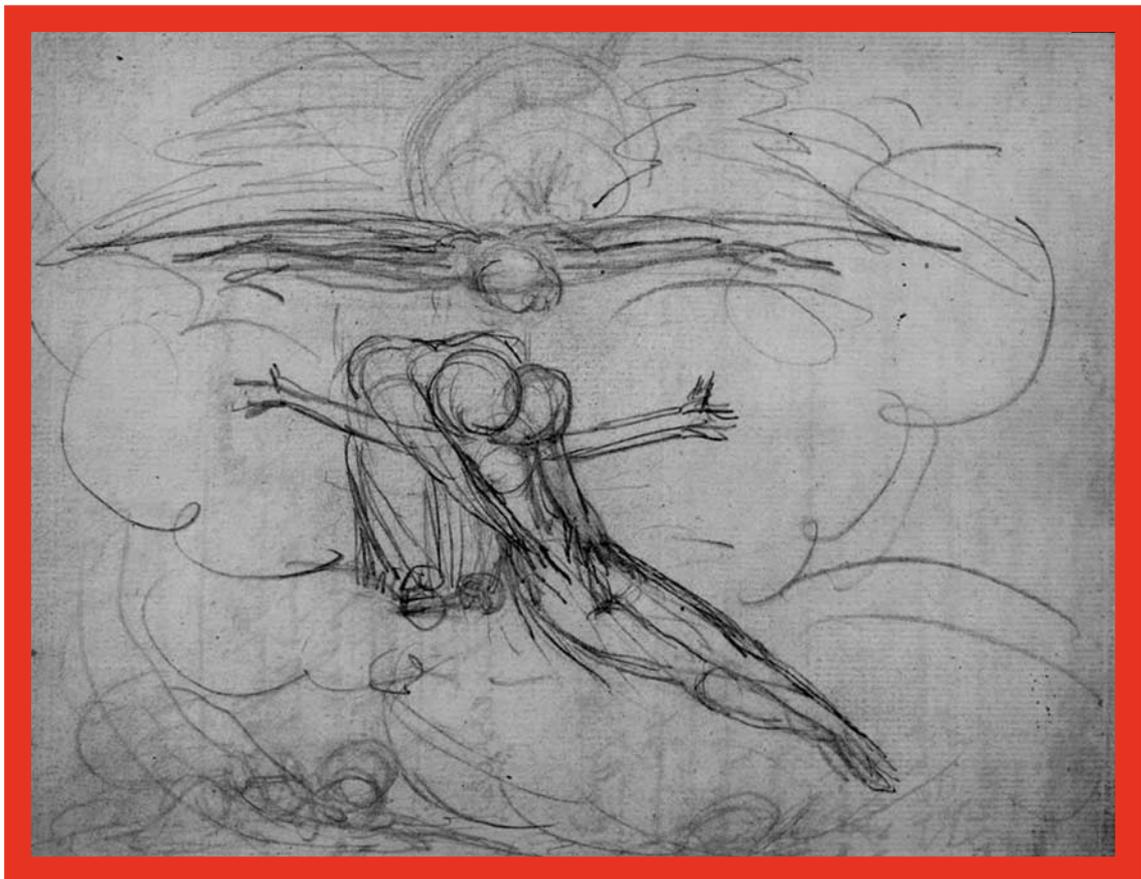


# Common Theology

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## **INSIDE:**

- Forestry industry competes with food production
- 12 reasons for rebuilding the Church
- Prophecy not just for loners

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



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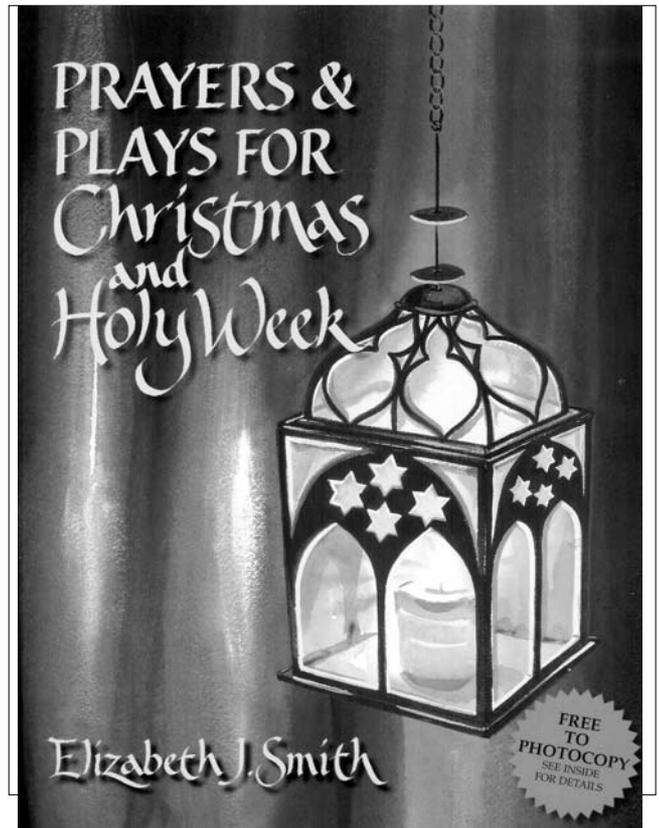
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**Cover:** A reproduction of 'The Trinity' from the notebooks of William Blake, held in the British Museum, London.



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## From the Editor

**D**estruction of old growth forests is part of the common or garden greed and technical power which characterises the industrialised world. Unfortunately, there is nothing new about the visceral pain such wholesale destruction can cause people who are ecologically sensitive. In these pages horticulturalist and farmer Rodney LeLievre warns us that the forestry industry, if unchecked, threatens to impoverish our food resources and bring social entropy to rural regions in Australia.

In January social psychologist Diarmuid O’Murchu was refused a platform in Melbourne by Archbishop Denis Hart because his writings were under investigation by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Workshops went ahead in Janet Clarke Hall, in the University of Melbourne. Internal politics in Rome should not prevent us enjoying this avant guard thinker’s contribution to the debate about the identity of the Church. Professor Hedley Beare, a *Common Theology* subscriber, has written a very digestible précis of some of O’Murchu’s arguments for reform.

There was little fanfare at the launch of The Elders, an initiative announced by Nelson Mandela on his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday in July, but it has been on the drawing board since 2001. Ten men and women with distinguished records in public life have joined forces to make their skills and wisdom available at negotiation tables around the world. Predictably, media reaction to the launch has been cautious – is it a bird; is it a plane? But The Elders have huge potential as a powerful force for good, and need prayerful protection for their work to prosper, in a world which tends to recognise only economic and political power.

Professor Robert Jensen takes up St Paul’s words in I Cor 14.1 that everyone should desire to prophesy. A solidarity of prophets sounds very appealing to those of us who are used to being lone voices in the wilderness.

The Vatican’s ‘clarification’ of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches caused some grumpiness earlier this year. Andrew Hamilton SJ puts the case in Home Truths that this document was an exercise in doctrine rather than public relations by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, and that no offence was intended.

These gleanings from Winter offer a rather heavy diet – but the advantage of a quarterly journal is that there is plenty of time to digest it.

**Maggie Helass**

# You can't eat trees

By Rodney LeLievre

**F**ood producers will struggle to keep their farms unless the playing field against the forestry corporations is leveled. Forestry corporations are winning against food producers in the competition for soil, water and government support.

Across Australia, timber plantations are replacing food production as a result of the corporate capitalisation of Managed Investment Schemes (MIS).

In Tasmania, the plantation estate is already more than 650,000 hectares (6,500 sq kms) comprising more than 400,000 ha of private timber reserves and 250,000 ha of public and other plantations – totaling nearly ten per cent of Tasmania's land mass.

Somehow plantation forestry has come to be classified as *agriculture*. Consequently, there are no restrictions to using our best soils for trees. Since trees grow much better on high quality land, plantation operators are very happy to buy up farms whenever possible.<sup>1</sup>

The Federal Government made a clear distinction that forestry is not an agricultural crop when it removed tax exemption status on agricultural MIS's and not on forestry MIS's. We should be demanding an explanation as to why the production of food does not rate as highly as plantation forestry for special tax treatment.

Food production for 2005 was reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as about \$800 million at the farm gate, with a further \$1,600 million or so in downstream processing – a total of \$2,400 million dollars from 86,000 ha of irrigated food-producing land, and supporting 3,877 businesses.

