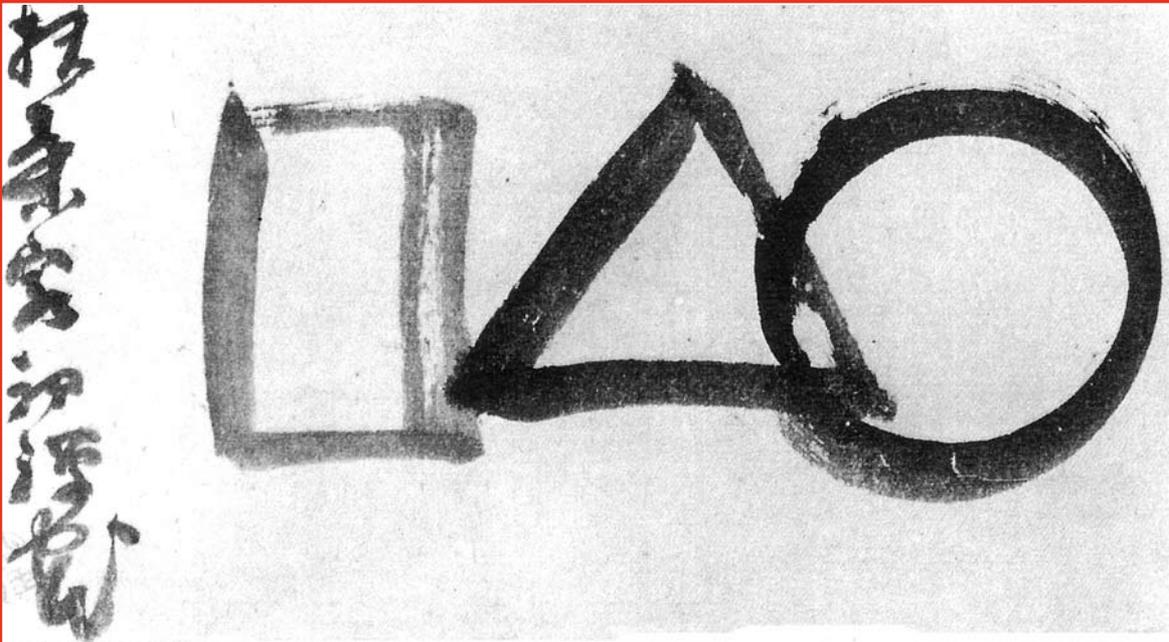


Common Theology

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The circle-triangle-square is Sengai's picture of the universe. The circle represents the infinite, and the infinite is the basis of all things. But the infinite in itself is formless. We humans endowed with senses and intellect demand tangible forms. Hence the triangle. The triangle is the beginning of all forms. Out of it comes the square. A square is two triangles. This doubling process continues indefinitely and thus we have an infinite multitude of things. In Chinese philosophy this is called 'the ten thousand things', which is the universe.

- INSIDE:**
- 2020 vision was shortsighted
 - Church wants a voice but not a conversation
 - Views from Gafcon and Lambeth

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



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From the Editor

The world moved to Beijing in August and the courteous exchanges between the prime ministers of China and Australia looked oddly old-fashioned amidst the political ruck of the Olympic Games. It seemed good to be here, far from the London/Washington axis, on the brink of a new world order which includes Asia.

Before his untimely death in June, the late Christopher Newell wrote for *Common Theology* an intimate account of Australia's 2020 Summit, sharing his hopes for a different kind of government in this part of the world. He has been a faithful subscriber and we are privileged that he is published in these pages at last.

In this edition I have taken the step of writing an article on the pernicious state of church/media relations. I was prompted to this by the spectacle of World Youth Day 08 in Sydney, and the pain of watching the impermeable membrane between world and church tear a little then, just as quickly, repair itself.

The two Anglican world conferences competing for media attention this winter were Lambeth and Gafcon (Global Anglican Future Conference) – the latter a revolt against the doctrinal path the Anglican Church is taking. We publish an account of some of the grievances which led to Gafcon, by Sydney's Dr Mark Thompson. There seems to have been a great deal of heat and very little light on this disagreement, from the point of view of the on-looker. Perhaps this article will address some of the confusion and clarify some differences which are felt so keenly by this group.

An unfortunate theme has emerged in this edition bagging contemporary society for its toxic effects on the human spirit. But whilst recognising this we can also be grateful for the formerly unheard of blessings of health, leisure and domestic plenty capitalism has brought us.

Common Theology lives from hand to mouth, on very slim resources. Like all independent publications, it is a venture of faith, albeit on sound business principles. Small journals fill a niche not catered for in the corporate sector or on the Internet, where a limited number of people can make a deep encounter. To do this we have to remain flexible in our use of resources. We could not publish in Autumn this year but your subscription will be rolled over to take account of that. Perhaps we should call this an 'incidental' journal, or a periodical, instead of a quarterly?

Maggie Helass

2020 vision was shortsighted

By Christopher Newell

In April more than a thousand Australians responded to the invitation by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to get together to talk about a long-term strategy for the nation's future.



In this article I will tentatively seek to identify some of the ways in which the 20/20 Summit was both a good thing and a devastating event for participants. I came away from it feeling privileged and depressed at the same time – a paradoxical mix of emotions reflecting the significant but under-explored spiritual dimension to the summit.

I never expected to be selected for the conference and indeed it was only at the last minute that somebody nominated me. I have a variety of claims to minor fame associated with some of the boards I sit on, my positions as Associate Professor of Medical Ethics at the University of Tasmania and even as Canon Theologian at St David's Cathedral, Hobart.

But I know that I was nominated most specifically because of my daily experience of being reliant upon health care.

We came together to talk about ten major policy challenges facing the country including productivity; education, skills, training; science and innovation; the future of the Australian economy; population; sustainability; climate change; water; the future of our cities; future directions for rural industries and rural communities; a long-term national health strategy; strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion; options for the future of Indigenous Australia; the future of the arts, film and design; the future of Australian governance—renewed democracy, a more open government (including the role of the media), the structure of the federation, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens; Australia's future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world.

Inevitably my experience is influenced by the particular stream that I participated in – fostering a long-term national health strategy. Yet it was also informed by my daily experience of being a person with a disability, who uses a wheelchair, oxygen therapy, and high dose painkillers to keep going. It was those realities that I brought to the summit.

Here is how I introduced myself to participants on the 2020 website:

“I grew up in Queensland as a person with multiple and life-threatening disabilities, failed at school and had the formative experience of working in a sheltered workshop. I have spent years of my life, from childhood onwards, in a variety of institutional settings. I was dealing with my own mortality from a very young age. Having moved with my family to Tasmania I still remember being refused entrance to a degree program at the University of Tasmania – the same institution at which I am now Associate Professor of Medical Ethics.”

Sunday is no longer a day to plan religious observance

Very real questions that I faced were: how do I participate in such an event and live out my theology? How can I identify and nourish the sacred? Where is the spiritual dimension? Evelyn Crotty talks of spirituality in terms of “What it means to live, feel, see, experience and touch more authentically the sacred around me”.

It was clear to me that the spiritual dimension was deeply there at the conference – but unremarked, even shunned with the exception of token indigenous participation.

The nature of a secular Australia, where it is a disadvantage in public life to be a religious type, asserted itself in the planning of the weekend. Sunday is no longer a day where we are allowed to plan religious observance – or not if we want to participate in the *polis*.

The 2020 Summit was an important and devastating experience. Its importance lay in the bringing together of a thousand people of

good will to imagine the future. It was a vital opportunity for citizens to seek to engage in the activities of the *polis* – reminiscent of its early Greek origins. Its inspiration clearly drew upon the activities and ideals of New Labour in the UK in the Blair years.

