

Common Theology

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INSIDE:

- Churches are losing the space race
- An Elder's message from Gaza
- 'Lament' not featured in Christian scriptures

A Periodical Journal for Australians



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Common Theology is a periodical publication serving a community interested in emergent Christianity worldwide, and based in Australia. This journal 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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Cover photo: A scene in Cape Town at the southernmost tip of Africa at the time of the FIFA World Cup in July, during the coldest winter on record. Ice at this venue would be called 'an extreme weather event' in the bland jargon of our times. Although a 'weather event' is not necessarily indicative of climate change, temperatures below freezing where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet at Latitude 33°56'S is certainly newsworthy.

all theologies



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From the Editor

Have you noticed how we are asked for our opinion on everything from how well the latest X-Factor performed, to our favourite piece of music? We can add our tu'pence worth to any organisation's website and to every blog in cyberspace. It has the effect of diffusing the ambient sense of powerlessness, but one wonders if it's just a waste of time, which one could spend doing something more useful... like praying.

That having been said, we are grateful for letters from readers, and particularly for your help in finding the way forward for *Common Theology* in the Sargasso Sea which is print media in 2010. With Fairfax newspapers showing signs of foundering, and the prestigious *Meanjin* magazine apparently at sea over its future, this journal maintains a small, eclectic, free-thinking readership and goes proudly on the record of our times with its tu'pence worth of signals and watchwords for the future of religion in Australia.

In this edition Professor Gary Bouma addresses the contested space of the secular, what is happening there, and the possible consequences of the affray for Christianity on this continent.

Three courageous young women have contributed opinions from the heart in these pages. Helen Brake has lifted the lid on the agonies of depression, and made a call to sufferers to come out of hiding in order to exorcise the stigma of this modern day leprosy. Vicki Mergard has put a postmodern perspective on the relationship between science and religion. Amy Lewis-Cooper has made a lucid argument for the churches to get our heads out of books and into the real world.

The Elders are a group of seasoned veterans of world leadership, who have chosen to spend their retirement sharing their expertise to help in the often frustrating and thankless task of negotiating for peace in the world's trouble spots. Lakhdar Brahimi brings us a message from Gaza.

We have introduced a new column called PostIts (and hope 3M won't prosecute us for intellectual property infringement). So much fascinating information crosses an editor's desk, for which there is not enough space in these pages. So here are a few tidbits which you may like to follow up. If you don't have computer access, write to us and we will forward you more information.

Maggie Helass

Churches are losing the space race

Professor Gary Bouma addressed the Centennial Conference of Trinity College of Divinity in Melbourne in July entitled the Future of Religion in Australian Society. His subject was Organised Religion and its Relationship with Australian Society. We publish here edited excerpts from his lecture. He began by acknowledging Professor Andrew McGowan, Dean of Trinity College, who defined the secular as “a space of negotiation”.



I want to focus on organised religion and the contestation of this space, called secular.

I will be using the word ‘church’, but my subject matter applies equally to Islam, Buddhism, the spiritualities, etc. The forms of contest between religious organisations and other players in this particular space is what we are addressing.

Spiritualities will be here forever, but the form of contestation between religious organisations, and other players in this particular space, is what we’re talking about in terms of the future.

Where have we come from? With Australia I don’t have to go back to the First Century, but to 50,000 years of religious diversity. Honouring our indigenous heritage and remembering its diversity and its continuities does set a tone, a standard, for this land.

Organised religion got off to a fairly weak start in Australia. The late 18th Century was not a high water mark for religiosity in Britain, and those who came here – either willingly or unwillingly – were not particularly churched people in the UK.

This lack of organised religion amongst the European denizens of this land for the first fifty years set a standard for Australian spirituality and expectations about religion – a low temperature religion. We get upset when somebody is too religious – perhaps wearing too large a religious symbol. I had the same response to an industrial

strength nun in the 1950s as I did to a woman in a burqa. It was electrifying.

Christianising was part of empire. So as the churches moved in they formed a particular pact with the government and society to Christianize, to civilise, build institutions or provide social services. (In the 19th Century there were plenty of Jewish as well as Buddhist and Chinese organisations, but we got rid of them.)

From 1960 on things begin to change, in ways that have left us with a highly contested secular space. I want to talk about a few basic sociological drivers of change that are operating at this point, to help to be more specific about the future of religion in Australia.

Migration has changed demographic composition and produced diversity in the land. It also produced opportunities for service.

The 1950s, particularly for Christian churches, was a time of welcoming migrants, stitching them into a community; building society; building the nation. Nation building and church involvement in it provided strength, involvement, reason for being, and sources of revenue for churches.

If you are worried about your place in a new diversity you are going to fight for it

By 2006 there were more Buddhists than Baptists, more Muslims than Lutherans, more Hindus than Jews. There were four times as many witches as Quakers (when I’m talking to a group under forty years old, they say, What’s a Quaker?).

The old Anglican, English Protestant dominance is gone. Anybody who is sixty and over grew up with that, but for somebody under sixty the reality was quite different. It’s a loss of a major socio-cultural norm.

This shift has also broken the demographic basis for the compact between the churches, religious organisations and society around nation building.

Back in the olden days, in 1950, the prime minister would have made two phone calls – one to the Anglicans and one to the Presbyterians, representing

well over fifty per cent of the population. Add the Methodists and the calls would cover more than sixty per cent. The Roman Catholics didn't count.

Today the diversity within religious groups almost exceeds the diversity between them. This diversity is huge and that is why certain groups have begun to pay more attention to their boundaries. If you are worried about your place in a new diversity you are going to fight for it.

We've seen the rise of Pentecostals, new spiritualities, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu communities, and now the new Christian norm is Catholic. The Roman Catholics have the only churches really cashed up; institutionally available to do anything of substance in society.

As groups decline they become noisier; and as Andrew McGowan was saying, our relationships in the 21st Century are characterised by fear.

So this new zone called the secular in which we contest for space is one dominated by fear. Groups who fear their loss of control, influence and impact, who used to be able to quietly operate through informal mechanisms and associations with the state, now have to be much more noisy to make an impact.

So religious voices re-enter the public arena in a new way. Often they haven't got the theological foundation or the biblical knowledge with which to put their case in the public sphere. They haven't been trained in it, they aren't experienced in it, they try to use secular language and as a result, they are not heard. A major voice is no longer there – the Christian voice is abandoned to those who have an agenda that I would call not very Christian.

The smaller groups become noisier. The contestation becomes more difficult.

The failure to retain a voice has resulted in a depletion of an old mainstream. When forty-one per cent of those born Anglican now say they have no religion, you've lost two generations and you're well into losing your third.

Before, it just happened. You went to a state school and you got some Christian stuff there. It was in the ethos, you just sort of sapped it up and you didn't have to differentiate yourself against much, except maybe Catholics. Now, people don't know what Christianity is.

Pentecostals are youthful, as are all migrant religions – because it's youth who migrate. They also have a higher birth rate, because there was a higher birth rate where they came from. It takes a genera-

tion or two to bring it down. But the youth are not as Christian as they used to be and that's going to affect the kind of futures that some churches have to look forward to

We've lost Christendom, we have begun to lose normalcy of belief. Spirituality is on the rise but religious types don't like it because they can't control it. They can't charge for it. They can't get their income from it.

