

Common Theology

Volume 1, number 9, Spring 2004 — \$3

ISSN 1447-3615



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- **God's servant Beyers** A legendary Afrikaner
- **A different way of life in the Tasmanian forest**
- **Luther didn't speak English** reader's view

A Quarterly Journal for Australians

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Cover Photo—Crucifix at The Brookfield Centre for Christian Spirituality, Brisbane.

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

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From the Editor

In 1968 some of us were students protesting about a society that seemed to us to be dehumanising. We believed we could change the world. We loved justice. Some of us just loved love. Few of us were humble.

In 1848 a similar wave of protest engulfed the universities of Europe— then they were protesting against monarchical rule. A generation later most of Europe had broken out in a rash of democratic governments.

Now we are a generation on from the heady days of the '60s. God moves in generations. It is not individuals who change the world, but the prophets point the way.

Most young revolutionaries joined the work force and supported the consumer society which they had so passionately objected to. But some pioneers survived and are now well rooted in nooks and crannies of the western world—exerting a disproportionate influence upon young people today.

During thirty-five years of journeyings on three continents I have met lots of people who have dropped out. But dropping out is not the same thing as going on a journey in search of truth. Dropping out is not the same thing as giving up family, comfort and wealth for the sake of the treasure you found on that journey.

An important source of the discontent of youth in the '60s was that the spiritual dimension had leached out of our culture—burnt in the fires of the Inquisition, frozen in the Enlightenment, drowned in consumerism. Here and there, in convents and monasteries, Christian mysticism survived, clung to the fringes of society and kept alive another way of life, but this was mostly hidden from the young.

In this edition of *Common Theology* four people who are living a way of life that nurtures soul, at the expense of physical comforts, describe something of their journey—and their homecoming.

In the '60s it was seriously uncool to speak about Christianity. But now Christian mystics are meditated upon in the Tasmanian forest, their books are found in Buddhist ashrams, and Madonnas preside in log cabins above the snow line.

In this edition also, Robert Braun returns to the crucible of Alexandria, where the early Church grew; a black Nobel Peace Prize laureate salutes a legendary Afrikaner; the concept of family comes in for some forensic scrutiny in Home Truths.

Maggie Helass

Back to Alexandria

Archdeacon Robert Braun OGS spent November in Egypt reconnecting with friends and former parishioners of St Marks, Alexandria, where he was Chaplain, and Archbishop of Canterbury's Apocrisarius to the Greek Patriarch, during the 1990s.



It is very good to be home again after four weeks, carrying on my love affair with Egypt. I spent a few days in Cairo—long enough to visit Gizeh and bow three times to the Sphinx. Travellers have done this for centuries, and asked the mysterious creature whether the universe is friendly. I didn't hear his answer.

However the Egyptians themselves were as friendly as ever—as long as you weren't an American! I had to assure people all the way along that I wasn't American. America has few friends in the Middle East today, despite the fact that they're still propping up the Egyptian economy with their dollars.

I spent three weeks in Alexandria, which is still as enigmatic as ever—part Egyptian/part European. City of culture. City of many different religious traditions.

I stayed in a room with a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean, and just across the harbour was the promontory (once an island) where the great Pharos or lighthouse of Alexandria once stood. One of the seven wonders of the world. Parts of it are salvaged from the sea every so often, by the archaeologists, together with statuary, jewellery and all sorts of other treasures. Not far way, on another promontory, the palaces of Cleopatra and the Ptolemy Kings once existed, now replaced by very unregal government security buildings.

I preached, and took services in my old churches in Manchea Square, in the centre of Alexandria,

and at Stanley Bay. And I renewed my friendships with various other Christian groups—the Copts, the Armenians, the Greeks, the Maronites, and a few remaining members of the tiny Jewish community, which once numbered as many as fifty thousand—now only a few dozen.

I went on a guided tour of the new Alexandrian Library, which has tried to recreate the atmosphere and the fame of the ancient Great Library which was partly burnt down when Julius Caesar bombarded the city in 47BC. The Copts and the Moslems finished off the job in later times, as it was seen to be a repository for pagan/infidel literature.