Perhaps the most important aspect is that the famous, powerful and ordinary rubbed shoulders in imagining the future. A real highlight was when indigenous voices spoke of important steps in healing our nation. My quiet times – few and far between – will always be treasured as I listened to the stories associated with why people were selected. Such moments are nourishing and build connection.

Yet there was also a sense of devastation where I felt as if my life experience and reality were so different from the norm narrated at the summit. In particular I struggled to translate into words my life experiences of daily being dependent upon the health system into a future scenario, to which others without that experience could relate.

I struggled to translate my life experiences of daily dependence upon the health system

As I sat there in my wheelchair with my nasal prongs inserted in the requisite “days of our lives” manner I did not feel very important. Yet I was increasingly aware of how such life experience is needed in the areas of health and welfare – and how such powerlessness may paradoxically be so valuable.

One of the real challenges for the organisers of the 2020 Summit was to bring people together and create community in such small space of time. Telling experiences of whether or not I belonged and what was important about the 2020 Summit occurred well before our arrival – in particular, the realisation that we were in the hands of an organising machine oriented towards the media.

I was called by a friend who told me she had opened the newspaper to find I had been included – yet I only had the formal letter of invitation a week later. So many knew about it before I did – a very strange and somewhat

alienating experience. A few other delegates told me of a similar experience.

On my way to the summit I was privileged to travel from Sydney in the pointy end of the aircraft – travelling with several NSW Labor political power figures. There is a certain attitude and approach exuded by those who know the reality of power and privilege. It was fascinating to hear them talk as they prepared for the summit and discussed it amongst themselves. They knew what they wanted. The comments made about a republic (and their opinion of the public for not passing the referendum) will forever remain with me as a testimony to the importance of ordinary citizens over against power elites.

As a wheelchair-user I was soon reminded of how unimportant I was – a normal experience in my life. When I arrived I found that rather than joining all the other delegates who were quickly processed and placed on buses, I had to wait for the inevitable wheelchair taxi that took an hour to come. Rather than having wheelchair accessible buses the three of us who needed wheelchair-access were given separate arrangements. It was the start of an important lesson with regard to the weekend – of course everyone is equal, it is just that some are more equal than others.

The hour that I had sitting in the cold waiting for the wheelchair taxi was a great experience as I observed the delegates arriving from their planes. Some had determined looks on their faces, folders in their hands. They knew exactly why they were here. The famous and ordinary were all headed for the parliament – and eventually I made it there as well.

The opening ceremony of the summit was by far the highlight and a spiritual event in itself. I have little doubt all of us were touched by the deep ceremonial aspect of indigenous people opening the summit and using their wisdom. Yet this profound sense of the sacred also left me with a disturbing question – for all that we were honouring indigenous people and their wisdom, where was the wisdom of indigenous people and how was it to be enacted in the whole of the summit? Not just in the opening event, but in the way that we went about doing our work? Deep listening is so important in indigenous wisdom

and also in great western spiritual traditions, but where was it allowed during the summit?

Such questions became even more urgent to me at the summit plenaries in the Great Hall of Parliament House – filled with noise and flashing images, rather than silence and the opportunity to reflect. The summit organisers used music to create a sense of occasion and as we assembled we were assailed with noise and images on the screen. It left me deeply desiring time for silence.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, an Aboriginal Elder from Daly River, expresses spirituality this way: “What I want to talk about is a special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called Dadirri.

“Dadirri is an inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call ‘contemplation’. A big part of Dadirri is listening.

“In our Aboriginal way, we learned to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good or useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn – not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening,

waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years. My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home with it.

“They have lived for thousands of years with Nature’s quietness. My people today recognise and experience in this quietness the great Life-giving Spirit, the Father of us all. We all have to try to listen to the God within us, to our own country and to one another. Our culture is different. We are asking our fellow Australians to take time to know us; to be still and to listen to us.”

In the spirituality of Indigenous people we can see startling similarities with the emphasis upon silence and relationship with others found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, as I understand our Indigenous spirituality, and its emphasis upon the importance of the land, we can find some similarities with the Hebrew Bible. Land as sacred space and as an integral part of spirituality, is perhaps one of the most under-realised aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

My conclusion is that only with deep listening and space can we really *do* public policy and only with listening and space can real dreaming of the future be done. The hurried focus on outcomes when we had not built relationship was devastating.

Common Theology

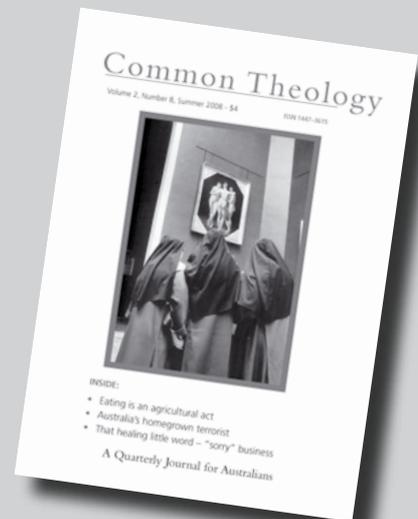
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Diana Roper
Hervey Bay Qld



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How can I dream with someone I do not know well and with whom I have not yet developed trust? In particular someone I have not broken bread with? How can I dream when so much of our shared time was full of blaring music rather than the wisdom found in shared quiet and reflection? How can I feel valued when so much of our imagining together was built upon a cult of celebrity and a desire for fame? The front-page photos of the beautiful Hugh Jackman and Cate Blanchett (with baby) reflected the central role given to celebrity.

Many welcomed such an involvement of celebrities. I wondered why we could not place the emphasis on ordinary Australians – and of course realised it would not have got the media attention. Indeed the desire for celebrity is so important in Australia that it was clearly used in the narration of the 2020 Summit.

We are focussed on hi-tech solutions yet these do not address my underlying fears and concerns

The tacit values associated with the summit were fascinating – a mix of the virtues and consequentialism. The focus on outcomes and its acceptance by all was fascinating. As I sat with my groups I was deeply aware of how I needed to spend so much time listening to stories and talking with my colleagues. But we distilled people's wisdom into a few words on a whiteboard, which then translated to larger groups.

What could theology offer to such a process I wondered? Perhaps rather than focusing on a consequentialist ethos, could we not have spent more time listening to stories? But that would mean less time to focus on a document of outcomes for the Prime Minister. There were too many times when something that I said was translated into a few words for the whiteboard as “You mean ...” when I did not mean that at all.

My suggestion is that the stories were more important than the outcomes that were recorded. At one stage I imagined a country where in 2020 each person knows they are loved and have a valued place in society, yet this was dismissed

as not fitting into the focus on generating a few important but ultimately jingoistic words.

No better example is to be found than in the focus of some delegates and the media on the idea of a Bionic Eye by 2020. (As it subsequently emerged this will be a reality well before 2020.) It struck me that this was an expression of the underlying desires and power relations in society – the focus on a technical fix for what troubles us without tackling why it is that we are so disturbed in the first place.

I sat there recalling that a few years ago blind theologian John Hull wrote a book entitled *In the Beginning there was Darkness*, exploring the contributions to theology and an understanding of the world found in being blind. We are so focused on hi-tech solutions yet my experience is that these do not address my underlying fears and concerns.

These deeper issues are found in the Bible but our social-religious disconnect is such I could not start talking theology – yet the discourse of medicine, professionalism and charity was acceptable. Likewise I have found many valuable insights in the Bible through my experience of living with my mortality and frailty found in my disability. Yet this wisdom is not welcomed in a society that fears the very things about our human condition that Jesus Christ addressed in his ministry.