We have had a rise of secularism and that's a group who wish to take over the secular, defined by McGowan as a space of contestation. They thought they had actually got hold of that space and it was theirs, but with these voices of religion coming back into the public space there's contestation. So they've got to fight.

Contestation over this space influences how religious and philosophical ideas work to shape public policy.

There is no whole package marketplace unless you happen to go into Opus Dei

With the rise of consumerism and individualism we're in an open marketplace, free choice prevails. You say to somebody, Choose this day who you will serve for the rest of your life, and they say, What? I can do it on Tuesday, but I don't know about Wednesday. I'll take a bit of this but I won't have that. There is no whole package marketplace unless you happen to go into Opus Dei. That kind of whole life choice stuff just doesn't work any more.

The 'priesthood of each believer' means you've lost your professional priesthood, your capacity to control and you're into a much freer market. The consequences of that, of education being given to our students, means that they are much more discerning consumers, much more aware of alternatives. Previously a choice was made at baptism, confirmation and you were stuck with it for the rest of your life in an unconsidered, kind of repetitive way.

That isn't the way these consumers operate in any market, including religion.

I think that a secular society is one in which religion and spirituality are out of the control of state and religious organisations. I think that statement describes the society that we are in at the moment.

If we look back through our history, we can see times when one or the other controlled that space, or the space was controlled by a compact between the state and the religious organisations. There might have been a little bit of diversity around the edges – too much diversity and you got burned at the stake! But now, neither the churches or other religious organisations, nor the state have any levers over the religion and spirituality of Australians.

Any notion that some archbishop can do this or that and things will happen leaves most archbishops weeping at night. They can't. They don't have that kind of control.

On the other hand, secular does not mean no religious voices in social policy. We've got all kinds of religious voices in social policy and they're making a fair amount of noise.

Secular does not mean irreligious either; a secular society does not give any priority. It is a space that is open for negotiation, contestation – and that is going on now.

The shift from rational to experiential modes of authority is another major cultural shift that is catching religious organisations unawares. You can see three types of authority:

- **Tradition;** you give authority to the bishop, to the monarch. It's an hierarchical authority.
- **Reason** in law, text based, rational, creedal, reasonable.
- **Experience;** how things feel, wonder, encounter, charisma.

Authority is seen as something you give, not something you have. Bishops may think they have it but it's really only because we give it to them.

If you happen to be in the Roman Catholic Church, ultimate authority resides in an hierarchical system in which you refer decisions to be made by bishops, archbishops, etc. So too for Anglicans and Presbyterians.

However, the Reformation used reason to argue against bishops and kings – and reason prevailed.

The high water mark for reason would have to be Jesuits and Presbyterians in about 1950 producing highly reasoned forms of religious understanding – volumes of systematic theology, carefully reasoned out – thinking your way to God.

But that that forum is now passing, quite fast, from reason to experience, starting arguably with Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher. Experiential judgment is what people under fifty are going to be using as their basis for making decisions.

When abortion was first beginning to be made legally available in the West, particularly in Australia and the United States, the Presbyterian Church was officially in favour of abortion. It became a reasoned position because it gave the woman control over her body, it limited damage by butchers, there were health reasons, and the legislation went through.

In comes (Leader of the Federal Opposition) Tony Abbot and he says, A hundred thousand abortions in Australia doesn't feel good. All of a sudden we had an argument within public policy about feeling. All of a sudden the domain had changed, the kind of argumentation had changed.

Time and time again, somebody will walk into your church, synagogue, mosque and walk out again saying, It didn't feel good. I didn't have the experience I came for. The experiential mode of deciding is going to be much more dominant in those who are seeking religious services than it was before.

In that shift, we move from altars, to pulpits, to platforms.

The platforms of the Pentecostals these days have sound systems that make most rock bands weep and they'll give you an experience. Indeed, in the shift from preaching to aerobic Christianity, you'll certainly go out feeling better – you'll have

aerobic Christianity

– you'll certainly go out feeling
better

moved around, had a good airing.

Reading to watching, sitting to moving, books to video screens, concordances to the Internet, permanence to impression – that's what we're dealing with in this kind of shift.

Whilst preaching is the ultimate of the rational approaches to Christianity, good liturgy is, of course, good experience. But it will be judged by what experience it imparts as opposed to its objective capacity to deliver grace.

Points of experiential contact are changing *vis à vis* the roles of Sacraments, preaching and religious experiences. People will no longer want you to describe your God... I don't want to hear about your God. Can I meet your God? Can I have an experience of encounter with the sacred?

This of course connects with pilgrimages and sacred sites and places that are quite marketable.

Common Theology

A Journal for Australians

Common Theology readers have affirmed the non-commercial foundation of this journal via last year's survey. Results can be viewed on our website or are available by mail on request.

More readers' views will be published in forthcoming editions.

Our revised statement of intent is on the inside front cover and your comments on it would be welcome.

A subscription form can be found on the back of this edition



Readers' views:

I don't know what to suggest as to role and content of *Common Theology* in the future. I like it just as it is. However, one of our Oratory of the Good Shepherd members edited *Theology* for a number of years and he always said he aimed at three things:

- To provide a medium through which all that is best in contemporary theology may reach clergy, laity, and those outside the church who are looking towards Christianity for a reasonable and relevant faith.

- To serve as an organ where writers with different associations and various special interests may meet and contribute to the clarification and exposition of the faith which has their allegiance.

- To serve as a liaison between theological thought and those movements in contemporary literature, art and political philosophy which are working towards a rediscovery of the significance of the Christian faith.

Alec saw himself in the position of a 'midwife', encouraging and facilitating the arrival of welcome additions to theological thought and dialogue.

I know *Common Theology* is on a slightly different path, but perhaps something of the above may be of some use.

It might be interesting to hear something from the people who are making the decisions about theological training, in different traditions – if they know what they're doing at present – which is rather doubtful.

Robert Braun OGS
West End QLD

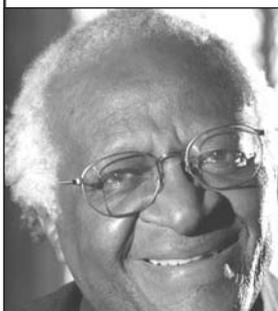
I'm a retired priest who very much enjoys and is challenged by your Journal. I would encourage you to continue as there is a real need for alternative views to be aired and debated, especially as we are faced today with so many fundamentalist views in the world. I also find the book reviews of interests and some of the occasional feature articles too. Keep up the good work.

Peter Wellock
Mornington Vic 3931

I find your journal thought-provoking and well edited. I would be prepared to pay double the price! God bless your work on His behalf.

Vernon Williams
Armidale NSW

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



Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



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

Kay McLennan
Veteran Religious Affairs Journalist

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

"*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.

But dragging people in to hear a boring sermon on a Sunday morning? That doesn't feel good. My bed feels much better.

