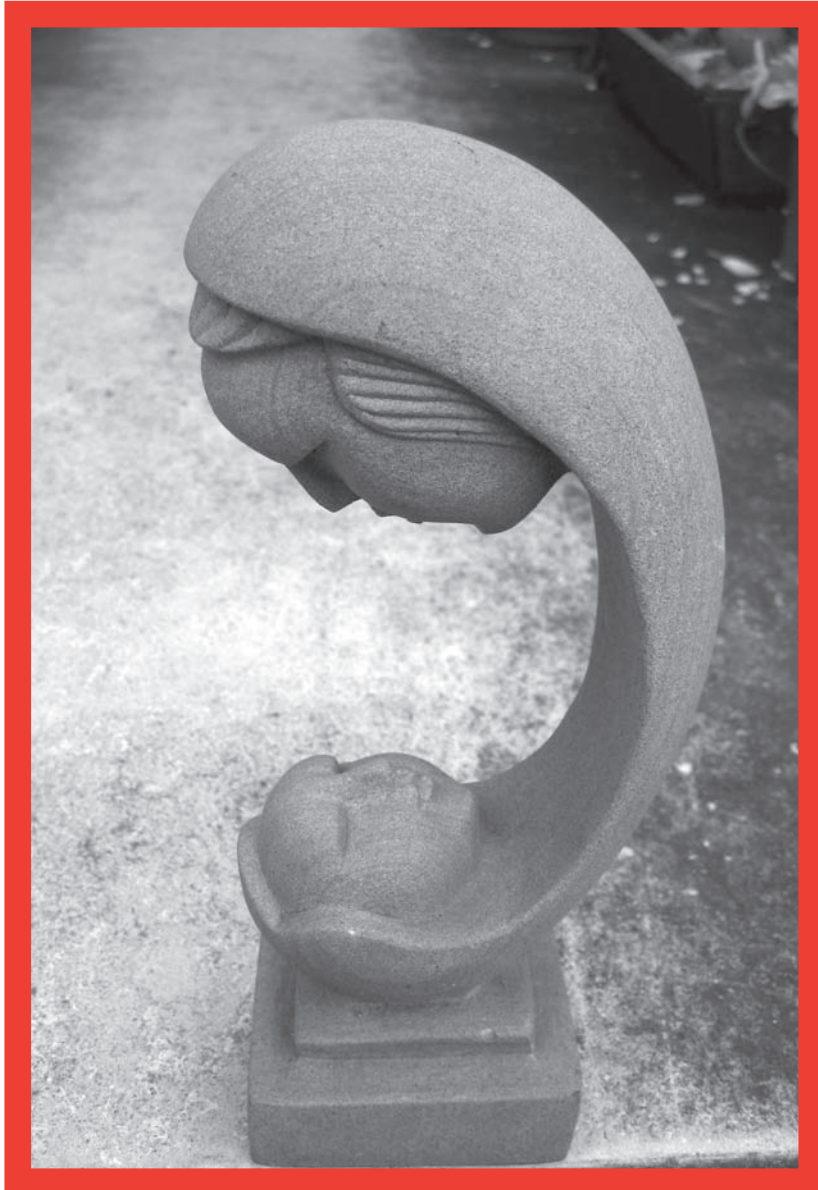


Common Theology

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INSIDE:

- Who is my neighbour? — what the bishops said
- Life at all costs is not the goal of care

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



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From the Editor

Fratricide in the Anglican Church invokes fascination, pain and disgust amongst the company of Christian believers and the world at large. But such a spectacle in God's Church is not a new phenomenon – as the briefest survey of church history would reveal.

Professor Stephen Sykes, himself of the Reformation tradition, writes clinically in these pages on the defining characteristics of the Anglican Church and what he hopes will survive the forthcoming crisis of the Lambeth Conference¹ in July next year.

The Rwandan genocide was in another league altogether of horror. But office-bearers from all the major churches were implicated in the mass murders which claimed a million lives in a hundred days in 1991 – and some priests, ministers and nuns have been on trial for crimes against humanity. Mary Grey's book *To Rwanda and Back* attempts to peer into the future of new paths to reconciliation where even the churches themselves are perceived as perpetrators.

The hopeful news is that we may be divesting ourselves of the Victorian idolatry that Christians are intrinsically 'good'. Even Jesus would not accept that epithet, so why should we?

Care of the mentally handicapped and of the dying mark Jesus' own response to a suffering world. Scott Stephens and Dr Michael Barbato tackle these subjects with a view to changing prevailing social attitudes to mental illness and death.

As a sweetener to all this Advent soul-searching, David Macgregor's account of how the Holy Spirit prepared a way for his aeroplane over the mountains of New Zealand reminds one of the hope which provides courage to look the suffering world in the eye – and not be afraid.

Hugh McGinlay's 'books' is a mine of information on new publications which are available from Australian religious bookstores, and Arthur Grimshaw's review of the controversial book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson gives a hint of the rethinking going on in that tradition.

Paget, as usual, has a pungent remark on the season in his cartoon to round off this edition's gleanings.

Maggie Helass

1. A meeting held in England every ten years comprising all the bishops employed in the Anglican Church worldwide.

Evil's bureaucratic forms

By Scott Stephens



Anyone wanting to poke fun at the naïveté of the first-century worldview – and by implication the biblical texts shaped by it – will sooner or later bring up the ‘primitive’ belief that those suffering from a mental affliction are actually beset by demons. As unremarkable as this jibe is, the comparisons that inevitably follow between their worldview and our own are even less interesting.

For instance: while the first-century world is full of magic, myths and demons, the modern world is determined by rationality, hard science and medicine. And so, whereas the ancients used exorcism to deal with mental illness, we use medication, precise treatment programs and various forms of supported accommodation.

The implicit judgment that drives these comparisons is the superiority and benevolence of modern science and the health-care system, versus the cruel, more ancient practice of ostracising the sick from civic life.

But is the difference quite so clear-cut? As soon as it's pressed, this double reduction (modern benevolence versus primitive cruelty) collapses.

To begin with, earliest Christianity – in which designation I include Jesus himself – did not simply accept the superstitions and religious palliatives supplied by its cultural surroundings. Instead, it consistently exhibited a remarkable capacity for theological imagination and an ethical intensity that released it from the clutches of nationalist idolatry and merciless ritual practices.

The ethical freedom of early Christianity is nowhere better demonstrated than in the radical way that it presents and uses the notion of ‘the demonic’.

Far from simply accepting the existence of malevolent, individuated personalities as an

easy explanation for a variety of ailments, the Christian texts identify demonic influences as an effective mechanism of cultural and political critique.

For instance, in Mark's Gospel, the commencement of Jesus' public activity – in the form of the announcement of the redefined kingdom of God – is punctuated by the presence of “a man with an unclean spirit” in the synagogue.

It is as if the Jewish religious system itself, governed by the demands of holiness and ritual exclusions, is possessed by something antagonistic to the presence of the kingdom of God.

Similarly, it is hard not to pick up the political overtones in Mark's episode concerning the Gerasene demoniac. As Dominic Crossan¹ observes: “The demon is both one and many; is named Legion, that fact and sign of Roman power.”