So many of our human frailties were present – even celebrated – at the summit. Fame and position was ‘in’, as journalists jockeyed for the right shot and power interview. None seemed interested in the mum who over a boxed breakfast told me of her beautiful son with multiple disabilities who had died in her arms recently. We shed a tear quietly together as around us others told stories to each other, also unrecorded in the media and official outcomes. Such wisdom, such beauty!

There were important lessons and, I would suggest, missed opportunities for us as Church. Special consultation was held prior to the event with the Jewish community because of the Passover, yet on Sunday morning we as Christians needed to witness together and pray collectively.

On Sunday very early I said the Morning Office alone and reflected on where God could

be in all this? Is God so unimportant we could not find time in our busy schedule to stop and be nurtured? It would have been so powerful for the Christians at the summit to have recognised and proclaimed God in our midst. What about some inter-faith service that celebrated the spiritual dimension?

Perhaps part of the reason that there was no time for the messages of Christianity in the summit is the way in which the Church lives out its theology. We are seen as contradictory.

Movers and shakers of the church were largely not present

If we are honest, some of the best powerbrokers are deeply ambitious church politicians. The sad reality is we promote these people to leadership and not those who live out the virtues. For all that, it was noticeable that purple shirts were not represented in the delegates who attended 2020. Sadly I suspect this will mean that there will be little engagement by the Church with the lessons of 2020.

Theology teaches us of the importance Jesus Christ placed on the poor and dispossessed. We needed more of those voices, silence, and then corporate action.

My suggestion is the Church still has a significant opportunity to listen to the spiritual yearning found in each suggestion recorded (and the many that did not make it to the official record) and to engage with these cries. All of us yearn for valued place, to know we are loved and to be all that we can be. It is not just the religious, but the spiritual dimension of the summit that needs to be made explicit.

There is no doubt that the missed spiritual and religious dimensions of the 2020 Summit are important. For me this raises the challenge of how we as a Church live out our theology. To be thinkers full of love, embracing all of the Christian virtues, requires us to listen and then act.

Theological perspective helps us to understand that while 'God talk' may not have occurred at the 2020 Summit, there was a significant sacred dimension. The chief focus of our policy discussions was the importance of people and

how we as a nation should interact and grow together.

Even the opportunity to come together as members of the populace and to move beyond party politics was a very significant opportunity.

Perhaps most important insight that theology can offer to such an event is to help to focus on the poor and the oppressed as a vital question for the churches and our society.

There was so much important about the 2020 Summit. It was a privilege to be present even though the failure explicitly to address the spiritual dimensions of our humanity was a sad omission. There is no doubt that important suggestions were made regarding Australia's public policy towards 2020.

Robert Mann (academic and public intellectual) is right in his assessment, on balance despite the failings, the summit was "A Good Thing". The Church needs to engage with such a process and the aspirations present in it. Will we be prepared to do so although the movers and shakers of the church were largely not present?

The Revd Canon Dr Christopher Newell AM
died on June 24.

To: Common Theology

My dear Uncles

I got your loving gift of dollar 75 for my education. Thank you very much for the same. May the good God bless you and your dear ones. I pray for you every day.

The school has been reopened on June 2nd. Now I study in Class 2. There is rain every day. I bought text books, note books, umbrella and uniform with the money you sent. It was a great help. I am studying well. At home Papa, Mummy and others are keeping well.

Please give my loving greetings to all in your family

*With much love
Your adopted child*

Kebin Pius

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Church doesn't want to swim

By Maggie Helass

In July 1986 archbishop-elect of Cape Town Desmond Tutu decided on a course of action to end the unrestrained savaging of the church in the mass media which followed his election as Primate.

In South Africa the first black Anglican archbishop was considered to be Public Enemy Number One – the result of years of demonisation by the state-controlled mass media. The congregations of the Sydney-backed Church of England in South Africa (CESA) were boosted by panicked white Anglicans fleeing their own church after Bishop Tutu's election to the top job.

By the late 'eighties, even before the Internet, new technology had made it possible for the church to create its own communications networks through e-mail and desk-top-publishing. So the churches in South Africa became pioneers of the new media as a consequence of the apartheid state's stranglehold on mass media organisations.

In July this year, 22 years later, World Youth Day (WYD) launched the website Xt3 (Christ in the Third Millennium) and the Pope texted his greetings to thousands of pilgrims on their arrival in Sydney.

Trevor Cook wrote on Crikey.com, Australia's first non-corporate news website, that WYD had re-positioned the Catholic Church, two millennia old, as alive and well and relevant to a whole new generation of enthusiastic adherents, millions of them, around the world.

"At face value, the Church should be out of date and on the way out. Celibacy, all-male hierarchies, opposition to birth control, abhorrence of homosexuality, miracles, intelligent design – it's all stuff that sits so oddly with the ordinary values of contemporary society.

"But through all this, the Catholic Church, like the British monarchy, has shown a remarkable ability to reinvent itself and stay relevant while holding on to the age-old traditions that act like a security blanket for many people.

"WYD is a bloody good show. Hundreds of thousands of young people from all over the



"And now the Cardinal is being incensed by the deacon." SBS commentator during the Opening Mass of World Youth Day 08 in Sydney.

world having fun without drugs or alcohol provides remarkable images in a media that is otherwise saturated with all that alcopop binge horror epidemic stuff. Those WYD pictures are the most hopeful we've seen for quite a while.

"Part of the trick, of course, is the old Roman idea of 'bread and circuses'. The Catholic Church is, after all, a vestige of the old Roman Empire from which it borrowed much of its administrative structure...

"Moreover, the Pope played straight to the Church's strength. He spoke out against materialism and urged people to lead 'deeper' lives. A few decades ago, in the midst of the biggest surge in material well being in human history, only hippies and other crackpots talked along these lines but now it is a mainstream community concern.

"Nevertheless, few people are ready to embrace poverty and a life of self-denial. So the idea that you can be part of the Church and have 'fun', and be spiritual at the same time, is a real winner."

Crikey.com was not uncritical of course. Nicholas Pickard wrote; "(T)he problem always will be that World Youth Day was an exclusive event controlled through the compulsory registration of participants. It has left a sour taste

in the mouths of those not involved with this particular strand of religion.

“Unlike the Olympics or the Sydney Festival, the people of Sydney found themselves catering to a very specific cross-section of society. I can only imagine how the Protestant factions of the Christian Church felt over the last seven days.”

Pickard seems unaware that the event was largely ecumenical and included interfaith meetings with the Pope.

He went on to report that a protest of one thousand people gathered in the gay heart of Oxford Street to voice their concerns about the Catholic Church and its dominant political and social policies. “Lesbians and gays joined with socially liberal Christians, atheists, disaffected Catholics and representatives from Broken Rites.

“They made it clear during all of their speeches that they weren’t anti-Catholic but rather they demanded tolerance and acceptance. Even when a stray group of young American pilgrims found themselves in the middle of the protest they were greeted with smiles and good humour.

“And it was smiles and good humour that really summed up the week. I found myself on the final day of WYD sitting on a pub balcony watching the thousands of pilgrims returning. Sitting with a few locals we waved and cheered them for no particular reason.

“The local drunk kept yelling at those carrying banners and flags asking where they were from. This was always followed by a cheer. We waved goodbye and found ourselves exactly the same as when they arrived. Nothing has changed and it is such a shame that after all that money, after all those people and all that effort, most of us... weren’t included.”

This report from a self-described ‘outsider’ opens several important portals for dialogue should the churches be interested.