Catholics and Anglicans are tied up in a traditional hierarchical authority system but they do have liturgy, which can be a good experience. Redolent with imperial and monarchical imagery, which I must say leaves me giggling half the time, it's nonetheless fun if you like it.

Another driver of religious change is the changing competitive market.

The rise of secular alternatives has challenged the particular compact the churches had with the society from about 1840 to 1960. There are alternative sources of entertainment.

People my age and a little bit older talk about how the churches were places for dances, movies, social connections. All this happened around churches in suburban Melbourne. But now you'd go to a café or a club. Some would say that's purifying religion, getting back to the core business. But you're going to lose a lot of people that came for the social stuff and may have hooked onto religion as a result.

But the critical factor to focus on is this thing called the welfare state. Where the welfare state was full on providing education, health, social services, you get the greatest declines in religious attendance and participation. Where it was not as full on there was much less decline. It's one strand of explanation for the differences in decline between the USA and the UK. You didn't need to go and develop that community in order to have access to education, health, welfare and other aspects of social life if the welfare state provided those things.

Now the question is, as governments are winding back the welfare state, will people go back to church? I can see a bunch of my Anglicans friends saying, Oh good they'll come back to church. But if they went into your church, you'd probably say, Oh, you can help us, as opposed to, Have we got a program for you?

That's the difference between a resourced church and a dying church. Go into Hillsong* and they'll say, We've got a program for you, you need something, we can help. You go into an average suburban Anglican church in Melbourne and they would not be able to do that.

Catholics are probably sufficiently resourced as parishes to be able to provide some assistance, certainly with their schools bolted on. But the Protestant mainline churches are no longer able to do what they did from 1840 to 1960.

Perhaps, a mega-church model could work, with some kind of personnel and financial resources to develop programs – not only to resource people who might come in looking for something, but actually to build Christians – which takes a little bit more effort than a half-an-hour on a Sunday morning.

So what's the future looking like?

Further decline for mainstream Protestants. Decline for Roman Catholics. Loss of a Christian majority in every sense, and rear-guard action contesting this space called secular. Some will try to claw back the old days. There will be a fight over symbols as reality recedes.

We're being beset with 'dog whistle politics' all over the place. Within the Anglican Church it's gay priests and gay relationships – simply inscribing on those people the symbols of difference and using various kinds of symbolic forms to claim to be better, more pure, closer to God, than some others. I call it competitive piety.

As governments are winding back the welfare state, will people go back to church?

Secularists, in the form of the Evangelical atheists, have joined the fray. We'll fight like blazes over having the Lord's Prayer to open Parliament, or we'll behave like Denmark, where eighty-five per cent of Danes are confirmed at age seventeen in high school.

In Denmark the bishop comes to the school, which has given them Religious Education, and confirms the lot. They've never been in church, they don't have to go to church except for baptism, marriage, funeral. But suddenly they call themselves Christians. They don't know what it means – except that they aren't Muslim.

When the reality is gone, the cymbals start clanging, the noise increases, and so does the chance for rather nasty stuff. That is what is happening as the old compact breaks down and we move into the contestation of the secular space.

* Hillsong: a Pentecostalist congregation in Sydney.

None of these drivers are controlled by religion. Nineteenth Century growth was due to Church being tied to nation – Empire. It produced a particular context that was appropriate. It provided an opportunity for combined social service and religious services – but that’s gone.

Are we the sole marketers of morality?

The 1950s high point was the second rise of the soufflé, as a result of the baby boom. Migration and government policy forcing women out of employment and into domestic life provided a volunteer army of women to do things in the church sphere – but they are no longer there.

What is religion’s speciality? What is that core business that some favour?

Is it simply saying mass every day and letting the world come or not – that would have a small slice and could operate. But it certainly wouldn’t sustain many suburban churches.

Make a connection with God – but how to make that experiential in the current cultural context is a question.

Are we the sole marketers of morality? In New South Wales they’re busy trying to keep secularists from providing a neutral – well they call it neutral – philosophical basis for morality, as opposed to a religious one.

Do we deal with our competitors by driving them out of the market? Or by ramping up our own capacity to provide our own goods in a way that’s appealing, providing them confidently in a competitive space? That’s the challenge. And how is religion to be offered? When, where, by whom, to whom and who’s gonna pay for it? Those are the questions that we face at this time.

Gary D Bouma is Emeritus Professor of Sociology and UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations Asia Pacific at Monash University, and Associate Priest in the Anglican Parish of St John’s East Malvern in Melbourne.

A letter from Kebin pius Nedumpallikunnel

Common Theology subscribers support Kebin pius Nedumpallikunnel who goes to school at St Ann’s Carmelite Convent in the Ernakulam District in India.

My dearest Uncles and Aunts, I was very happy to receive A\$100 from you. We are much grateful to you for your generosity. We do pray for you. We remember you especially in our family prayers, so that the God Almighty may bless you abundantly.

*My father Pius and mother Nancy are keeping fine. My brother Ebin is in Class IX. He is very good in studies. This year I will pay my whole attention in my studies. I received the first Holy Communion on 25th April. I remembered you specially on that day. Once again thanking you and assuring my prayers. Your loving
Kebin pius*



Kebin pius and his mother.

If you would like to provide books for an Indian or Sri Lankan child’s education through a tax-deductible donation of \$100 a year please contact:

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Most of St Veronica’s centres are in India where the very, very rich are no more than 5% of the population – similar to Australia’s Packer, Pratt and Lowys families. There is also a growing middle class.

Then there is the group St Veronica’s is interested in – the very poor.

In Australia the poor are a numerically small group, and receive government support. In India the poor are counted in hundreds of millions. Widows number anywhere between 50 million and 100 million and they, and their children, are some of the most disadvantaged people in India.

Voices from Hell

By Helen Brake

As I grated the sandpaper across my face, the skin rubbed away but didn't bleed as I expected.

Goopy plasma softened the paper's rigid surface. I picked another piece and tried again, over the weeping skin. This time I got blood and was satisfied that if I explained that my face was the result of tripping up the stairs I could remain in the house for a few more days. I went inside and tried my hardest to remove all thoughts from my mind.

Three weeks later I was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder.

It's a selfish illness – the desire to reverse your existence. However, in recent months my GP has found me medication that has been effective and I am returning to a feeling, whole human.

Earlier this year, after a lousy day, I recognised I was both bored and frustrated – and went a little mad with happiness. It had been almost three years since I had not regularly feigned emotions.

Since becoming well, it has been difficult to describe what it was like living with depression. To get some distance and so to better articulate what it can be like, I asked a friend if he would allow me to share his story.

I remember meeting Mathieu more than ten years ago on a youth group activity that involved catching a train to the CBD. He was miming a lawn sprinkler break-dance while moving up the carriage walkway. He encouraged other passengers to suggest different moves or join in themselves.

His lanky, uncoordinated but enthusiastic efforts were too funny to ignore and broke the no-talking-listening-or-acknowledging-others-on-public-transport norm.