Demons are null and void but they are not nothing

Toward the end of Luke's Gospel, the nocturnal arrest of Jesus is depicted as the proper activity of “the power of darkness.”

And in Paul's writings, not only are the Roman rulers reduced to impotent ‘powers’ that cravenly plotted to execute Jesus, but the Jewish Torah itself is described as belonging to the *stoicheia*, the dark, elemental forces that exert their chaotic influence on this world.

What is crucial to notice here is the way that the demonic influence is mediated through political and religious structures as the means by which individuals are subjugated, humiliated, excluded, dehumanised.

The message of the gospel is that these powers have been emasculated (as Karl Barth put it,

1. John Dominic Crossan is an Irish-American religious scholar known for co-founding the controversial Jesus Seminar

demons “are null and void, but they are not nothing”), and that their effects must be opposed in the same manner by which they were defeated: in faith and by love.

The powers are thus to be taken seriously, but disregarded as an act of faith. Here again, Barth captures the spirit of the Christian critique perfectly:

“Demons are only the more magnified if they are placed in a framework of the conflict between a modern and an ancient system... The demythologisation which will really hurt them as required cannot consist in questioning their existence. Theological exorcism must be an act of the unbelief which is grounded in faith.”

The Christian attitude toward demonic powers, then, was not simple acceptance of their existence and influence on the world, much less a kind of primitive heuristic device for explaining what now is the domain of medicine.

Care of the mentally handicapped exposes the deep contradiction at the heart of liberal humanism

Instead, it represented a vital critique of those political, religious and even bureaucratic systems that subjugate the masses, and thus manifest a terrifying yet anonymous form of Evil.

But this sword cuts both ways. Just as the New Testament texts are neither naïve nor homogenous in the way they speak of demons, our own world is hardly free from ‘demonic’ influences.

What is needed is the theological clarity and moral courage to be able to identify these influences as such. And one need look no further than the diabolical effects that political neglect and bureaucratic indifference continue to have on the quality of mental health care.

The dehumanising forces endemic within the mental health care system stretch from the woeful levels of funding – designed to maintain an already exceedingly tenuous status quo – to the high rate of staff turnover due to burnout and work-related stress.

But Stanley Hauerwas has gone further, suggesting that the care of the mentally handicapped exposes the deep contradiction at the heart of liberal humanism:

“No group exposes the pretensions of the humanism that shapes the practices of modernity more thoroughly than the mentally handicapped.”

“Our humanism entails we care for them once they are among us, once we are stuck with them; but the same humanism cannot help but think that, all things considered, it would be better if they did not exist.”

In his terrifying masterpiece of theological journalism, *Hostage to the Devil*, Malachi Martin insisted that it is the exorcist himself that must play the role of “the devil’s hostage”, by placing himself between the victim and the demon, by being an advocate for the one who has no capacity to resist.

This is precisely the kind of faithful advocacy demanded from Christians today: to oppose Evil even in its most innocuous, anonymous and bureaucratic forms, and thus to enact the prayer, “Deliver us from the Evil One!”

Scott Stephens is an author and theologian who lives in Brisbane. He is the co-editor (with Rex Butler) and translator of the two volumes of the selected writings of Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* and *The Universal Exception*.

Correction to Winter Edition 07



eye witness

Rodney Le Lievre is the author of our lead article in the Winter 07 Edition of *Common Theology* ‘You can’t eat trees’.

We misspelt his name in the printed version and apologise for this error.

Guidelines from the bishops

Fr Frank Brennan SJ spoke at the launch of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Statement for Social Justice on September 17. He had a role in the early drafting of 'Who is My Neighbour? Australia's Role as a Global Citizen'. This is an edited text of his address.



This statement gives heart to those seeking a greater contribution by Australia and Australians to global justice, in part because it is realistic and balanced, grounded in the scriptures and the church tradition, and attentive to political and economic realities.

Prepared months before a federal election but for discussion in parishes during an election campaign, it is a clear, strong statement without being partisan or party political.

The statement is not full of doom and gloom. It acknowledges that, "One of the blessings of living in a free and confident nation is that we have the opportunity to develop our gifts and contribute to a better world for those without the same gifts or opportunities".

It is clear in making a call based not on guilt but on responsibility: "a call for us Australians, better and more joyfully, to understand and to act more in the interests of our neighbours who do not share our prosperity and security".

It realistically acknowledges that in a democracy, the government will usually be attentive to the aspirations and concerns of the voters who will insist that the government act in the national interest.

The statement does not put all the weight on the politicians or the government, proclaiming incessantly, "They oughta...". Rather it acknowledges that "A politician's first instinct must be to act in the interests of her or his constituents, and in the national interest. But over time, constituents can encourage the politician,

the political party and the government to act in accordance with values more inclusive".

It is heartening to see the bishops draw on the considered opinions of Joseph Stiglitz about globalisation, its possibilities and discontents.

Stiglitz was one time economic adviser to President Clinton and then Chief Economist of the World Bank. He is also a member of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences. How refreshing to have such an expert pleading so passionately for global justice.

The bishops express approval for trade liberalisation and the cutting of tariffs but they remind us that Stiglitz insists, "Free trade has not worked because we have not tried it: trade agreements of the past have been neither free nor fair".

The statement focuses on five issues and is practical in proposing ways forward.

The bishops don't leave it
all to government... they
serve it up to all of us

On foreign aid, development assistance and trade justice, Peter Costello (former federal treasurer) said, "Economic growth is the real poverty buster". The bishops say: "True, but economic growth must go hand in hand with eradicating poverty and ensuring trade justice... Government needs to cooperate with the non-government sector, contributing to true development, which extends beyond the aim of economic growth".

In our Australian context, Peter Costello needs Tim Costello¹ if we are to do our part in making poverty history.

On military alliances and interventions, the bishops give us all pause with the poignant observation that we "Australians have been less agitated than US and British citizens about the morality and prudence of the Iraq War".

1. Former federal treasurer Peter Costello's brother, who is Chief Executive of World Vision Australia.

On a day when we hear Alan Greenspan giving credence to former federal defence minister Brendan Nelson's direct linkage of the Iraq War and oil, the bishops, while acknowledging the importance of our US alliance, publish a timely warning that "We would fail in our duty as a good global citizen if we were again to take military action without our own thorough assessment of its morality and prospects, and without broad international approval. Obligations to an ally cannot include an obligation to engage in war that is not justified".

Even if there be disagreement about application of these principles to (say) the first Iraq War or the Kosovo intervention, there ought to be agreement about the principles.

Following the lead of Pope Benedict XVI, the bishops say that "No matter what

criticisms we might have of the United Nations, we would be lost without it".

They endorse the sentiment of Kofi Annan on his retirement about the need internationally to give "the poor and the weak some influence over the actions of the rich and the strong".

On climate change and fuel policy, the bishops are circumspect in the face of contradictory and uncertain scientific predictions.

They "invoke the precautionary principle, which aims to manage situations of uncertainty and allow decisions to be made that can be modified if and when new data comes to hand".

They are insistent that "in assessing the worth and risks of nuclear power, we must have due regard to the safety and well being of future generations".

