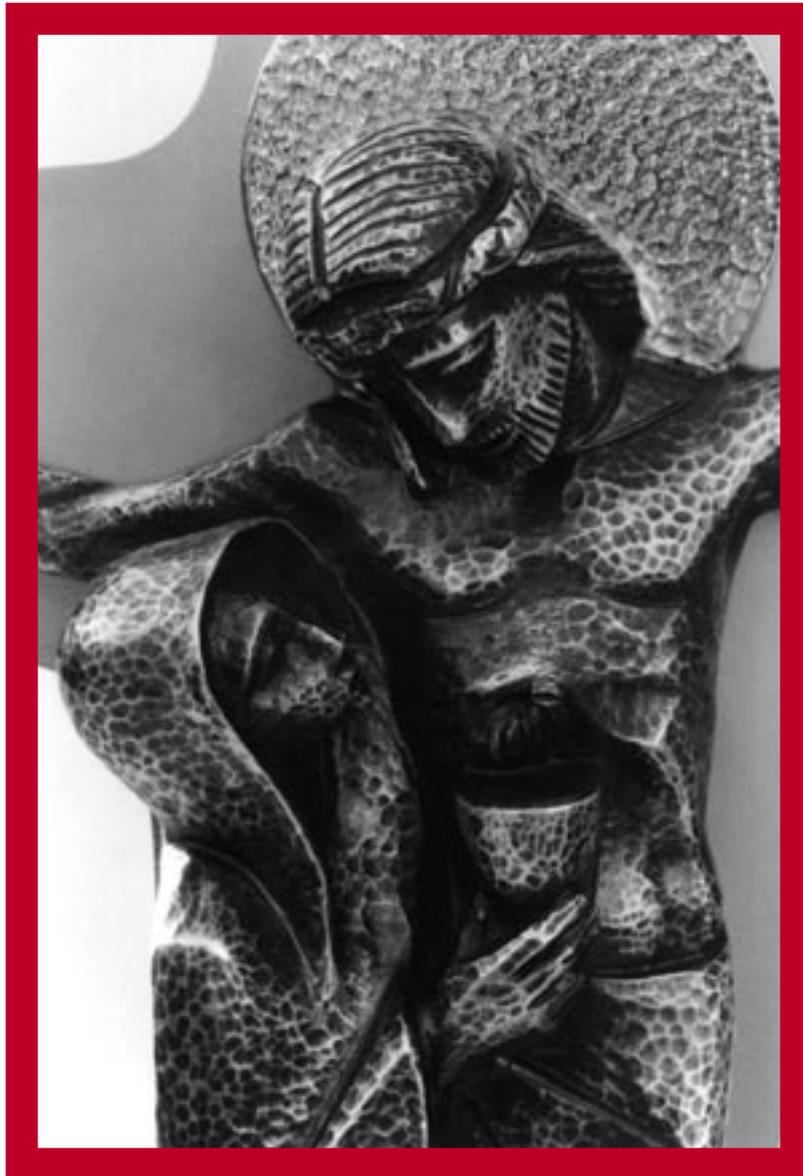


Common Theology

Volume 1, number 11, Autumn 2005 — \$3

ISSN 1447-3615



INSIDE:

- Living in End Time — how to live with global warming
- Jesus pop culture
- Songs for terror — Kidz 2 Kidz

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



Cover: An illustration from *Australian Religious Diary*. Anzel Vincente Serro, 'Unity Cross of the International Schoenstatt Movement', 1966 (7). Photo by John Casamento. See review page 25.

Published by HelassInk

PO Box 117, Sandgate, Qld 4017

Technical Production

Clare Nolan, Clockwork Communicators

Administration

Anne Bucetti, *doing data*

Printed by Watson Ferguson & Co, Moorooka

Website: www.commontheology.com

Webmaster: Cameron Taylor

Common Theology is an independent publication funded by its subscribers. It aims to be a forum where public matters that affect Australian Christians' daily life and decision-making can be aired in a theological context, in language accessible to anyone who can read.

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From the Editor

As *Common Theology* approaches its third year in circulation—something of a miracle for an independent publication—I have been reflecting on the mysterious way each edition constellates on a theme. Articles gathered from across Australia, Oceania, and even other continents, usually come together on these pages with a common motif—the nature of truth; the catholicity of the Church; the struggle for social justice; practical Christianity. This edition is preoccupied with the knotty problem of forgiveness.

Helen Prejean, a Sister of the Community of St Joseph and the author of *Dead Man Walking*, was in Australia this autumn. She is a gifted storyteller—with the odious topic of the death penalty. She says that although we do not have the death penalty in Australia, we still have an issue with the death penalty. Her witness to the power of one person to alter the course of history is valuable for those of us who groan over the state of the world.

Theological college principal Philemon Akao, from the Solomon Islands, presented a very different point of view of global catastrophe from the one we are used to, at a conference in Canberra in April. For the vocal west, environmental meltdown is ‘not yet’, he says. But Oceania is literally *in* it! Faith takes on an entirely new perspective in Melanesia where God is vulnerable, not almighty, and Christians are required to live joyfully, and continue to act, in the face of immanent catastrophe.

John Kani, the grand old man of South African theatre, was also in Australia this autumn. His play, *Nothing but the Truth*, is the first great post-apartheid drama to find a new vocabulary for one of the perennial conflicts of the human heart—the path of forgiveness.

In *Home Truths*, a priest who has every reason to resent a pope who called him a Judas pays his respects to John Paul II.

The breathtaking election of Pope Benedict XVI reinforces the theme of forgiveness for a generation of Germans who have grown up with the stigma of the Third Reich. The election of a German (albeit Bavarian) pope will pour oil on a nation which may have excelled in the economic sphere since World War II, but which has yet to return in full measure from moral exile.

Maggie Helass

The death penalty nun

In 1982, as a pastoral gesture, Sister Helen Prejean CSJ wrote to an inmate at Death Row, Louisiana State Prison, USA. She became his spiritual advisor, and two-and-a-half years later she walked with him to his execution in the electric chair.



She realised she had been a privileged witness to a social atrocity that laid upon her the responsibility to tell this story. She wrote a book, which became the famous movie *Dead Man Walking*. As fear and terrorism paralyse many people in the west, Sister Helen visited Australia during February and March to tell how one person's story can change things.

I wrote to this man Patrick Sonnier on Death Row. And the trouble was, he wrote back! When you have an encounter between two human beings, that is a course that can change everything.

You don't have the death penalty in Australia. Thank God you don't. Thank God you are awakened and enlivened to know that, at least on this front of human rights, you are going to stand firm as a people. You have other challenges—immigrants, and people who seek asylum, not to criminalise them and throw them into prison. Every society has its challenges. There's a long way to go.

We have been meeting with some Aboriginal people in Redfern in Sydney, and hearing stories of what is happening, continues to happen, to face the deep problems of justice and reconciliation.

I had no idea that, two-and-a-half years from the time I began to know this man Patrick Sonnier, began to visit this man, they are going to kill him on the night of April 4 in the electric chair, at midnight. And at quarter to six in the evening, in the death house, everybody has to leave, except the spiritual advisor. Who is going to be me! Who is going to walk with him, who is going to be able to touch him as we walk to the electric chair. And who will say to me, “Look Sister Helen, you can't

see it at the end, you can't see it. It could scar you to see this!” He was trying to protect me.

Only poor people are selected for the death penalty. Rich people are never selected for the death penalty. Poor people get poor defence. Poor defence means the truth is not going to come out in trial, because for truth to come out in trial you have to have an adversarial system, which means prosecution presents; defence presents. Prosecution shows forensic evidence testing; defence shows forensic evidence testing.

Sister Helen feels compassion for jurors who have to make their decision on this shaky basis.

There is no deep reflection on this, it is the machinery of death, it is protocol death, and politicians feed the process, so they can be elected. That is why we have to educate the people.

First, guilt! I am consorting with the people who killed these kids.

She did not want to go naively into the business of being spiritual director to a convicted murderer, so she asked for his file, and saw photographs of the two murdered teenagers.

First, guilt! I am consorting with the people who killed these kids. I am spiritual advisor! This was any parent's nightmare. On a Friday night the kids go out to a football match, and they don't come home.

You hear politicians running for office in the United States—and it is good that you are protected from this (in Australia). You don't have the death penalty—you don't even have it on the table—because if you did, you'd have politicians making speeches like this too, running for office and saying, “Ladies and gentleman, the reason I am tough on crime, and for the death penalty, is because these poor victims families, they deserve some respect and some justice”. And the way they

interpret that is, “Now you wait fifteen, twenty years, and then you come sit on the front row, and watch now as we execute the one who killed your loved one, and that’s gonna heal you”.

We have so much to learn from native American peoples, and the circles of healing. That when trust has been broken, when an injustice and hurt in a community has broken the circle, the circle gathers together the wisdom of the community and talks about what we need to do to restore order.

Instead, the district attorney comes and says, in order to show how deeply we respect your child’s life we are going to go for the ultimate penalty.

What I know now, after twenty years of working with this issue, that those victims’ families where the district attorneys go to their homes and ask what they would like—do they want the death penalty or not—are almost always white people.

When people of colour are killed in the United States the death penalty is seldom sought. Not only is the death penalty not sought; often there is not even an investigation of the murder.