Strangers, other youth members and I exchanged grins. In short, Mathieu isn't someone you forget. Spending time with him makes you feel that the world holds colours you never dreamt existed – together you have stepped from a water-colour world to one of vivid oils and charcoal.



eye witness

Until recently, I knew very little of his struggles. I knew he was sometimes moody, and he would frustrate me by disappearing out of my life for a few months, then popping up again as if nothing had happened.

Mathieu was bullied throughout primary school for being dramatic and 'different'. It was something of a surprise when, at high school, this 'difference' was not only tolerated, but gave him a counter-mainstream popularity among other kids who didn't fit in.

However, from year ten onwards he struggled with thoughts of purging his mind and body. After absent-mindedly writing some poetry on an exam paper a couple of months before graduation, his teacher contacted his mother and suggested he see a psychiatrist immediately, as his teacher was worried Mathieu was going to kill himself.

He began listening to heavy techno music and binge drinking

Mathieu was diagnosed with major depressive disorder and anxiety disabilities, and began taking medication. Six months later, wanting to be free from medical 'control', Mathieu stopped taking his antidepressants.

He began listening to heavy techno music and binge drinking. He would stay awake as long as he could, because every time he awoke it was to the despondency of still existing.

During periods when he felt well, he would find work. However, shortly after starting a new job he would usually experience a panic attack, and the humiliation of explaining to an employer why he couldn't work but had to leave immediately meant he sometimes left without explanation and didn't return.

One year he decided to get a tattoo, and when his depression was thickest, he would ask his tattooist to work on the skin closest to the bones in his hands so the pain might distract him.

Several months ago, when looking through his father's office for a DVD he had misplaced, Mathieu found antidepressants prescribed to his Dad.

Hurt that he never knew his father also suffered from depression, he confronted his mother. She told him yes; both his father and grandfather experienced chronic major depression but she had felt it was his father's decision whether to share this with Mathieu.

Mathieu and his father still haven't spoken about their experiences.

What example do they have when their thoughts and emotions are so far from the stereotypically laconic and relaxed Aussie blokes'?

Mathieu has been determined to break his cycle of short-term employment. When he began his most recent job, Mathieu was open with his boss and let him know he may sometimes need to leave work suddenly, or arrive late. Since then, his boss has been supportive, has recognised Mathieu's many talents, and now wants him to stay beyond his six month contract.

consequences will be perpetuated through future generations.

At the moment, Mathieu is well and cautiously optimistic. He describes us both as 'sober depressives'. He is well now – and hopefully for a long time – but could become sick again. Mathieu wants a family, but fears how his illness may affect his future wife and kids if he is unwell for long periods.

I share this concern, especially for my one-day husband. What may I put him through when I'm unwell? Will I block him out like I recently did with those I love? How badly will I hurt him, and possibly our kids?

Although these are issues to consider, I continue to hope and work towards a strong marriage and wonderful family. I believe this is more likely to happen if we who suffer from depression share our experiences.

By the very irrationality of the thoughts it produces, it can be overwhelmingly difficult to even attempt explaining this part of yourself to someone who has never experienced a mental illness.

However, it is important to continue trying to remove the stigma that surrounds mental illness – otherwise, many men and women with major

depression will continue keeping quiet and allowing their behaviour to be interpreted as slackness, unreliability or laziness, and the consequences will be perpetuated through future generations.

Helen Brake is studying English Literature at the University of Queensland. She spent four months teaching English in south-west China, and meets students from other countries at a volunteer-run, conversational English class in inner-Brisbane. This article was first published in the online magazine *Eureka Street* in September.

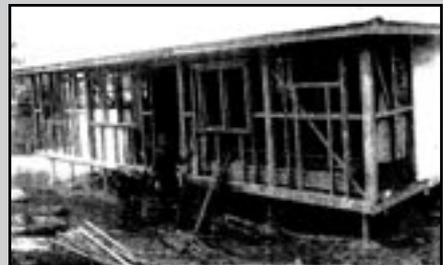
Pos Konea's house project

Readers have so far donated A\$250 to this project, for which Pos Konea sends sincere thanks.

Unfortunately the bank refuses to forward the money without a street address. Pointless trying to explain to the mandarins of the Bank of Queensland that there are no streets in Mendi in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea – certainly not the sort with house numbers. A post box address simply will not do, the bank says.

This another chapter in the tragedy of this PNG citizen's attempt to forge a relationship with Australia.

Readers will be aware of his story (*Common Theology* Vol 2 no 10) as one of the overseas students who come to Australia, investing tens of thousands of dollars to gain an education, but who receive no proper support from educational institutions, and go home "disappointed".



The Rev Pos Konea is building a house in Mendi in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, to accommodate his family and the orphans of AIDS he cares for while his wife travels the country conducting AIDS education.

If you would like to contribute to this project you can send funds to the *Common Theology* account (details back page) clearly marked for PNG. We will find a way to forward the money.

Our failed duty of care in Gaza

Elders Lakhdar Brahimi, Mary Robinson, Ela Bhatt and Jimmy Carter visited Gaza in October for discussions with political leaders and civil society there. The Elders are an independent group of eminent global leaders who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.



From Lakhdar Brahimi

I have not set foot on Palestinian soil since 1967, two months before the Six-Day War, and I have never before been to Gaza. You might say that it was inevitable that I would feel some emotion as we Elders visited this week.

Indeed it was extremely troubling to see the extent of the poverty in Gaza. The token easing of the Israeli blockade has made little real difference.

We were told that eighty per cent of Gazans, for example, receive handouts from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and other donors. Construction materials are still not allowed in and it is clear as you drive through the streets that thousands of Gazans live in dire conditions.

What angered me most, however, is that the future of Gaza's youth is being compromised by a political crisis for which they bear no responsibility and over which they have no control.

Palestinian factionalism is adding to Israel's collective punishment and is stifling society. The international community is failing in its duty to ensure that young Gazans have access to education and opportunity.

No new schools have been built in Gaza for four years, despite the fact that over one hundred schools are needed, especially after the destruction caused by Israel's brutal attack in December 2008/January 2009.

UNRWA has to turn away 40,000 children from its schools because it doesn't have enough classrooms to teach them in. We visited an UNRWA school where children were packed into classrooms built from shipping containers. They were sweltering hot; I cannot see how a child can possibly learn in such conditions.

Forum

Half of Gaza's population is under eighteen years old and they are being terribly let down by the international community. UNRWA is experiencing a funding shortfall of about twenty-five per cent of its total budget this year.

I for one refuse to believe that eighty million dollars cannot be found to help it provide education to the thousands of children who are denied it.

We also met university students who are filled with disappointment and anger. They told us of the education that they dream of, and of the education that they receive in reality. They lack the tools and experiences that other students take for granted – such as laboratory equipment, good computers, and opportunities to study abroad. When they complete their education, unemployment is so high that they are unlikely to find work.

Most of all, young people told us of their frustration. Division among those who call themselves their leaders denies opportunity to all young Palestinians, in the West Bank as well as in Gaza.

If Palestinians are brought up surrounded by such bitter division, how will they ever learn to accept the other?