The modern library, which was opened by President Mubarak in 2002, contains the largest reading and study space, under one great domed

I found myself at a dinner party given by a Lebanese princess, in a sumptuous apartment as big as a department store.

roof, anywhere in the world. It is truly vast, and also contains interesting historical displays, and collections of antiquities and ancient manuscripts.

My Moslem friends were keeping the Feast of Ramadan, which lasts from daylight to dusk, and I was invited on a number of occasions to join in the *Iftar* meal, which breaks the fast at sunset each evening.

Such is the vast difference in people's circumstances, that on one evening I'd find myself eating a meal with some of the Sudanese refugees who belong to our church—in a two or three room apartment inhabited by a dozen people. On another evening I found myself at a dinner party given by a Lebanese princess, for fifty people, in a sumptuous apartment as big as a department store. Great wealth and great poverty, existing side by side.

Our church in Alexandria and Cairo has organised things quite well for the Sudanese, most of them Christians from the South of Sudan, who have been persecuted by the oppressive Islamic government in that country. In Cairo, the Anglican cathedral has 20,000 of them on its books, for medical and social aid, clothing, education, etc.

In Alexandria some of the church rooms have been turned into a school for the children, and what I once used as a garage for my car is now a surgery for a Sudanese doctor, caring for some of the refugee community in Alexandria.

I was able to meet with Robert and Salomé Volle, whom I hope we can assist with resettlement in Australia. They've still to wait for all the red tape to be worked through, with their application to our Department of Immigration. They are the last of the Sudanese who were in our church community in Alexandria in my time there. They have been waiting in limbo for fifteen years now.

Robert Volle is a personable young man in his 30s, and his wife Salomé is a very statuesque lady, the daughter of an Anglican bishop in the Sudan.

If and when their application is approved, they'll need plenty of assistance with their travel, their settlement, and their setting up house in Brisbane. We've done it before with John Koma, of course, nearly four years ago now.

One of the things I found myself re-connecting with in Alexandria was its history. The Church in Alexandria was founded by St Mark, some of whose 'remains' are preserved in the Coptic cathedral in Cairo.

Some of the greatest scholars and saints of the early church lived and taught in Alexandria—St Athanasius, St Cyril, St Clement and Origen. And some of the greatest heretics and controversialists made a name for themselves there also, notably the arch-heretic Arius, who taught a defective doctrine of the Trinity, in which the nature of God the Son was weakened.

Ours is very much an historic religion, connecting at many points with people and places that still make an impact in our world.

In the Egyptian desert, the Coptic monasteries have been the scene of Christian community life, in an unbroken line, right back to the days of the early church.

In Alexandria, you can still pinpoint the sites where important historical figures like St Athanasius built their churches. Some sites have had continu-

ous habitation on them since Alexander the Great founded the city in 331 BC.

The novelist EM Forster, who lived in Alexandria through the heady days of the First World War, wrote a beautiful little history and guide to the city. In it he says—

“There was no other city like it, in the ancient world. The science of Greece had planned it. It had been the intellectual birthplace of Christianity. To begin with, Christianity was not philosophic, being addressed to poor and unfashionable people in Palestine. But as soon as it reached Alexandria its character altered. The Alexandrian were highly cultivated, they had libraries where all the wisdom of the Mediterranean was accessible, and their faith inevitably took a philosophic form.

“Occupied by their favourite problem of the relation between God and man, they asked the same question of the new religion as they asked the Jews and the Greeks—namely, ‘what is the link (between God and man)?’

“The new religion replied ‘Christ is the link!’ There was nothing startling to the Alexandrians in such a reply. Thus Christianity did not burst upon Egypt or upon Alexandria like a clap of thunder, but stole into ears already prepared.”

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Visit us on the web www.faithfutures.org/sabeel.html*

A cloud of unknowing

By Maggie Helass

Snug above the snowline in Jackey's Marsh, Jim Deghand dyes wool of many hues from forest bark, lichens and roots, to weave on the loom in the loft in his cabin.