We know that there are about 15,000 homicides in the United States every year, and in less than two per cent of all those people who commit murder is the death penalty sought. We also know the pattern—that the practitioners of the death penalty are very clear. It is the ten or twelve southern states that practiced slavery the longest. Over eighty per cent of executions happen in those states. Yet we have equal justice under law.

Jesse Jackson¹ calls the death penalty “legalised lynching”, and they call the prison system legalised slavery, because when you go to prison in Louisiana you get two-and-a-half cents an hour for your work. You see people walking in columns out to the fields of cotton and sugar cane and vegetables, with hoes over their backs, a guard on a horse in the front with a rifle, a guard on horseback at the back with a rifle, taking them out to the fields. What has changed?

It goes right back to slavery, and the feeling of the whites that we have to control these people. When I did get a chance to have a dialogue with the Pope about this I said, what society is ever going to be pure enough that it can say that it cares as much if a homeless person gets killed, or if a judge gets killed; if a policeman gets killed or a

poor person that no-one has heard of gets killed? No society has the purity to say that we care for all our citizens, and if we don’t care, and if we don’t care about their lives equally, we are never going to be able to apply death equally either.

We are at a place now in the United States where the discourse is beginning to shift because we have 118 wrongfully convicted people who have come off Death Row. Not because the court systems are working, but because college-age kids have got involved in these things called ‘innocence projects’, working with their professors. They dig into these cases and find out what the defence attorney never found out, because poor people don’t get a good defence. They find evidence of innocence. They find varied police reports, where from the beginning there was another suspect, but it got buried. Sometimes they find DNA that was held back. This is just recent.

Governor Ryan was the first governor to stand before the nation and call for a moratorium on the death penalty in Illinois, which has held to this day. As he was leaving office, he commuted all the sentences on Death Row, because, he said, even if there is one innocent person—and how could there not be other innocent people on Death Row—it is unconscionable for me. He set up a flare, he set up a beacon.

In my new book, *The Death of Innocents*, I talk about people who have already been executed. People are aware now that probably we have already executed an innocent person, and there could be a lot more.

We can stop this tomorrow morning at nine o’clock. We don’t have to keep killing people, or letting government be in charge of this. We know on one hand we can barely trust government to fill the potholes in the street, much less be given the job of deciding which citizens live and which citizens die. And what about the poor juries?

All crimes against innocent people are terrible. And we feel outrage when we read about it in the paper.

The true hero of *Dead Man Walking* is Lloyd LeBlanc, because as he begins to share his life—what it means to lose his only son—he said, “When the sheriff’s deputy came to get me, the day after David went missing, he said, you need to come, we think we have your boy in the morgue and we need you to come and identify him.

“When they pulled his body out and I looked down on my son, my only son, I said the prayer I learned as a child with my Mum and Dad, that we said at mass every Sunday, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven’, and when I came to the words, ‘forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us’, I said the words over my son’s body. I didn’t feel the words, but I know what Jesus told us to do when he set his face on that path.

“Some people think forgiveness is weak—that you condone what they did. My wife cried for three years. I would come home from work and it was like coming home to a morgue. We all of us died with David’s death. Condone what they did? This is what I know, that they ain’t going to take the love out of me. I don’t condone what they did, but I’m not going to let the love that is in me be overcome by hate.”

That is how he interpreted what Jesus meant by forgiveness. These are the people who have been through the fire, and they are the ones who show us the way.

One of the things I came to understand is that, once a victim’s family, publicly, has asked for the

I’d never seen anyone killed in front of my eyes before.



death penalty, how could they ever get out from under that without looking like they are betraying their loved one?

When they electrocute people they put a mask over the person’s face who is being killed, to protect the witnesses from seeing the 1900 volts of electricity course through his body.

I’d never seen anyone killed in front of my eyes before. It was all so futile. It was such an act of despair. To see that the only thing we can do when a person is killed—we imitate their violence—we kill them. And what is that showing? It is making more victims’ families, because then Pat’s mother, Pat’s sister, Pat’s brother have to put him in the ground. Another funeral. What have we proved? When are we going to choose life?

I came out of that execution chamber and all I knew was that my little boat had gotten into this current. I had been brought into this and I was a witness. I knew that in Louisiana the poll said eighty per cent of people thought the death penalty is a fine idea.

They were never going to be brought close to it. People didn’t know what was going on, and my job was to tell the story. And so I began. And believe me, before there was a movie and book, we are talking about limited audiences.

I remember giving a talk after lunch at a nursing home in New Orleans. There was an announcement: “Who wants to hear the death penalty nun?” Three people went to this little room, and I was talking ten minutes and two of them were gone. They were not snoring, but they were not listening.

I began to learn how to tell the story. How to take people over both sides—to descend into the outrage of the death of an innocent person, to feel the suffering of the victim’s family, and then to slowly bring them into that outrage of seeing what happens when the state kills a human being. So I gave talks, I began to write pieces for the newspaper, then I got a wonderful literary agent, I wrote a book, had a great editor, learned how to shape the book of *Dead Man Walking*.

William Faulkner, a southern (USA) writer, when he got the Nobel Prize for Literature, said the only thing worth writing about is the conflict in the human heart, and to take people into that conflict.

You don’t have the death penalty in Australia, but it doesn’t mean that you don’t have a conflict with the death penalty. When you’ve got a really terrible crime there is something in us that rises up, “Well, whoever did *that* deserves to die”. It’s in all of us because we are human beings, and we are outraged over the death of innocent people.

Getting the discourse out is the most important thing. I work with the media. I say to the media your work is very important because you bring the stories to the people in our society, and without you we don’t have discourse, we don’t have a way of really reflecting on what is it we are about as a society.

Helen Prejean’s new book *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* is available on Amazon.com

1. A USA civil rights activist.

Living in End Time

Philemon Akao is a theologian from Melanesia who addressed an international environmental conference in Canberra during April. He delivered a paper with a very different point of view of global warming—from the islands of the Pacific. An edited version of his paper appears below.



It was in the winter of 2004 when I met an old friend of mine in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As we drove along the highway from Acadia University he said to me, “What can you make out of your visit to the Maritimes?” I answered, “What do you mean?” and he said, “What has an islander from the South Seas to do with someone from the continent?”

I guess the essence of my friend’s question is one of the difference between power and vulnerability. Continents are mirrors of the power of great influences, in contrast to the reality of vulnerability in the island nations of Melanesia in the Pacific.

The populations of the low-lying atolls, coastlands and islands of the Pacific are facing a future many people have come to believe is an impending premature death. In spite of this, the peoples of Oceania continue to celebrate the feast of life—a mystery unfolding each day.

It appears that every time concerns are expressed for the environment, we address issues of the human abuse of power. This is definitely a dominant view in the west. But this view must give room to other views. I am conscious above all of the concerns of the vulnerable Pacific region, whose views to a certain extent are a challenge to the predominant views of those from the continents. Our view is embedded in our experience of vulnerability.

Vulnerability for the tiny communities in Melanesia is our absolute dependence on God in the face of a reality we are *in*, and not one that we are awaiting in the near future. For many

Christians, God Almighty can never be reduced to “what is not”. But for Melanesians in the Pacific, where the low-lying atolls, coastlands and islands are in the process of submerging, we see every day not the face of a powerful God, but the face of a vulnerable God who shares our vulnerability.

How can God be all-powerful when low lying atolls are submerging and being lost for ever in the rising sea level?

If power is a necessary evil, was not that the reality of the recent tsunami affecting the low-lying coastal areas of the Indian Ocean? In reality. Not a ‘not yet’ reality for the deceased, whose silent voices have captured the attention of the entire globe?

Living in the midst of such an impending calamity, the concern save the world of the Christians of the Pacific region has nothing to do with the question of what shall we do to save Mother Earth? Rather the question is what can those from the continents, in the process of regretting their own actions, learn from the faith and the lifestyle of those who are actually caught in the threat of the ocean’s unpredictability?

I am in no way denying we too, in our small ways, have contributed to the problem. But at least

Some promote a decent lifestyle for our peoples, as if we do not know decency at all, in their terms.

our experiences of vulnerability have created for us an awareness of “Vanua”, Mother Earth, as a mystery continuously bursting forth with life.

In the light of the grim reality we are *in*, the peoples of the low-lying atolls of the Pacific do not want to hear empty rhetoric from our sisters and brothers from the continents. Instead, what we want to see is a dynamic and an authentic response from your governments.

Our problem is, the small island states of the biggest ocean in the world seem to matter less for those on the continents. They matter only for purposes of self-interest.

The irony is, these small island states are huge when the last forests are being negotiated for felling by local corrupt governments and multi-national companies.

Our people are like aliens from another planet to the greedy multi-national corporations when we put up a fight for justice.

Our people’s lifestyle seems displaced in the post-modern era of the 21st Century, to the extent that some promote a decent lifestyle for our peoples, as if we do not know decency at all, in their terms.

It is absurd for armchair researchers of the environment to generalise about the depleting state of the islands’ ecosystems, while in Melanesia people contentedly continue a centuries-old lifestyle of care and respect.

Mere emotion over a world that will end tomorrow must not be confused with the real experiences of the small island states, whose populations are able to look after their environment in the face of unpredictable catastrophe.

Shalom means peaceful coexistence with God, people, and the created order. Wholeness is the embodiment of my people’s ‘laidback’ lifestyle, who have lived with this reality for centuries.