As a young man, I was part of a liberation struggle; the young students we met reminded me of those days. They are angry and disappointed, but they believe that they can build a safer and more prosperous future for themselves and their country – and they have the energy and capability to do so.

I told them that they must raise their voice. They must show that Gaza and the West Bank's large youth population is their biggest asset and the international community, and Palestinian leadership, must harness this now. We cannot continue to let young Palestinians in Gaza down.

Lakhdar Brahimi was born in Algeria in 1934. He joined his country's liberation struggle as a student and represented the National Liberation Front in Indonesia. Following Algerian independence in 1962, he served his country as an ambassador, first to Egypt and then to the UK. Since 2001 he has also served as UN special envoy in Iraq and he lectures world-wide on international relations and conflict resolution.

PostItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPostItsPos

PostIts is a new column which brings you some snippets of general media comment which may get bypassed in readers' busy routines, but seem to us to help put this increasingly hurried and complex world into a common-sense perspective.

The Pope and the Monarch

Benedict XVI's visit to Great Britain engaged such potent symbolism one suspects that the best liturgical brains of the English monarchy and the Vatican were put on the job.

Holyroodhouse in Scotland was Queen Elizabeth's venue for the first encounter between a Pope and a British monarch for more than four hundred years.

The falling out occurred before the first Queen Elizabeth chopped off the head of her half-sibling, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, but what better place to meet in 2010 than Scotland?

And the name of the British monarch's Scottish residence Holyroodhouse, makes a definite point that this was a meeting not only between two heads of state (see Paul Collins comment under *Eureka Street* below), but also an encounter between two heads of churches.

There was so much *brouhaha* in Britain about the Pope's visit that the solemnity of this reunion between two leaders of the most enduring institutions in the western world went almost unnoticed in the media.

Peter Scally SJ, writing for *Eureka Street* on the Pope's UK tour noted that Alex Salmond, the Scottish First Minister enthusiastically took part at the Bellahouston Mass, in spite of weeks of negative publicity in the British media.

Scally wondered if this meant that there were more votes in welcoming the Pope than in opposing him and went back to the September letter

to *The Guardian*. Out of fifty-five signatories arguing against a state visit by the Pope, not one was an active politician.

British MPs have a much better sense of ordinary people's views than most academics, commentators and journalists because it is part of their job to listen to those views, Scally wrote.

So if British MPs think that, on balance, dissing the Pope is a vote-loser, they are probably right, and that tells us a great deal about the views of ordinary British people.

While Britain is often described as a 'secular' country, it is by no means an aggressively secular country. Secularism holds that religion's place in public life should not be a specially privileged. Aggressive secularism tries to drive it out of public life completely (see Gary Bouma's article page 5).

Ironically, it was precisely these 'more aggressive forms of secularism' that Pope Benedict warned against in the first address of his visit at Holyroodhouse.



In the Public Interest?

Dr Helen Young, School of the University of Western Sydney, wrote in *Crikey*, the on-line news service, in October:

When WikiLeaks published the Afghan War Diaries earlier this year, the site was criticised by the free press association Reporters Without Borders for bad journalistic practice. In an open letter to the site's founder, the Australian Julian Assange, the association said "journalistic work involves the selection of information".

There is no question that digital technologies have changed the face

and the capabilities of the media industry; at no point before the rise of the internet could such a leak of classified documents have taken place.

Publication of information that is "in the public interest" is a key goal of journalism, and in an increasingly globalised and information-hungry world, precisely what this means is becoming ever more complex.

In the case of the WikiLeaks publication of such huge numbers of US government secret document relating to Iraq and Afghanistan, the real issue is how could it be possible for one organisation to select all the material that was in the interests of the various publics around the world?

The good of the US public is different to the good of the UK public, the Iraqi public, the Australian public and so on, and to group even along national lines is also to make sweeping generalisations.

The story or stories that matter to one media outlet's readership has no necessary relevance to that of another.

The Iraq War Diaries document 109,000 deaths, including those of 66,000 civilians, 15,000 of these were previously unreported.

The full stories of each individual killed, wounded, or otherwise involved in each event are not told in the documents published by WikiLeaks, and identifying material including but not limited to names and places has been excised.

One, two, even a few media outlets working in a conventional way could never tell the stories of those incidents, either on a small or large scale – and have the relevance to the public interest and good that making the censored whole available can.

How could WikiLeaks select the material that should be available once the premise that releasing classified documents might be in the public good is established?

Book reviews

Manning Clark: A Life

by Brian Matthews

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008

ISBN 9781741143782, \$59.95

Reviewed by Andrew Hamilton

Matthews' book on Manning Clark is modestly subtitled 'A Life'. It is one of many possible lives.

It could also have been titled 'The inner life of a writer'. The notable events and circumstances of Clark's life are well described. But the focus is on the relationship between his writing and his dramatic inner world.

The key which Matthews uses to unlock Clark's inner life is the diary that he kept intermittently in his earlier years and faithfully in his maturity.

In it he records his anguish, struggles with faith, guilt at drinking and infidelity, sense of rejection and self-laceration, particularly in the years that he prepared for and carried out his major writing – the six-volume history of Australia.

These dramatic preoccupations often colour his historical and autobiographical writing.

The great virtue of Matthews' work is his attentiveness to the text of Clark's private and public writing. He weighs the text for meaning and for rhetorical colour. He does not simply claim connections between the diary and the history, but demonstrates them.

He also illuminates Clark's writing by comparing it with similar passages from other writers, like Lawson and Orwell, with whom Clark identified himself. He explores the way in which Clark's imagination worked, putting his own gifts of style totally at the service of exposition.

To carry out this delicate task, Matthews needs, and deploys, the skills of a trained reader. But he goes beyond literary criticism in his work.

He inevitably invites the reader to pass judgement on Manning Clark as a human being.

Matthews is anything but judgemental, and his work finally evokes admiration of Clark and sympathy for him. The life of one who could be drawn to such a huge enterprise as the history of Australia, and who over two decades could carry it through in the face of such constant and terrible self-doubt, sensitivity to criticism, and self-laceration, is a life to be celebrated.

If Clark was oversensitive to criticism, he was also strongly, sometimes brutally, criticised by his peers and by journalists. He was an early target in what have come to be called the history wars. Matthews quotes Clark's critics, and for the most part allows their comments to judge themselves.

But the quality of his biography suggests how destructive it is to describe arguments about history or culture as warfare. The noisy and aggressive have appropriated the term to justify their using words as clubs on more reflective scholars.

Matthews' own work sets the proper standards for those who read and pass judgement on a writer's work. His example suggests that it is a prerequisite to read arguments from within the author's own perspective before criticising their work.