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Thanks for including a resume of my work in the recent edition of *Common Theology*. Much appreciated.

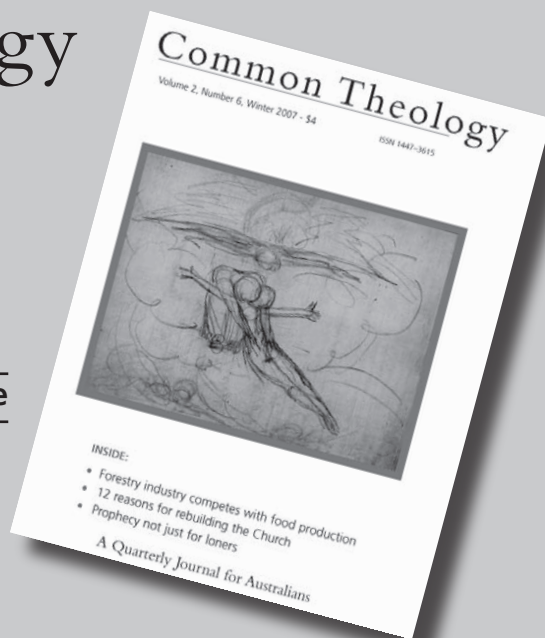
**Diarmuid O'Murchu MSC
USA**

I enjoy *Common Theology* – learn from it – and encourage friends to buy it.

**Fr David Wells SSM
Diggers Rest, Vic**

As I get older I need something like *Common Theology* to make me think.

**Joan Rowney
Somerville, Vic**



Thank you very much for a copy of *Common Theology* – we so enjoy reading it. It adds another dimension to our churchmanship.

**GM Hughes
Wareham, UK**

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Australia holds thirty-eight per cent of the world's known uranium reserves. The Switkowski committee which conducted the former federal government's recent review on uranium mining, processing and nuclear energy expressed the view that "nuclear power today is a mature, safe, and clean means of generating baseload electricity".

It conceded that the disposal of high level waste is "an issue". On the other hand, Professor Ian Lowe, President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, contends, "Until the problem is resolved, it is irresponsible to produce more waste. It is contributing to a problem that currently does not have a solution, dumping it on future generations to resolve".

The bishops don't take sides on this or other vexed questions but 'Who is my neighbour?' constantly urges the present, secure, well-off Australian to have due regard for those deprived security and wealth, and those of future generations.

No matter what our religion and no matter what our politics could we not agree...

O As the seventy-two proven refugee Sri Lankans on Nauru continue to languish while our government looks to any one but us to take them, I am delighted that our bishops continue to be unequivocal: "We should abandon the 'Pacific Solution'".

The bishops don't leave it all to government nor to the political parties. They serve it up to all of us, and with hope and practicality.

No matter what our religion and no matter what our politics, could we not all agree with the bishops that "We would be even more blessed if we lived in an Australia that:

- > matched the best of the developed nations of the world in aid and development assistance;
- > accepted the traditional Catholic doctrine opposing pre-emptive military strikes;
- > included a majority of citizens who voluntarily assisted their offshore neighbours at times of crisis;
- > supported the United Nations (though not uncritically) in efforts to provide the poor and

weak nations of the world their due place at the table;

> consumed the cleanest and safest energy on the planet;

> provided asylum and humanitarian assistance in Australia to refugees fleeing directly to our shores in fear of persecution;

> included parish and school communities that had good neighbourly relations with at least one parish or school community in the Asia-Pacific region.

I would add a couple of other benchmarks. Let's recall that last year young people filled Melbourne Town Hall to discuss 'Making Poverty History'. They then turned out in their thousands to a concert dedicated to this theme.

Forty-three thousand young Australians have signed 'Micah's call' with Micah Challenge Australia which is part of a global movement of Christian agencies, churches, groups and individuals aiming to deepen people's engagement with the poor and helping to reduce poverty as an integral part of Christian faith.

It would be great if we had more of our young people signing on for initiatives such as Micah's pledge and if we were able to boast more international volunteers *per capita* than all other countries which are poorer or less secure than ourselves.

The full text of this address can be found at www.cjpcbrisbane.wordpress.com

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Whether medicine is preventing death... or life?

By Lyndal Irons

Despite advances in technology, modern society is getting worse at caring for the dying. Dr Michael Barbato, in his address 'The Dying Odyssey', in October told the National Aged Care Chaplains Conference that more than forty years in medical practice had led him to conclude that the secularisation, institutionalisation and medicalisation of death in the 21st Century was counterproductive for those in the process of dying.

While advances in technology had resulted in people living longer, Dr Barbato questioned whether the obsession with extending life was actually only working to prolong death.

"There comes a time in all of our lives when preparation for death becomes more important than efforts to prolong it," he said.

"What we have failed to recognise is when that time is. What has happened is that the time for preparation has moved closer and closer to the time of death.

Death is too often treated
as a symptom rather than
a human experience

"We need to look at the care of the dying in a different way. We need to marry the holistic model of care with the biomedical model of care. They need to be happening together."

Dr Barbato believes that death is too often treated as a symptom rather than a human experience.

"What is important is the person, not what they are dying from," he said. "What we are dealing with are human beings, not the disease."

He said that death was now harder to predict and more difficult to manage, creating a more traumatic



Dr Michael Barbato

experience than that which was encountered earlier in history.

In earlier times, people expected to encounter death more frequently in their environment and therefore had greater acceptance of it as a stage of life.

He said many families used to have a coffin handy somewhere in storage for such an event. But now there was much undue prolonging of life due to fear of death or fear of litigation.

He said the modern trend of being in "death denial" furthered trauma by reducing the time available to prepare for the inevitable.

In his work in palliative care, at least once a month a family member asked him not to reveal the severity of the condition to the person who was going to die.

Dr Barbato said that, with death, the destination was the same for everyone but the choices people made on the way were very different.

For some, the decision to undertake a treatment that would extend their life in reality only extended their death.

He spoke of one woman who was being tube fed. She told him that what she desired most was the taste and experience of a cup of tea — whether it ended up in her stomach or her lungs.

He said doing some maths — subtracting the hours spent with doctors from the hours medicine added to a life — could help determine whether medicine was preventing death or life.

For many people, he said, news that their illness was terminal came as something of a relief after a period of pain. The main fear was how they would go.

While acknowledging that every person was different, he said his extensive experience in palliative care allowed him to distinguish a number of factors important to dying people:

Suffering is an experience to be lived not always a problem to be solved

- o Physical comfort. Patients are often more frightened of how they will feel before they die than the death itself.

- o Commitment to continuing care throughout the dying process.

- o Honesty, authenticity and vulnerability — especially in palliative care, he said, communication is ninety per cent non-verbal and visitors and family should not feel obliged to have all the answers.

- o To be treated as a person not a patient.

- o Time to explore, reflect and review.

- o Reconciliation.

What they didn't want, he said, was gratuitous advice. "Silence is perhaps the most important and most difficult thing you can offer someone who is dying.

"Chaplains exist to assist with the healing process as patients try to come to terms with their condition, but they should not try to heal the person they are caring for.

"Suffering is an experience to be lived, not always a problem to be solved," Dr Barbato warned.

