falling upward". And explores the counterintuitive message that we grow spiritually much more by doing wrong than by doing right!

**Breaking through the Stained Glass Ceiling – Women religious leaders in their own words, by Maureen Fiedler Church, ISBN 9781596271203, rrp \$33.95**

This collection of lively Q&A interviews with key contemporary female religious leaders focuses not only on the discrimination faced by some of the most important women in religion, but documents the emerging leadership of women in several faith traditions.

**Traveller to Freedom – the Roger Pryke story, by Francis Ravel Harvey, Freshwater, ISBN 9780646536538, RRP \$49.95**

Roger Pryke was a celebrated Catholic priest of the archdiocese of Sydney. This new book explores a rich life in a biography that acknowledges his extraordinary achievements without masking flaws and low points. "For anyone wishing to pursue the Vatican II story in Australia, this will be a necessary book." (Edmund Campion)

**Economics for Life – An economist reflects on the meaning of life, money and what really matters, by Ian Harper, Acorn, ISBN 9780908284955, rrp \$29.99**

Writing his book from the perspective of one of Australia's best-known economists and as a practising Christian, Ian demonstrates why economics is a good servant but a bad master. While the discipline of economics makes a valuable contribution to clear thinking about important questions that focus on humanity's material condition, it is not a philosophy for the whole of life – and was never intended to be.

**From Fear to Serenity with Anthony de Mello, by Thomas Casey and Margaret Hassett, Hidden Spring, ISBN 9781587680663, rrp \$17.95**

This is more than a book – it is a path to hope, a guide to prayer, and a call to see in a new way. It is an invitation to go beyond the ego and to drop any addiction to worry. It is a call to breathe easily and become aware. It brings together a wealth of de Mello's wisdom, and provides an excellent introduction to the man who taught so many that God is, as St Augustine wrote, "nearer to me than I am to myself".

**A Gracious and Compassionate God – Mission, salvation and spirituality in the Book of Jonah, by Daniel Timmer, ISBN 9781844744992, rrp\$29.95**

The book of Jonah is full of surprises: How could a city like Nineveh repent? Why is Jonah so out of touch with the God who calls him to act as a prophet? And the end of the book asks readers the same question that God poses to Jonah: to what extent is their character truly in accord with that of the God whom they claim to serve? Also argues that Jonah was written to facilitate spiritual change in its readers, and our study is not complete until

## book reviews

we have wrestled with it on those terms.

**Unmasking God – Revealing God in the ordinary, by Daniel O’Leary, Columba, ISBN 9781856077262, rrp \$24.95**

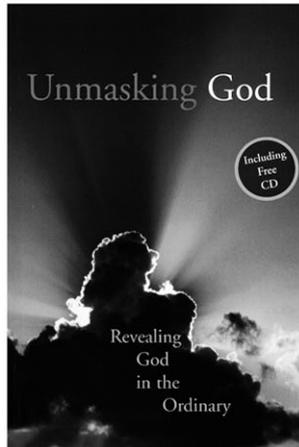
People are giving up on the mainstream churches in huge numbers for reasons too obvious to mention. They find contemporary Christianity irrelevant to their hopes, fears, creative longing and often despairing struggles. We must return to the true meaning of the Incarnation. The purpose of these reflections from one of the foremost spiritual writers of our time is to reveal ‘the dearest freshness deep down things’, to disclose the secret of turning your life around, and of living more freely and more abundantly.

**Faith Maps – Ten religious explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger, by Michael Paul Gallagher, DLT, ISBN 9780232527971, rrp \$29.95**

A theologian of great flair and originality ‘translates’ the voices of several leading thinkers into a series of reflections on faith and contemporary life and culture. The author does not simply report what they say but ‘translates’ their vision into a more contemporary and less specialist idiom. What would they say today? Or, what do they inspire in me?

**The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth, by Thomas Berry, Orbis, ISBN 9781570759178, rrp \$29.95**

Like no other religious thinker, Thomas Berry has been a prophetic voice regarding Earth’s destruction and the urgent need for human response from the Christian community. This book collects Berry’s signature views on the interrelatedness of both Earth’s future and the Christian future. He ponders why Christians have been late in coming to the issue of the environment. He reflects insightfully on how the environment must be seen as a religious issue, not simply a scientific or economic problem.



**The Trinity, Practically Speaking, by Frank Macchia, Biblica, ISBN 9781606570081, rrp \$28.95**

Three Gods, or One, or Three-in-One? Since the word ‘Trinity’ does not appear in the Bible, many people wonder whether the doctrine is anything more than an intellectual puzzle created by theologians. To counter this, the book takes readers on a guided tour of the logic leading to an understanding of God as Trinity – a communion of persons, a circle of love. God is no longer viewed as a distant judge removed from the sorrows of earthly existence; and our salvation involves being caught up in this life-transforming communion of divine love.