A crimson waratah blooms in his yard. The remains of spring daffodils wilt at his door. A single log burns in the fireplace. Simmering on the hob is a pot of green tea.

Thirty years ago Jim left Melbourne to live in the backblocks of Tasmania, when Deloraine was a sleepy, dumpy little town, without a deli.

Three companions bought an abandoned farm at \$12 an acre. Three cabins still stand on the block but only Jim's is lived in now.

A lot of people in the '70s went bush in pursuit of a better life, but found themselves thrown together in challenging circumstances—possums in the vegetables, snakes, leeches—without mod cons, piped water, telephones or electric power.

They came here with the idea of dropping out, becoming self-sufficient, living an alternative lifestyle. Of those who survived the challenges of living bush, in middle-age many began to feel they were missing out on something, retrained, got back into the workforce, started making money again and moved back to the city.

Jim has lived alone all his life. He grew up as an only child in mainstream, rural South Dakota, USA. He got into trouble for reading Shakespeare and Dickens on the farm but that apprenticeship—building, splitting poles—has well served the whole community at Jackey's Marsh.

With four academic degrees to his credit, and whilst doing a research job with a Melbourne dye company, Jim had a Eureka moment and decided he wanted to do something real! He decided to earn his living by weaving.

“I was raised in a strict Roman Catholic household and when I went to university and started reading things and meeting others I realised that

the Roman Catholic Church does not have a monopoly on truth.

“I've gone to Buddhist meditation courses. I was in an Indian ashram for a couple of months (near Gosford). The Buddhist statues in my house aren't really objects of veneration. I like them as sculpture, but also the concept of calmness and just sitting.”

On the wall next to the fireplace is a picture of the Madonna and child. “I clipped that out of a newspaper—some Italian Renaissance master. This creamy white babe, that doesn't look at all like a Jewish or a Middle Eastern person!”

“My spiritual development I suppose is that I have decided—just pick and choose. Read different things. I don't call myself a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist. I'm everything and nothing.

“One of the things that's really annoyed me



Summer, YARNS Artwork in Silk, Deloraine

about all the religions—Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu—is this spiritual blackmail. I object strongly to that. You've got to be good or you'll go to hell. Or if you do this or don't do that you might end up in the next life as an ant. Why can't it be 'do good, be compassionate for the sake of your fellow human beings'?

“That's why I reject the concept of eternal damnation. If there is this all-knowing, compassionate God, I couldn't imagine an entity like that casting even a Hitler or a Stalin or a Genghis Khan into

eternal suffering. I am of the belief that people are not born monsters.

“These born-again Christians—particularly of the George Bush type—or orthodox Jews, talk about (religion) but at the same time they send people to be executed.”

Jim discerns what to choose from the various religious disciplines by whether it feels good. But how does he know, when he chooses from some element of Christianity, or Buddhism, or Islam, the difference between what is life-giving and life-denying, for there are some things that feel good that are really bad for one?

“I suppose, without wanting to sound arrogant, that’s a process of wisdom. ‘The getting of wisdom’ as Miles Franklin would say, over years of study, and not just necessarily theology, from my broad liberal education—history, politics, literature, sociology.”

“A lot of these—particularly Asian—gurus say ‘it’s not a supermarket, you can’t pick and choose, you’ve got to get onto one philosophy or one teacher and stick with it’.

“Gurus say it’s very dangerous to shop around—supermarket spiritual shopping—but I think to myself, well, why is it dangerous? Of course there are the crazies, which we normally associate with

“No coffee, no tea, no mushrooms, no onions, no garlic, no Indian spicy stuff because it stimulates the lower body chakras!”

America (USA), who commit mass suicide. At some point too you’ve got to use your own nut. If you’re that naïve well, just bad luck. You have to be discerning.

“I suppose for a lot of people it can be lonesome and depressing, and a lot of people want to be told what to think. I was quite naïve when I started doing this guru round myself. . . I was aghast. Gurus were saying, ‘Don’t read novels, I am telling you, novels will corrupt the spirit!’ Or sex! Or chocolate! No coffee, no tea, no mushrooms, no onions, no garlic, no Indian spicy stuff because it stimulates the lower body chakras!