Mike Bolan, using ABS figures, estimates the average annual return per hectare from food production at \$5,600. Running similar calculations for plantations, Bolan estimates that a plantation will yield 150



eye witness

tonnes green lumber per hectare, which will produce about forty tonnes of pulp at \$600 per tonne. This earns \$24,000 each fifteen years (the approximate lifecycle of a tree) or \$1,600 per hectare per annum.

The 2020 Vision (plantation forestry) program places emphasis on the 'investors' in the plantations, but in fact most of the investment is made by taxpayers who are allowed 100% tax deduction for investing in trees.

The amounts paid to plantation operators for plantation development were also generous, given that the actual cost per hectare is around \$3,500 while the deduction has been around \$9,000. The difference of \$5,500 has meant that plantation operators make enough to purchase more land after putting the money through their books. The result has been described by farmers as a tax-fuelled land grab.

There is a progressive shift in land use from food production to tree production

This huge advantage provided to one industry by the tax subsidies is distorting the free market and exacting a growing penalty on rural Australia.<sup>2</sup>

When there is competition for scarce resources, as there is for Tasmania's 107,000 ha of crop lands, then plantation operators can always dominate that competition thanks to the federal tax schemes. So there is a progressive shift in land use from food production to tree production, with serious consequences.

Since 1997, when the 2020 Vision was launched, about twenty per cent of Tasmania's

2. Ibid

1. Bolan, M. (2007) *You Can't Eat Trees*  
<http://tasmaniantimes.com>

farms, mainly in higher rainfall areas, have been purchased by MIS corporations. Of approximately 4,552 farms in the state at that time, around a thousand are now owned and controlled by MIS plantation forestry corporations.

Private Forest Tasmania (PFT) figures state that in 2003, 1158 hectares of our farmland was turned into forestry plantations. In 2004 it was 3,563 hectares – an increase of 205%. In 2005 it was 6,266 hectare – further increase of 75.8%. In 2006 the amount of farmland lost to plantations increased by a huge 163.5% to 16,518 hectares.

Australia's finite soil and water resources are up for grabs. Forest plantations are shaping up to use a lot more water than agriculture and demand is likely to exceed supply.

The problem, in a state like Tasmania for example, is that, in many areas, trees get the water first. In most of our river catchments the state forest has been converted to plantations. Vast areas of uniform young eucalypts suck the catchments dry. Consequently water becomes scarcer and more expensive for the farmer.

## The distortions of the free market will overtake the nation's food production capacities

The latest concern over water supply is that Hydro Tasmania in August confirmed a contract to sell the forestry monolith Gunns Ltd 26,000 megalitres a year – half of the total domestic water consumption of the whole of Northern Tasmania. For reference Launceston uses 29,000 megalitres.

“The proposed Gunns Ltd pulp mill's huge thirst is the latest issue in a battle between farmers and forestry for water and soil resources.” (*Tasmanian Country* 10/8/07)

The threat to agriculture is that the distortions of the free market that occur with tax subsidised operations will overtake the nation's food production capacities. A crop of trees takes ten to fifteen years to mature, while food production produces crops each year.

Furthermore most foods tend to produce a higher dollar return per hectare than trees, and generate more employment.

Shifting land use from food to tree production cuts overall revenues, reduces job opportunities and

cuts the cash flow to rural communities – all undesirable consequences of subsidising one industry in the competition for prime land.

Food production and its downstream processing activities are employment rich, contributing significantly to the nation's economy – particularly as so much of the money passes through rural centres and stimulates local economies.

When tree plantations take over from food production, the process is largely irreversible, and therein lies the greatest threat of all.

It is the conversion of vibrant existing rural centres into socially depressed areas surrounded by trees, coupled with an increased failure to be able to feed ourselves from our own lands. We will lose control over the quality, variety and cost of foods available to Australians.

Tasmania is a particularly urgent case, being faced with the imminent approval of the giant Gunns Ltd pulp mill.

In Tasmania the battle for resources would be accelerated by the Gunns pulp mill, for which there has been no adequate risk assessment. Tasmania has more timber plantations per land area than other parts of Australia. More specifically Gunns, a major financial player in Tasmania, owns approximately 175,000 hectares of freehold land and manages in excess of 65,000 hectares of plantations (Tasmanian Government, 2006).

The Tasmanian government has married the state's future with Gunns Ltd and its tree plantations, leaving the farmer, tourism, and everyone else well and truly out in the cold.

Originally from NSW, Rodney LeLievre is a horticulturalist living and working in rural Tasmania. A biodynamic farmer, he is the editor of *The Journal of Biodynamics Tasmania* and director of the Tasmanian Biodynamic Co-operative, a citizens action group concerned at the increasing corporate control of food production and distribution and the loss of our productive farmlands to forestry corporations.

**[www.biodynamics-tas.com.au](http://www.biodynamics-tas.com.au)**

# Laureates join force for good

The Elders' first mission was to Sudan in October. A delegation led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu went to address the immense human suffering in Darfur. The group included Lakhdar Brahimi, Jimmy Carter, and Graça Machel.

The Elders was founded by Nelson Mandela and his wife Graça Machel in July, a humanitarian initiative bringing together an august group of people to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to solving problems in the world.

Independent of any government or international organisation, the Elders can consult widely – including, in the case of Darfur, with leaders from the United Nations and the African Union – and have lent their support to the United Nations Security Council Resolution authorising a joint peacekeeping force in the region.

Global technology is fostering unprecedented creativity, but there is also a sense of chaos, insoluble problems and fear for the future. Elder statesmen with a global perspective are rare.

The first ten Elders each have a track record of wisdom on the world stage, have demonstrated foresight and together have a formidable wealth of experience behind them. Their power as a group is not vested in economic or political interests but in the future well being of the world community.

The first Elders are Nelson Mandela – former President of South Africa; Graça Machel – Women and Children's Rights Activist, President of the Foundation for Community Development, Mozambique; Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Chair); Kofi Annan – former Secretary-General of the UN; Ela Bhatt – Women's Rights Activist, Founder of SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association, India; Lakhdar Brahimi – former UN Envoy and conflict resolution specialist; Gro Harlem Brundtland – former Prime Minister of Norway, former Director General of the World Health Organisation; Fernando Henrique Cardoso – former President of Brazil; Jimmy Carter – former President of the United



States; Li Zhaoxing – former Foreign Minister, China; Mary Robinson – former President of Ireland; Muhammad Yunus – micro-credit pioneer, Founder, Grameen Bank, Bangladesh.

Their stated purpose is to alleviate human suffering by helping bring peaceful resolutions to relevant conflicts; seeking new approaches to global issues; sharing wisdom and reaching out to grassroots leadership and the next generation of leaders.

The Elders had its genesis in a proposal put to Nelson Mandela in 2001 by musician Peter Gabriel and British entrepreneur Richard Branson that the so-called global village needed guidance and help from wise and independent leaders to solve its seemingly intractable problems.

They do not have  
careers to build, elections to  
win, constituencies to please

At its inauguration on his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mr Mandela said the members of the group are not elders because of their age, but because of their individual and collective wisdom.

“This group derives its strength not from political, economic or military power, but from the independence and integrity of those who are here,” he said. “They do not have careers to build, elections to win, constituencies to please. They can talk to anyone they please, and are free to follow paths they deem right, even if hugely unpopular.”

In order to ensure that the Elders are fully financed, a group called The Founders and Partners have pledged to provide them with the resources they need to carry on their work, whose independence is, however, jealously guarded.

The Founders to date include Richard Branson and Virgin Unite; Bridgeway Foundation (US-based); Michael and Ray Chambers; Peter Gabriel; Humanity United; Amy Robbins; Shashi Ruia; Dick Tarlow; the United Nations Foundation.

While working independently, The Elders will not duplicate or compete with the efforts of other organisations and they will seek opportunities to partner established groups.

[www.theElders.org](http://www.theElders.org)

## A Letter from Kebin Pius Nedumpallikunnel

To *Common Theology*  
My dear uncles,

It is with a very grateful heart that I am writing this letter. I got the money \$75 which you sent for my education. Thank you very much for the same. I am praying for you all every day. I am studying well. I have VI<sup>th</sup> rank in the class.

At home all are keeping fine. These days there is viral fever everywhere. My papa and mummy also got it. I was suffering from chicken pox. Now all are better. My brother Ebin is studying in VI<sup>th</sup>. Nothing else to pen.