Those who know nothing about the tune of this song, who ask us now to sing a familiar tune, must prepare to sing in tune with us.

The call to change course, at the eleventh hour, to save Mother Earth is due largely to humanity’s self-indulgence. God made us good and simple, we have made ourselves complicated. The grim reality today is that simplicity is a lifestyle of the past, and only now are we trying to find our way back after complicating our own lives. This return journey is the challenge of our time.

Even where indigenous peoples continued to sustain the environment with a lifestyle the rest of humanity is on a quest now to find, their traditional lifestyles were not recognised as an alternative.

Many people the world over are afraid of the impending calamities because they are not *in*. Our situation is the opposite. The rising sea level is a reality engulfing us on every side. In this reality of speechlessness, the voice of God is our beacon of hope.

Hope in God for a better future for the Melanesian people has led to a re-adaptation to the old traditional lifestyle. A paradigm shift from

a fast-track life, to the adoption of a ‘laidback’ lifestyle of care and respect.

In the remote Melanesian jungles, just like any tribal communities, the struggle to befriend the environment is not because of what is happening in the industrialised countries. It is on the basis of a ‘love hate’ relationship of receiving and caring.

Our people depended on the earth’s resources for centuries. Even today and for the future it is enough for our peoples to survive—if only the monsters of consumerism would give us a break.

Faith, in our vulnerable experience, means to celebrate with action in the midst of a hopeless situation.

Arguing against a life of contempt, a church elder said, “Land in the Solomon Islands is enough for human needs, but it is not enough for human greed”.

The mission of the outside churches to vulnerable communities must strike a balance. In the Pacific, such a mission must recognise the new consciousness of hope that is taking shape among our communities. This hope is practical living in all its varying dimensions. It is action-orientated awareness, rather than a program of meetings.

This hope is a new consciousness, which aims to empower the literate who are ignorant of the values of the traditional lifestyle, which makes sense of the concept of a ‘love hate’ relationship. The implication of faith in this paradigm shift is obvious. Faith, in our vulnerable experience, means to celebrate with action in the midst of a hopeless situation.

A ‘laidback’ lifestyle for the traditional communities has nothing to do with lack of electric power, lack of infrastructure, no decent permanent housing, non-availability of canned food products, no water supply, lack of transport, non-availability of mass communication, radios, telephones, faxes, Internet, email facilities, literacy in English. We need these, but not all humans need them. What human communities need today is a decent state of mind.

In Melanesia the return to a ‘laidback’ lifestyle has seen in recent years a reinterpretation of the concept of community. Often community is understood in terms of humans. But a new awareness of the ecosystem, drawn from the traditional

lifestyle of Melanesia, has developed a new understanding of community.

Community is not the human community alone, but all that interacts with human life to make the human community what it really is for Melanesians. A community can only define itself on the basis of coexistence with the non-human species. Community is a co-existence of multiple differences and varieties; different voices and not a single dominant voice; coexistence that recognises the essential value of everything. Community is the reality of living 'with'; in essence it is a 'love hate' relationship. Community is a shared experience that demands care and respect in order to maintain the values of its mutual coexistence. For Melanesians, the idea that community is defined by

human beings, and anything that is not human is beyond reach, is absurd.

This international environment conference representing the voices of concerned Christians has a daunting task. Since we all affirm the agony of creation, and declare it cannot go on like this, it is important for the affluent communities to listen to those whose voices do not carry weight and are often oppressed. After all, the wisdom of the human God, Jesus, values the little things in life.

I am convinced that if those on the underside of history, in their vulnerability, are allowed to stamp their story on the quest for answers, we could see great things created out of these peoples' contradictory lifestyle.

Common Theology

A Journal for Australians

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

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

Subscribers' comments —

I thank you for another year of great reading. With failing eyesight I appreciate greatly the matt surface (shiny paper is a real problem) and the size of the print—it makes it possible for me to participate.

I Baltvilks, Leongatha

I picked up a copy of your journal on a church bookstand. It was dated Advent 2002. I found it excellent reading and would like to subscribe to this quarterly journal.

Mary P Blackford, Pastoral Assistant, Perth

We thoroughly enjoy the high standard of *Common Theology*.

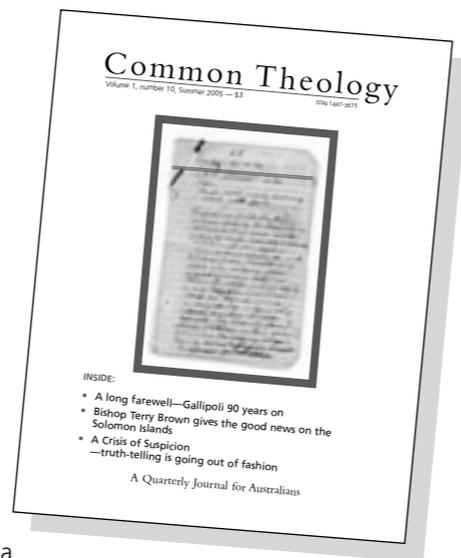
The Revd Mother Valmai CHN, Melbourne

As ever, you seem to have touched on very important issues for the church at large, whether it be here in the UK or down under. The article by Timothy Radcliffe on 'A crisis of suspicion' was definitely challenging and will merit a re-reading. This is indeed a serious issue and so very relevant to us in the UK as

we prepare for a general election. I did enjoy Kay McLennan's piece on 'Rehearsals for heaven'—I appreciate her style of writing which speaks to me loud and clear. Bishop Terry Brown's article on the Solomon Islands was an eye-opener. It really is excellent how *Common Theology* brings these kind of issues into the spotlight.

Pat Leighton, Barrow Gurney, England

Our sponsorship co-ordinator at St Veronica's Welfare lent



me her copy to read and I read it from cover to cover and enjoyed all the articles.

Velma Eckersley, Brisbane

I continue to enjoy the range of articles in *Common Theology*. In the Spring 2004 edition I particularly enjoyed the book reviews.

The Revd Ted Witham, Perth

Citizen Sipho has his day

In October **John Kani**—veteran playwright and actor—will receive a coveted presidential award for his contribution through the arts to a free and democratic South Africa. In April his celebrated post-apartheid drama, *Nothing but the Truth*, was playing at Brisbane's Powerhouse, prior to a season at Sydney's Opera House. **Maggie Helass** asked him why he brought a drama to Australia about how an ordinary black South African comes to terms with the puzzles and complexities of forgiveness. A review of *Nothing but the Truth* is on page 22.



One has to start with why I wrote the play, and why I felt South Africa needed to hear this story.

Sometimes there are things you feel, but do not say. You stand and you see other people treat your friends with disrespect; you wish you had said something. You go home and you curse yourself for not having said what you felt at that time.

We need to vent our anger, and that is what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) gave us. It gave us the opportunity to speak out, and not be bottled up with this pain and anger and frustration—the fact that we stood there and we said, tell me what happened to my brother, to my son, to my wife?

I too stood and I listened, and I poured the tears as I heard how my brother, or my wife, or my husband was killed, and in the end it was a cleansing ceremony. It was like exorcism.

That is why, standing in front of my brother's grave, I smiled. He paid the ultimate price so that I am now a member of a free society. And even bigger than that, a member of the free world community. That I got from him, and many others of his age who paid that price, the ultimate sacrifice

for freedom. Now we look at the pain of the past as a reference point, lest we forget.

We always referred to it (the TRC) as a bandaid round the wounds of the nation; bringing black and white people together; bringing stability in order to be able to see with clarity where we will be able to take the country.

That being done it left the responsibility to the *individual* to deal with their own past; to deal with their own pain.

In the hearings people said, "I forgive", and when they went home they understood that it was a difficult position they placed themselves in, because the family said, what do you mean you forgive?

There was a part in the Lord's Prayer which I couldn't say with honesty.

My mother and my father were Anglicans, and staunch members of the church. My younger brother is the Archdeacon of the Diocese of Port Elizabeth, so whenever I write something I always consult him. A couple of years ago I wrote a play extracting from the four gospels the story of Jesus Christ in the idiomatic form, using the voices of the prophets themselves. But at the end of this script I sent it to my brother, because when you deal with issues of faith, religion and the Bible you don't want to be arrogant and impose. This is one book that has no second, or fifteenth, edition.

When I was writing this play the most important part for me was the Lord's Prayer. There was a part in the Lord's Prayer which I couldn't say with honesty. If I say "Forgive us our trespasses", it is the second part that worried me, "as we forgive them that trespass against us". That is a commitment to God. You are saying to God you do forgive those that trespass against you. That is the basis of asking for forgiveness. If I cannot forgive white people, if I cannot forgive the white man who shot my brother—who was a poet, at the age of 25 years, in

Common Theology is an independent publication funded by its subscribers.

1985—how do I say the second line? So I chose not to do the Lord's Prayer, because I was uncomfortable with not being honest.

And then I decided, perhaps I am too angry. Maybe I need to tell the story to someone about how I feel.

It started by being a tribute to my younger brother, the poet. But it took a pleasant turn as I was writing, and left my brother alone and went to the story of this man Siphos, this ordinary South African—no name, no face, no importance, of no significance, but who was *there*.

He was the pair of eyes that saw us all. In silence he followed us, in silence he did everything we asked him to do.