When people were dying, the most common subject he discussed was regret.

He said the best way people prepared for death was by leading a full and active life. He said that advice was apt for people without a life expectancy prediction too.

"Death is a very magical, mystical and significant period in someone's life. Everybody is dying everyday and acknowledging that makes us live better."

Lyndal Irons is a journalist working in the Communications Unit of the New South Wales Synod of the Uniting Church.

index

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On a wing and a prayer

By David Macgregor



There is a difference between spiritual gifts (*charisms*) of the Holy Spirit and human skills or talents. Talents can be used of God, but the two must not be confused. One skill that I acquired before I became a disciple of Jesus, was flying airplanes.

One occasion sticks out in my memory. Our parish mission team of four had been called to conduct a Gospel weekend in a coastal town in New Zealand. The fastest and cheapest way to get there was to fly.

Mountains separated our west coast parish and the mission venue on the east coast, though one could take a longer route to avoid the highest mountains. Which we did, arriving on a Friday evening for a Saturday of visiting and teaching, and then two services on the Sunday.

I remember with great joy the response to our ministry of worship, teaching, and healing while

There was no gap in
the mountain
through which we could pass

offering people an opportunity to discover the reality of God through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was so powerfully present.

But there was a problem. My team had promised to be back home by midday on Monday morning for work commitments. The weather report was bad and I was advised that it may not be possible to fly our Cessna 180 home in time. We should be prepared to stay an extra day.

Our response was to pray, and that evening the Lord gave us a scripture which was quite amazing. It happens sometimes when one is in prayer that a scripture will come to mind. Occasionally it is a charism of wisdom for something specific. The word that came was *Habakkuk 3:19*.

The extraordinary element in this was that the version of the Bible that I was using at that time

eye witness

for devotional purposes was a paraphrase edition called *The Living Bible*. And in no other version does this verse read as follows:

“The Lord God is my strength, and he will give me the speed of a deer and bring me safely over the mountains”.

Four messages: Focus on God; His grace will meet the timing needed; we shall be kept safe; the mountains will be traversed.

We took off early next morning climbing through the clouds towards Napier airport. On the way, an air official called me and said everywhere on our longer route south was closed down, and we should stay in Napier.

At Napier airport, we landed and went to breakfast. The Control Tower confirmed that there was no gap in the mountain through which we could pass, and the alternative southern Manawatu Gorge route was definitely closed.

But in our minds, it was clear. God, not man was in control. At 10h00 the Control Tower pointed out that there was a small lifting of the cloud base near one of the high peaks. We could try but return if in any doubt.

We climbed and climbed and approached the small break – going higher was not advisable as we had no oxygen and had reached the cloud base. *Can we go in Lord?*

Again in my spirit, the word of wisdom.....*I will bring you safely over the mountains* – faith keeps the Christian disciple breathing.

Into the gap... peaks on either side... cloud on top... ten minutes of quiet tension... then suddenly... sunshine and the whole glorious land below, the sea and our destination in the far western distance.

A heavy sigh all around with “Praise the Lord” from the group. God is faithful, and we revelled in the joy of a long glide towards home and a safe landing.

David Macgregor is a former Dean of St Alban’s Cathedral in Pretoria, South Africa, and is now retired in Port Elizabeth.

Can these bones live?

Professor Stephen Sykes is Bishop of Ely in England. He delivered the annual Felix Arnott Lecture at St Francis' Theological College in Brisbane on June 8. His lecture, entitled 'The Future of Anglican Christianity' has been edited here for print.



Futurology was a term which in England had a brief flowering around the turn of the Millennium. Contemporary Christians – a number of them familiar to a wider public from starring roles on television – might be heard meditating on the difficulties of portraying a future with any degree of assurance. Modesty became them, since none of them predicted the impact that an event such as 9/11 was to have on the early years of the 21st Century.

My concern is to convey a sense of what should matter to Anglicans – not to guess at what may happen to the Anglican Communion in the next twenty years. I am very clear that events can overtake institutions and constrain them.

Leadership has the exceptionally difficult task of maintaining the Church in the truth of the Gospel, whatever may happen. And, in my view, one of the quite demanding tasks our contemporary church leaders face is the prevalence of anxiety in the developed world.

When Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not be anxious”, he was addressing a fact about human beings, greatly magnified by particular social conditions.

I have on my shelves the first edition of Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* (1952), with its three-fold analysis of the history of Western civilisation as characterised successively by ontic, moral and spiritual anxiety.

As a young student in the 'fifties I was taught by a man who had seen service as a naval chaplain in the Second World War, who was wont to mock the idea that 'deep down' humans are consumed by existential despair.

But I have to report, fifty years later, that I have frequently encountered church men and women in a serious and debilitating state of anxiety about their church.

To them I have simply wanted to address Jesus' words – lest they should come to think that the future of God's Church is in any other hands than His own (where it is, in the long run, perfectly safe) and to assure them that what is demanded of contemporary members of the Church is not success but faithfulness.

I will reflect briefly on the significance of the -ism at the end of Anglicanism.

As William Cantwell Smith, the Harvard historian of religion, pointed out, there was a moment in Western intellectual history when general terms for the religions came into fashion and when *christianitas* ceased to mean the practice of living as a Christian and took on the overtones of our modern term 'Christianity' – meaning a particular belief system.

It was a process of objectification, intellectualisation and abbreviation.

'Anglicanism' is a term invented as part of this broader intellectual movement.

The first uses in English, given by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, are by John Henry Newman in 1838 and Charles Kingsley in 1846. It is presumed that Anglicanism is describable as a set of beliefs, and constitutes at least an attempt at a system.

The problem is that almost imperceptibly -isms become reified self-contained systems which function independently of any particular thinker.

Part of the 'invention' of Anglicanism was the myth imparted to generations of Anglican theological students, that this church taught

something more ‘balanced’ than the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone.

But given that general terms such as Anglicanism do have a proper and justifiable use, there has to be a dynamic process of argument about the term if Anglicans are to be exposed to the truth about their church.

In 1964 the philosophical historian W B Gallie introduced the notion of an “essentially contested concept”, giving as instances art, religion, justice and democracy, the correct use of which necessitated awareness of the history of the terms.

These are not meaningless or vacuous concepts – we cannot do without them. Knowledge of their history exposes us to the contests about their meaning, which are endemic to them.

I have argued elsewhere that ‘Christianity’ is itself an “essentially contested concept”.

So also must be Anglicanism, as a version of Christianity. The term should designate what *characterises* Anglicans without any implication that such characteristics are in any way *distinctive* of them. It is perfectly possible for example that Anglicanism is composed of a group of characteristics none of which distinguishes it.

To illustrate what I mean, consider the well-known tune by Haydn called in many hymn books ‘Austria’. Musicologists tell me that every phrase of this tune has been borrowed from somewhere else, but we have no difficulty at all in recognising the melody when we hear it.

It is a mistake to object when a *characteristic* of Anglicanism is mentioned that it is not *distinctive* of Anglicanism. Because what is being spoken of is the Christian faith, it ought to be expected that Anglicans will share characteristics with other Christian churches, and the significance of the modern ecumenical movement is precisely that it has identified some of these shared characteristics.