“I always think of Christ’s comment, ‘not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man’.”

Jim has a modest following of younger people, a new generation of pioneers in a different way of life who respect the fortitude, wisdom and life skills of this craftsman of the forest.



Autumn, YARNS Artwork in Silk, Deloraine

Rod was one of many people with lots of ideas in the eighties, who wanted to get out of the mainstream through permaculture, Buddhism, going back to nature.

“I’d been wandering for a while and ended up here. I’ve been in Tasmania since ’85. I was just living out on state forest, then my father got dementia, so I had to get a house with electricity and so forth, to look after him.”

While he was looking after his father he met his wife Avghi and they moved to her house in the mountains above Meander.

“Now we’ve got kids we’ve got to toe the line so that they are not too alienated and they can still function in mainstream society. We’ve just got to make sure the kids don’t get isolated so that they’ve got opportunities and options still open to them.”

Rod would like to see his children living a simple life with nature, “just like we are. No mod cons, we are more comfortable without them”. He is leery of mainstream schooling.

“Education can be more trouble than it’s worth. Sons’ education was to stay at home on the farm. Now they go away and the farms are sold to Gunns (the logging company).

“There are 70-year-olds with three and four sons and no-one to run the farm. Because the boys

watch how Dad’s working and they find out they can make twice as much money working half as many hours. They don’t want the farm, so there’s a whole resource base just disappearing into the hands of one company—Gunns Ltd—until they’ve got control of all freehold land to cut down the trees, just like they’ve got control of the state forests.

“There used to be a local mill in every valley. In every town there were local mills, in every tiny little valley. In ’85–’86 state legislation changed so that all forest concessions would go to the big companies and these local mills could no longer go into the forests and get their own timber. With intensification the companies became one, and now they are buying up all the freehold land.

“You’ve got *The Cloud of Unknowing!* I’ve got relatives in the Anglican Church who’ve never read it!”

“We lost our farm because my father got dementia. . . I was more interested in religion actually. So I came to Tasmania to go into the forest, to get solitude, so that I could focus.

“I was fairly itinerant. Before Dad came to live with me I just had a shack on the Ringarooma River. I had a vegetable garden and the fish in the river and beautiful forest, and I had a good lifestyle. I could just focus on what interested me. If I’m not involved in the mainstream it’s because it simply did not have anything that interested me.

“I’ve studied the complete works of St John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Buddhism, Ramana Harshi—he was my original inspiration. I went to India when I was about 21. That’s where I had my first profound experience of God. And so that’s all that interested me. It was very hard to reconcile one’s sacred life and the world after an experience like that.”

“I was at a Buddhist retreat centre at Lorinna and they have a book there—*The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila. So I realised that Christianity is probably about the same thing. I didn’t realise! I was brought up Christian. I just thought it was about social stuff. I didn’t realise there was a spirituality to it. I went to an Anglican school and grew up in

the Presbyterian Church, but I never encountered any spirituality.

“You’ve got *The Cloud of Unknowing!* I’ve got relatives in the Anglican Church who’ve never read it!”

“After I read that book I found the Carmelite nuns in Launceston. I had the same experience with the prioress there as I did at Arunachala so I’ve been there under their encouragement since then. You can’t do without them (spiritual direction), not after spiritual experiences like that.”

Rod has no pretensions to being a contemplative—“I’m just a worker”. He came to live in the house that Avghi built after his father died and it is here that they raise their children on a forested mountainside, keeping poultry and a vast vegetable garden.

An orphaned duckling chirps in a box on the table, near to the wood stove. A child hammers at the piano. Avghi’s household is warm and comfortable.

“The light of an evening is lovely. I was a bit ignorant of my surroundings when I first came here—it seems hard to believe. I came from the city



Winter YARNS Artwork in Silk, Deloraine

(Melbourne). . . I didn’t pay enough attention to all I should have, like prevailing winds. I didn’t understand the damage wind could do to plants and how difficult it was going to make gardening.”

“I came on a holiday here when I was 21—a month bushwalking. That was my first wilderness experience. I just felt so wonderful. I wanted to live here and feel like that all the time. Saved up with an idea of coming down here and being self-sufficient. Seems a bit innocent now.