When the voting came in 1994 I was taken to the top of the queue because I was the celebrity,

I didn't have this deep philosophical vision. I just wrote the story of these two brothers.

and there were photographers from all over the world taking pictures of me voting. When Mandela went to cast his vote he was taken to the front of the queue. We never waited in those queues for four hours. Siphos did. So I felt it was time for Siphos to stand up and for someone to say "thank you" to him.

What ensued then was a deep exploration of the concept of forgiveness. What I find very interesting in South Africa is that the burden is placed squarely on the victim to initiate the forgiving process. It was the victim who thought about the TRC, it was the victim who extended the invitation to all those who had perpetrated these crimes against our people.

The most controversial part of the TRC was the amnesty for perpetrators of crimes against humanity. If you tell all, you know there would not be a possibility of a prosecution. You may be forgiven, not just by the law itself, but also by the victims of the crimes you perpetrated.

So it was the victims—it wasn't white South Africans who said, "let's go into this". It was *us*. I found that fascinating because there were the Siphos who were standing at the back, and thinking, what does it mean?

So when this process (the TRC hearings) happened in my town I asked my mother, who was 78, "Are you going to go, and find out who shot my brother? And maybe look at that man's face, and see who he was?"

My mother said she is happy with no face. She is happy with knowing that the story has been told. Many women like her have told the same story about how their children were shot or killed, so it is not necessary for us to go. My Mum was a matriarch. She said 'no', that was no!

In my heart there was no closure, so I wrote this play, addressed it to myself, so that I could come to a point of understanding forgiveness. And I found the truth that was liberating to *me*. I was the one who was liberated by agreeing to confront forgiveness. I was the one who felt free of the past and the pain and the anger and the bitterness, and all that was holding me back. I felt liberated when the story was told.

So when it was first performed in South Africa the reaction was mind-boggling. People stood in the theatre weeping, crying. The youth started singing and *toyi toyi-ing*¹, people came forward and said, only you can tell it like this! Aren't you afraid the government is going to be uncomfortable in the way you referred to the ANC not having delivered to you?

I just wrote the story of these two brothers. I didn't have this deep philosophical undertone and vision, and the study of forgiveness. I just wrote the story of these two brothers as a tribute to my own brother.

When we took the play to New York I was a bit reticent because I thought, what has it got to do with the Americans?

America is not a very easy society, it is a materialistic society, it is a cosmopolitan society. In one day you can have two holidays—of the people from Serbia and the people from Ireland.

We opened on Broadway at the Lincoln Centre, and I was stunned again by the reviews, but mostly by the Americans who asked, "Do you think reconciliation may be the way to heal the wounds of the past between us and the descendants of the slaves, who were brought to America? Because it doesn't matter how much we do, how much we bring equality, how much civil rights, how much

1. A contemporary war dance made famous during the South African anti-apartheid struggle, said to be derived originally from the African National Congress (ANC) training camps in exile.

in job opportunities, in affirmative action, the issue is deep-rooted. The African Americans always feel they were robbed of their forty acres and a mule". That is what they were promised in 1834 when they were given freedom from slavery—that each one of them, for their pain and suffering, would receive forty acres and a mule. And it never happened. African Americans still talk with passion about how they were stolen from their Motherland. We are talking four hundred years, and people still keep it in their hearts.

That was why many people felt the Americans should learn from this play. They should understand that problems cannot be forgotten. They have to be addressed, confronted, people have to reconcile.

When we were in Boston, in January, an elderly couple, African American, were standing at the stage door, and this gentleman was weeping. He was about 80. He said, "You reminded me. My

Ubuntu is a word that will sooner or later enter the western vernacular.

brother. He died. I wasn't talking to him—at all. And now I am going to the south and will stand on that grave and will ask him to forgive me. Because your play showed me it wasn't too late. You talking to your brother in that urn gave me the idea. I can talk to him."

When Nelson Mandela saw the play in South Africa, he came with his three grandchildren. He said, "What a powerful family drama. Political in a very subtle way. I want to thank you, John, for reminding us that the job is not done yet. And I hope everybody will see this play and know we still have to reach out to our people". Of course that was in the newspaper the following day, so of course we were sold out. Then the ministers kept coming one by one. Some of them sit quietly, then they go away, some of them wait for me. It was almost like a quiet directive was given to the politicians—go see the play! The church leaders also came.

A crucial political issue that emerges in the play is the fact that some activists, like Nelson Mandela, stayed in South Africa during the

apartheid struggle, and some, like current President Thabo Mbeki, went into exile. John Kani grasps this nettle with the story of the two brothers, Siphos and Themba.

It was like the prodigal son. All those who were in exile came back with pomp and fanfare—and the tickertape parade to welcome the exiles—and they came home strutting high. And 'Hallo' I was here! I stayed with my father throughout the most difficult time and looked after the sheep and the cattle. Now my brother who was long lost has returned. Now you slaughter the fatted calf! My father says, "You were always with me. It was he who was lost and now is found." That was the metaphor I used with Themba and Siphos.

Themba comes home and the whole of New Brighton township says, the hero is coming home, he is going to be buried at home. But Siphos says, I was here! I've been here all the time. I'm the one who went to the marches, who went to the funerals; I'm the one who marched through the cities. What's going on here?

I used to observe while I was travelling abroad in Australia, in England, France and America, that the children of the exiles, born in exile, could not even speak the indigenous languages. And they were more western than African. The idea of being African was a nostalgic pipedream. It was to think, 'I am an African', rather than being one.

So by coming back, Mandisa (Themba's daughter) has two purposes. She has come to bury her father—to complete the father's dream to be buried close to his parents and ancestors. She is also coming to find herself. She has come to learn about what being an African is.

She comes and sits on the chairs, she straddles her legs, she speaks her mind. She has to learn ultimately, by the end of the play, that in an African family structure there are rules. There are things you have to comply with. With all the feminism and individual freedom, within the African structure there is a hierarchy—the grandparents, the father and the children, the uncles and the siblings. You belong to a community, where you have to abide by the rules. She learns that really quickly. She now knows what 'home' means.

Ubuntu is a word that will sooner or later enter the western vernacular. John Kani gives this concept a central role in his play and I asked him what it meant.

Ubuntu. We used to challenge this. I used to be very surprised by the generosity of my parents' hearts. The way they found it easy even to understand why white people are as cruel as they are. My mother always said, "They know not what they are doing, John. They don't know. You have to be big enough to understand that it is stupidity and fear that is driving them to do these things. Rise above it. Don't you ever allow apartheid to push you down. You are God's child. You have every right to be on this earth, like the trees, like the wind, like the sun, like the stars. No-one is superior to you." And that was my upbringing, from a very illiterate family.

This becomes very important to me when I speak about *ubuntu*.

My niece says, "African generosity! I call it giving in too easily".

I call it African humanity.

When the offer came from the Brisbane Powerhouse I sat down and thought, well I have got so many other things to do, why would I go to Australia? I remembered when I was here in 1976 I met some Aboriginal activists in Sydney and in Perth. I remembered, when listening to their story, that I have never been humbled by other people's suffering. And I thought, my Lord, what has happened here?

In 1993 when I came back to Australia there was great improvement. Some of the people I had met were now at university and some were in business. Of course we were still talking about the other difficulties that the indigenous people face, but it wasn't a blank denial of their existence. Australia was beginning to talk about issues of the Aboriginal people.

Coming now here today I thought the play may have a message which I could share with the Australian community.

You can't assume that the more you do good the more people will forget the bad you did. You need to talk about it.

When the negotiations started the former President, FW de Klerk, proposed a statement by the two presidents (himself and Nelson Mandela) that would say forgive us for the ills of the past, and Bishop Tutu and the other leadership said, "No! We

have to go through this process. *You* can't make a statement for all white people in government, and Mandela would respond, 'We forgive you'. People must make individual choices."

So one hopes that the Australians, especially the politicians, will begin in their speeches, in the way they do things and run the country, not only quietly to pass laws which improve the lot of the marginalised minority communities, but speak about these things. Because when important people speak about them it has a huge impact on the people on the ground. If Nelson Mandela had not supported TRC; if de Klerk had not supported TRC; if Bishop Tutu had not spoken and told us that is the only way, it wouldn't have happened.

**This is my gift to Australia.
War may stop the
fighting, but will not
resolve the conflicts.**

Some of us were dead against it, because we wanted Nuremberg-style trials. We wanted tribunals, witch-hunts, we wanted 'crimes against humanity international', we wanted to see some of the policemen who tortured us held accountable, to stand in the dock, and maybe sent to prison for life. But suddenly we were told no, this is not what we are going to do.

Tribal, community, academic leaders as well as political and religious leadership made this happen.

Even if we have little niggles, we now have the big picture. We now have seen the results. South Africa today, economically, stands as a very strong powerhouse in the southern part of the continent. It now is the centre for Southern Africa, and we now understand that the success of South Africa depends on the economic empowerment of the neighbouring states.

This is my gift to Australia. War may stop the fighting, but will not resolve the conflicts.

Nothing but the Truth will be filmed during October/November for worldwide release next year. The play is also published by Wits University Press as a textbook for high schools and universities in South Africa.

Jesus pop culture

By Greg Jenks



The interplay of history and metaphor in the construction of religious narrative has been in my mind recently as I read two books that had been recommended to me.

The first book was *The Pagan Christ* by Tom Harpur (Allen and Unwin, 2004). The second was *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (Bantam, 2003). To round out my crash course in popular religious culture, I even made myself sit down to watch a DVD of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*.