I propose to abandon all pretence that I am offering a description of an abstract entity called Anglicanism, the Anglican Way, or Anglican Christianity, and give you frankly what I hold to be valuable in the Anglican tradition, in the hope that it will have a future as well as a past.

What I think we shall notice is the historical contingency of these characteristics.

There is no law which says that the Anglican way is something immutable. I was brought up as a schoolboy, as a student, and in most of my ministry upon the services of Morning and Evening Prayer, together with Coverdale’s Psalter, as presented in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The assumption that this experience is still true of the whole of the Anglican Communion now cannot be made.

There are many places where revisions of these services, or what are thought to be the needs of modern worshippers, or where what is said to be liturgical creativity, have displaced what once was true for most parts of the Anglican world.

There are consequences, of course, in this variety. Uniformity, in its own way, was a testimony to the unity of the church in its offering of worship. And there was something extraordinary in finding the same words in many different parts of the world. But there were undoubtedly negative features too, and modern liturgical developments have changed this feature of historical Anglicanism, perhaps forever.

This is an example of the fact that none of these characteristics should be thought of as immune from the possibility of change in the light of historic circumstances.

Anglicanism, is a particular way of believing or practising the Christian faith. It has sustained my own journey in the faith for more than sixty years, and I have every reason to be grateful for it.

But the crisis which has overtaken the Anglican Communion in the last few years looks as if it has the potential for causing a serious division between so-called liberal and so-called conservative versions of it. It is only a very bold (or very foolish) writer who will make predictions about it.

If I am asked what characteristics of Anglican Christianity should have a future as well as a past, these would be among my replies:

o First and foremost would be belief in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, held along with respect for the context in which they were formulated in the Early Church.

The importance of these to Anglicanism is obvious enough from the Thirty-nine Articles, and from the use of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds in the worship of the church.

Although the authority of these creeds was challenged in my lifetime, it was a challenge which has not been sustained, and these two doctrines are apparently securely rooted in the practice of the church, its life and its worship.

o Secondly, belief in the doctrine of justification by grace alone, to be received by faith alone. This is not as widely spoken of by Anglicans, partly because it has come to be the common possession of Christians of many traditions.

It was, of course, very controversial at the Reformation, but the recent agreement between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church on a matter which had torn Christians apart for five centuries hardly caused remark in Anglican circles. Why should this be?

It is partly because the 16th Century expression of this doctrine in the Thirty-nine Articles

A polarity in an American religious market is being exported to the rest of the world

was in a very moderate form, and partly because Anglicans have internalised this doctrine through the prayers they have been using.

o This brings me to the third of my chosen characteristics – the place of the Scriptures as the sole source of saving knowledge.

Again, it has been characteristic of Anglicanism from the first that the Bible should be publicly read to the people of God in their own language. It is furthermore assumed that, on the most important matters, what the Bible has to teach us is perfectly intelligible. It is plain enough so that ordinary people should hear for themselves, and even if illiterate should be able to judge that what they were being taught was, in fact, the substance of saving truth.

o This characteristic is intimately connected to my fourth characteristic; which is respect for due authority, cultivated within a climate of consent by the whole church. For Anglicans in the 16th Century this meant an ordered ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, who were to teach ‘with authority’.

But this authority could not be mistaken for any kind of personal whim. It was rather contained in the Gospel; it was available to the whole church; and to make it even more plain a Bible was presented at ordination with the words: “Take thou authority to preach the Word of God and to minister the holy sacraments”.

Episcopal authority has waxed and waned over the centuries, and the manner of church government has varied in different geographical, political, economic, social and educational contexts. From the first however, Anglicans have assumed that lay people can and should be consulted.

Normally this has meant the lay people within the bishop’s immediate locality.

The globalised village in which we all now live gives surprising measure of responsibility to a bishop if reports of what has seemed a purely local matter are carried by modern media into unimagined contexts.

Suddenly the idea of the consent of ‘the whole church’ may take on an altogether new and unexpected meaning.

At the same time bishops are ordained within the ‘Church of God’, not the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Australia, or the American Episcopal Church. They have, therefore, an inherent responsibility for the unity of the ‘Whole Church of God’ – this is part of the ecumenical mandate of Anglicanism.

o My fifth characteristic is a developing understanding of the church rooted in baptism.

This is an aspect of Anglicanism which has only come to the fore in recent years. Of course, it is based on the practice of baptism, which has been an integral part of the Anglican Way from the first.

But the strong affirmation that in baptism with water in the name of the Trinity, God confers membership of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, is characteristic of many 20th Century ecumenical statements.

Furthermore, the Anglican practice of extending Eucharistic hospitality to all who are baptised and in good standing with their own churches is a comparatively recent gesture, consistent with the same understanding of baptism.

In this connection I enjoy citing the view of Symon Patrice, later to be Bishop of Ely from 1691 to 1706. He had a background as a Pres-

byterian, and was preaching at the baptism of an infant son of a Presbyterian minister. This is what he said:

“We are not baptised into this or that particular Opinion, or received into a particular Church, but into Belief in the Gospel, and into the Church of God in general, and therefore should love all the Followers and Disciples of our Lord, and embrace all of every persuasion that live godly in Christ Jesus”.

In a century of severe conflict with Presbyterians this was a notable and inspiring view of the uniting character of Christian baptism. There were at least some Anglicans who had grasped its ecumenical potential.

O My sixth characteristic really belongs more to modern Anglicanism than to its traditions, but nonetheless I hold that it is exceptionally valuable. It is the openness of our way of believing to a plurality of spiritual traditions within historic Christianity.

It is a striking fact about the calendars of both the Anglican Church of Australia and the Church of England that they contain the commemoration of a number of non-Anglicans.

This includes some persons who set themselves against the Anglican Church of their times, such as George Fox (d. 1691), John and Charles Wesley (d. 1791 and 1788), John Henry Newman (d. 1890), Thomas More and John Fisher (described as Reformation Martyrs, d. 1535) and John Bunyan (d. 1688).

In addition to people such as these, there are named in our calendar people of quite widely different spiritual traditions, heritage and theology, including some from the pre-Reformation Church, both eastern and western, with no obvious preference for one tradition over another.

There is an English spiritual tradition to be appreciated in such 17th Century figures as George Herbert and Jeremy Taylor. And Australia has produced its local men and women whose lives are also commemorated.

It would not be difficult to show that some of these figures are strictly incompatible with each other – and doubtless their presence in a common Calendar is the result of some modern ecclesiastical compromise.

On the other hand, they are an enrichment of the life of the church, and it is an advantage that no Anglican is obliged to hold that a saint is

incapable of error. So it is possible to read their works, or consider their deeds, in a teachable frame of mind, but it is unnecessary to defend them on every point, or to abandon one's critical faculties.

The presenting issue of the current crisis is, as is well known, a new view of the possibility of a life-long, non-celibate partnership between people of the same sex. But the way this has impacted on the life of the whole Church deeply involves the view which is taken of the unity of the Church.

In ecumenical discussions Anglicans have generally taken the view that the Church should aim at organic unity.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in this dispute there are those who hold that the teaching, and also the practice, of the church cannot change on this matter without the consent of the majority of the churches of the Anglican Communion.