**The Challenge of Easter, by N T Wright, IVP, ISBN 9780830838486, rrp \$7.95**

In this excerpt from his *The Challenge of Jesus*, historian, biblical scholar and bestselling author N T Wright, looks at Easter in its earliest context, where we see a band of followers discovering the fulfilment of all the promises God had made to their people over the centuries, and pronouncing a new era that unsettled their friends and scandalised their oppressors.

**The Religious Test, Why we must question the beliefs of our leaders, by Damon Linker, Norton, ISBN 9780393067958, rrp \$32.95**

Argues that the public has a right to know how a political candidate’s religious beliefs will influence decision-making and suggests six ‘commandments’ to address the complicated interrelations between churches and states. Although written for a US audience, the issues raised are also appropriate for the Australian and New Zealand context.

**Ecclesial Repentance – The churches confront their sinful pasts, by Jeremy Bergen, Continuum, ISBN 9780567523686, rrp \$51.95**

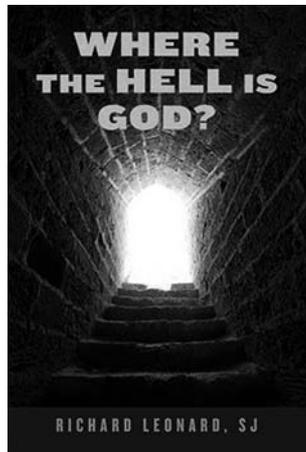
Churches have been repenting, apologising, and asking forgiveness for beliefs and practices they once justified. These often high-profile statements raise questions such as: Can a church repent for things that happened centuries ago? Is it possible for a church to sin or to be forgiven? What difference will repenting make? Is this just more church hypocrisy? With grace, courage and a discerning

# book reviews

spirit, the author offers an account of ecclesial repentance worthy of a pilgrim people, a church at once reconciled and always on the journey towards full reconciliation.

**Where the Hell is God? by Richard Leonard, Paulist, ISBN 9781587680601, rrp \$17.95**

How do we reconcile the experience of God's apparent indifference to our suffering and loss with our Christian affirmation of God's goodness and unfailing love? Where is God when death takes a child, where terrible accidents occur, when war and famine and all sorts of natural disasters devastate entire families and communi-



ties? The book starts with a very personal story of the author's sister being left a quadriplegic from a car accident twenty years ago. This personal experience of grief and tragic loss leads him to reflect seriously, objectively and compassionately about the nature of this God we worship. And he offers suggestions that are pastoral, faithful and sensitive for those who suffer and are in pain as well as for those who care for them and minister to them.

**When Christians get it Wrong, by Adam Hamilton, Abingdon, ISBN 9781426709142, rrp \$21.95**

When people talk about their problems with Christianity and the church, they most often name certain attitudes and behaviours on the part of Christians, including judging others, condemning those who belong to other religions, rejecting science, injecting politics into faith, and focusing exclusively on 'hot-button' moral issues like homosexuality.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Adam Hamilton offers hope that following Jesus can be more about open doors than locked fences, more about serving people than judging them, more about joyful living than angry fighting.

**Good and Bad Religion, by Peter Vardy, SCM, ISBN 9780334043492, rrp \$29.95**

Religion is a central aspect of culture, as is the critical evaluation of different types of religion. Since 9/11, religion and different manifestations of it have been far more in the public eye in western societies than they had been since the Enlightenment.

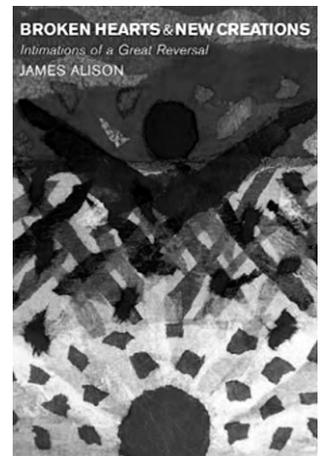
Yet, not all forms of religion are necessarily good for those who adhere to them and for others. Some types of religion are de-humanising and need to be resisted whilst others are profoundly humanising and good.

**Mary MacKillop – The ground of her loving, by Margaret Paton, DLT, ISBN 9780232527995, rrp \$29.95**

Delves more deeply into what inspired the new Australian saint, and her devotion to children and to the poor; describes the articulate intelligence that enabled her to stand her ground against bishops, and the generosity of spirit that led her to forgive everyone who had wronged her.

**Broken Hearts and New Creations – Intimations of a great reversal, by James Alison, DLT, ISBN 9780232527964, rrp \$29.95**

Has all the brilliance, wit and panache that have made him one of the most influential contemporary Catholic writers. Celebrated for his firm but gentle insistence on facing down current ecclesiastical teaching on homosexuality, Alison is also admired and enjoyed for the freshness and



verve of his interpretations of Scripture, for his dazzling word play and teasing connections, surprises and reversals.

## book reviews

**Introducing Catholic Social Thought,**  
by J Milburn Thompson, Orbis,  
ISBN 9781570758621, rrp \$38.95

Describes the general historical development of Catholic social thought, and provides five chapters that each deal with a specific theme: faithful citizenship, economic justice, human rights, war and peace and the consistent ethic of life, and care for the earth.