In some ways those three contemporary expressions of popular interest in religion have little in common, but each of them intersects with my own research interests, as well as being texts which have had a powerful impact on the way religion is currently perceived in many quarters. When the students in my Year Twelve religion class were asking me questions about *The Da Vinci Code*, I knew it was a book I was going to have to read!

Harpur dispenses entirely with an historical Jesus in favour of a "Christ myth" that originates in ancient Egypt, and argues for a consistently allegorical interpretation of the biblical texts. Brown draws upon recent scholarship on Mary Magdalene as a senior figure within the immediate circle around Jesus, as well as the Gnostic gospels from Nag Hammadi, as part of his religious detective story.

On the other hand, Gibson steadfastly ignores contemporary gospel scholarship in his film on the physical and psychological suffering of Jesus during the final twenty-four hours of his life.

One of the interesting things is why it took me so long to get around to reading/viewing them. My reluctance was in part due to a sense that I would find their treatment of the historical issues so out of synch with scholarly methodology that

the experience of reading the works would cause me significant frustration. I could imagine myself writing copious comments in the margins, or on a note pad, as I read the book or watched the film.

The Pagan Christ had come up in a conversation with a participant at a workshop in Sydney. I had been vaguely aware of the book, but had not acquired a copy at that stage. Having begun to read it, I found that it was also being read (and used in the homilies) at an inner city Catholic parish I sometimes visit. The homilists were citing the book in a very positive way—somewhat to my surprise as I was by then about halfway through the book and was finding it far from convincing.

Harpur is a former Anglican priest and was at one stage a professor (Greek and New Testament) at the University of Toronto. In this book he is especially dependent on the work of three Orientalists who specialised in Egyptology¹. From them, and especially from Kuhn, Harpur has taken the idea that there was a widespread religion found throughout the ancient Orient that understood humans to be incarnations of a divine "spark" and which shared a common myth in which a Christ figure symbolises the need to die to flesh and be raised in the spirit.

Following Kuhn, Harpur traces this myth to ancient Egypt and insists that Jesus of the Gospels is simply a reworking of the timeless Isis/Osiris myth, with Jesus being equated to Horus.

Harpur combines this view of the origins of the Jesus story with his own version of a conspiracy theory, in which the fourth century Church knowingly contrived to eradicate texts and teachers that promoted the (true) allegorical meaning of the New Testament, with the result that a sublime allegory has been subjected to the cruel fate of being treated as literal history.

Clearly Harpur has an interest in the metaphorical meaning of Scripture, rather than historical research into the texts and their worlds.

1. Godfrey Higgins (1771–1834), Gerald Massey (1828–1908) and Alvin Boyd Kuhn (1881–1963).

At the same time, Harpur is not averse to citing (or at least alluding to) historical information about ancient Egypt and the Patristic era of Christianity. He has some authentic historical threads in his hands as he begins to knit his new seamless garment of “cosmic Christianity”, as he describes the reinterpretation of Christianity that flows from his work.

These authentic threads include the following items—

- Egyptian cultural dominance in the eastern Mediterranean and beyond for most of the historical millennia prior to modern times.
- The wide dissemination of a fertility cult involving a dying/rising god.
- The persistence of ancient iconography into early Christian art (e.g. mother/child figures).
- The influence of Hellenistic mystery religions on early Christian ideas and practices.
- Dualistic and Gnostic influences within Christianity including denigration of flesh in favour of spirit.
- The suppression of dissident and heretical voices by the imperial Church.
- The destruction of pagan (and dissenting Christian) texts by the Church.
- The condemnation of previously esteemed teachers such as Origen.

In addition, it seems to me, Harpur is on sound ground when he asserts that the primary intent of the Gospels is not to relate history but to provide sacred stories that can be read in various non-literal ways for spiritual insight.

Where I found Harpur’s book most disappointing was in its failure to provide anything like a critical apparatus.

In its approximately 240 pages there are numerous claims that require careful documentation, but there are only about nine pages of endnotes, and few of them provide bibliographic information to assist a reader in checking the claims independently. Instead, the reader is repeatedly told to consult the works of Higgins, Massey and Kuhn for detailed substantiation—but even so, it is rare to find page numbers.

We are presumably expected to read the entire corpus of Kuhn’s Theosophical writings in order to locate the information. Harpur seeks to evade this duty by saying that his book is intended for the general reader rather than the scholar, but the general reader has even more need of such a critical apparatus than the professional scholar.

In the absence of adequate documentation, the breathless claims of an ancient conspiracy seem a little overdone. In some ways this strikes me as a shame, since the “pearl of great price” that seems to lie at the heart of Harpur’s manuscript is the idea that we do well to read the gospels as allegories for the spiritual journey we are each on, rather than seeing the Gospels as historical sketches or psychological profiles of Jesus.

In between reading *The Pagan Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, I happened to watch Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ*. Where I had approached Harpur’s book with some positive expectations, I came to this DVD with a head full of objections. I had read a great many negative reviews of the film, and recently purchased the anniversary collection of reviews published by Belief.Net. I disagreed with Gibson’s historical reconstruction, and I disagreed with his theological view that the death (and especially the suffering) of Jesus was the most significant thing about him.

I also have a low tolerance for graphic depictions of violence, and knew that my comfort zones were about to be assaulted.

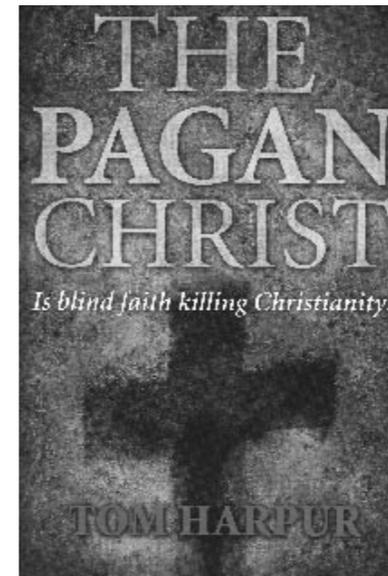
Despite all that I found the film far less objectionable than I had anticipated. I could view it as a work of art, and I could appreciate some of the biblical interpretations Gibson was offering—for example, when Jesus crushes the serpent under his heel in fulfilment of Genesis 3:15.

The implicit blaming of the Jews for Jesus’ death was no worse than what we might hear read in church from the New Testament any Sunday.

While the casual blending of episodes only found in one Gospel into an artificial composite story was irritating to me, I could see that Gibson was doing no more than many preachers and catechists have done over the years.

In effect, it seemed to me that Gibson was taking the Gospel of John as the controlling story and elaborating it with scenes from the synoptics as well as from non-biblical sources. Since I do not regard any of the New Testament Gospels as historical accounts of what actually happened at the time of Jesus’ death, I found myself watching this new digital passion narrative with a certain detachment.

History, allegory and truth (or at least meaning) were interacting in unexpected ways.



After those two recent experiences, I approached the task of reading *The Da Vinci Code* with an expectation that Dan Brown’s work would be more like Harpur’s text. In fact it was an entirely different reading experience for me, although I can imagine how some readers would find the book’s contents quite confronting.

To my surprise and my delight, I found *The Da Vinci Code* a good read—a whodunit for a Religion scholar! When I found myself deciphering some of the secret codes before the book’s characters had solved them, I knew I was enjoying the book.

One of the differences between this book and both of the other two works is that Dan Brown is not trying to convert anyone. It is simply a well-written detective story with most of the plot involving a struggle to secure (or protect) secret religious knowledge.

Presumably the shock value of this book derives from that secret knowledge being an unconventional view of the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

The idea that Magdalene was at least a disciple with equal status to the Twelve, and maybe even Jesus’ wife, comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with recent historical Jesus research. Certainly there are non-canonical gospels now extant that refer to ongoing debates over Magdalene’s unusual status among the disciples, even if none of them explicitly affirm that she was Jesus’ partner.

To the extent that *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Pagan Christ* both presume that the Church authorities have colluded to suppress information

about Jesus, these books share some common ideas. However, Brown’s book is entertaining literature while Harpur’s book is a tedious sermon, and Gibson’s film is an all too familiar pastiche of pious assumptions.

Of course, fundamentalists will be offended by *The Da Vinci Code* suggestion that Jesus was married (a strange thing to take offence over, given their ‘family values’ agenda). Faithful Christians will be offended by the assertion that the Church was deliberately covering up evidence that Jesus was entirely human and not in the least divine. Catholics will be offended (but perhaps not surprised) by the portrayal of the Church as a self-serving institution interested mostly in its own survival. However, all of these points are views attributed to the mythical Priory of Sion, rather than being beliefs that the author seeks to impose on the reader.

These two books and the film by Mel Gibson all relate in some way to the explosion of historical information about the world of Jesus and the diversity within earliest Christianity. In a sense they demonstrate that the knowledge created in the academy does eventually find its way into the street, and becomes part of the common discourse of our society.

Rather than rage against the errors in these books, or the bias of the film, perhaps the challenge is to see how we can generate and disseminate information about Jesus, the composition and interpretation of the Scriptures, and the history of Christianity that will promote a general religious literacy, and equip people to discern more reliably those expressions of faith that are toxic and those that are life-giving?

All beliefs are not equally true, nor are they equally healthy when adopted as the basis for individual or communal choices.