Yours in Jesus  
Nancy (mother) for Kebin

Kebin's education is sponsored by *Common Theology*. He is now seven years old.

# Common Theology

## A Journal for Australians

A Lay Ministry of the Australian Church committed to the demystification of theology — a forum for theological views in plain language on matters which affect the daily lives of Australians.

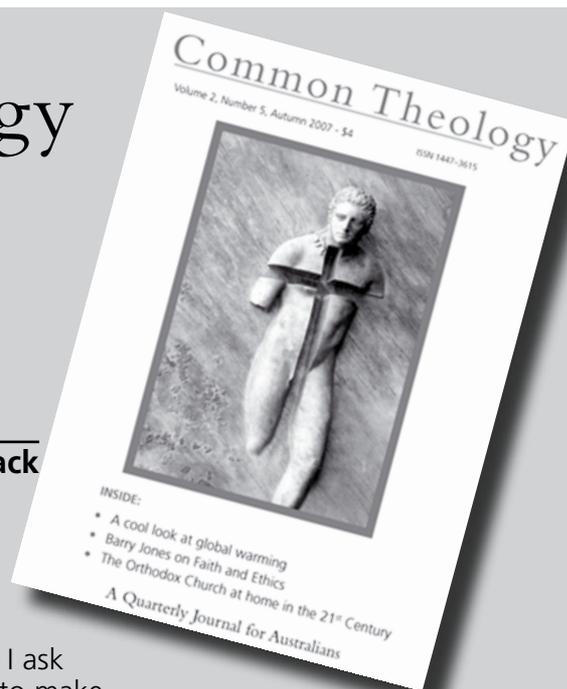
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I have been reading *Common Theology* since its inception and have always found most of the articles to be insightful, helpful and often confronting and challenging. This current issue – Autumn 07 – which I have just completed reading is again excellent and I found all articles worth reflecting on and sharing with others.

**Fr David Head  
Hampton Vic**

May I ask you to make me a subscriber to your excellent journal *Common Theology*? Congratulations on filling a great need.

**The Rev Douglas G McKenzie  
Moffat Beach Qld**



***Common Theology* is an independent publication funded by its subscribers**

# O'Murchu's 12 Theses

Sacred Heart Missionary priest and social psychologist **Diarmuid O'Murchu** visited Melbourne in January but had to rechedule his venue after Archbishop Denis Hart withdrew permission for the lecture tour because a complaint about O'Murchu's writing was before Vatican authorities at the time. Workshops were held at Janet Clarke Hall in the University of Melbourne. Here, Professor Hedley Beare writes on O'Murchu's key message from his new book.



By Hedley Beare

In the first chapter of *Catching up with Jesus*, headed 'Bringing Jesus out of Captivity', O'Murchu endeavours to describe the anachronistic frameworks which are handicapping our understanding of who Jesus was and is, what he represents, and his central message about the 'Kingdom of God'. In the following, I have tried to make a précis of that important chapter. A précis differs from a summary in that it attempts to use as far as is possible the original author's own words. My purpose has been to reduce O'Murchu's ideas to an accessible length so that they can be made readily available to a wide reading audience and form the basis of ongoing discussion and action so that we comprehend how much the old frameworks had to be remodelled.

**C**hristianity has a fossilized story, says Lisa Underwood. Its living characteristics have been set in rock by outdated language and obsolescent thought-forms. For much of the twentieth century, scholars have been chipping away the cultural debris which has accumulated around the story of Jesus – efforts which have led to a reconstruction of the Jesus story.

But there are at least twelve chains that still bind and imprison what we have inherited from two thousand years of Christendom.

## Incarnational reductionism

If God has been fully at work at every stage of the evolutionary process, then divine involvement must include the period from the very beginning of the cosmos as we know it, bearing in mind that the human species appeared six million years ago.

'Incarnation' does not begin two thousand years ago with the birth of Jesus, therefore, but at least six million years ago with the emergence of humans. 'Incarnation' can be rescued from its narrow anthropomorphic restrictions by using the biblically and culturally more responsible term 'embodiment', which includes the cosmos, our home planet, and not just the human body. To use Jesus' birth as the starting point of 'incarnation' is a form of reductionism.

So our creation story has to be reconceptualised. Human beings are just one of billions of species that inhabit this planet, and we do not have the right to conquer and control them all. Stewardship differs from control. Human beings have been co-creators with God during six million years, and the process of *natility* (becoming, flourishing) has been awesomely successful. It has brought us to a new threshold of evolution, a transbiological state which Teilhard de Chardin calls psychic evolution, the epitome of the new humanity represented by the resurrected Jesus.

## Divine supremacy

In striving to give prime attention to the divinity of Jesus, we have caricatured his humanity in a way that seriously compromises the divine potential of the human itself. We have consistently put Jesus on a pedestal, avoiding his challenge to adopt a radically new way of being human. Indeed, the human desire for absolute power drove the doctrines and creeds resulting from the councils at Nicea and Chalcedon.

Why have we been so preoccupied with the divinity of Jesus? Robert Funk, leader of the Jesus Seminar, says that on innumerable occasions in his thirty years of researching and speaking he has been asked if he believed in the divinity of Jesus, but never once in all those years was he asked if he believed in the *humanity* of Jesus. A fixation on Jesus' divinity may well distract us from knowing who Jesus really is.

## Academic rationality

Because of the dominance of the idea that we discover truth through rationality and not through imagination and intuition, the Jesus story became a set of facts around which his life was written and explained. Because the dominant culture could not handle, contain, or control this creative dreamer who spoke in parables, metaphors and stories, he came to be represented as of royal lineage, with patriarchal status as the first-born son, a member of a conventional Jewish family, indeed a loyal Jew, and one subservient and obedient to his Father.

But he was obviously a creative rebel against all those things, passionate about justice, a visionary with a prophet's imagination, and wild. He defied convention, transgressed the boundaries which incapacitated the poor and the marginalized, flouted the sacred hopes of the established order, and called for a new form of governance based on radical equality. Only when we choose to liberate Jesus from the tedium of the rational and the literal can we truly come to terms with the divinely illuminated Wisdom-sage that he was.

## Captivity to absolute dogmas

"It would never have occurred to anyone to doubt God's existence if theologians had not tried so hard to prove it," wrote Anthony Collins. The creeds became a constellation of dogmatic truths, deemed to be binding for all time, and not subject to review or modification, with God depicted as the supreme ruler whose power flows down to the church leaders. Power, not faith, is the core value the creeds enunciate and proclaim.

So God's power is represented as passing down unadulterated through a line of male succession via the only-begotten son (even though the Holy Spirit is intentionally feminine). There is absolute

clarity about the one on the top, a clear chain of command from the top down, a line of protection and promotion for the ruling class, with those at the bottom of the pyramid required to behave with unquestioning obedience. It is good for those in power, but dogma like this disempowers the rest of us.

Even a cursory glance at the synoptic gospels reveals that Jesus does not belong to this paradigm. Some Christians have broken out of the tyrannical model, internalising their faith through a commitment of heart and mind rather than basing their faith on external observances. There is now a sense of suspicion abroad in the contemporary Christian world about male-dominated hierarchical models, and when we retrieve Jesus from the patriarchal straitjacket, the whole Christian edifice begins to feel shaky, insecure, and unreliable. It is not at all clear what the next move is.

It transpires that Christian faith is a lived experience and not merely intellectual assent to a creedal formula. Such formulae, however, lead to social and religious classification, defining those who are 'in' and those who are 'out', and it has become the base for legitimising much racism, bigotry, sectarianism of many kinds, witch hunts and brutal exterminations.

## White imperialism

The Romanising of the Christian church has had a staggering impact on Christian iconography, perpetrating a white, male Jesus, bearded, and robed like the ancient Roman. Equally widespread is the caricature of a white, unreal, European Mary, virgin, poised in humble subservience. Even Catholic countries like Brazil and the Philippines in their processional ceremonies have borrowed directly from Spain and Portugal, with Mary dressed and crowned as a queen ruling from on high, an irony in cultures where the cult of the Great Mother Goddess flourished in ancient times. Yet both Jesus and Mary were people of Palestinian ethnic origin of dark skin and distinctive non-European features.

It is not a case of trying to re-invent Jesus. If he is the incarnational representation of God who co-creates throughout the whole of creation and through six million years of human evolution, then we need a creation story which honours those archetypal, primordial realities.