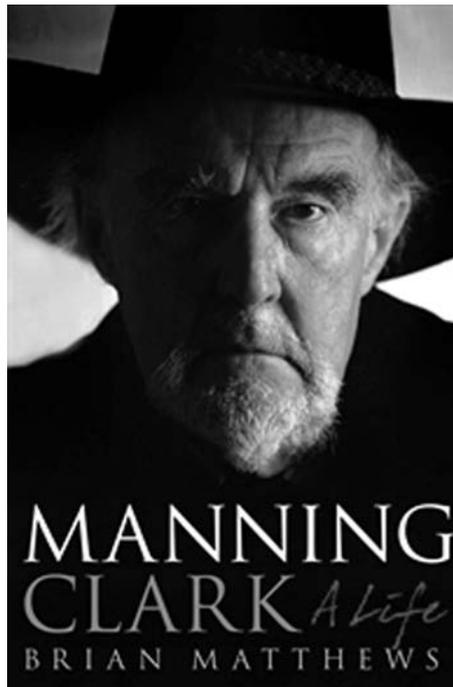
Many of Clark's critics did this. Their punctiliousness did not prevent him from being hurt. But other critics would have later been ashamed, one hopes, to read again what they had written.

This kind of bullying is never excusable. But when we read some of the responses to Manning Clark's work, we might be tempted to ask, as school teachers often do, whether something in the way some people present themselves attracts bullies.

Was there something in the way in which Manning Clark presented himself personally and

in his writing that brought the inexcusable worst out in many of those who wrote about him?

Matthews rightly makes much of Clark's enduring preoccupation with Christ.



Book reviews

Christ was for him variously a symbol of religious faith, of any standing point that might give confidence in living, of grounds for hope in the face of all the things that kill it, of the possibility of self-acceptance and forgiveness, of an integrated life. This was a symbol that fascinated Clark, but one to which he always felt an outsider.

That is understandable. His use of the symbol evokes the different cultural worlds of Luther, Matthew Arnold, Cardinal Newman, Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard.

To have appropriated and integrated the symbol as his own would have meant reconciling great tensions. His energy went into reconciling them in his history, not in his life or his religious belief.

Matthews' life of Manning Clark, as a good biography should, leads its readers to realise that they have only begun to know its subject and to want more.

"destructive" arguments about history/culture as warfare

At Clark's funeral, a colleague praised his gift for friendship and as a teacher. I found this surprising. From Clark's repeated lament in his diaries that he was a failure, misunderstood and unsupported by his friends, we might have been led to believe his gift was for losing, not winning or retaining friends.

It would be good then to have another life that will describe Clark as friend and as teacher with the same attentiveness as Matthews gives to his inner life and to the wellsprings of his writing.

At the centre of the book, too, is a shadowed figure who begs for illumination. This is Manning Clark's wife, Dymphna Lodewyckx, who is constantly mentioned and called upon in the diary but who is herself reticent. She comes to fascinate the reader, and I suspect Matthews himself, even more than her husband.

Andrew Hamilton SJ is Consulting Editor of the online magazine *Eureka Street* where this review was first published. He teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

Lament not stressed in Christian canon

By Ray Barraclough



My guess is that we begin to ask the question "Why?" about things when we are about three years old. Who has not encountered the child who pursues the adult carer with that question Why?

"Why does the moon have a piece taken out of it?; "Why does the water in the sea always keep moving?"

Or the difficult one when a mother of a young child dies; "Why is Mummy not coming home?"

Jesus journeyed into the anguished realm of the question Why? As his life ebbed from him in the cruel pain and anguish of crucifixion, he shouted out a Why? question.

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabacthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Mark 15:34 *Good News Bible*)

Too readily Christians leap to fill this passage with various atonement theories. So the focus is on ransoms paid or blood sacrifice and other atonement agenda. And in so doing the human dimensions of Jesus' experience and words are tragically reduced.

But we need steadfastly to acknowledge the human dimensions of Jesus' anguish. For Jesus' words have been echoed, and will be echoed, by millions of people who have to face tragic experiences in life.

In the English translation there are five words that follow the invocation of "My God...". Preachers can create five sermons simply by putting the stress on each of the five words in turn. Each word so stressed highlights the anguish that can be encompassed by these bare words of the gospel. Anguish that millions of people experience who also feel abandoned by their God.

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Here in contemporary Australia we live in a different explanatory universe from the writers of the Bible. They all lived in a pre-modernist world of explanations whereas our environment is replete with modernist – especially scientific – explanations for events.

Tension is now rising because of the surge of Christian fundamentalism in our times. Fundamentalism (Christian, Islamic or Jewish fundamentalists are very similar in their claims to infallibility) is opposed to the explanations that modernism bring to their sacred writings – whether it is the Christian scriptures or the Jewish scriptures or the Quran.

Explanations that are advanced by Christian fundamentalists that the 9/11 attack was due to American liberals, or that the Victorian bushfires were due to the Victorian government's laws regarding abortion, may grate on our ears as contemporary Christians. But they have a long history, beginning in the pages of the Bible.

Consider the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that struck Lisbon on All Saints' Day, November 1755, and which killed 60,000 people. When John Wesley asserted that God had caused the earthquake because of God's anger at the Catholic Church and its Inquisition, few Protestant voices would have been raised in protest.

For believers, tragic experiences raise difficult questions about the very character of God. All our language about God is human language. And so all our language about God is inadequate, insufficient, and can even be mistaken. I recommend Karen Armstrong's discussion of this in her thoughtful book *The Case For God*. In particular I commend her chapter entitled Silence.

Given the temptation Christians face of always wanting to have the last word, it is worthwhile to reflect that God dwelt in silence for eons before human speech was heard. God is not afraid of silence. It is we who are far more keen to have the last word than to be drawn into the divine silence.

It is not a bad thing to be speechless. Silence can be the deep experience of awe. Silence can also be the deep experience of grief.

Traditionally the three monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) have been based

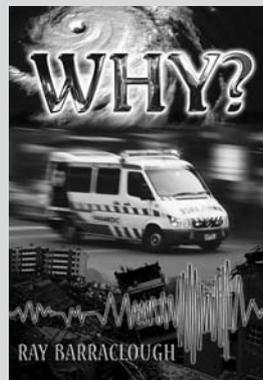
on the threefold foundation of belief in God as an omniscient, omnipotent and all-loving God.

- God is all knowing
- God is all powerful
- God is all compassion

But every theology has to acknowledge that the three-legged stool of traditional belief in God cannot be sustained in facing, for instance, the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Before such a catastrophic event the three legs cannot stand with equal strength or with unquestioned certainty.

- Those who stress the sovereignty of God face the challenge of explaining God's motivation in causing the Boxing Day tsunami to occur.
- Those who stress God's full knowledge (omniscience) face the challenge why God was content not to forewarn the quarter million people of the impending disaster that would claim their lives. (Would not human parents have been prompted to utter a warning when they knew their children were endangered?)
- Those who stress the immanence (compassion) of God face the challenge of re-negotiating biblical and liturgical statements that assert that God is almighty and that God causes such

*How do we give an explanation for tragic events?
What response can we give when family and friends
ask 'Why?' when calamities occur?*



WHY?

*The Challenge of Giving
Explanations for Tragic
Experiences in Life*

By Ray Barraclough

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Book Reviews

phenomena as earthquakes (and consequential tsunamis) to occur.