In the stories that we construct now to say where we come from, and how we ought to live, how can we best combine history and metaphor in the service of meaning, and perhaps even of truth?

To what extent will these new stories draw on Scripture? How will they draw on the new understandings of the cosmos that are emerging from the sciences? Will we be able to discern the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in that process, leading us into all truth?

The Revd Dr Greg Jenks is a New Testament Scholar, currently Chaplain at a Brisbane ecumenical college.

reader's view

I was most interested to read your article on Alan and Rupert Henderson (A long farewell-Gallipoli 90 years on) in the last edition of *Common Theology*.

In 2003 as a then prospective Army Chaplain studying at Trinity College, Melbourne I was conducting some research on ANZAC Day in the Leeper Library when I came across a letter written by Alan Henderson to his mother on the eve of the landings at Gallipoli. In his letter I believe he said, "Australia tomorrow founds a tradition, God grant that it may be a great one". A rhetorical question that I have posed to those who have gathered at every ANZAC Day Dawn Service I have conducted since. I have always found that serving and former soldiers always respond constructively to Alan's letter to his mother.

The Revd John F Sanderson
Royal Australian Army Chaplains' Department
Currently posted to Long Term Schooling in the
Diocese of Bendigo

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Photo: Kebin Pius Nedumpallikunnel
who is being sponsored by *Common Theology*.

Songs for terror — Kidz 2 Kidz

Sana Mammo gave up her civil engineering career to work with refugees, because of an incident in her own home, in Australia, which drove her to try and make a difference to Iraq. She continues her work in spite of the fact that in April, two of her cousins in Iraq were kidnapped, and killed, for a \$21,000 ransom. She spoke at a women's breakfast in Brisbane on April 29.



Sana Mammo with her daughter Natalie.

My childhood (in the 1960s) was beautiful. I went to a convent school with Christians, Muslims, Kurdish, Jews. I had wonderful parents—my father was a gynaecologist, my mother was a teacher. Education is something Iraqis believe in—poor or rich. Education is free in Iraq. I lived in a generation of wealth.

One of my sisters is a gynaecologist in the UK, my other sister is a pharmacist in Saudi Arabia—the head of a hospital research centre. My brother-in-law is a cardiologist, the personal doctor of the King of Saudi Arabia. My brother is a dentist in the States (USA). I studied civil engineering.

In the Iraq I remember people respected each other. We had no racial discrimination—churches with crosses on the roof, clubs, women gathered, belly-danced, the Christians accepted the Muslims and *vice versa*.

My father said he would provide for us, but we must push for our education, because money could be lost, but no one could take that piece of paper from us.

And that is what happened to us. Even our jewellery was looted from the bank last year. I don't know where my mother was buried.

I had joined my sisters and my brother overseas to continue our education. I had an opportunity to study in the University of Wales, in Cardiff.

eye witness

Of course, two months after I left in 1979 Sadam (Hussein) started the war with Iran. My mother was visiting and she left our home—even her wedding ring on the sink—thinking she would be back in a couple of weeks. She never managed to go back.

Twenty-five years down the track Iraq has been through three wars, sanctions—it is a new generation. Iraqi people deny who they are because of all that is happening. My nephew and niece in Saudi Arabia refused to learn the Arabic language because they were ashamed of Iraq—because Sadam was leading us to one war and another. The Iraqi people were isolated. We did not know what was going on outside, because there was no freedom of speech.

I am one of the five million Iraqi professional people who are scattered all around the world. Not by choice. I know how rich our people and our heritage are in Iraq.

When the last war started my little daughter Natalie came down and saw how emotional I became—especially when I saw the looting of the museum and the bombing. She told me that she can't go to school, because the children at school had told her that if the war started Iraqi soldiers would be shooting at Australian soldiers, and they don't want to play with her.

**If you deny where you
come from you can't be a
good citizen in Australia.**

I decided I must do something about it. As the war escalated people started promoting the 'reconstructing of Iraq' and business opportunities. I said if you want to support the reconstruction of Iraq you have got to start with the basics. Support its people. And that is how the Iraqi people will recognise you. Support their humanity. There are chil-

dren involved. There are thirteen million children under the age of fourteen.

I wanted to develop this project called Kidz 2 Kidz. The idea was to develop something to link the kids, because the kids need understanding. They hear the parents, they see the media, the coverage, and they form their ideas.

We approached three state schools, and we have 220 kids in the choir. We sat with these kids and we asked questions, "If you were an Iraqi kid what would you say? What would you do? How would you help?" All these ideas were written on a huge sheet of paper. The musician took it away and wrote the music, and we produced the CD 'Kidz 2 Kidz'—for hope and peace from children in Australia to the children of Iraq.

We recorded an Iraqi song, reminding them of who they are, reminding them that the people of Australia and the world are not against them, but with them. Don't give up. There is hope. This is what the CD is about. If we can put a smile on one kid, or two, that is two or three less suicide bombers—because we are giving hope.

I link mainstream Australian kids with refugee kids. The kids who attacked my daughter are singing with her in this project. We have changed their views.

I am passionate about building who we are. For if you deny where you come from you can't be a good citizen in Australia. You have got to be proud of where you come from, regardless of the difficulty.

The money I have raised so far has gone towards the production (\$31 000) of the CD.

The CD 'Kidz 2 Kidz' is available by mail from PO Box 801, Sumner Park Qld 4074, or from Dymocks bookstores in Brisbane. Cost \$23 includes packing and postage.

Funds raised from the sale of 'Kidz 2 Kidz' CD will go to a Catholic school in Basra, in the south of Iraq (which has become more stable with the British and now the Australian and the Japanese militia), and to building links between kids in Australia and Iraq. Kidz 2 Kidz is a registered charity and donations are tax deductible.

'Thank you' from a 21st Century missionary

Pos Konea would like to thank former residents of St Francis Theological College, fellow students and lecturers at the Brisbane College of Theology, other friends, and subscribers to *Common Theology*, who contributed \$1,500 so that he could spend last Christmas at home with his family in Papua New Guinea.

"My 'thank you' seems not enough, therefore I will show my appreciation in all five very different languages that I know — *Tenk yu* (Pidgin), *Areme ore* (Hule) — *Ou endakerer* (Enga), *Sei Turi Oro* (Mendi, Southern Highlands Province)."

Heather Cooke, Sarah MacDonald, Dr Ray and Dorothy Barraclough, Michelle Knight, the Revd Rod, Penny, and Georgie MacDonald, the Revd Charlie and Melissa Murry, Mel Perkins, John Hooper, the Revd Peter Blauw and the Uniting Church congregation at St Ives, the students at Trinity College, the Anglican Parish of St George's Windsor.

Common Theology sponsored Pos Konea's three month trip to PNG during which he did valuable research for his thesis on the cultural and religious practices in Mendi in the Southern Highlands of PNG.



— Advertisement —

A must-have e-library

CD-Rom Australia's Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration, 2nd edition, Philip J Hughes and Sharon Bond, Christian Research Association, Melbourne. ISBN: 1-875223-22-3. Rrp \$137.50.

Christian faith in Australian life is demonstrated in the second edition of *Australia's Religious Communities*, CD-Rom, released in February.

Some Christian denominations have seen considerable growth including the Baptist and Pentecostal churches. The fastest growing of the Christian groups, however, is the Coptic Orthodox Church, demonstrated in the recent establishment of two Coptic Orthodox dioceses in Australia.

This CD-Rom details the origin, beliefs and structure of each of the denominations. There are book length materials on each Christian denomination, complete with the latest statistics, biographies and bibliographies, references and glossaries.

The CD-Rom also contains information on other religions in Australia—Baha'i, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Each of these has been written in an analytical and descriptive fashion by thirty scholars associated with these communities. Hence, the CD-Rom allows one to hear each group speak for itself.

During recent years there has been a proliferation of small religious groups. There are articles on more than a hundred of these small groups. If you want to know about Caodism, Eckankar, Paganism, Scientology, Theosophy or Wicca, you will find materials on the CD-Rom.

The 'no religion' group has also been investigated. While numbers of people describing themselves as having 'no religion' fell between 1996 and 2001, the group still constitutes nearly sixteen per cent of the Australian population. Analysis shows, however, that for half of this group 'no religion' means that they do not desire to identify with any particular religious group, although they do believe that spirituality is an important aspect of life.

With approximately 3500 pages of text, it is the most comprehensive set of materials on religion in Australia ever produced. With current statistics and the latest analysis, it provides a cutting-edge account of the Australian scene.

More than 1500 photos and graphics, and 75 minutes of video clips—mainly of worship in the different religions and denominations—make this CD-Rom a pleasure to use.

It has been prepared at the appropriate level for senior secondary school students, but some primary schools have found it useful in introducing students to Australia's cultural and religious diversity. Government organisations and several universities have it on their websites as a valuable resource. For individuals and churches, as well as welfare organizations, theological colleges, schools and universities it provides an invaluable reference and resource.

More information about the CRA at www.cra.org.au



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Jim Adams, The Center for Progressive Christianity

reviews

Nothing but the Truth, a play by John Kani
Starring John Kani, Rosie Motene, Moshidi Motshegwa

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Nothing but the Truth showed in Brisbane and Sydney during April and May and will be made into a movie later this year for worldwide release.

The set is a post-apartheid South African sitting room, a homely township scene (which was out-of-bounds to white South Africans for forty years). There are the crocheted mats on the coffee table, the Sacred Heart on the wall, the framed family photographs on the sideboard, well-polished linoleum, and a water-tap right beside the back door.