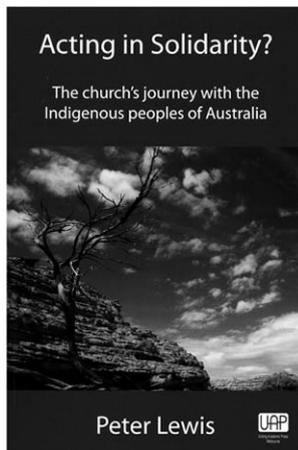
**A Key to Balthasar – Hans Urs von Balthasar on beauty, goodness, and truth,**  
by Aidan Nichols, DLT,  
ISBN 9780232528589, rrp \$33.95

Hans Urs von Balthasar is widely recognised as perhaps the greatest Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. This ideal introduction to his work unlocks the treasure of his theology by focusing on the beautiful, the good, and the true; and capturing the essence of what Balthasar wished to say.

**Acting in Solidarity – The church's journey with the Indigenous peoples of Australia,**  
by Peter Lewis, UAP,  
ISBN 9780980580341,  
rrp \$39.95

Traces the history of the churches' involvement in the arrival of Europeans, with a particular focus on the Uniting Church whose former constituents (Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches) had a considerable presence among the Aboriginal peoples; and considers how all the churches need to come to terms with their colonial past, seeking to understand previous failures, trying to find ways of being truly reconciled to their Indigenous members.

**Hugh McGinlay** is Academic Theological Representative for Mosaic Resources



## Home Truths

By Andrew Hamilton



**T**aken together the recent events in remote detention centres are both deplorable and predictable.

The disturbances at facilities housing minors, the use of tear gas against demonstrators at Christmas Island, the approval of such measures by the Minister the next day, the riots and destruction of property after presently unspecified letters were received by detainees, the demonstrations in Curtin, and the death of a young asylum seeker in Weipa, are simply deplorable.

They cause grief to the detainees, to the officers supervising the centres, to the police and to the surrounding communities.

But these events are wholly predictable. When you place vulnerable people, mainly young men, in remote places for long periods of time, they are driven mad. Prolonged detention of vulnerable people for no just cause, with no set end and with nothing to do, does that to people. It is like building a nuclear reactor, putting fuel rods into it, and neglecting to provide water or to care for it.

### asylum seekers' mental health will continue to deteriorate

When the detention centres are also overcrowded and under resourced, it is totally predictable that people will act out their frustration and anger. When people in such a place, without adequate access to advice and support, receive impersonal Government letters, presumably containing notices of rejection, it is predictable that they will express their despair and anger.

The Government recognised the destructive nature of indefinite detention when three years ago it announced that people would only be detained if they posed a security risk. But because they never passed legislation to enshrine this principle, we now have the present disastrous situation.

# Detainees on the rampage

## — victims of crazy policies

Money continues to be wasted in building and staffing remote detention centres that harm the mental health of the detainees and lead to incidents such as those which we see now.

Other Government decisions have contributed to the present deplorable situation. The earlier decision to suspend the processing of applications from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka has both extended the time for which many asylum seekers have been detained and deepened their sense of grievance.

They know that they have committed no crime and that Australia is committed to protect refugees without respect to how they arrive. They can only see the extra months that they spend in detention as a deliberate punishment.

The length of detention and the consequent injury suffered by asylum seekers have been compounded by the Government decision to require security clearances from ASIO before releasing refugees into the community. Many people have remained locked up for over a year waiting for this clearance.

This demand is discriminatory and unnecessary. Thousands of people are admitted into Australian society as tourists or students without such clearance. If it is needed, it can be secured while living within the community.

If the present detention policy remains, the likely consequences are unfortunately also quite predictable. Asylum seekers' mental health will continue to

deteriorate. This will be reflected in more instances of self-harm and of violent protest.

Experience of police dealings with the mentally ill in many Australian states suggests that the responses to such protests will also become more violent and punitive, involving technology like stun guns and tasers. Politicians will defend their use, and blame the asylum seekers for creating the need for such measures. And if it comes to using guns and shooting asylum seekers who act out of mental illness, we shall be assured that it was necessary.

### enormous financial outlay in detaining asylum seekers in remote areas

Those who defend the humanity of asylum seekers and criticise detention are used to being dismissed as bleeding hearts. Although name calling is not all that helpful, it would be tempting to respond by referring to those who defend the existing regime of detention as bleeding minds.

Could anything other than bleeding into the brain explain how one could defend the enormous financial outlay on detaining asylum seekers in remote areas, the prolonging of their detention in the sure knowledge that it will drive them crazy, the slowness of releasing children from such a regime, and the generation of conditions in which people will inevitably be injured and even killed.

Allowing asylum seekers into the community while their claims are processed would be a far more rational policy, both in economic and in ethical terms.

Andrew Hamilton is Consulting Editor of the online journal Eureka Street. He was previously associated with Jesuit Refugee Service. This essay appeared in Eureka Street on March 21.

### Paget's Parable



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