Most of the story begins in Africa where humans first evolved some six million years ago. The black colour of human skin is more basic to human identity than the Caucasian façade introduced by colonisation.

Yet Christian theology is still largely the preserve of white western specialists. Most efforts to comprehend Jesus in the Southern Hemisphere begin with the colonised version of Jesus invented by Europe.

We need to disrobe the kingly figure, representing power and the glory of triumphalism, and reclaim the vulnerable suffering servant. In a multi-faith context, we also need a Jesus who is acceptable in and can dialogue with diverse cultures.

## Male exclusiveness

For some thousands of years before Jesus, only males were seen as full human beings, alone possessing the seed through which new life was procreated. Women were merely the biological receptacles for the fertilisation of the male's seed. Male offspring perpetuated the family line and were valued above females.

These archaic and destructive beliefs still persist, not least in the descriptions of Jesus. In the birth narratives, for example, we romanticise the angelic heralds, the virgin (pure) mother, the Jesus-seed as provided by the third person of the Trinity, the traveling star in the firmament, the wise men, the only begotten son, and so on, allowing these elements to distract us from the main message.

Jesus did not adopt this male stereotype of dominance, control, rationality, and remoteness. Instead of guarding power, he gives it away; instead of rational discourse, he tells stories; instead of claiming rabbi status, he engages the outcasts; instead of excluding the rabble, he includes them at the fellowship of his meal table. Relationality rather than rationality pervades his whole story.

Indeed, Jesus' behaviour is far more androgenous (a mix of masculine and feminine propensities) than people have been willing to admit. He disturbs the orthodoxies of then and now.

We must admit that a Jesus devoid of an exuberant and joyful sexuality would strip incarnation of its meaning and integrity.

## Redemptive violence

“Can anyone imagine a more obsessional phantasm,” wrote Antoine Vergote, “than that of a God who demands the torturing of his own Son to death as satisfaction for his anger?” The notion of sacrifice has been a central feature of both ancient and modern cultures, and is connected to the ritual of blood-shedding. Since earliest times blood has been deemed to be the primary channel of the universal life force. To placate the angry life-giver on high, blood-letting or blood-shedding became the means of appeasement or propitiation, and it was further established by the myth of the ravaging male hunter, killing animals so that his tribe could feed, live and survive. The death of Jesus was taken to be the ultimate act of sacrifice.

The notion of ‘victory’ then crept in to the rhetoric along with the notion of a ruling vindictive God who seemed, particularly in the Jewish scriptures, to be pleased with the slaying of his enemies and whose glory was enhanced by victory of the sword. These two ideas became entangled in the Jesus story, and the idea of salvation by death on a cross gained momentum which rendered further scapegoating unnecessary.

The concept of scapegoating has now been extensively studied, and it now appears that blood sacrifice is in fact an invention of a patriarchal period which began about ten thousand years ago, which evolved from an anthropomorphic world-view, and which saw man as the measure of all things. There is scant evidence for it before that time.

For Jesus, however, nonviolence is at the heart of the new dispensation, including love and forgiveness even for enemies. The early church missed the message of life and ended up exalting death as the primary catalyst for redemptive liberation.

The cult of redemptive violence has inspired many to shed their blood and to give their lives for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity; but it is a male martyrology promoted by a male-led church.

The Kingdom of God, however, is about life radically lived to the full; resurrection is not so much about death as about the affirmation of that kind of life. The woman's contribution to improving the quality of life through care for the land, mothering, home-making, caring for the sick and poor, and educating the marginalized has never

seemed heroic enough to satisfy a bloodthirsty, sacrificial system.

## Ecclesiastical domestication

Following Jesus has become concomitant with allegiance to one or other Christian denomination. The churches themselves are patterned on the organisation from Roman society. Their formats camouflage what Jesus stood for.

The strategies Jesus used were both paradoxical and subversive – paradoxical because the liberation which people yearned for would be delivered not by imperial and political intervention but by an empowerment from the ground up; and subversive because it undermined royal patronage to its very core. The one and only time Jesus approved of people calling him a king, he chose to ride on a donkey whereas a king always rode on a horse.

Jesus' behaviour must have astounded the people of his culture, because he was forever breaking religious laws and flouting religious tradition. As Leonardo Boff puts it, he demythologised religious language, deritualised piety, emancipated the message of God from its connection to one religious community, and secularised the means of salvation.

The twelve wanted Jesus to be an heroic messianic figurehead, and they became increasingly disillusioned as well as disabused. St Paul in many ways understood better the inclusive, liberating vision of Jesus, but by the time of the incorporation of Christianity into the Roman world in the fourth century, the church had become institutionalised according to a paradigm that betrayed Jesus' original vision of the Kingdom. From there on, ecclesiastical domestication took over.

Today, that domestication is in disarray. The institutional church struggles to mobilise the credibility of its disenchanting followers. The firm hand of ecclesiastical control is rapidly losing its grip as people grow up and engage with their faith not as passive children but as questioning adults. This is precisely what the church has had difficulty in appropriating, indoctrinated as its members have been in subservience, in obedience through suffering, and in a kind of infantile

mind-set. It has taken two thousand years for Christian people to catch up with Jesus who leads us to an adult faith. We are now seeing several ruptures and schisms emerging in the contemporary domesticated churches.

## Middle-class respectability

As a maverick visionary of the new reign of God, Jesus shook the foundations of his inherited culture. To the religious figureheads and authorities, he was a pest whom they wanted to get rid of. Two thousand years later, Jesus is still held captive by middle-class respectability. Christians are expected to behave according to culturally sanctioned norms of allegiance, fidelity, obedience and respect; they are expected to conform with the laws of both church and state, and to accept the hierarchical structures that prevail in developed societies.

Although Christians are expected to be kind and charitable, too much talk about rights and justice is considered left-wing and perceived to be alien to true Christianity.

The following of Jesus is not a respectable religion and was never meant to be. Christians are called to be different and should be recognised as *being* different, otherwise they have lost their ability to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

In conventional understandings, martyr-like suffering is the unique mark of Christian dedication. The martyr option, however, is based on spurious rhetoric arising from the theory of redemptive violence. In the present time at least, the option to live for Jesus rather than to die for Jesus is what is truly heroic, for it requires a radical commitment to the values embodied in the vision of the new reign of God.

## Distorted personalism

What is truly revealing about divine incarnation is that salvific power in human life resides in connectedness and not in single individuals. The cherished paradigm of personhood in the west is that of the self-reliant, individualized, rational, responsible human being. This is an understanding originally developed in ancient

Greece and in writers like Plato and Aristotle; but it is an understanding of personhood notably absent from the indigenous cultures of Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. In those cultures there is an alternative understanding far more widespread than the west assumes, namely that “at all times I am the sum of my relationships and that is what constitutes my identity”. It assumes that for much of our evolutionary development humans were seen to be enmeshed in and connected not only in tribes but also with nature.

Separation is probably the single most distinctive feature of the western viewpoint, and it breeds alienation, including setting ourselves apart from nature and over against it – the relational web of life through which everything is begotten, grows and thrives. So if we desecrate and exploit, it is not creation we will destroy, but ourselves.

Jesus belongs totally and unambiguously to the relational way of being human and should never have been imprisoned in the limited construct of the autonomous self. (*cont. overleaf*)

## A Letter from Zimbabwe

Dear World

I am a 16-year-old person living in Zimbabwe. I think the time has come for a more direct appeal, and so I am writing to you, the world. Maybe, just maybe, there might be someone out there who can help us...

It's tough here now. The inflation rate is so high that if you don't change money within six hours you could get half the amount of foreign currency that you would have originally received.

We're starving now; people die around us. In the last year alone at least ten people associated personally with my family have died despite the fact that they were only middle-aged. Other people don't make it to middle age. They don't even make it past childhood. Our once-proud nation is on its knees. We flee or die. This beautiful, bountiful once-rich land has become a living hell. We have dealt with it until now; we have made a plan. That was the Zimbabwean motto: “MAKE A PLAN”.

But now we can't make a plan. We're too tired, too broken, too bankrupt. We can't afford life, and life does not cost much, not really.

We cannot afford to eat, we cannot afford to drink, and we cannot afford to make mistakes, because if we do we die. We don't have the capital to support ourselves, and those few who do, have to deal with the horror of watching their friends and family fall into absolute poverty as they cannot afford to help them.