The problem is, the churches appear not to be interested in today’s mass media marketplace, except on their own terms.

Xt3 has no links and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s site has a policy of no links, which seems to illustrate the churches’ attitude on the Internet – today’s marketplace. They want to be in the playground but they don’t want to play; they want a voice but they don’t want a conversation.

The church has in fact become part of the breakdown of communication instead of being in the vanguard of the world’s struggle for a new language, a *logos*, for 21st Century spirituality.

Ironically, the Church is ideally placed to declare the Good News amidst all the bad news of food and fuel shortages and climate change. We have to radically change our lifestyle. Western economics is built on consumerism and the premise of wealth as goods and services. The dilemma is that to save the planet westerners have to adapt to a lifestyle which would undermine the current economic order.

In this situation the Church can declare the good news (which would be political suicide for our secular leaders to deliver) that a simpler lifestyle in the so-called developed world would not only give us a chance to save the human species but be good for our health and happiness.

The Church has the most globally pervasive culture, networks and infrastructure in the world – and considerably more moral power than the United Nations. The Church really does not need to waste its time prescribing to politicians how to change the world – they are powerless in the current crisis. The Church has the people power that is needed to change the way we live.

“The media is the water in which the fish swim”

Quote from Bill Murray, great newspaperman and former Editor of Brisbane’s Sunday Sun.

But the mainstream churches do not have the necessary tools of corporate leadership to speak with authority in the public arena because they have not woken up to the fact that the mass media is the environment in which we live – it is not merely a resource to manipulate or be manipulated by.

The power of the media as a cultural environment was demonstrated in apartheid South Africa where an entire nation was so brain-washed by the ideologues who came to power in 1948 that within a generation the minority white population and a large proportion of the black population could not discern the difference between right and wrong in the moral fog of apartheid.

It is an anomaly that the mass media are owned by the corporations. The mass media, like politics, is rightly the property of the people. Given the conflict of interest between the health of the planet and the economic goals of the corporations, their monopoly of the mass media could prove to be fatal for the whole world.

Today the technological climate is much more amenable to the creation of worldwide alternative media networks than it was in South Africa in 1986. Facebook and YouTube¹ have built worldwide communities almost overnight. Journalists on every continent are making moves to reclaim the Fourth Estate from the corporations – ProPublica’s public interest journalism in the USA; Crikey.com here in Australia where public journalism was pioneered during the Sydney Olympics.

More problematic than the technology is the churches’ adversarial and defensive relationship

1. Social spaces on the Internet.

with mass media following decades of misunderstanding, mismanagement and bruising encounters. This may have something to do with the fact that the Church itself monopolised the mass media before the Renaissance and has never quite given up its culture of control.

But it would be as well for the churches to bear the cost to their centralised authority of joining moves to retrieve the mass media from the monopoly of the corporations. Otherwise the Church in this age will be remembered for child sexual abuse, obsession with gender issues and bizarre definitions of sexuality, while the world sinks beneath the waves.

Maggie Helass is Editor of *Common Theology* and has worked in church media relations in Australia, Southern Africa and England.

Security blanket for mobile menace



Britain’s first ‘Safe Text’ street has been created complete with padded lampposts to protect millions of mobile phone users from getting hurt in street accidents while walking and texting.

Around one in ten careless Britons has suffered a “walk ‘n text” street injury in the past year through collisions with lampposts, bins and other pedestrians.

The 6.6million accidents have caused injuries ranging from mild knocks and embarrassing cuts and bruises through to broken noses, cheekbones and even a fractured skull.

Collision course: Padding around a lamppost in Brick Lane, London. The move is part of the ‘safe text’ drive to cut the number of phone users injured in street accidents

Wrong way! Turn back

In July a group of bishops and others representing a bloc of Anglican and affiliated churches met in the Middle East for Gafcon (Global Anglican Future conference).

Sydney Anglicans played an influential role in the organisation of the conference and we publish here an edited text from a briefing by the **Rev Dr Mark Thompson** prior to the conference at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on March 14.



The first thing to note about the crisis the Anglican Communion is facing today is that it has been coming for a very long time. I remember almost twenty years ago reading an article by Robert Doyle in *The Briefing* entitled 'No Golden Age'.

The gist of the article was that the idea of a golden age of Anglicanism, in which biblical patterns of doctrine and practice were accepted by the majority, is nothing but an illusion.

Biblical Christianity has always struggled under the Anglican umbrella. At some times it did better than at others, but there was never a time when evangelical Anglicanism, even of the more formal Prayer Book¹ kind, was uniformly accepted or endorsed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer were, after all, burnt at the stake with the consent of most of the rest of the bishops in Mary Stuart's (Roman Catholic) church.

The Puritans who stayed within the Church of England suffered at the hands of Elizabeth I, and William Laud and others made life increasingly difficult for them after Elizabeth's death.

The re-establishment of the Church of England following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was never a determined return to the

Reformed evangelical version of Archbishop Cranmer, but a compromise designed to exclude anything that resembled Puritanism.

Wesley² was hunted out of the Established Church. Whitfield had to preach in the open air when pulpits were closed to him.

However, the real seeds of the problem we now face lie in the 19th Century.

John Henry Newman's infamous *Tract 90*, published in 1841, encouraged Anglicans to read the Thirty-nine Articles as a Catholic document. In this way he opened the door to the possibility that you might publicly assent to the Articles while reinterpreting them to say what you wanted them to say.

What he did in the interests of a more Catholic version of Anglicanism others would do in the interests of a more liberal version before very long. As one scholar put it, "whether he intended to or not, he taught us to lie".

Evangelical Anglicans have struggled in a hostile environment for a very long time

Later in the century liberal approaches to the Bible and Christian doctrine were introduced into Anglican thought through men like Samuel Taylor Coleridge (whose *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* was published in 1840 though it had most likely been circulating privately before then) and two collections of essays: *Essays and Reviews* published in 1860 and *Lux Mundi* published in 1889.

By the end of the 19th Century, liberal Anglo-Catholicism was the dominant form of Anglicanism in Britain and elsewhere (with one or two significant exceptions).

So it is not simply that a couple of rash actions in the past five years or even the last fifty years have undermined what was a pretty well-functioning institution prior to that. Evangelical Anglicans

1. *The Book of Common Prayer* 1662, the canon of Evangelical Anglicanism which includes the 39 Articles of Religion.

2. Founder of the Methodist Church.

have struggled in a hostile environment within the denomination for a very long time.

Sometimes their ministry has flourished, despite the hostility of the hierarchy. Whitfield, Simeon, Ryle, Stott, Packer, Lucas – God has raised up many Anglican evangelical leaders in England and elsewhere. But their faithful ministry has always involved struggle within the denomination.

That background might lead you to ask, “So what’s changed now; if the denomination has long been compromised in these ways, and evangelicals have always struggled within it, why are we arguing that we have now reached a moment of crisis where decisive action needs to be taken? What is different about what’s happening at the moment?”

I want to suggest that there are five features of what has been happening in the last fifty years or so that have brought this current crisis to a head.

The first is an increasing number of public challenges to orthodox doctrine grounded in plain biblical teaching by serving bishops and other leaders in the Anglican Communion.

In that book he questioned the doctrine of God

It is simply a matter of historical record that the last fifty years or so have witnessed an increasingly virulent attack upon biblical truth and biblical morality led by those who should have been guarding both.

There had, of course, been a long history of such an attack from within the universities and colleges.

Academic liberal theology had been flexing its muscles for over a century.

Yet in the nineteenth and early twentieth century serving bishops within the Anglican Communion had mostly been rather guarded in their public comments and made no attempt to change the teaching of the denomination in any official way.