Sipho, played by John Kani, rapidly establishes his role as the respectable patriarch who is assistant chief librarian in the city. He polishes his gleaming shoes, deftly dons his tie in a Windsor knot, and awaits the arrival of his brother's remains from London. Thabo had gone into exile in 1976, and died there. The whole township awaits the hero's final return, to lay him to rest with his ancestors.

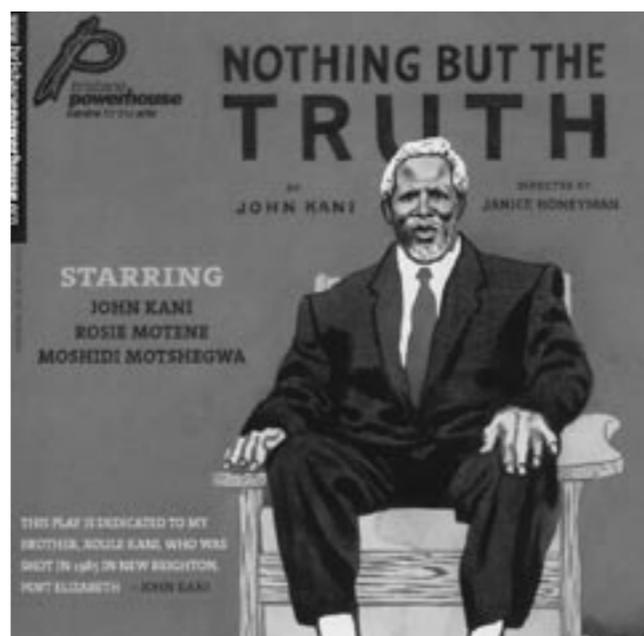
Unfortunately, cultural misunderstandings blunder into this milieu in the shape of Thabo's daughter, Mandisa, played by Rosie Motene.

Sipho's own dutiful daughter Thando, played by Moshidi Motshegwa, meets Mandisa with courteously veiled alarm as the voluptuous, mobile-phone wielding, London-born cousin turns up with an urn of her father's ashes under her arm.

Thabo's presence, in a marble urn on the coffee table, dominates the drama so profoundly I do believe he should be listed in the cast.

Sipho is appalled. How can his brother be in there? How can there be a funeral without a body? His frustrations are compounded by the fact that a young returning exile has just got the job he coveted, as chief librarian.

Gentle, respectful Thando nails Mandisa's brash selfishness with the mild comment, "You are so direct!", tactfully explaining to her that she is not a cousin here in Africa, she is a sister, and part of a community. She cannot go out drinking the night before her father's funeral.



Sipho, after a lifetime of simmering resentment, is more forthright. Why, he wants to know, if Mandisa's father was such a hero of the struggle, did he not come back in '94, when the ANC took government? Why did he remain in a comfortable house in London, watching events 10,000kms away through binoculars?

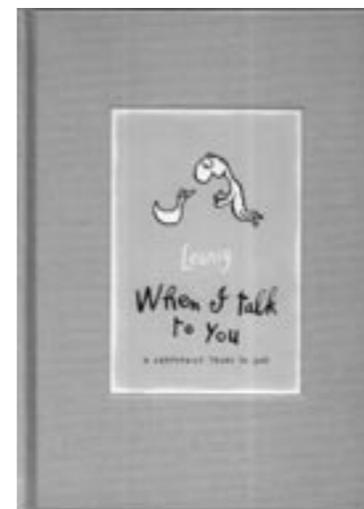
The script runs into minor difficulties at this point, trying to explain in a nutshell the politics of the South African anti-apartheid struggle. This is forgivable as the play is history-in-the-making, articulating some reflections on that experience for the first time.

Sipho is the invisible man. He is the one who was always there. When he buried his father he was pushed aside. He was merely the brother of the absent celebrity of the funeral—Comrade Themba. But Sipho was in the great city marches, he was always there. Sipho paid for his brother's education, cared for his mother and his father. Sipho endured the rent boycotts and the consumer boycotts.

The denouement comes when Sipho calls Themba, in his urn, to account, and is liberated from resentment. Now he has a future. He will write to Mr Mandela and ask for an African library to be built, right here, in New Brighton, and he, Sipho, will be Chief Librarian.

A subtitle for Nothing but the Truth could be, *sotto voce*, "So help me God". The quicksands of truth and liberty are revealed even in domestic trivia. Sipho gives his daughter permission to go to Johannesburg with Mandisa. Thando gasps with joy and surprise, "I don't know what to say!". Sipho replies, "That is the trouble with freedom".

Nothing but the truth is dedicated to John Kani's younger brother, Xolile Kani, who was shot dead in 1985 in Port Elizabeth.



When I talk to you : a cartoonist talks to God by Michael Leunig, published by HarperCollins, 2004, ISBN 0 7322 8043 5.

Reviewed by Maggie Helass

It is a biblical tradition that when religious leaders are preoccupied with politics, morals and religious affairs, neglecting justice and compassion, God sends a holy fool to remind the world about what is important in life.

Michael Leunig has long been Australia's cartoonist laureate, tweaking the noses of the rich and powerful on behalf of the little man, and a duck.

Now, with a new collection of poetry and prose, accompanied by the familiar small person, kneeling before a duck, Leunig has published a useful textbook on prayer.

In his Introduction Leunig asks, how do we search for our soul, our god, our inner voice? How do we find this treasure hidden in our life?

"There are many ways, all of them involving great struggle, and each person must find his or her own way. The search and the relationship is a lifetime's work and there is much help available, but an important, perhaps essential part of this process seems to involve an ongoing, humble acknowledgement of the soul's existence and integrity."

Leunig's prayers take place in the daily round, the world in which we live and move and have our being, much as Jesus' parables do. The world of teapots and tomatoes.

Through the small events of life Leunig puts his finger on the perennial quandaries of the praying person.

Humility. "Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations".

Contrition. "God help us to find our confession... The stowaway which has been smuggled into the dark side of the heart"

Loneliness. "Teach them to embrace their sadness lest it turn to despair".

Insomnia. "Let us restore the night and reclaim it as a sanctuary of peace".

And a prayer for the prophets, "Let us try to understand their sometimes strange or difficult ways... for they have been affected and shaped and changed by their struggle at the frontiers of a wild darkness..."

This is more than an anthology of warm fuzzy feelings and pop wisdom, although it is both charming and thought provoking. It contains valuable information for the novice pray-er—and jolting reminders for those of us who may have grown slipshod.

"Let us stop the noise. In the silence let us listen to our heart. The heart which is buried alive. Let us be still and wait and listen carefully. A sound from the deep, from below. A faint cry. A weak tapping..."

The value of this collection of prayers is that Leunig has been there. The very public pilgrimage of this very private man has been well documented, particularly in the past fifteen years since his book *A Common Prayer*. He has been to "the frontiers of a wild darkness"; harvested his own tomatoes "Plump with summer's joy"; and found his way through "mystery and wild contradiction".

The pages have no numbers (a statement in itself on the untamed character of prayer), and are cream, pink, grey and black, according to subject matter.

I, for one, will be obliged to buy several copies, for friends who could do with a duck to talk to.

book reviews

The 'brook by Alfred (Crow) Fletcher—as told to Cheryl Jorgensen, available from Blake Publications, PO Box 1051, Brighton, Qld 4017. Rrp \$20.

Reviewed by Katy Gerner

Alfred (Crow) Fletcher's and Cheryl Jorgensen's *The 'brook* is a horrifying and unfortunately true story about Crow's growing years at the Westbrook Reformatory in Queensland. I didn't find the physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect Crow experienced surprising (I'm a foster mother and believe me I've heard *everything*). But what I found astounding was that the abuse and neglect continued for years, and until the Schwarten Enquiry in 1961 no changes were made.

Occasionally Crow, who gained his nickname after an escape attempt in which he spent time up a tree with a crow, mentions people who knew something of the abuse the boys were receiving but did little about it. He talked about policemen who fed escaped Westbrook boys before they returned them because "they knew what was goin' on at that bloody place", and "kind people" who left a church meeting because they couldn't cope with the screams of a boy being attacked with a pitchfork nearby. But there is no mention of these kind people reporting the abuse to the authorities.

Crow was originally placed in Westbrook for three months, mostly because he was a neglected child. His frequent escapes led to his extended stay, but may have extended his life. Crow was expected to rise at 5am, eat little and bad food, work all day in clothes which were washed once a week, and he had no underwear. The lack of washing, particularly after working so hard, meant the boys smelt very bad. The lack of underwear also appeared to be deliberate, because it made floggings more humiliating and more painful.

Floggings were accompanied by your hair being pulled out and being made to walk up and down a path quickly, or older boys were allowed to hit you.

Crow describes it thus—"Can you imagine? You've had a floggin', your backside's black and

blue, the sores are weepin' and stickin' to your strides, you've been up since five o'clock that morning, and you've done a day's work in the paddock. You've had your hair off and there are chunks of flesh missing' from your head, torn out by the horse clippers they used. If the weather is cold, you've got a terrific headache. Your feet are blistered and bleedin' because your boots don't fit and you haven't got socks to wear.

"And then you hear Golledge sing out, 'Mr Kolberg! Get a couple of sergeants down to the path and hurry that waster along a bit'."