“We don’t actually live in the wilderness. It is quite difficult because we are still connected to everything outside. We live this strange commuter life. We are using the car more than we really want to. We are not self-sufficient really. I always had my garden and baked my own bread. It was an attempt but it was nothing like self-sufficiency.

“I remember feeling this sort of place was extremely hospitable to me. I felt very cradled and protected. I felt *safe*—that was the thing! I remember now. I never felt very safe in the city. I’d always felt a bit of a frightened person. I felt *so safe* out there. There was just nothing to be frightened of. Tasmania’s not a really extreme environment. It gets a bit cold but we don’t have real extremes of cold. I felt it was hospitable to people. There was fresh water, the climate was easy, food would be easy to come by. I felt safe, that was it.”

Above Liffey Falls Patricia is contemplating selling her house and going on the road again. Wood smoke curls from her chimney. A statue of the Virgin Mary stands on the veranda, a Welsh blessing is tied over the front door, a laughing Buddha watches over her sitting room.

Four years ago she was an assistant bursar at a college in central Victoria.

“There was something here that pulled me. An inner knowing that I was meant to be here. Deloraine had a strange energy, a sort of innocence.

“But it was energy locked into an old way of being—loggers, trappers. I am part of the front line

“Tai Chi for me is a spiritual journey—reading spiritual books, *feeling* very, very deeply into the heavenly Father and the holy Mother.

that’s come here to split the psyche of this island wide open. Because it was no longer working, for the women in particular. I am surrounded by women who thirst and hunger for spiritual food.

“Everything I do in the way of classes or retreats, reiki, or whatever, I am moved by spirit. I am really clear on that. As I get older I meditate a lot, I pray a lot.”

She has had this innate spirituality since she was a child. Not nurtured so much by parents as by past lives. She can’t always understand people who don’t have that connection.

She spent five years on the road with her two children, travelling in a bus. Then when she was



Spring, YARNS Artwork in Silk, Deloraine

34—picking tomatoes in Bowen—she had a numinous dream which ended when she heard the words, “You can wake up now Patricia, it is only a dream”.

“When I woke up I went outside and screamed at God, ‘How can you let this happen? How can you let wars happen....?’

Two months later, in Victoria, the discipline of Tai Chi came into her life.

What happened I was filled with light, my body was filled with light. I heard the words, ‘Welcome home’ and that was it! I’ve never been anywhere else but home... Wherever I am.

“Tai Chi for me is a spiritual journey—reading spiritual books, *feeling* very, very deeply into the heavenly Father and the holy Mother. I endeavour to always do what I am asked to do.

“I get promptings to do or to say things... I hand over, so that whatever happens in my Tai Chi classes is not mine... we may experience a shared reality in my class which is holy.”

What is holiness?

“To be absolutely connected with the heavenly Father and the holy Mother, and to know that our life matters, and that we are absolutely not alone,

that our life matters, it has a purpose, we have a purpose.”

“The word Chi Kung means a daily practice. People get a bit frightened by the term, but it means enhancing our own life force energy through a daily practice.”

Patricia’s women’s classes—which include circle dancing at a local convent—have generated a new leadership, which means she can now move on.

If the Church is interested in contemporary prophets, it could do worse than listen to the stories of the *anawim* in the forests of Tasmania.

“There is the most incredible network of women here in this area who support each other... and I’m not saying that’s because I’m here. I’m saying it’s because maybe I lit a candle.”

“My husband and I are going to be selling this house and the clinic in Deloraine.”

Her husband is a remedial masseur, who worked in with the Melbourne Football Club in their previous life. “We are going to buy a little house in Deloraine, and a mobile home, and take classes out onto the road. Raoul will teach self-defence for the elderly, judo—he’s a martial artist. And I’ll do women’s retreats and day workshops on the road.”

“I never take the fee for the class, I have a tin. A class is *x* amount of dollars. You put in that amount—or what you will.”