We're waiting desperately for a great hand

to pick us up out of the dirt because at the moment we are outnumbered by Fate herself, and so we close our eyes and pray. We have fought for too long, and have been brought to breaking point. We simply stand, heads down, and bear it. Our spirit has gone; we are defeated. After a valiant struggle of over fifteen years, we have been broken.

There is no will left, no spirit. Like a horse that has been beaten until it cannot fight anymore; we are the same, and, like that horse, we stand dusty, scarred and alone, with dried blood on our sides and lash marks along our flanks. Our ribs too stand out; our hide is also dull.

Our eyes are glazed, our throats are parched, and our knees struggle to support us so that we stand with splayed legs to bear the brunt of the next beating, too dejected even to whimper... This is my plea. The thought of picking ourselves up again is sickening; one can only take so many blows before oblivion is reached, and we are teetering on the rim of the bottomless void. One more push will be the end of us all...

There must be someone out there who can do something. There must be someone out there who cares! We are a destroyed nation, and the world sits back and watches, pretending they cannot hear our cries. I appeal to you all... Help us!

**This letter was originally published in a Cape Town newspaper.**

He always points the finger away from the individual self towards the Kingdom – the fullness of his relational self. The Kingdom as a relational matrix in its largest and most inclusive sense.

## Inspid religiosity

Patriarchal cultures breed a climate of dependency. Some are in charge and the rest are subservient, having a role of passive obedience. Inevitably the metaphor of parenting arises, and we see this in every major religious culture – God as father, church as mother, our relationship with either as that of children, and being adopted into family as the primary icon. The adults are in charge. So Jesus is popularly depicted as a gentle, obedient child in a family system that honours the priority of the patriarch (God), and where he is the first-born son who preserves the family's lineage and future. It is an image in which the discipleship of equals has little hope of surviving.

Certain behavioural traits then emerge. The ruling powers encourage a devotion-type spirituality based on obeisance which assures divine rescue for the faithful, answers one's questions and requests, cultivates a feeling of unworthiness, with ritual practices designed to earn the favour of the ruling deity. Spiritual literature tends to sponsor fervour, a personal relationship with God, and salvation depicted as something uniquely individualistic. A responsibility for God's creation is almost a distraction from the real work of personal salvation.

From this grew the culture of inspid religiosity – and it is not easily dismantled for it is a kind of spiritualised hope that sustains and nourishes millions of people in the poorer parts of the world, often in the face of horrendous oppression and injustice. It keeps them from challenging fiercely the powers that be, as Jesus would mean them to do.

He promulgated a view about God that is characterised by engagement, participation, liberation, and compassion.

The Greek word for compassion is a verb, not a noun as in English translations. It means an intense visceral empathy with the suffering of the other, a word full of guts, vitality, righteous anger, and an insatiable desire to see justice done.

It is not well rendered by 'pity' or 'mercy', the insipid English words often used to translate this otherwise fiery term. Of all the urgent needs for the Christian church today, none is more pressing than the need to reclaim the prophetic stance of Jesus. Anything less perpetuates the cult of inspid spiritualism and the ideology of compromise.

## Black domination

Christianity is rapidly becoming a religion of the Southern Hemisphere. Seventy five per cent of the world's Catholics live in the Southern Hemisphere, with similarly large percentages of other denominations. This statistic presents us with both a challenge and some daunting questions.

Christianity must learn to transcend the white ethnicity which millions assume to be endemic to Christian identity. Yet black cultures today are precisely the ones that betray Jesus. They perpetuate devotional religiosity which is largely at variance with the realities of their daily life and very weak on confronting major questions of justice in the world. The growing body of black clergy tends to perpetuate power and control to a degree that makes western imperialism look tame and benign. African bishops and priests look to their local chiefs as primary models – men who command absolute power and unquestioned authority. Yet that model does not derive from their history or tradition but rather from the era of European colonialism.

In the two-thirds of the world of Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America, patriarchal monopoly still allures people with deadly attraction. So there is an expectation that women dress in a manner to expose as little as possible of their body, a patriarchal desire to keep women invisible. It becomes worse when it is heavily reinforced and protected by mainstream religion. It is the lure of internalised oppression. It is a deadly ideology.

Demographically, then, the future of Christendom is in the hands of the South, but whether the Christian South can honour the radically liberating vision of its founder is a formidable question. The current prospects do not look good. Diarmuid O'Murchu *Catching up with Jesus* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company. 2005

# Desire above all to prophesy

By Robert Jensen

It may be the fate of humans always to believe that we live at the most important time in history, that our moment is the decisive moment. But even factoring in this tendency toward collective self-centeredness, it is difficult to ignore that today we face multiple crises — economic, political, cultural, and, most crucially, ecological — which have the potential to make ongoing life on the scale we know it impossible.

Predictions about the specifics of the trajectory are beyond our capabilities, but we can know — if we choose to know — that we must solve problems for which there are no apparent solutions. These threats have been building for the past 10,000 years, intensifying in the past two centuries to levels that only the foolhardy would ignore. The bills for the two most destructive revolutions in human history — the agricultural and industrial revolutions — are coming due, sooner than we think.

Never before in this world have we had such a need for strong, principled, charismatic leadership. In the United States, where such leadership is most desperately needed at this crucial moment, we can look around the national scene — whether in politics, business, religion, or intellectual life — and see that no one is up to the task.

It would be seductive, as we stand at the edge of these cascading crises, to look for leaders. But where would they lead us? How would they answer the unanswerable questions and solve the unsolvable problems?

Better to recognize that we are at a moment when leaders cannot help us. Perhaps there are no inspiring figures on the scene because authentic leaders know that we are heading into new territory for which old models of movements and politics are insufficient.

So, let us stop looking for leaders, stop praying for prophets. Instead, let us recognize that we



all must strive to be prophets now. It is time for each of us to take responsibility for speaking in the prophetic voice.

I don't mean this in the shallow sense of the term prophecy — claiming to be able to see the future. The complexity of these crises makes any claims to predict what lies ahead utterly absurd. All we can say is that, without a radical change in our relationship to each other and the non-human world immediately, we're in for a rough ride in the coming decades.

Although I think the consequences of that ride are likely to be more overwhelming than ever before, certainly people at other crucial times in history have understood that they had to face crises without definitive understanding or clear paths.

The barriers to that understanding are not only in the world but also in ourselves, and facing our collective failures is most important. A 25-year-old Karl Marx wrote about this in 1843:

## To denounce injustice with passion requires clarity

*The internal difficulties seem to be almost greater than the external obstacles. For although no doubt exists on the question of "Whence," all the greater confusion prevails on the question of "Whither". Not only has a state of general anarchy set in among the reformers, but everyone will have to admit to himself that he has no exact idea what the future ought to be. On the other hand, it is precisely the advantage of the new trend that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old one. Hitherto philosophers have had the solution of all riddles lying in their writing desks, and the stupid, exoteric world had only to open its mouth for the roast pigeons of absolute knowledge to fly into it.<sup>1</sup>*

We should instead understand the prophetic as the calling out of injustice, the willingness to confront not only the abuses of the powerful but

1. Karl Marx, letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843. [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43\\_09.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm)

our own complicity. To speak prophetically requires us first to see honestly – both how our world is structured by illegitimate authority that causes suffering beyond the telling, and how we who live in the privileged parts of the world are implicated in that suffering. In that same letter, Marx went on to discuss the need for this kind of “ruthless criticism”:

*“But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to ruthless criticism of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.”*

To speak prophetically is to refuse to shrink from what we discover about the injustice of the world. It is to name the wars of empire as unjust; to name an economic system that leaves half the world in abject poverty as unjust; to name the dominance of men, of heterosexuals, of white people as unjust. And it is to name the human destruction of Creation as the most profound human crime in our time on this planet. At the same time, to speak prophetically is to refuse to shrink from our own place in these systems. We must confront the powers that be, and ourselves.

## Most of us cannot endure that kind of isolation

What can we say about this task of speaking in the prophetic voice? The prophets of the Old Testament offer some guidance.