There is another disturbing aspect to the dispute.

In North America generally there is a polarisation in all the mainline denominations between liberal and conservative forces.

The dispute is being fought with all the sophistication that modern media can supply.

There are many signs that this conflict is now being globalised – that a polarity established in an American religious market is being exported to the rest of the world. In my view this would be a tragedy.

The first casualty in such a situation is the time and patience which is necessary before the requisite wisdom can emerge.

Many African cultures are confronting homosexuality in its modern, urbanised western form for the first time.

There is also a highly significant shift taking place in western attitudes towards intimacy of any kind.

In the context of these movements the Church needs time to discern the implications of its historic teaching about holiness. But time is what the campaigners will deny us if they see an opportunity.

review

To Rwanda and Back – Liberation spirituality and reconciliation

By Mary Grey

Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007, ISBN 139780232526646, pp 228, rrp \$39.95

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Rwanda is to Africa what Cambodia is to Asia or the Holocaust to Europe. Genocide is not uncommon in human affairs. This book makes an heroic attempt to analyse the phenomenon with a view to discover a way back to wholeness for a nation which has murdered children and mothers, fathers and neighbours.

Professor Mary Grey is a feminist theologian who was faced with the churches' complicity in genocide when she visited Rwanda as part of a World Council of Churches visit in 2004.

The experience forced her to rethink her understanding of justice and reconciliation (researched in many books by this author).

This read is interesting for exposing some of the risks of applied theology – of praxis – and weaves together narrative, scholarship and speculation.

The author describes her first visit to Africa, although she works in an impoverished part of India and has extensive cross-cultural experience. Her personal journey as an Irish woman growing up in England is a glowing ember in the narrative.

The bald statistic of a hundred days of killing a million people turned out to be the “tip of the iceberg” for the WCC visitors to Rwanda thirteen years after the genocide.

Colonialism had sown the seeds in this most Christianised African country, and a long war had preceded the actual genocide – which had confused perceptions in the international community, which in turn led to its abandonment of Rwanda during the killing.

The phenomenon of structural amnesia was identified by the WCC visitors – where the context for remembering is deliberately made impossible. This experience is common around the world – refugees, migrant workers, asylum-

seekers, peoples with disabilities etc are often silenced by the dominant discourse.

In the case of Rwanda silence was often induced by memories too horrible to recall.

Liberation theology, influenced by the Exodus story, honours the process of ‘dangerous memory’ that allows an oppressed people to remember origins. But this author introduces a concern that liberation theology’s understanding of memory is not adequate to the fact that we have not always been innocent victims of history.

This introduces the subject of the silence over the damage and exploitation done to the planet – a core theme in this book.

Feminist spirituality stresses the interconnections between personal, political, psychological and spiritual. Sometimes this attempt at integrity causes the discourse to balloon into distant skies outside the reasonable competence of a couple of hundred pages.

There are salutary points of connection with our own lives as members of a human race with a history – and particularly for Australians faced with the conundrum of an apology to Aboriginal peoples.

Re-membering in this case is painful because it involves coping with the claims of guilt. The author refers to this as *metanoic* memory, a remembering that needs humility and a willingness to bear witness to the truth.

The area of reconciliation and justice is fraught with difficulties because of countless attempts to barge through forgiveness at any price. A subject the author explores at length, with restorative justice as an aspect of the atonement.

“It is within this vision of structural justice of right relation that forgiveness finds meaning.” (p.37)

A radical message of this book is a call for an overhaul of church ecclesiology, which puts the emphasis not on the cross as sacrifice and expiation but as symbol of identity in love, and a readiness to share the same vulnerability that afflicted the people Jesus loved.

review

Similarly, the author suggests that social transformation needs transformed consciousness and a new symbol system that inspires different ways of relating to the earth – away from a privatised notion of salvation – and a recovery of the Common Good.

This text is not well-polished but provides an interesting insight into the struggle of researching “the embodied spirituality of reconciliation” which the author is developing. As such it is a good example of praxis.

Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church

by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson
Johngarrett publishing, 2007, ISBN
1920721479, pp 307.

Reviewed by Arthur Grimshaw

This is a splendid and thought-provoking book written by a Roman Catholic bishop — which ought to be required reading for theological students and informed lay folk of all denominations.

Anglican emphasis since the 16th Century on the three-fold nature of Christian revelation has linked the three streams of Scripture, Reason and Tradition.

In his book Bishop Robinson identifies these streams under slightly different titles, as the wisdom of God contained in the bible; the wisdom of the present studies of the world around and within us; and the wisdom of the past embodied in what has been handed down in the tradition of the church.

He makes the point that Tradition pre-dated the Scriptures, and indeed defined which Scriptures were counted as authentic by the Church.

He also reminds us the *tradere* also means ‘to betray’ and thus in the creative and imaginative process of handing on what we have received it is always possible to betray what had been handed on to us.

Spiritual discernment is needed to interpret each of these streams of the wisdom of God.

The tradition which has been handed on from the Lord and his witnesses was the transmission of the living faith and corporate life of the infant Church.

Before long it was recognised that to preserve the memories of Jesus and his life and teaching beyond the early generations of adherents, some written record of the events and teachings would be needed. Thus the tradition preceded the writing of the New Testament.

In the century after Christ’s death and resurrection there were many apocryphal writings in addition to the four Gospels now recognised by the Church as authentic witnesses (e.g. the Gospels of James, Thomas, Nicodemus, and many others).

In discerning whether or not a sacred writing was accepted into the general life of the Church, three principles were adopted:

○ antiquity – was the scripture written and used while the eyewitnesses were still alive, or was the authenticity attested by reliable eyewitnesses?

○ universality – was the particular Gospel accepted for reading in all the churches, or only a few?

○ authenticity – was there in the writing integrity with the teaching of the other gospels; did they lead to a deeper understanding of Jesus and of God?

Only four conformed to these standards – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

It was important to the early Church that the very diversity of the four gospels assisted Christians to come to a deeper understanding of Jesus and of God.

The ‘canon’ of scripture was not settled until some four hundred years later.

The Scriptures were created to assist the process of preserving the ‘tradition’. Without tradition we would have no Scriptures.

The wisdom of God as mediated through contemporary studies in more recent times is perhaps a more difficult area, with greatly diver-

gent notions and understandings, especially in such matters as the place of men and women in society, the scientific understanding of sexuality and its implications in our reflecting on homosexual matters, or scientific research in a world which is very different from that encountered in the Scriptures.

The following paragraphs are quoted verbatim from Bishop Robinson's book:

"Within the Anglican Communion there are three branches that are sometimes called evangelical, catholic and liberal. All three have great respect for the bible, all three acknowledge that specifically Anglican ways of doing things have been handed down and all three would consider themselves reasonable and rational.

"Nevertheless, relative to each other, the evangelical branch gives more weight to the bible, the catholic branch gives more weight to what has been handed down, and the liberal branch gives more weight to the wisdom of the world around us and within us. The same preferences can be seen in other churches.