Moving to Tasmania has not been without cost, in the relational rather than the material sense. Patricia weeps when talking of losing regular contact with her granddaughter, but every two or three months she returns to Melbourne.

“I have come to understand that grandparents are involved in the spiritual wellbeing of their grandchildren. Parents have the physical wellbeing of their children at heart.

“I don’t get to be there for my children’s birthdays, and that hurts. I’m actually going to do it differently next year because I don’t want to hurt this way any more.”

A defining characteristic of these people, who have chosen a way of life which takes them to the limits of physical and psychological endurance, is their personal beauty.

The two men were brought up as Christians but had to travel far to find a spiritual home. Indeed, the age-old motif of travel marks the lives of all four pilgrims.

All are disarmingly frank about the ‘unknowing’ surrounding their destination, but find fulfilment in the journey.

It is worth remembering that that St Francis and St Clare lived on the fringes of society, and were in their day a scandal to the Church. As was our own Mary McKillop, who was excommunicated for her headstrong pursuit of integrity in her spiritual quest.

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God's servant Beyers

—a legendary Afrikaner

Beyers Naude spent the years from 1977 to 1984 under house arrest in South Africa for his opposition to apartheid. In 1960, he became editor of *Pro Veritate*, a monthly ecumenical magazine which opposed the policy of apartheid and which promoted the growth of the ecumenical movement in South Africa. After the Dutch Reformed Church removed his status as minister of that church in 1963, he accepted the position of director of The Christian Institute, a multi-racial and denominational organisation of Christians. From 1960 onwards, he travelled extensively to Europe and the USA to fundraise and gain support for the work of The Christian Institute and fight for the plight of those in South Africa who had no political and little legal rights. Beyers Naude died in September. Archbishop Desmond Tutu paid tribute at the memorial service to this great Afrikaner pastor.



Beyers Naude

I'm intrigued by the divine sense of humour. God seems to delight in tickling our noses, in turning things topsy turvy. Who in their right minds would have chosen an adulterer, David, to be the ancestor of the Messiah—for the Messiah is called the 'Son of David'. Who in their right mind could have called a vacillating figure like Peter—who denied his master not once, but three times—and choose him to be the chief of the apostles? Would anyone in their right minds have chosen the arch persecutor of the church, Saul, to become the prime theologian and missionary of the movement he had set out to destroy? Most people wouldn't. And I wouldn't. But God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Now look at Beyers. He had the right pedigree, absolutely impeccable for advancement in the Afrikaner establishment—which ruled the

roost from 1948. He was a *dominee*¹ son, of a *dominee*. He was named after a greatly admired Afrikaner general in the Anglo Boer war, educated at Stellenbosch University where nearly all the Afrikaner elite in those days had been. With such impeccable credentials he could have had the highest office in the land in church or state. It seemed that predictions about his advancement were being fulfilled. He had become a leading light in the all-powerful *Broederbond*² of which his father had been a founding member. He was already Moderator of the Transvaal NGK (Dutch Reformed Church) and it was just a matter of time before he would reach the top of the ecclesiastical tree.

That is what human beings thought. But they had not reckoned with God's sense of humour. God was looking for a champion, someone who would help to give Christianity credibility, especially amongst blacks.

1 Afrikaans for "pastor"

2 Afrikaans masonic organisation.

Radical blacks were establishing black theology and black consciousness. God was looking for a champion for non-racial justice and democracy, for caring and compassion, for someone who would stand up against the vicious racist oppression, the evil policy of apartheid. Someone who would stand up for the inalienable right, the fundamental rights of all God's children.

Who in their right minds would have gone to look for such a person in the self-same Afrikaner community that had embraced apartheid as a creed and a way of life? But this is precisely what God did.

Oom Bey³ was working through a Damascus Road experience, for in March 1960 the police opened fire on unarmed anti-pass demonstrators in Sharpeville. Sixty-nine were killed, mostly shot in the back as they were running away. The world was appalled and the Cottesloe Conference was convened—a cornerstone conference, which pronounced that apartheid could not be Biblically justified. Beyers was one of the NGK representatives who supported this view, which was later rejected by his church. He had already married Ilse and the doubts soaking into his mind about the rightness of his church's doctrines were influenced by the non

When an Afrikaner sees the light then the commitment is total. He is committed to the hilt, as we have seen with the likes of Nico Smith, David Bosch

racial worship he experienced in Genadendal. But Sharpeville was the point of no return, and we've heard how he founded the Christian Institute.