- Those who stress human free will face the challenge of explaining why earthquakes, and other natural disasters, are caused by human sinfulness. They also face the challenge of explaining why some parts of the earth are earthquake free. Are the residents in those regions less sinful?
- Those who posit that this world can only operate as it does to give scope for human free will need to explain why earthquakes preceded human existence.
- Those who assert that their God is sovereign, or that disasters occur to test or strengthen faith, need to explain why others' lives are sacrificed so as to strengthen or test the faith of Christians. Is that a divine model of ethical behaviour?

Anyone prepared to talk about God in the face of disaster will need to embrace paradoxes, contradictions, the absence of faith, even the absence of God.

The great Christian scholar Jürgen Moltmann expresses this in the succinct sentence, "Where the Kingdom of God is at hand, we feel the abyss of God-forsakenness."¹

How are Christians to respond to the anguished cry of *Why?* when tragedy strikes a family, a village, a town, a city, a country?

From its longer faith journey Judaism copes with this better than Christianity. In the Jewish scriptures one finds holy people who are prepared to sheet home to God their lament, their agonised cry of *Why?*

The Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, challenged God directly in regard to the injustices experienced by people. He hedges his defiance with an opening statement of trust but then presents his case like a godly barrister: "You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" (*Jeremiah 12:1-2*)

No New Testament passage matches that questioning. Christians feel uncomfortable with such words addressed to God. Laments do not feature in the Christian scriptures. There are several reasons that account for this.

New Testament writings cover only a short range of time and human experience and so they cannot encompass the widest range of responses to God.

New religious movements are not noted for being self-critical or critical of their own ideology.

When such movements are buoyed by expansion and are convinced that God is on their side, they find it hard to give room for lamentation against their God. Not surprisingly, what is absent from the Christian scriptures has also been suppressed in subsequent Christian worship and piety.

Christianity has become the religion of happy endings

Expressions of anger, hatred, rage, resentment, bitterness, betrayal, abandonment, unbelief have for the most part been, consciously or unconsciously, banned and eliminated from liturgies, hymnals and prayer books.²

There is another significant silence. Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus give counsel to those who face prolonged suffering. One is reminded of Terry Eagleton's insight that, "It is notable that the Jesus of the New Testament, who spends much of his time curing the sick, never once counsels anyone to reconcile (themselves) to (their) sickness."

Rather Christianity, especially sentimental Christianity, has become the religion of happy endings. Does not the Christian always end with resurrection and happiness for ever in heaven for the chosen ones, the Christians? A consequence is that popular Christianity will not face the reality of ongoing anguish.

Choruses proclaim that "our God reigns" while the questions that anguished human beings raise against such a well-established Christian assertion

1. Tyron Inbody, 'The Power of Prayer and the Mystery of Evil', *Anglican Theological Review*, 81, 1999.

2. Herbert E. Hohenstein, 'Oh Blessed Rage', *Currents in Theology*, 10, 1983, 167. For a similar observation note Inbody, 72-73.

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are ignored or smothered because they disturb Christian triumphalism.

Did God reign over the Boxing Day, 2004 tsunami – or the Haiti earthquake? And what kind of godly reign is that?

We need to incorporate into our liturgies words, theology and passions that are prepared to confront the tragic realities of life and to face God with them.

There is an essential element in Christianity that – while it does not provide an answer to the anguished question *Why?* – opens a window into that anguish.

For within the many-faceted beliefs in Christianity is a belief in a crucified Messiah. Moltmann explored these depths in his book entitled *The Crucified God*.

A feature of Process Theology is that its stress is on the immanence of God rather than God's transcendence.

Our liturgies and our scriptures largely focus on God's transcendence. But Process Theology, rather than seeing God as an imperial heavenly monarch, locates God in the down-to-earth experience of pain, as well as pleasure. This theology focuses on the Crucified God.

To quote an image from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it is the "vulnerable God" who emerges through Process Theology.

And it is the changing God – not the Aristotelian changeless God, or the Platonic timeless God – with whom we and the universe engage. God is present, vulnerably within the tragedy.

Process Theology gives more room for God to be free. As Hartshorne commented: "If God is free to do new things, (God) is free to have new experiences."³

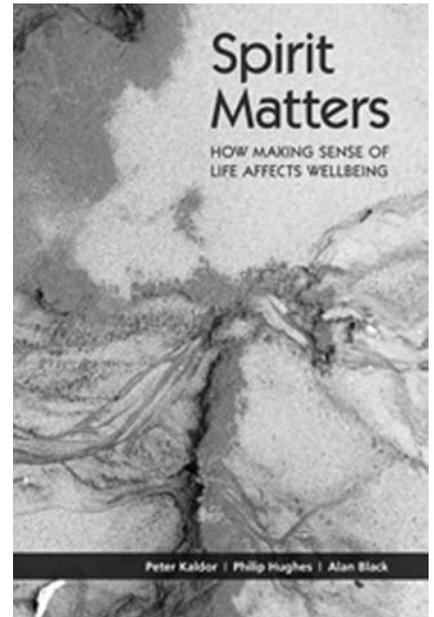
The Revd Dr Ray Barraclough was ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane and is now retired. He was Senior Lecturer at St George's College, Jerusalem and Lecturer in New Testament Studies at St Francis Theological College Brisbane. His book on Process Theology *Why? The challenge of Giving Explanations for Tragic Experiences in Life* was published this year.

3. Cited by Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1988, p.94.

*Spirit Matters:
How Making
Sense of
Life Affects
Wellbeing*

by Kaldor,
Hughes and
Black

ISBN:
9780980827507
Mosaic Press,
2010, 161pp,
\$35.00



Reviewed by Stephen Webb

The authors of a new book about Australian spirituality say there are significant links between how we make sense of life and our personal and social wellbeing.

Spirit Matters, by Peter Kaldor, Philip Hughes and Alan Black, was launched at the 'Shaping Australia's Spirituality' conference in Melbourne in August.

Subtitled *How Making Sense of Life Affects Wellbeing*, it presents an in-depth analysis of national surveys undertaken in Australia on wellbeing, religion, spirituality and how we make sense of life.

Despite what some commentators may say, religious ways of making sense of life are far from dead in contemporary Australia.

Approximately one quarter of Australians (26%) approach life from an actively religious perspective. Others (17%) are influenced by alternative spiritualities. Somewhat more than half (57%) are not influenced much by either religion or spirituality.

Most of this last group are not atheists, but are not sure what to believe, taking a secular approach to life by default.

From further analysis, the book identifies seven major approaches to life and asks: What are the consequences of a choice for one or another approach?

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Spirit Matters pinpoints ways in which different approaches can affect personal wellbeing and the common good. It shows that some approaches are more likely than others to generate outcomes such as a strong sense of purpose, optimism and openness to personal growth.

The book also explores how the choices we make about our individual lives have implications for the wider community – to the way we relate to and trust each other, to the priority we place on concern for others and to living out such a wider concern, and to our levels of altruism and generosity.

“The implications,” says Peter Kaldor, “are not just for our own generation, but for the generations to come.”

Philip Hughes says, “Trends in recent times have left us with a wealth of life choices. People sometimes assume that it doesn’t matter very much what they choose.