They did not see themselves as having special status, but rather were ordinary people. When the king’s priest confronted Amos for naming the injustice of his day, Amazi’ah called Amos a “seer” and commanded him to pack his bags and head to Judah and “never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom”. Amos rejected the label. (Amos 7:14-15)

Nor did the prophets seek out their calling. Jeremiah told God he did not know how to speak, claiming to be only a youth, but God didn’t buy the excuse. (Jer 1:7-10)

Nor was it typically much fun to fill the role of a prophet. On this, Jeremiah was blunt. (Jer 23:9)

And, finally, the Old Testament reminds us that to speak prophetically involves more than just articulating abstract principles which are relatively easy to proclaim. For example, these inspiring words from Micah are quoted often:

*“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Mic 6:8)

That is an eloquent way to summarize our core obligations, but at that level of generality it is one that virtually all would endorse. Cite that verse and everyone will nod approvingly. But remember that Micah also was calling out the injustice around him, often in harsh terms. (Mic 6:12-15 & 7:2-4)

To denounce injustice with such passion requires clarity in our own hearts, minds, and souls. To speak with that clarity to others requires that we have first examined our own lives. When we call out others, they typically ask us – and rightfully so – whether we have asked the same questions of ourselves.

Our task is not to shine the light on others, but to shine the light through ourselves onto that which is unjust in the world. When we have been honest with ourselves, that light gains intensity and focus as it passes through us.

That process is not easy, especially in a culture that offers those of us who are privileged a steady stream of rewards for suppressing these thoughts and not facing these struggles. It is easy to turn away from injustice and turn to supermarkets with endless shelves of food, to glasses overflowing with wine, to television stories that lull us to sleep on those nights when food and drink have not erased completely our troubling thoughts of the world.

It’s also not easy to speak prophetically because in unjust systems the people who carry out the system’s orders usually don’t seem to be bad people.

The corporate CEO who throws workers out of their jobs to increase profits also is a great softball coach on the weekends. The colonel who orders cluster bombs dropped in civilian areas, ensuring that children will die for years to come, also is a caring parent. The real estate developer who destroys habitat to put up McMansions also keeps a lovely garden at home. And all of them, no doubt, contribute generously to their churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples.

Many of us, in fact, do jobs that we know contribute to the unjust distribution of resources and the steady erosion of the planet’s ability to sustain

life. I don't exempt myself from this; I work at the University of Texas at Austin, where – no matter how much critical material I teach in my courses – I help legitimate an ideological factory system that certifies students to go off in the world and fire those workers, drop those bombs, and destroy that habitat.

So how are we to find the strength to speak in the prophetic voice? The answer is in the collective. Unless one is truly a saint, it is difficult to resist all the temptations and confront self and others without support. We think of prophets as lonely figures who have stepped out, or been cast out, of a society for speaking the truth bluntly. But even if an occasional idiosyncratic figure can speak from such a solitary place, most of us cannot endure that kind of isolation. So, we must speak prophetically together, not in unison or in lockstep – speaking prophetically means speaking from one's own heart, which will mean our voices are always distinctive – but in solidarity.

## ...a soulless culture in which mega churches flourish

But even when we are surrounded by those who share our concerns for the world and for each other, there are always risks if we are to take up this role. To claim the prophetic voice that is in each of us, we have to assess those risks so that we can deal with them sensibly. Here I want to borrow from an exercise developed by Allan G Johnson.<sup>2</sup> At a conference for activists working on issues around racial justice, Johnson posed three questions about risk. My slightly modified version of his list is:

>What are the risks you would have to take (or have taken) if you actively work for social justice in a way that is self-critical and challenges powerful institutions and people?

>What are the risks if you don't do that work?

>If you take the risks in question one, in order to survive and thrive what do you need from: yourself/others/institutions and organisations (public and private)?

When people with relatively high levels of privilege do not make a conscious attempt to assess

2. Johnson has written two widely used texts about power and privilege: *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005); and *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

accurately these things, we tend to overestimate the risks of acting and underestimate the risks of not acting. In other words, privilege makes it easy to avoid our responsibilities. So, it's important for us to consider these questions carefully, not just for what we learn about ourselves but to help us in reaching out to others. We need support, and others need us to support them, to understand the risks they face. We need each other to encourage us to take risks.

We live in a society that appears to be awash in political talk and religious activity. But, in fact, we live in a deeply depoliticised society, full of political chatter on cable television but lacking spaces in which we can have meaningful discussions about how to address problems that politicians often ignore.

We live in a largely soulless culture in which mega churches flourish, but many of us search for something beyond doctrine and dogma to help us answer questions that preachers often ignore.

We live in a world in which politics is too often little more than public spectacle and religion is too easily cordoned off as a private matter.

In such a society, we don't need more politicians who avoid the pressing problems that have no apparent solutions. We don't need more preachers afraid of the questions that go beyond the available answers. And we don't need a prophet. We need prophets, ordinary people like us who are willing to tap into the prophetic voice that I believe is within us all.

To speak in that voice is not to claim exclusive insight or definitive knowledge; it is not to speak arrogantly. To speak in the prophetic voice is not to proclaim the truth self-righteously but to claim our rightful place in the collective struggle to understand the truth – which we do in order to deepen our capacity to love. When we call out injustice, when we find the courage to speak truths in a fallen world, it can be easy to be consumed by our anger and our grief, to lose track of that love. I know this, painfully, from experience.

Let us seek knowledge. Pray that we stay strong in our faith in each other, that we help each other find the courage to speak prophetically. But, more than anything, let us remember to keep our hearts open so that we do not lose the capacity to love more.

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This text is from a sermon delivered in August.

## review

### *Merciful Meekness – Becoming a Spiritually Integrated Person*

by Kerry Walters

Paulist Press 2004, ISBN 0809141191

rrp \$24.95, pp 137

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

This book attempts to make sense of some of the anomalies between traditional Christian spirituality and the philosophical context of western society today. The strain of living suspended between these differing – often antagonistic – world views leaves little energy left over for many of us to get on with our Christian vocation.

Kerry Walters tackles this dissonance and confusion between one's spiritual life and the public environment with the bracing remark that Christ came to shake things up, not hand out canned platitudes. "We Christians should follow his example... Otherwise we risk becoming whited condominiums."

He uses Friedrich Nietzsche's savage vivisection of the Christian values of meekness and mercy to demonstrate how the 20<sup>th</sup> Century world view undermined traditional spiritual teachings of the Church.

We dwell in a climate whose core values and beliefs are Nietzschean, Walters says, arguing that this German philosopher was possibly the most articulate prophet of the age.

Nietzsche taught that meekness and mercy are morally repugnant as well as being incompatible; that they are not what they seem – meekness characterised by timidity and spineless indecisiveness; mercy by dominion and manipulation.

Private contempt for meekness went public in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, writes Walters.

Christ's clear instruction in the Beatitudes was to cultivate *both* meekness and mercy. Although the qualities of each virtue may require a different attitude, a balanced person had what the Medievals called *integritas* – "a stable but creatively adaptable harmonisation of beliefs and

motivations, intuitions and concepts, intentions and actions".

Some of us are more naturally inclined to meekness, others to mercy, but full personhood requires a creative synthesis.

Walters investigates Nietzsche's notorious distinction between master and slave. The "blond beast" embraces freedom and passion, but the slave clings to the herd and a staid, unruffled existence. In Nietzsche's view the Christian god epitomises weakness – meek persons have, in our common parlance, the lowly status of mice.

Ruthless self-examination is one of Walters' tools for examining Nietzsche's premises. He finds that although we may try to segregate our lives into airtight secular and churchy compartments, we never really succeed. Deep-seated fidelity to the will to power inevitably expresses itself in all arenas of existence.

### This person has tamed the savage beast within

We dwell in an internal environment of moods, emotions, ideas and temperament which can be harshly inhospitable. In this environment, the self-deception of rationalisation can re-label and redefine our own failings – a tendency Nietzsche called "transvaluation". Here, intolerance becomes zeal; pharisaic nit-picking masquerades as fidelity to the law.

Our task however, is to restore congruity between outer and inner worlds – and this begins with meekness.

Jesus himself (the Word) displayed remarkable self-knowledge. Through him we learn that meekness is a spiritual strength that bestows clarity on who we really are... warts an' all.

The meek person has a poverty replete with riches unimagined by Nietzschean masters or power-hungry go-getters, because this person has tamed the savage beast within.

A wild beast can't tame its own nature, as Paul discovered: "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand..."

## review

By nature, an unrestrained feral will to power enslaves, so that the unmeek person becomes a conscript in the service of megalomania and that most ferocious of all predators – self-will. This saga ends in the horror of spiritual destitution – hopeless entrapment in the labyrinth of the beast.