Although it might not have been the first instance of this, we might start with the publication, in 1963, of John A T Robinson’s book *Honest to God*. At the time he was the Bishop of Woolwich.

In that book he questioned the doctrine of God and many other elements of classic Anglican teaching. And this was the new thing – that a serving bishop should mount a challenge to the doctrine of the Articles and the teaching of the Bible in such a public and unashamed way.

Even before his consecration as Bishop of Newark in 1976, John Shelby Spong, an admirer of Robinson, had been writing controversial books. In fact his controversial views would eventually lead to charges of heresy, which were dismissed in 1987.

In 1986 Spong published *Beyond Moralism: A Contemporary View of the Ten Commandments*. Two years later he wrote *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality*. A year later he openly and knowingly ordained a practicing homosexual man. He has denied the uniqueness of Christ as the only Saviour of the world, and the authority of the Scriptures to determine Christian doctrine and Christian practice.

In 2001 he published his autobiography: *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality*. In it he appended ‘Twelve Theses for Christianity in the 21st Century’ which begin with the breathtaking statement, “Theism as a way of defining God, is dead”.

In 1984, the then bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, gained notoriety by commenting in a BBC interview that the belief that Jesus was raised bodily from the grave was ridiculous, an infantile preoccupation with “a conjuring trick with bones”.

His comments were regarded as controversial and he has argued they were taken out of context, but on any account is hard to reconcile them with the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve” (vv. 3–5).

In 1995 the then bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, defended his cathedral’s invitation to a practicing Muslim to preach the university sermon on the BBC’s ‘Thought for the Day’ program. He quoted Jesus’ words “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God,” and then went on to deduce that since the Muslim concerned was working for peace in his own country he not only

came under the blessing of Jesus, but shared the title Son of God with him.

When challenged about the uniqueness of Jesus on the basis of John 14:6 he wrote “to suggest that Jesus actually said those words is to deny 150 years of scholarship in the Gospel of John”.

Michael Ingham, the current Bishop of New Westminster in the Church of Canada was interviewed by *The Ottawa Citizen* in September 1997. In that interview he insisted, “It’s time for Christians to drop the idea that Christ is the one sure way to salvation”. He developed these ideas in his book of the same year, *Mansions of the Spirit: The Gospel in a Multifaith World*.

Outlandish statements by bishops of the Anglican Communion, undermining the teaching of Scripture and the doctrine of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion are only barely newsworthy these days. They seem to come with such regularity and disdain for anyone who disagrees with them that only rarely do they provoke controversy.

No one must be excluded from the Christian table no matter what they believe

Instead, it is the orthodox who are the source of scandal as far as the secular press is concerned. Statements of orthodox Anglican doctrine are often ridiculed and then dismissed.

The second feature we should mention is the redefinition of the gospel that has occurred in some parts of the Anglican Communion.

It is increasingly clear that the gospel of salvation by the cross and resurrection of Jesus, with its call to faith and repentance has been replaced in some quarters by a liberal gospel of universal reconciliation – what some call ‘the gospel of inclusion’.

It is vitally important to recognise that this is what has happened. It explains why the hierarchy in the American and Canadian churches won’t let go of their advocacy of homosexuality, for instance.

The full inclusion of practicing homosexuals into the life and ministry of the churches is a gospel issue as far as they are concerned. As one website

put it last year, under the heading ‘Drenched in Grace: Anglicans, Inclusion and the Gospel’:

“More than at any time in the recent past, those who seek to offer an open, inclusive and welcoming Gospel within the Anglican Communion are facing great challenges. Now more than ever we need to be equipped with the theological and ecclesiastical resources which mean that we can with confidence affirm that the Gospel of justice, inclusion and peace we try to communicate is scriptural, rational and central to Anglican tradition.”

No one must be excluded from the Christian table, these people insist, no matter what they believe or what life choices they have made. Love must triumph over all so that no one is any longer considered ‘unclean’ (with obvious allusions to Acts 10).

Exclusion from fellowship or responsibility in the churches on any grounds is interpreted as an act of discrimination, an issue of social injustice, which must be overthrown.

Ashley Null, commenting on the consecration of Gene Robinson, a practicing homosexual man, as bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 put it this way:

“The legislative leadership of the Episcopal Church, including a majority of the House of Bishops, believes that they have been called and therefore inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish the guidelines by which the Bible is to be interpreted. And in keeping with their commitment to religious truth as an experience of the inherent oneness of all things, they have selected those biblical texts which talk about the inclusion of outcasts as the true definition of the Gospel of Christ. All other parts of Scripture are either interpreted so as to support this explanation of Christianity or rejected as no longer being applicable in our day.”

There have, of course, been alternative explanations of the Gospel before. However, this redefinition has become a rallying point for a redefinition of Christianity which aggressively seeks to eliminate all other understandings.

Its adherents are crusaders, and the battle for the acceptance of homosexual practice is simply the next battle in one long war to overcome prejudice and discrimination.

The civil rights vigilantes of the 1960s have a new cause and a new justification.

The third feature that has made this a moment of crisis is the way attempts have been made to officially endorse teaching which is in direct conflict with the teaching of Scripture.

This could be illustrated in a number of areas.

We might focus on the defeat of a motion affirming the authority of Scripture on the floor of the General Synod of ECUSA³ in August 2003.

Or we could think again about the refusal of the Australian General Synod even to allow a vote on a motion rejoicing in what God has done for us in the cross of Jesus just last year.

However, because it is the catalyst for our immediate decisions, I will simply cite the official shift of position on homosexuality in the American and Canadian churches...

The roots of this shift in thinking can be seen way back in the 1940s. However, in the last ten or eleven years the pace of the push to officially revise the church's teaching on this issue has speeded up. Now it is not just a matter of an individual bishop's heretical opinion, either expressed in private or published for general consumption. This is the institution changing its official position.

The fourth feature we should mention is the way these developments have taken place in full knowledge and in open defiance of the objections of the rest of the Anglican Communion, most commonly on biblical grounds. Those involved had been asked not to proceed.

Carefully reasoned arguments explaining the teaching of Scripture were presented again and again. Letters were sent between bishops and Primates. Phone calls were made. But so committed to the cause were the bishops of ECUSA and the bishop of New Westminster (Canada) that they refused to listen and rejected all calls to turn back...

The final feature I want to highlight is for many people one of the most disturbing of all. It is the open persecution by the hierarchy of the Episcopal Church and the Bishop and Diocese of New Westminster (and indeed others) of all who dissent from their program of doctrinal and moral revision.

In early 2003, as the situation in New Westminster was deteriorating, and following the encouragement of the Global South⁴ for parishes in dispute with the bishop to seek alternative episcopal oversight, Bishop Buckle of the Yukon offered to provide just that to the beleaguered parishes.

In response, Bishop Ingham of New Westminster instigated charges against Bishop Buckle and the parishes seeking his oversight and before long the offer was withdrawn.

The same Bishop of New Westminster wrote to Professor Jim Packer, author of numerous books including the classic *Knowing God*, and David Short, the Rector of St Johns Shaughnessy following their vote (along with their church) to stay within the Anglican Communion yet seek the oversight of a faithful bishop, the Bishop of the Southern Cone.

The letter charged them with a relatively new ecclesiastical offence, 'Presumption of abandonment of Communion' and threatened to remove their "spiritual authority as a minister of Word and Sacraments conferred in ordination".

The bishop's supporters have protested that this action is entirely legal and in accord with the constitution of the denomination. However, these measures are devices which the liberal establishment has created with this one purpose in mind – to punish anyone who objects to their practice and who seeks a way of remaining true to biblical teaching and Anglican doctrine when the denomination itself has abandoned it...