Golledge was the home's superintendent for thirty-seven years. His floggings were supposed to make better men of the boys, and he reduced the number of the floggings if the boy called out "Oooh Sir" every time he was hit. Even after the enquiry, Golledge denied he did anything wrong at Westbrook.

"My attitude was one of kindness—I tried to be a good father to the inmates—but firm punishment when it was needed."

Crow also writes of Golledge's beliefs that he was being cruel to be kind.

"Then after the church meeting he would give us a good lecture about how he loved us, he was a father to us all and these floggin's must be done so we can go outside into this world and be wonderful young men.

"That was the sickness of this lunatic and the sickness of the officers who worked there, who stood by watchin' this goin' on for years and did nothing, with the blessin' of the government."

Crow, who must be a master of resilience, managed to escape a number of times and took part in the Schwarten Enquiry, which eventually led to a change in superintendent. Although, unfortunately, not straight away. But Crow mentions that when he was flogged after the enquiry he was allowed to keep his pants on.

Although Crow was able to report the abuse he had received, right down to the grubs in the food—and saw changes—he resented the lack of legal representation the boys received, and the fact that much of what the boys said was not revealed to the public.

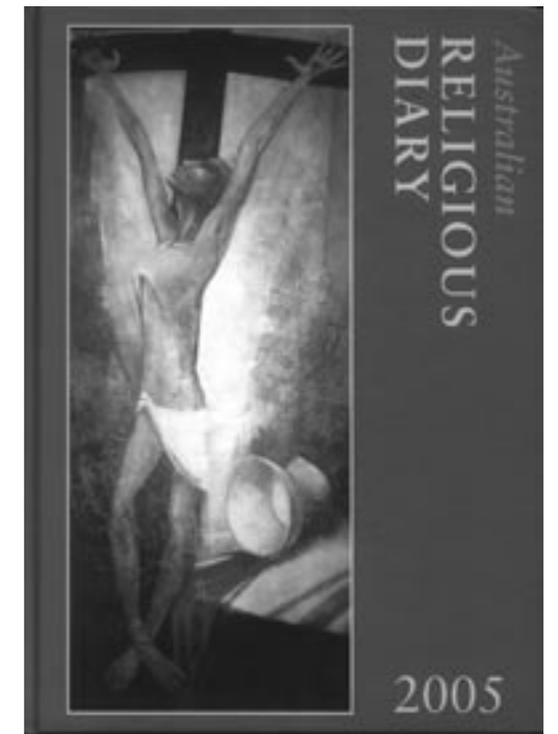
"A terrible lot of things were brought out. But it was closed to the public. It was a closed enquiry, even though the public demanded an open enquiry. So the truth was not brought out and told to the people.

"And most of the wicked things of this enquiry, have been put away till about 2025. So the public will never know the real truth unless they wait around till then. And who'll remember Westbrook then? That's the whole idea, of course."

Crow manages to survive his time in Westbrook, but many of his mates did not. They ended up in gaol and or died young from suicide or alcoholism.

The 'brook is not an easy book to read; it is definitely a man's inhumanity to man type of book. However, it should be essential reading so that we never become complacent when we suspect injustice.

The first print run of *The 'brook* sold out in six months. Editor and publisher Cheryl Jorgensen would like to hear from 'brook boys of any era who would be willing to talk about their experiences. Write to Crow Fletcher or Cheryl Jorgensen at PO Box 1051, Brighton, Qld 4017, or telephone (07) 3869 0640.



Real-life ecumenism

Australian Religious Diary 2005, David Lovell Publishing, pp132, ISBN 1 86355 104 2. Rrp \$29.95
Reviewed by Maggie Helass

Using this diary gives me a mellow sense that the week begins on Sunday, that I have daily appointments with saints and martyrs, and that ecumenism is real.

Not only do I have daily bible readings to browse while I am waiting for an actual human being to answer the 'phone, but I can address my Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church, Lutheran, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim friends with an appropriate greeting on their holy days.

This diary even starts with the first Sunday in Advent.

Sixteen artworks from Australian religious artists illustrate the hardback book—one of which is on the front cover of this edition of *Common Theology*.

From the practical point of view, each double page spread (the diary measures 243 x 176 mm) displays a week.

I recommend this diary for a daily exercise in ecumenical and interfaith awareness. The 2006 edition will be available in August.

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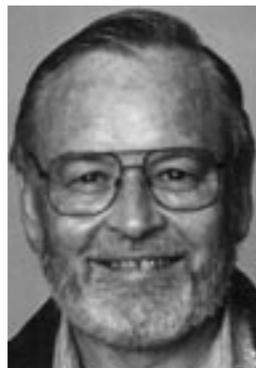
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Supporting people and groups as they explore religious thought in its many expressions, promoting religious literacy and contributing to a tolerant society for all people.

Just a man at last

Tony Carroll is President of the Queensland branch of Epiphany Australia, an association of Catholic priests who have resigned from active ministry, their families, and those who support them through the terrible process of adjudication between their vocation to the priesthood and their vocation to marriage.



This article appeared as the President's Comment in Epiphany's April newsletter *Cross Reference*.

I was baptised in the last days of Pius XI, confirmed under Pius XII, ordained under John XXIII, dispensed from the obligation of celibacy under Paul VI.

I was delighted with the election of the short-lived John Paul I, hopeful with the election of John Paul II. But severely disappointed to be labelled a Judas—John Paul II's description, in his first Holy Thursday homily, of all those who retired from official ministry.

I am indebted to Brian Doyle, editor of *Portland Magazine*, Oregon Catholic University for the following tribute.¹

Why was the Polish playwright Karol Wojtyla indeed a superb pope, and one of the great religious leaders of modern times?

For all the reasons you would expect, of course, the feats that will echo for centuries—his creative genius for image and symbol, his courage and humour surviving an assassination attempt, the brave humility that led him to bow in prayer at Jerusalem's Wailing Wall and kneel in apology for two millennia of Catholic sins, the capacious imagination and energy that helped free Poland and shatter the Iron Curtain, his clear voice against war, his relentless insistence that life was a holy gift. Even the enormous physical courage he evinced in recent years as he deliberately remained a public figure as his body failed—I think in order to show

home truths

the world that pain and death are not our masters, that grace under duress is a form of ferocious prayer, that the spirit outlives the body.

But there is a deeper and truer reason to say that this man was wonderfully Christ-like, was a spiritual exemplar of rare wattage. Paradoxically, that reason is what he did badly—his thousand mistakes, his astounding stubbornness, the dense thicket of contradictions that defined his papacy as much or more than the astounding parade of his accomplishments.

For this was also the man who choked off Liberation Theology in Latin America, when it might have toppled that haunted continent's web of corrupt governments. This was a man who time and time again dismissed women—more than half the billion members of his church—from any serious role and voice in the ancient corporation. This was the man who spoke warmly of the innate brotherhood of Christianity's many sects but did little, practically, to bind ancient rifts.



It seems to me that the worst thing that could happen to the legacy of John Paul II, now that his spirit has begun its unimaginable travels towards the Light he believed in with all his might, is to reduce him to immediate sainthood.

Saintly he was, of course, and he may well have been as great a leader, in his way, as the greatest pope I have seen in my lifetime, the cheerful John XXIII, who had the courage in 1965 to take the church he loved by its ancient, hoary, arrogant throat and shake it until the dust and hubris fell like snow.

He was so patently and daily and persistently us—feat and flaw, virtue and vice, brilliance and blindness.

But John Paul II's greatest accomplishment, I believe, is that he was so patently and daily and persistently us—feat and flaw, virtue and vice, brilliance and blindness. This man, this priest, this servant of the faithful, evinced on the world stage for nearly twenty-seven years the essence of the Catholic faith—this crazy hope that we are capable of complete mercy and grace and courage and humility and generosity. That we are more than mammal. That against all the daily evidence of our creative cupidity and predilection for violence, is the constant possibility of love, in all its billion forms.

John Paul II did not do everything well; he did some things very poorly indeed, or did not do them at all. Yet at the same time he was a man of stunning presence and charisma, a corporate leader of wonderful creativity, a figure of light and hope for many millions of people—especially, and perhaps most crucially to the century he leaves, young people.

Tony Carroll was ordained a priest in 1961. After he left the official ministry he worked in sand mining on Stradbroke Island, and ultimately became a secondary school teacher. He is now happily retired with Bernadette, also an ex-teacher.

Common sense

Communion

My own approach to uncovering the meaning of an idea is to begin by looking in dictionaries. I confidently expected to find that behind “communion” lay a Latin root—to build together, to fortify. But the Oxford Dictionary sent me to another Latin word. Instead of “communion”—I fortify, the noun *communio* meaning (no surprise) fellowship etc. But the real interest was in the root of this noun, given in the Latin dictionary. It was *munus*—a service, a charge, a duty; and in the plural, official or professional duties. Further, the root of this is *mu*, to bind. Thus, at the very roots of the word communion lies obligation and an outward look, rather than a comfortable sense of like-mindedness.

The extent to which the history of a word gives flavour to the idea it expresses is problematic, but the pursuit of that history can be helpful. In general, some knowledge of the languages that lie behind our (translated) scriptures and formularies can illuminate their meaning. This, together with the cultural implications of a language can sometimes help us to avoid impressing our own presuppositions on our own language versions.

Eric Cooper

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