The only way out of servitude is to acknowledge powerlessness and give up the struggle. This is not cowardice but a clear-headed and honest confession of our own limitations – poverty tames the beast.

Paul recognised such powerlessness and relinquishment of self-control in the Crucifixion. “We know that our old self was crucified with Christ...” Rom 6.6. He discovered that God’s power is made perfect in weakness – in dependence, in the loss of arrogance. We may suffer, and we will die. But we cannot perish.

Mercy is identified by Nietzsche with pity which, he says, disrupts the natural course of evolution – the weak should be allowed to perish.

Pity observes the suffering but does not recognise the person – an “object of pity”. William James, the American philosopher called this the “sentimentalist fallacy” – professing loving concern for the welfare of abstract “humanity”, while all the time aloofly disregarding the well-being of individual humans.

There is a difference between the philological roots of the words for mercy in Greek and in Hebrew – the former describing a passive emotional response and the latter a way of being.

Recognition of shared personhood prepares the way for compassion. Henri Nouwen calls this “voluntary displacement”, and it involves letting go of judgementalism – “it’s utterly unimportant whether the suffering arises from foolish or even sinful choices”.

Walters engages the imagery of the lion and the lamb to work with Nietzsche’s premise of the incompatibility of meekness and mercy. Meekness is the lamb who is most comfortable in the green pastures of quiet gentleness and withdrawn contemplation. Mercy is the roaring lion that robustly engages with the world.

The difference between these two virtues is marked by *freedom from* in the case of meekness; *freedom to* in the case of mercy. This precipitates a discussion of the nature of freedom – characterised by Nietzsche as radical individualism.

But long ago, another of our founding fathers, Aristotle, identified the human being as a political, or social, animal – *zoon politikon*. In First Century Athens, the world of Aristotle, Paul claimed that communion, not isolation is the order of things. (Rom 12.4-5)

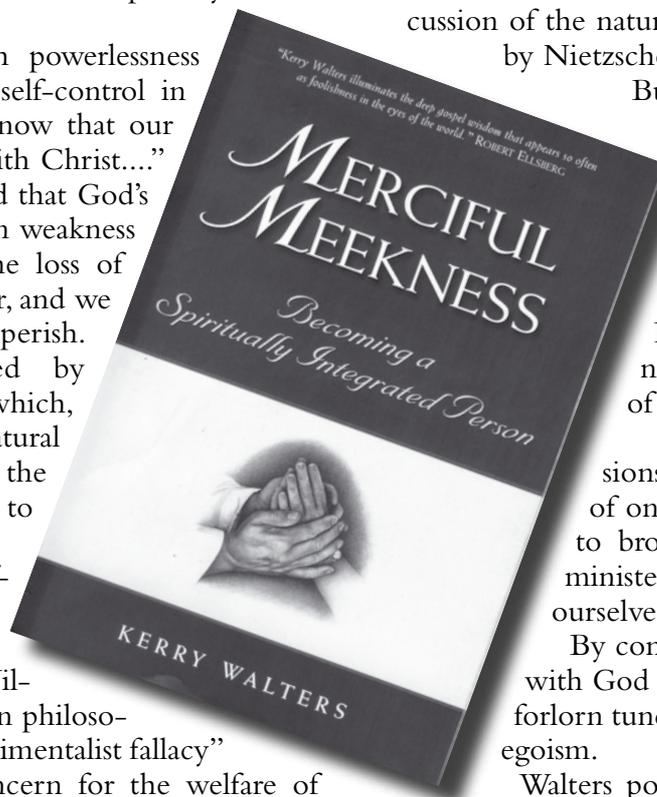
As persons we are extensions of the divine Person and of one another. In showing mercy to broken wayfarers, we not only minister to God, we also minister to ourselves.

By contrast, attempts to sever all ties with God and one another exile us to a forlorn tundra of lonely and directionless egoism.

Walters points out that Peter, Paul and Luther all claim a dynamic of both subservient slave and free lord for the Christian. We acknowledge our dependence with gratitude and humility – when we admit everything, we enter into the way of meekness and are thereby liberated from the beast’s ravages.

We discover that God can bring peace, compassion and love through our wounds. The lion and the lamb lie down together.

The stylish typography of this little book makes it eminently readable. A good companion for a retreat or holiday.



## Hugh's books

From Hugh McGinlay

One of the gems that comes from Paulist Press in the USA is their series called Classics of Western Spirituality, which is quite simply a library of the great spiritual writers throughout the ages. The latest to reach us is ***Luther's Spirituality***, edited and translated by Philip Krey (0809139499, \$47.95) and it contains much of Luther's thoughts on how we believe and behave as Christians. The collection has most of Luther's best known writings on spirituality but also includes some previously neglected gems, including some of his writing while he was still an Augustinian monk. Highly recommended for people looking for new insights into the life and thinking of the great reformer.

Also from Paulist is Maureen Sullivan's ***The Road to Vatican II*** (0809142775, \$29.95). This highly readable book traces the story behind the Second Vatican Council, reminding us how the Roman Catholic Church moved from the rigid hierarchical model espoused by Pope Pius IX at Vatican I (1869-1870) to the collegial model that emerged under Pope John XXIII. She tells of the events and trends that lead up to the Council in a way that helps us understand this watershed in the history of the Church.

***Unexpected Grace – stories of faith, science and altruism***, by Bill Kramer, is a new title from Templeton Foundation Press (01599471124, \$34.95). This is a surprising book, in many ways. Most conferences tend to be in-bred affairs, but at their meeting, the contributors to this series – scientists and theologians – were deliberately trying to blur the traditional boundaries, looking for bridges and stories to cross academic disciplines, to break down perceived barriers between science and religion. The result is a collection of fascinating and compelling stories of people trying to make sense of complex issues, from the tragedy of the World Trade Center to the nature of racism, to the experience of forgiveness. These are captivating stories, reminding us that our common humanity is the fertile context of love in its various theological and scientific aspects.

I have read (twice!) John Carroll's new book ***The Existential Jesus*** from Scribe Publications

(1921215178, \$35). It has some fascinating insights into certain characters in the Gospels of Mark and John but I confess that I became increasingly uneasy about its failure to connect Mark and John with their faith communities as the context within which and for which these gospels were written.

In a similar way, the book seems not to notice that, long before Mark and John were written, the Christian community and its faith had already been shaped by their experience of the risen Christ, the teachings of Paul, the entire Old Testament, the presence of the Spirit. This is an entirely secular approach to the Jesus story – in my view, the story makes little sense outside a faith context.

Sections of the book are helpful and fascinating. The author knows his Greek and suggests new ways of translating the text to support his ideas. But often we are in areas of fantasy that pay little attention to contemporary biblical scholarship. Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on Mark is dismissed as "bewilderingly implausible" (p.17) and at one place (p.228) a suggestion by Raymond Brown is dismissed as "sheer guesswork" – a comment that for me sums up most of this book.

Yet I commend it for lots of reasons, not least that it is being read widely around Australia and theologians and biblical scholars need to be aware of its strengths as well as its shortcomings before making critical judgments about its message.

In August in Ballarat, we celebrated the publication of ***Taking Away the Pound*** by Elizabeth Dowling who lectures in the School of Theology at the Australian Catholic University's Aquinas Campus. The book from Continuum (9780567043641, \$195) is subtitled 'Women, theology and the parable of the pounds in the Gospel of Luke'. As the subtitle suggests, the book proposes that the parable of the pounds in Luke 19:11-28 is not simply another version of Matthew's parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) but is a paradigm for other Lukan characters who 'lose their pound' when they challenge unjust oppressors. The author has a special interest in connecting this situation to women in the

New Testament who resist patriarchal expectations and ideals. This is a very fine and scholarly book, all the more welcome because it comes from an Australian biblical scholar.

The story of women's ministry is also told in *This is our Story* by Janet Wootton (9780716206064, \$59.95, Epworth Press). It tells of the ministry of women in the Free Churches in the UK and probably reflects reality within those churches in Australia.

Hans Kung has a new book *Islam – Past, Present and Future* (9781851683772, \$79.95, Oneworld). In it, he examines Islam's fundamental beliefs and practices, outlines major schools of thought, and considers the positions of Islam on the urgent questions of our time. This is a significant contribution to our understanding of Islam from a renowned Christian scholar.