The crisis we face at the moment has a different character to the background struggle that evangelical Anglicans have long endured. These factors have taken us further down the road of denominational apostasy than we have ever been before.

The embrace of teaching and practice which is directly opposed to the teaching of Scripture is now being institutionalised in a new way. And it is being done in the face of careful, godly, biblical calls to stop. What's more, those who are making that call are being recast as the villains and every effort is being made to disenfranchise them and remove them from the Communion. That is what is different now. That is why we need to act.

The Rev Dr Mark Thompson is President of the Anglican Church League. <http://acl.asn.au/the-sydney-lambeth-decision-briefing/>

3. The Episcopal Church of the USA.

African-style *indaba* at Lambeth

By Allan Reeder

The Lambeth Bishops' Conference came to an end not with a string of contentious decisions but with the public release of a shared story of "honest discussions".



More than 600 Anglican bishops began winging their way home across the globe after the once-a-decade international gathering ended with a Closing Eucharist on 3 August.

"I feel (the conference) worked out very much as I had hoped and prayed," Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams told reporters at a final press conference just before the service.

"The Anglican Communion needed to know how deep the commitment was... to staying together," he said. "I think we've got a bit of an answer to that."

The conference format initially faced criticism for not allowing formal debate and decision-making on the difficult dilemmas threatening the international fabric of the Anglican Communion.

However, for Rowan Williams the small-group format known as 'indaba'¹ which characterised the conference has generated signs of an ongoing commitment to deal with the church's problems.

This year's Lambeth Conference "hasn't evaded the difficult questions, even if it hasn't answered them in the way some people would have liked," he said. "The conference has never been an executive body that can simply make those sorts of quick-fix decisions."

"I've actually been surprised by how much energy there's been growing in the indaba groups to continue the process of encounter."

Breaking new ground, instead of a series of motions and decisions, a 44-page 'Reflections' document, compiled as a summary of the small-group discussion was released at the end of the conference.

Perth's Archbishop Roger Herft chaired the document's writing committee, describing it as the story of "our lived experience and the open and honest discussions we have had together".

"This document is not the primary outcome of this conference," Roger Herft wrote in its introduction. "Written words can never adequately describe the life-changing nature of our time together. We have gained a deeper appreciation of the worldwide Anglican Communion and of our common calling as disciples of Christ."

However, alongside balanced and nuanced arguments about a range of topics, under the sexuality heading the Reflections document indicates a general agreement was reached among the bishops calling for a series of *moratoria* or open-ended bans on the ordinations of people living in a same-gender union to the episcopate; the blessing of same-sex unions; and cross-border incursions by bishops.

We want the *indaba* to continue

The document concedes the *moratoria* "will be difficult to uphold" and that "there are questions to be clarified in relation to how long the *moratoria* are intended to serve".

A timetable has been set down to pick up the threads of the conference.

Archbishop Williams said he is also planning to write a pastoral letter to the Anglican Communion and also to the bishops who boycotted the Lambeth Conference, asking them "how far (did the conference) go to meeting concerns, how far does this provide a basis for co-operation?"

There were mixed views too on calls for an Anglican covenant.

"Even where people may not want to sign up to formal agreements nonetheless they have felt that the exchanges they have had have been nourishing, valuable and," Archbishop Williams said, "we want the indaba to continue".

Allan Reeder is Editor of MarketPlace Online at www.marketplaceonline.com.au

1. A Zulu/Xhosa word for a meeting, but with significant structural and procedural differences to western patterns of conferencing.

Hugh's Books

By Hugh McGinlay

Five books about God or the search for God are on my desk.

Seeking God's Face by Notto Thelle (Paulist, 9780809145157, \$22.95) is subtitled 'Faith in an age of perplexity' and asks whether it is possible to find God beyond distorted images and empty words. The Professor of Theology at the University of Oslo, Norway, describes faith as a gracious landscape where we can breathe freely. He makes use of compelling and yet familiar Bible stories – including the Song of Songs and the story of the woman taken in adultery – to offer us glimpses of God's full presence as what he calls "re-enchantment". Here is a spiritual and theological antidote to the pessimism and alienation of our time.

Making God Laugh by Anne Primavesi (Polebridge, 9780944344699, \$27.95) has a different take on how we may approach God. Taking as her starting point the Yiddish phrase "If you want to make God laugh, tell God your plans", she reflects on the claims of many to know what God knows and to speak with divine authority about God's plans for us and our world. While this attitude surely makes God laugh, she claims, it can have far from laughing consequences on our relationships with other Christians and other religions. She suggests that perhaps the time has come to replace human arrogance with ecological humility.

A Touch of the Sacred by Eugene Borowitz (Jewish Lights, 9781580233378, \$31.95) has a chapter of his book that says 'We can't talk about God but we must'. While the book is primarily written for his fellow Jews, its insights into Jewish understandings of God and Jewish belief offer a refreshing – and quite different – approach to the topic.

Bread and Water, Wine and Oil (Conciliar Press, 9781888212914, \$24.95) offers an Orthodox Christian experience of God. The author reflects on the idea of life as mystery – not in



the sense of a conundrum that can be solved if we think about it long enough; rather as a place where the human mind cannot go but must depend on the heart for understanding. This leads the reader to reflect on the mystery of God and the Church, with its seven great mysteries also called Sacraments.

Finally from Paraclete Press, an entirely different book called *How (Not) to Speak of God* by Peter Rollins (Paraclete, 9781557255051, \$29.95) that has at its heart a mystical approach to God as "a secret which one is compelled to share yet which retains its secrecy". The book is part of the 'Emerging Church' movement and explores the theory and praxis of this contemporary expression of faith.

Issues surrounding religion and science are perennial. A new book *The Big Questions in Science and Religion* by Keith Ward (Templeton, 9781599471358, \$24.95) explores ten big questions such as: How did the universe begin? How will it end? Is evolution compatible with creation?. The author is Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford and a fellow of the British Academy and has a special interest in the interplay between science and faith. His book includes the understandings of thinkers from other faith traditions as well as the views of cosmologists, physicians, mathematicians and philosophers.

Tony Kelly from the Australian Catholic University has another impressive book published recently by Orbis. Called *Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (9781570757709, \$39.95), it asks what difference should the resurrection of the crucified Jesus make to Christian thought, to our sense of the cosmos, and our understanding of humanity itself. He sets out to affirm the resurrection as the living centre of Christian life and the basis for its theological methods and themes.

Australian Jesuit theologian Gerald O'Collins also has new book recently published: *Jesus – A Portrait* (DLT, 9780232527199, \$29.95). There are many books about Jesus, but few attempt to tell us what he was actually like. This new book

concentrates on bringing alive the personality of Jesus. It combines devotion and experience with a lifetime of scholarly investigation.

Over the years, Fortress Press has been publishing a sixteen volume series called *The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. Just arrived on my desk is Volume 10, subtitled *Barcelona, Berlin, New York 1928–1931* (9780800683306, \$99.95). It's a beautiful book, tracing Bonhoeffer's development during the crucial years 1928–1931, making available for the first time in English his letters and other writings that reveal to us his personal and intellectual life. This was a time when Bonhoeffer was – perhaps unconsciously – laying the foundations of his future opposition to National Socialism in Germany. Bonhoeffer has wide appeal in all the churches and this series will be welcomed by all who recognise the significance of this 20th Century theologian for our understanding of Christianity. Ten of the set are now available.