Such writings from a Roman Catholic source are evidence of stirrings of questioning within the tradition

"I mention this fact to stress the difficulty of finding the right balance between the wisdom of God contained in the bible, the wisdom of the present studying the world around and within us and the wisdom of the past embodied in what has been handed down.

"Much thought needs to be given to this matter and nothing less than the collective wisdom of the entire Christian world will be sufficient. The extremes of all three tendencies must be sternly resisted and we must work towards an understanding where each of these means of knowledge is properly balanced by the other two." (p.74)

Such writings from a Roman Catholic source are evidence of stirrings of questioning within the Catholic tradition which hopefully will lead to deeper theological encounter across the borders of denominational difference.

Having established this groundwork, Bishop Robinson goes on to reflect on the nature of the church that originated in Jesus and the knowl-

edge that Jesus brought to his mission to universally proclaim the reign of God.

He goes on to note the developments in papal power over the centuries quoting the devastating comment by Yves Congar, a noted theologian, who spoke of being "crushed, destroyed, excommunicated by a pitiless system which can neither amend itself nor even recognise its errors, but is run by men who are disarming in their goodness and piety". (p.128)

The author examines the beginnings of change initiated by the Second Vatican Council, and leads into his reflections on the questions of morality arising from the scandals of widespread sexual abuse within the churches and how they have been handled.

This area of concern was Bishop Robinson's particular brief for six years after he retired from his ministry as auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, and was elected by the Australian Catholic Bishops to the National Committee for Professional Standards (of which he was co-chairman).

Robinson's chapter 'A dark grace, a severe mercy' is particularly pertinent for those given the task of planning rehabilitation for former offenders.

The four chapters on moral issues are followed by four chapters on the beliefs of the church – equally ground-breaking and disturbing to traditionalists.

His vision is for the church to model in its members the responsibility appropriate to adults rather than the obedience appropriate to children.

As the dustcover summary proclaims: "Readers will love or hate this book, but will not be neutral".

This is compulsive reading, with opportunities for meditation and reflection at the end of each chapter. The author pre-supposes a prayerful disposition in those who reflect on the issues raised by his book, and these meditations at the end of each chapter would be a valuable resource for an ecumenical study group willing to take the journey offered by the bishop, and willing to grow in the kind of maturity Bishop Robinson seeks for our future in this world.

Fr Arthur Grimshaw is Dean Emeritus of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane.

Hugh's books

By Hugh McGinlay

Polebridge Press publishes some controversial books and some controversial authors (for example Jesus Seminar, John Spong, Don Cupitt, Lloyd Geering, John Dominic Crossan).



One of their authors is Nigel Leaves, Warden and Dean of Studies of John Wollaston Anglican Theological College in Perth. His recent title *The God Problem – alternatives to fundamentalism* offers new ways of talking about God in a society that seems increasingly uncomfortable with some of the more traditional images and language.

Paternoster Press from the UK now includes what is called the 'Paternoster Digital Library' series. As the name suggests, these are digitally produced editions of older titles that are still in demand.

Recent titles include *Not Ashamed of the Gospel* (New Testament interpretations of the death of Christ) by Morna Hooker (1842274503, \$38.95); *The Olive Branch* (An evangelical Anglican doctrine of the Church) by Tim Bradshaw (1842274449, \$59.95) and *Christ in our Place* (The humanity of God in Christ for the reconciliation of the world) by Travis Hart and Daniel Thimell (184227449X, \$74.95).

Hillenbrand Books is an imprint of Liturgical Training Publications in Chicago and continues to publish in a fairly specialised area of theology and worship.

Among their new titles, *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform* (9781595250216, \$155.00) by Anthony Ruff is an excellent reflection on those principles that govern appropriate liturgical music in Roman Catholic and other churches. In an age when often 'anything goes', here is a scholarly work that provides a balanced answer to the ongoing debate about the place of music in Christian worship.

Keith Ward's new edition of *Divine Action* (Templeton Foundation Press, 9781599471303, \$31.95) examines God's role in an open and emergent universe, looking at what is involved in our understanding of creation and offering a rationale for the role of divine operation and providence in a world of scientific law and intelligibility.

A new book about the Anglican Church reveal much about the internal workings of that denomination. Bishop Tom Frame of St Mark's in Canberra has written his *Anglicans in Australia* (UNSW Press, 9780868408309, \$39.95) as a way of providing a short but well researched history of the Anglican Church in Australia, and of identifying what he sees as the challenges for the church in the future, not least because of the deep divisions found within the denomination.

An exciting new title from DLT in London is Hugh Rayment-Pickard's *50 Key Concepts in Theology* (9780232526226, \$34.95). The author considers the central theological issues of the Christian tradition (atheism, atonement, biblical criticism, fundamentalism, eschatology, etc.) and in a series of short essays, introduces the themes and gives a short history of the movements and trends within that area, including the principal writers and thinkers on the topics. One reviewer says; "He has supplied a sound guide for the perplexed and a stimulus to argument amongst the interested".

The Language of God by Francis Collins, head of the Gnome Project (Free Press, 9781416542742, \$29.95) was on the New York Times bestseller list. At a time when faith is under attack from celebrated atheists from a scientific background, here is an authoritative book from a scientist who firmly believes that faith and science can coexist harmoniously and profitably. He works at the cutting edge of the study of DNA, the code of life, yet is a person of deep faith in God.

How do we make moral decisions and what is so special about this process for Christians? And if it is all so obvious, why do the various churches have different approaches in the guidance they offer their members? John Harrod, Principal of

Hartley Victoria College in Manchester, has a new book called *Weaving the Tapestry of Moral Judgement – Christian ethics in a plural world* (9780716206187, Epworth, \$69.95) in which he opens up to us the wide range of philosophies and traditions that influence how we reach moral decisions. He is comfortable enough within his Christian tradition to acknowledge room for uncertainty in particular cases, inviting us to consider seriously what informs our moral choices and decisions and, basically, the kind of people we seek to be and become.

In a more specific moral area that has pressing implications for us as believers, Michael Northcott's *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming* (9780232526684, DLT, \$39.95) laments the fact that generally the debate over global warming has failed to engage most Christian leaders, despite this being – he asserts – one of the biggest moral dilemmas of our time. His new book examines theological attitudes to climate change, from the complacent to the apocalyptic. Northcott is a priest of the Episcopal Church in Scotland and Professor of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh. He is well placed to reflect upon and argue persuasively for Christians to confront our personal and social responsibility for climate change. He plans to visit Australia in May next year.

For some in the churches, science and theology are often experienced as unusual companions. *Faith Seeking Understanding: approaching God through science* (9780809144518, Paulist, \$26.95) by John Shackleford believes that science is a gift of God, given to us to use in our quest to understand God. He explores the scientific evidence for a personal, loving God as part of an ongoing dialogue between science and faith. The current debates about creationism and evolution make all the more pressing the need for such informed books that show how religious faith can live in harmony with the methodology of scientific enquiry.