About a year ago, there was great excitement about a new publication called *Biblica: The Bible Atlas* – a social and historical journey through the lands of the Bible. Written by a team of international writers and distinguished academics and Bible scholars, and illustrated with more than 550 full-colour images from leading art galleries, museums, and collections from across the globe, it is the most authoritative and up-to-the-moment atlas of the Bible available in the world today.

Included among the team of international writers were four Australians – Margaret Beirne, Anna Grant-Henderson, Janet Healey and Mark O'Brien. The magnificent book had a sad history after publication when a dispute arose over an alleged flaw on the cover. Rainbow has managed to obtain around a hundred copies and it is highly unlikely that the book will ever be reprinted due to the enormous costs involved. The book (9780670029860) retails at \$120 and if you want a copy, I strongly advise that you get in fast!

SCM/Canterbury Press continues to impress with their SCM Studyguide series. The latest to reach us is *Christian Mission* by Stephen Spencer (9780334041085, \$49.95). The book explores the nature of Christian mission in contemporary post-modern society and is an excellent addition to the range of new books in an area of growing concern among all the churches.

Among DLT's recent releases, Jeremy Young's *The Violence of God and the War on Terror* (9780232526660, \$39.95) examines the uncomfortable connection between violence and religion,

suggesting that cycles of violence and violent behaviour are formative of both Christian theology and contemporary politics. The book makes for uncomfortable reading for us Christians in the context of perceived terrorist threats.

Australian author Denis McLaughlin from Australian Catholic University in Brisbane has a new title *Price of Freedom* (1863551204, \$45.00). This is a highly readable account of the life and contribution of Edmund Rice, Founder of the Christian Brothers, whose influence in education in Australia has been outstanding. The specific focus of the book is Rice's contribution as an educational leader and how that contribution was lost or ignored until recent times. The book will be of special interest to all who work in Christian education.

Two new books from Australian authors have recently reached us – both from Perth. Bill Loader's *The New Testament with Imagination* is subtitled 'A fresh approach to its writings and themes'. This really exciting book combines deep biblical scholarship with a concern for pastoral ministry that marks so much of the writing of this fine author.

Written for the non-specialist, he asks us to imagine the contexts of the chosen passages, a technique that works wonderfully well and, in the hands of this skilled author, is an excellent way of introducing the background and meaning of the texts. The book retails at \$27.95 (Eerdmans, 9780802827463) and is highly recommended.

The other Western Australian author is Alexander Jensen, a colleague of Bill Loader's at Murdoch University. His new book *Theological Hermeneutics* (SCM, 97803344029014, \$59.95) covers an area that is of increasingly critical importance in theology. What is the meaning of hermeneutics; what principles govern our interpretation of texts; how does culture affect interpretation; wherein lies any kind of 'authority' in how texts are interpreted? The book opens up the whole question of language – how it is used, how it changes over time, the danger of its being 'canonised' in the tradition. The author writes with authority but the book is also lively and approachable, covering the history of hermeneutics and the key schools that have influenced our approach to the topic. I found the book very satisfying.

Further details of the titles are on our website or you can consult your local Christian bookshop. [www.rainbowbooks.com.au](http://www.rainbowbooks.com.au)

# Vatican document fails PR test

By Andrew Hamilton

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith recently clarified the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches. Its document provoked mixed responses. Vatican officials insisted it said nothing new; many others, including Roman Catholics, found it offensive. Both responses were understandable. But taken together they pointed to a lack of attention in preparing such documents.



The Congregation addressed the view that the Roman Catholic Church is simply one of a number of brands offering the same product and that adherence to any church is simply a matter of individual choice. This attitude is part of the cultural air we breathe.

Against this view the Congregation insisted that Christian bodies must be judged by the extent to which their faith and structures represent the shape of the Early Church. All churches agree with this claim. But they define in different ways what continuity with the Early Church means.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches emphasise continuity in faith and structure, while Bible-based churches generally emphasise continuity in a particular form of faith. By these standards they judge whether particular Christian bodies truly represent Christ's Church.

In the Catholic theology that prevailed before the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church alone could claim to be Christ's Church. It drew sharp boundaries between the one true Church and other false churches.

The Second Vatican Council stressed the value of positive elements in other churches, insisting that God could work through these churches for the good of their members. Members of other churches shared Christian faith and their baptism was of decisive significance. The Council

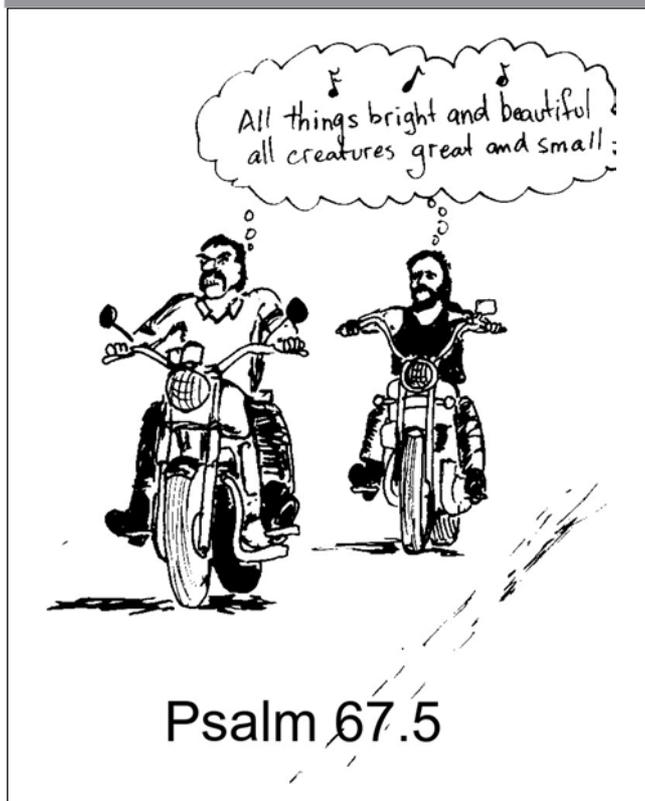
## Home Truths

reconciled this insight with its conviction that the Roman Catholic Church had a unique place in salvation by using the concept of participation. The Roman Catholic Church shares fully in the reality of Christ's Church. Other churches participate to greater and lesser degrees.

The Council caught the distinction in its statement that the Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, and by referring to other Christian bodies as ecclesial communities rather than as churches.

The image of participation has two corollaries. It makes less absolute the boundaries between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches. We cannot divide churches into true

## Paget's Parable



and false, but into greater and less. We must say that other churches and their ministries are not equivalent to the Roman Catholic Church, but we may not say that they are without value.

The image of participation also brings out the difference between the abstract shape of faith and church structure and the way in which faith is lived out. To say that the Roman Catholic Church uniquely embodies the faith and structured life of the Early Church does not imply that its structures function as Christ would have wanted, or work better than those of other churches.

From this perspective the goal of ecumenical endeavour is not, as Roman Catholics would

### ...a language that expresses the logic of participation

once have said, that other churches should return to Rome. The priority is that in all churches, their members' lives, their relationships and their structures correspond to Christ's values. If they are faithful their paths may lead to a form of unity that is today unimaginable.

That is the background to the document. But although it affirms the text of Vatican II, its context is different. Vatican II wanted to make space for conversation between churches and Christians by emphasising what they share. It shaped its decrees to ensure that they were open to those who were not Roman Catholic.

The Congregation's document emphasises the boundaries between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches by denying their equivalence. It is not concerned to win or to encourage those outside the Roman Catholic Church in their living of faith. For that reason when it quotes the statements of Vatican II that speak of ecclesial communities and of ministries, the passages have a different resonance than they had in the context of the Council. They seem to be judgemental and naturally give offence.

The document points to the need for the Roman Catholic Church to find a language that expresses the logic of participation. This will emphasise what they share in common, and will speak of differences in this light. It requires attending to the living faith of other churches

and not simply to their abstract deficiencies. It is a language that attends first to faces and only then to organisation. This document is lacking in this kind of attention.

In attentive conversation it is possible to say honestly that in Catholic understanding, only the Roman Catholic Church embodies structurally the fullness of church and ministry. But to imply that other churches are not really churches, and that their ministry is not really Christian ministry, would fail to attend to the way in which Christians, including Roman Catholics, commonly use words. The implication of the claim is gratuitously offensive. We should presume that the offence was not intended. But if it is to be avoided, a different kind of attention is needed.

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