Chance or Dance by Jimmy Davis and Harry Poe (Templeton Foundation Press, 9781599471334, \$37.95) provides an overview of design and a clarification of the controversial Intelligent Design movement. They reach an interesting conclusion that while there is no scientific evidence behind Intelligent Design, it remains valid to correlate faith and sensory experience, suggesting that while science has been successful at describing processes, it has failed to explain origins.

It asks if religion has contributed to the environment crises of our planet

Two books from Continuum, *God's Troublemakers – How Women of Faith are Changing the World* by Katharine Rhodes Henderson (9780826429254, \$29.95) is now in paperback. Based on interviews with twenty women, the book claims space for progressive forms of religion, honouring women who integrate a progressive social agenda with their faith.

Creation's Diversity (Voices from theology and science) by Willem Drees, Hubert Meisinger and Taede Smedes (9780567033291, \$80.95) is a collection of substantial essays that explore the

question of environmental engagement in the context of religious convictions. Basically, it asks if religion has contributed to the environment crises of our planet and presents a series of theological options that will not only respond to this allegation but seek somehow to establish foundations on which to build an authentic approach to sustainable diversity in our world.

The Lambeth conference this year attracted its own share of controversy with arguments about who should attend overshadowing the theological and pastoral issues that would normally be the core business of the gathering. Not by coincidence, some recent books on the topics have arrived here.

A Fallible Church – Lambeth Essays, edited by Kenneth Stevenson (DLT, 978023252730, \$32.95) ask two basic questions: can Anglicanism hold together? Is there something Anglican that is worth sustaining? The book has essays from leading Anglicans from different backgrounds and traditions who essentially share a conviction that the Anglican Church will continue to be used by God in the furtherance of the kingdom.

Still on the question of ecclesiology, there is a fascinating new book edited by David Clark called *The Diaconal Church – Beyond the Mould of Christendom* (Epworth, 9780716206354, \$65.00). In a previous publication, the author had argued for a diaconal church as the only one that could set us free from the continuing dominance of the Christendom model of church. This follow-up volume has contributions from thirteen scholars from a variety of denominations reflecting on the author's original model of 'diaconal church' and is evidence of a wide-ranging discussion about the servant nature of church and the primacy of the laity.

Transfiguring Capitalism is an expensive title by John Atherton, retired canon theologian of Manchester cathedral in the UK (SCM, 9780334028314, \$99.00). The book is a thorough analysis of economic globalisation and the transformation of capitalism. The author's purpose is to demonstrate the need for religious and Christian understandings of humanity to be brought to bear on dealing with the moral issues surrounding the global economy. The book

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is clearly for people who are concerned about contemporary social ethics on a global scale.

Finally, at a more popular level, comes *Marry a Pregnant Virgin* by Frank Honeycutt (Augsburg, 9780806680361, \$27.95). With the subtitle 'Unusual Bible stories for new and curious Christians', the book doesn't run away from the difficult and weird bits of the Bible. Rather, the author begins with the observation (from Burton Votisky) that "for rabbis and the church fathers, reading the Bible was an adventure, a journey to a grand palace with many and awesome rooms". Such a beginning allows him to bring lively and fresh interpretations to old stories. This is a book for people interested in new ways of reading familiar (and sometimes uncomfortable) Bible stories.

www.mosaicresources.com.au

Science & Soul by Charles Birch

UNSW Press, 2008, ISBN 9780868409580.
196 pp, rrp \$34.95.

Reviewed by Arthur Grimshaw

This is a timely and important publication revealing the inner motivation and inspiration of one of Australia's most notable thinkers in recent times. Charles Birch has been an inspiration to his students and contemporaries not only in the field of biology and ecology, but has matched this passion with his search for an understanding of both science and religion culminating in a synthesis which he calls 'an ecological model of God'.

Professor Birch takes us on a journey through the major influences on his thoughts and developments, in an ordered progression. Each chapter brings before the reader eminent thinkers of the past century, gathering them into convenient groupings identified in the chapter headings as Evolutionary Biologists, Animal Ecologists, Philosophers of Religion, and touchstone figures in the world of Science and Religion - lead-

ing to Birch's statements of his own philosophy of life under the headings Pansubjectivism and Panentheism.

On page 64 Birch comments: "We need help to fit the various elements of our lives into a consistent meaning. Science and Religion are two critical elements". This leads into his encounters with a group of eminent thinkers who have helped the author develop his own synthesis and philosophy. Such a diverse stream of influences makes for illuminating reading, and for this alone Birch's book is worth a priority space in our reading.

This may seem at a glance to be a somewhat indigestible stream of contacts - but take heart: the journey is made with a clarity of expression and a genuine passion for truth, which carries us along as if fellow travellers with Charles Birch, discovering new and old truths shaped into an exposition of the unique nature of his understanding of both science and religion.

Rachael Kohn's foreword is a helpful and insightful response to the journey of Birch's thought and his fellow travellers along the way, especially for readers whose own disciplines have taken a different route.

A striking feature in Birch's thought is the place he gives to subjective feelings - and this underpins many of the insights which he illustrates with references to poetic and biblical expressions which will resonate with many readers' own experience.

The Gospel of Mark, a Reflective Commentary by Denis McBride

CSSR, Dominican Publications 1996, ISBN 1-871552-55-9. 270 pp, \$25.95

Reviewed by Arthur Grimshaw

It is always a joy to read a commentary on one of the Gospels, and especially in this instance by an author with deep insights into the backgrounds of the Gospel narrative - not only in that of St

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Mark, the subject of this reflective commentary, but also in the parallel narrative of the other three Evangelists.

To read this text is to be taken on a journey through the specific territory of the Marcan narrative, but with insightful side glances at the references in the other Gospels.

Denis McBride's style is easy, without being simplistic. Because of his connections with the Church in the Philippines, he dedicates his work to his friends there "whose joyful witness amidst hardship speaks its own Gospel".

As the Marcan Gospel itself was addressed to a people facing persecution, so he brings to his reflections a contemporary relevance which is refreshing. As he deals with each section of the Gospel, the NRSV text is printed so that the reader does not have to cross-refer to a separate Bible to follow his helpful commentary. Throughout his endeavour, McBride keeps us conscious of the wider organisation of Mark's themes and development of the action of the Gospel.

The commentary on the events of the Crucifixion is particularly moving, and the author is clearly identifying with P Achtemeier in his *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 4, when he quotes from that work: "It appears that one of Mark's theological goals with his gospel, therefore, was to move his readers from observers to participants, and thus to move them to share in the gospel whose beginnings he had narrated in his account of Jesus of Nazareth."

This is a valuable resource for all Christians, but will be especially so next year when the Gospel portions read in the Eucharistic celebrations are largely taken from St Mark's Gospel.

The undergirding of his scholarship by a dedicated life of prayer and commitment is evident throughout the work. Some readers may already be familiar with Fr McBride's earlier similar reflective commentary on the Gospel of Luke – an equally valuable resource.

The Very Revd Arthur Grimshaw is Dean Emeritus of Brisbane Cathedral.

Prayer and Relationships: Staying Connected – An Ignatian Perspective by Patrick O'Sullivan SJ

David Lovell Publishing, 2008. ISBN 9781863551250, pp122, rrp \$22.50.

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Patrick O'Sullivan has framed a contemporary account of the journey of prayer first described by the Founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola, in 1522–24.

It was a practical way of prayer, written by a soldier, and lends itself to Australian bluntness and humour – Ignatius was "quite a boyo," writes O'Sullivan.

There is no beating about the bush from this Jesuit: "Is there a sign we are really trusting? Speaking from experience, I can say that we will feel scared, defenceless and vulnerable."

An aspect of prayer long-neglected and even feared in the mainstream churches – "affectivity" (anything relating to or arising from our emotions) – is front and centre in the author's narrative. "Faith devoid of any affectivity is something of an anomaly," he writes.