Recently, Paternoster in the UK issued a new edition of *A Thousand Tongues* by John Lawson (Paternoster, 9781842275504, \$37.95). As the title suggests, this is an exploration of the hymns of John Wesley not simply for their uplifting, experiential aspects but, more importantly, to discover the depth of their theology and bibli-

cal allusion. The book will be welcomed by people who have used the Wesley hymns over the years and are familiar with that tradition; and by contemporary liturgists looking for models of hymnody as a way of teaching basic Christian truths. The book is organised according to the great truths of our faith, with a succinct commentary on Wesley's theological understanding of those truths and how he expressed them in his hymns.

What do theologians have to say about genetic technologies? Two of them from the Department of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the University of Aberdeen have edited a new book from Continuum. *Theology, Disability and the New Genetics* edited by John Swinton and Brian Brock (T & T Clark, 9780567045584, \$53.95) comes out of a conference held at the University of Aberdeen in 2005 and is a series of essays that considers the promises and perils of today's genetic medicine, raising a fundamental question: will our acceptance of genetics make us less accepting of others?

On a related topic, Templeton Foundation Press have published *The Altruistic Species* by Andrew Flescher and Daniel Worthen (Templeton, 9781599471228, \$58.95). Subtitled 'Scientific, philosophical and religious perspectives of human benevolence', the book asks basic questions about altruism – what motivates altruism and how essential is altruism to the human experience? The book argues for the existence of altruism against competing theories that view benevolence as self-interest in disguise. This is a book not only for scholars of social ethics and moral psychology but for anyone who is seriously concerned about living ethically.

Finally, from Continuum we have *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up* – the sources behind the myth – by Esther de Boer (Continuum, 9780567031822, \$34.95). Unlike some recent best-sellers, here is a scholarly account of the history of Mary Magdalene that brings together an impressive range of texts from the first century when she was alive to the sixth century when her image as a penitent sinner was invented. Further details of the titles are on our website www.rainbowbooks.com.au or you can consult your local Christian bookshop.

When words really count

By Andrew Hamilton



Whenver a moral issue swims into public

view, people will call for church leaders to make a statement about it. The call should be weighed carefully – such statements have their place but are not normally all that helpful.

The reason is that church statements are written to achieve broader goals – to help form a lively and faithful church community and to ensure that the wider public is properly informed about Christian faith and its implications for issues facing the nation.

Statements by church leaders are only one of many strategies, and a relatively minor one, to shape a faithful church community. The most effective strategies are more simple – reading the Gospel, for example, gathering to pray, sermons and unstructured conversations about faith and how to live it.

Leaders of churches, of course, have an important place in shaping the community.

They are generally most effective when they speak modestly with church groups to encourage faithfulness and generosity.

Pastoral letters to the whole local church also have a long tradition and can be effective in encouraging faith. Those that try to clarify and define Christian faith are sometimes appropriate. They are also difficult.

To change ways of thinking you normally need to touch hearts. Doctrinal statements don't easily touch hearts. But if they fail to do so they can alienate minds as readily as they persuade them.

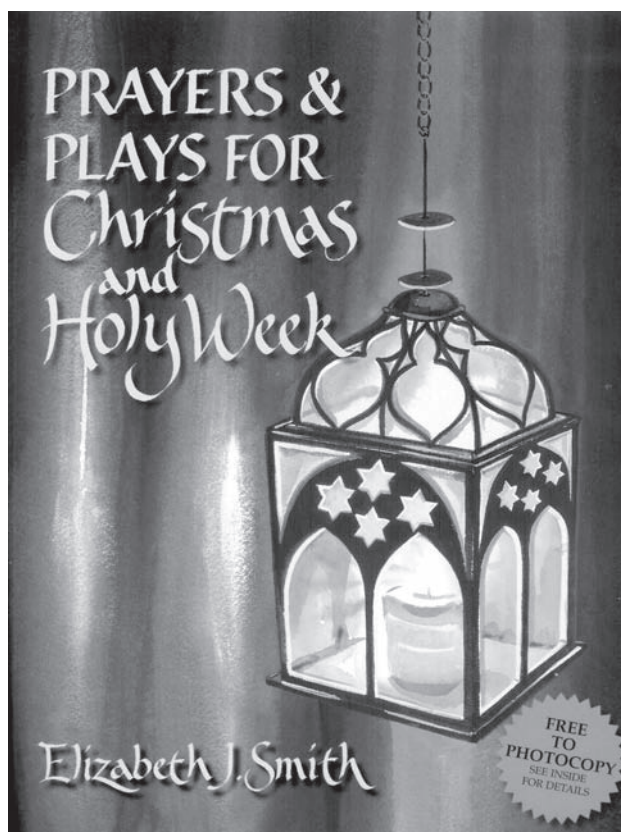
When people press for church leaders to speak, though, it is generally to address a public audience, through press releases or in articles or interviews.

Home Truths

Sometimes the right words and gestures can be extraordinarily helpful, especially when they represent the faith of their community in response to events that affect the nation.

Events like the Twin Towers, the Tsunami or the killings at Port Arthur allow church leaders to speak simply out of the faith of their church.

If they can encourage people by standing with them and helping them find good words to express the inarticulate movements of their



Prayers & Plays for Christmas and Holy Week

By Elizabeth J Smith

Broughton Publishing, ISBN 1920892931
pp 103

info@e-pray.org.au

hearts, they will speak more effectively than if they stand above people and lecture to them.

But those who urge church leaders to speak out usually want them to make clear to the broader public what Christians believe and what moral positions they take, in response to issues of current interest, such as the case of Dr Haneef, prospective abortion legislation and so on.

In these cases, too, the need for statements needs to be assessed against their goals. The most important of these is that the attitude of the churches should be understood and persuasively commended to the general public.

They do not support community commitment and organisation but substitute for it

That happens best when Christian attitudes and beliefs are evident in the life of the church communities.

The Christian attitude to asylum seekers and its incompatibility with government policy, for example, are evident in the large numbers of committed Christians who care for asylum seekers and speak on their behalf.

The most helpful contribution of church leaders here is to encourage the generosity and commitment of their communities.

Public statements will simply own what is being done in the churches and affirm its grounding in Christian faith. They are often best made by spokesmen for the church committees responsible for responding to the issues.

The reason why statements by church leaders should be only an ancillary strategy is that they are two-edged.

When groups make statements about a wide variety of issues, we normally stop treating what they say very seriously. We assume that they cannot have on so many issues the depth of expertise and commitment that might give authority to what they say.

Within organisations, too, such statements can be taken as a goal rather than a strategy. They then do not support community commitment and organisation but substitute for it.

Statements by church leaders can be an important strategy where matters of grave moral concern are of little interest to church communities. I believe that the potential for serious disrespect to human dignity make the laws against terrorism one of these areas.

There is little awareness in churches of their dangers. Statements by Church leaders can be significant in awakening awareness.

Statements of this kind, however, can have costs both for churches and their leaders. These have been evident in some of the bravest church statements – by German church leaders against Hitler's policies and by South African leaders against apartheid. The Gospel can take both the churches and their leaders on to perilous ground.

That is where words count.

Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ is Consulting Editor of *Eureka Street*. This editorial appeared in the on-line journal on August 16. www.eurekastreet.com

Paget's Parable



the missing verses ...

at the same time some 'not so wise' men from somewhere near the east got lost so they returned home and exchanged their gifts.

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