The ways we choose to live influence the wellbeing of the whole society

“The data in this book shows that it does matter. The ways we choose to live influence our personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of the whole society.”

While there is much in the book of relevance to churches, religious and other groups concerned with spirituality and meaning, it is written in an accessible style for a wide audience.

According to Professor Black, the book has significant implications for education. “We need to prepare young people to make wise choices about life and its directions.”

Findings also have implications for those who are concerned about social policy, personal and community wellbeing, including psychologists and community health workers, educators and religious leaders, politicians, community leaders and the general public.

Dr Peter Kaldor was the founding Director of National Church Life Survey Research and for twenty-five years has researched and published

in the areas of spirituality, religion, social policy, wellbeing and effective leadership.

Dr Philip Hughes, the author or co-author of many books and reports relating to spirituality and religion in Australia, as well as various publications on community life, has been a researcher with the Christian Research Association since 1985. He is currently an honorary research fellow of the Edith Cowan University Social Justice Research Centre.

Dr Alan Black was Foundation Professor of Sociology at Edith Cowan University before his retirement at the end of 2003. His fields of research and publication include religion, spirituality, wellbeing, social capital, and community life.

Stephen Webb is a religious journalist on the team of Uniting Creative, the communications unit of the Uniting Church’s Synod of New South Wales and the ACT.

Paget’s Parable



SCIENCE AND RELIGION

By Vicky Mergard

Someone once said to me that science and religion are two completely separate things; one should not be used to support or discredit the other. I have a different view. I believe that science can be studied in an effort to understand and admire the beauty and complexity of the world around us.

It is truly amazing that an awesome and powerful God created us in His image, and then gave us the means to explore and understand – one of the mediums of this being science.

“What is man that you are mindful of him?” asks the Psalmist. God reminds us of His care and attention by saying how much more valuable we are to Him than sparrows (Matthew 10.31b). Such detail is given to the little things around us.

I am a science teacher at a high school, and am saddened at the prevalence of teaching evolutionary theory as ‘fact’ to students. It is amazing how even simple things are dominated by evolutionary theory, such as the term *Protista*, a kingdom classification coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866, meaning “first of all ones” (www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Protist).

The total value of elements and minerals in a human is US\$4.50

The Bible states that the origin of life is God, who created the heavens and the earth and all things in them within a six day period (Genesis 1). Christians believe that all Scripture is inspired by God, and that His word is true. I believe God was able to create our universe in a heartbeat, but chose instead to display His creativity, and ultimately His purpose by fashioning man like Himself.

Science to me is a verb, not a noun, as it involves a number of actions: experimenting, theorising, inferring, questioning and so on. We have amazing capacity as humans, and science is a platform for discovery. Science is an effective tool we can use to evaluate and process the wonders around us. How can fish in the depths of the ocean see in the dark?

HOME TRUTHS

How do we know the whereabouts and sizes of planets that are millions of light years away?

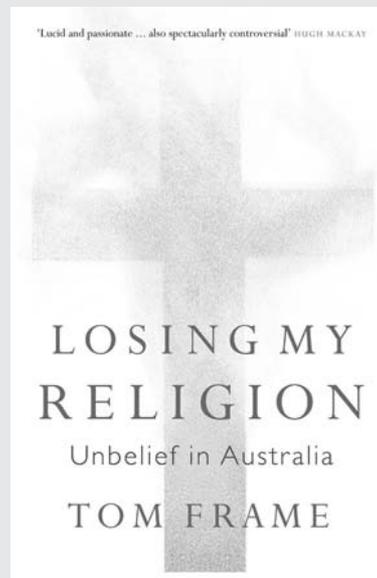
What drives us to even consider such questions, in light of our oftentimes inward view?

I see it as an inbuilt desire to know what our true relevance is, and what we mean to God.

Economists tell us that the total value of the elements and minerals in a human body is approximately US\$4.50 (www.ehmac.ca/everything-else-eh/43511-bodys-worth.html), yet look at the wonders God has designed for us! He created stars for us to gaze upon, flowers to brighten our day, and coral reefs for us to snorkel on in the holidays. Such things weren't left to chance, they were intentionally and wonderfully made – just like us.

Vicky Mergard is a science teacher at a Lutheran school near Brisbane.

Bishop Tom Frame, Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre, has won the 2010 Christian Book of the Year awarded by the SPCA.



Losing my religion: Unbelief in Australia
by Tom Frame, UNSW Press, ISBN 9781921410192

Is there any room for us?

By Amy Lewis-Cooper

The Church has been known as a place to go to talk to God; for sanctuary and refuge; to meet people; to learn; or to just be.

As I look into Medieval history, I learn about the need to have stained glass windows in churches and cathedrals, as well as doom paintings and other colourful icons. The Cross itself is a powerful visual symbol.

Most people were not able to read and write in Medieval times. That is why shop signs had pictures of what they sold or did, instead of names, and churches used paintings, stained glass and coloured icons to teach the majority who could not understand Latin.

Now that school education has become widely available in western Christian countries, have we forgotten the many who struggle, for whatever reason, to learn, and who do not fit into the current IQ system?

What if you have a 'misfit', an adult with a short attention span in your church? Do you make them sit quietly in a corner so that they don't disturb the service? Maybe, he or she might wish for a way to know God too?

So often it is assumed that all people think and feel the same as their peers, but people with learning difficulties face a very different world of problems.

Of course learning difficulties cover a whole range – from people like me and many others who experience long episodes of depression and for a long time afterwards find it hard to concentrate, to people who are unable to speak or move.

Home groups are often the only solution for adult learning in a parish situation and if a home Bible study group suits you, that's well and good.

If however, you're an adult who learns best from, for example hands-on history, or hands-on science, and you are expected to "just grow up" or just sit quietly, you might think that maybe God is far too busy to bother with you.

Does this mean there is no place for us in parish life? We could perhaps have learning zones of



HOME TRUTHS

exploration in church buildings which are colourful and hands-on?

Colour and play are not "just for the kids". After all, seals were first invented to aid kings who couldn't write their own names.

Church services are good for those who like to read a lot – who can read – but we need other options too.

I am a deep thinker, but to really engage concentration and to remember what I need to learn, I am sure a lot more hands-on visuals would be a stronger glue for my brain. After all, a well made stage set is more likely to be remembered than two people on chairs in conversation throughout a whole play.

The word 'nave' describing the body of a church building comes from the Latin *navium* meaning 'ship'. Officers of sailing ships wore strange-looking hats to show rank and authority, much as bishops wear mitres.

Midshipmen, the lowest level of officer, were expected to know much about navigation systems and the meaning of flags and signals on ships' masts.

But other ranks were not able to study, and depended upon those who could.

We are all children of God. I know brothers and sisters often fight, but much that happens in church hurts me.

I am 29 years old, but I don't fit into a twenties/thirties age group because I am not interested in talking about relationships, career, business or children.

It hurts that I cannot be with younger people without having a police check – the implication being that I could be dangerous to children.

It hurts that there is so much suspicion of women and so much attention to the different roles of men and women.

I am also very concerned about so many people like myself who are frustrated in their search for God by the practices of the churches.

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