This book is a narrative, just as *The Spiritual Exercises* were the story of a journey, but with a text book character, teaching something which used to be as natural as breathing but which somehow went missing from our culture – prayer.

The question of how we can tell whether our devotion is faith or superstition receives a delightfully pragmatic illustration. The problem of opting for the Gospel's preference for the poor gets a 21st Century context: "Much easier said than done... because we live in a society, the consumer society, that is not concerned about truth, and even cultivates unreality."

The environment of persuasion in which we live militates against prayer. Vulnerability is replaced by control and performance, intimacy is replaced by voyeurism, and fidelity is replaced by opportunism.

The journey of the heart, by contrast, broaches the infinite space within. Although it is deeply personal it affects the whole community.

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Chapter headings such as ‘Sin and the family’ and ‘Fractured relationships and exposing evil’ dismiss the fog of sentimentality and briefly get to grips with sources of dysfunction. Did you know that there is a crucial difference between hypocrisy and self-deception – and that the latter is a symptom of lack of intimacy?

O’Sullivan’s view of the qualities of children, by contrast to his pragmatic approach elsewhere in this book, is somewhat sentimental – for instance that children are not devious and manipulative and do not role play.

Fear is named as a grave inhibitor of God’s action in our hearts – not *feeling* fear (which Jesus did), but acting out of fear, which never achieves anything except allowing our fear to grow. Having courage means being able to act differently, not feel differently.

Contemplative prayer is described simply as a very human sort of experience, available to anyone with a willing heart and the courage to face reality. For one of the first things we get to know and experience in contemplative prayer is our own sinfulness and fragility.

The basic acceptance of one’s own sinfulness is a prerequisite for effective social action because without it one inevitably divides people into Goodies and Baddies – them and us.

There is valuable teaching on discernment in the chapter ‘Prayer – help in following Jesus’, along with pithy advice such as “Forgiveness is a journey; revenge is a cycle”.

In contrast to the aspirations of our society the chapter ‘Dispossession and loss – a way to Jesus’ talks about actually treasuring such experiences, for it was through dispossession and loss that Jesus found us.

There are some frightfully useful lists – the sort you see in magazines which give you scores for proficiency. But these are lists of signs that one is following Jesus; that Jesus is present; and how to tell the difference between good and bad spirits. Vital signs. The Sunday liturgy adjures us to pray, but seldom does it describe how to go about it.

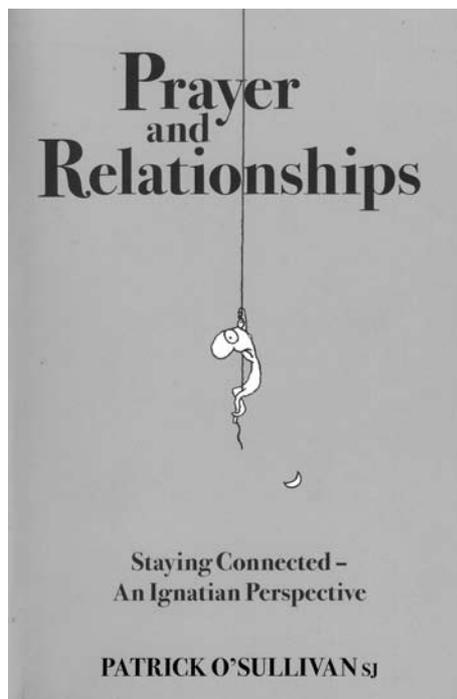
The author quotes Teilhard de Chardin in a discussion of suffering, describing it as an essential part of the evolutionary process of our world, and also a foreshadowing of death.

A modern take on mortification is being prepared to go out of one’s comfort zone regularly so that one’s own agenda never gets in the way of one’s relationships.

O’Sullivan is Brisbane born and he tosses in some family folklore from the time of Archbishop Duhig who was a friend of his

father, a state parliamentarian.

I would strongly recommend this book for anyone who is committed to the way of prayer, however long ago or recently they embarked on the journey.



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Down to earth with Jesus

By Stephen Webb

In July on ABC Radio National *Breakfast*, Mark Bannerman spoke with Peter Cundall about his final episode of *Gardening Australia*.

Mr Cundall spoke about how, in a time of environmental crisis and world shortage of fuel, it was essential for people to take up gardening instead of buying food that had to be transported great distances.

As in many of his recent “farewell” interviews, Mr Cundall repeated his message, “Grow your own in your own backyard or in pots or tubs and we can survive.”

He is working on a book titled *We Can Survive*, responding to the fear of climate change, food shortages and falling food standards by providing a guide to growing food in the smallest of gardens.

“I’ve been making television programs since 1969 ... because I want to say to people, ‘What’s wrong with going out the back door and pulling up your own carrots and cabbages?’

People are sitting down
to food that has travelled
several thousand kilometres

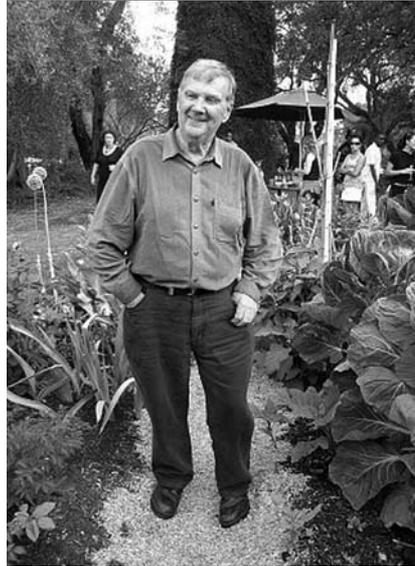
“Most people who sit down to a meal today are sitting down to food that has travelled several thousand kilometres or more.

“And yet even my little vegie patch at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens — four metres wide by twelve metres long — is enough to provide a family of four with all the vegetables they can eat, including enough spuds to last seven or eight months.”

Communities with such gardens could share food with one another, he said

Jesus said it was impossible to serve God and wealth. But, in our consumption-obsessed society, how can we discern what, if anything, Jesus would want us to buy?

Home Truths



Garden guru Peter Cundall who retired from the ABC in July

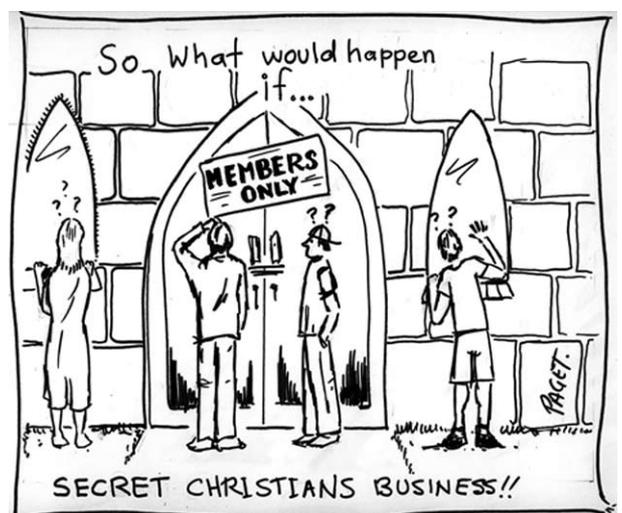
Insights magazine this month asks, “How would Jesus want us to live?” and has produced a website inspired by the film *What Would Jesus Buy?*

The website contains articles, links, resources and a guide to transforming our habits and communities.

www.whatwouldjesusbuy.org.au

Stephen Webb is a religious affairs journalist currently working with the Uniting Church in Sydney.

Paget's Parable



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