This helped to restore the credibility of the church for young blacks and for some whites too. The gospel of this Jesus had a cutting edge—that God did care when people were treated like rubbish, when they were tortured and killed, that God cared when they lived in pain and poverty, and that this God was Immanuel, the God with us.

It was in the work of everyday living that we knew this one was a God of the Exodus, the great liberator God who cared about politics. This God was not neutral—this God was notoriously biased. He was notoriously biased always on the side of the poor, of the weak and the oppressed.

The Christian Institute promoted the Black Consciousness of Steve Biko, the black theology of Itumeleng Mosala and others, and gave support for the theological training of the leaders of the Independent Churches.

Predictably this was anathema to the establishment. (Beyers) was booted out; he was ostracized, he preached his last sermon in this church about obeying God rather than men. Like Paul, he was to suffer greatly for the gospel.

One of the great great blessings we have in this land is that when an Afrikaner sees the light there are no half measures, for Afrikaners are not partial. When an Afrikaner sees the light then the commitment is total. He is committed to the hilt, as we have seen with the likes of Nico Smith, David Bosch and many many others.

The Afrikaner actually is an African. Like an African, he/she knows, deep inside, "I am because you are." The Afrikaner knows that "a person is a person through other persons"⁴, and so nothing could be more painful—excruciatingly so—for an Afrikaner to leave the community that gave him life.

This is what happened to Beyers. He was ostracised as a traitor, a sellout to his people. He was banned for seven years, a prisoner at his own expense, not allowed to meet more than one other person at a time. It was extraordinary that the world flooded to Greenside to meet this living legend.

He couldn't go on a picnic, he couldn't attend a wedding or a funeral without special permission. He, a committed Christian, was banned under the suppression of Communism Act!

And the more the system tried to discredit him the more his stature grew amongst the oppressed and throughout the world. Do you remember the highly charged funeral of Steve Biko? Do you remember how they hoisted Alan Boesak on their shoulders? But there was a second person who was also carried shoulder high—that was our dear

3 "Uncle Bey", Afrikaans term of respect

4 *Ubuntu*, African concept of society

Beyers. It was an accolade from the people, that they have accepted him with his whiteness. For as we had kept saying, times without number, that was a total irrelevance.

I was appointed General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) because they had suddenly decided it was time that this body—whose membership is overwhelmingly black—had got to have a black general secretary. So Desmond Tutu came up and was appointed. Then I became a Bishop of Johannesburg in 1985 and SACC needed someone to succeed me. This very same body that said *nee nee* we must be led by a black, chose not just a white man, but an Afrikaner, and a *dominee* of the NGK, the son of a founding member of the *Broederbond*!

And then God—with his supreme sense of humour—chose Beyers in the most spectacular fashion. When the negotiations to bring an end to the oppression of apartheid came, he was one of

the ANC delegation. He was chosen as a midwife to bring the new dispensation of democracy to birth—this one who had so long been ostracised. He helped many blacks to embrace non-racialism who might have been tempted to be anti-white—and it was crucial to the kind of democracy we have become.

I was with him in the vestry of the university Dutch Reformed Church, Pretoria, just before the Memorial Service for Johan Heyns and this formally ostracised one was asked: “Can you pray before we file out into the church”.

I went to him and I said “How do you feel?” His eyes filled with tears, as he said, “I’m so thankful it has happened while Ilse and I are still alive”.

He was received with acclaim at the General Synod of the NGK when the church made a wonderful handsome apology, a public apology, to Beyers and the others of its prophets.

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 impact upon the daily lives of Australians.

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

Readers’ comments on the last edition —

I am very impressed indeed with everything in it, especially its brevity and succinctness. It is especially apropos here... at this time when similar thoughts pervade the minds of many of the outstanding folk in this part of coastal Virginia.

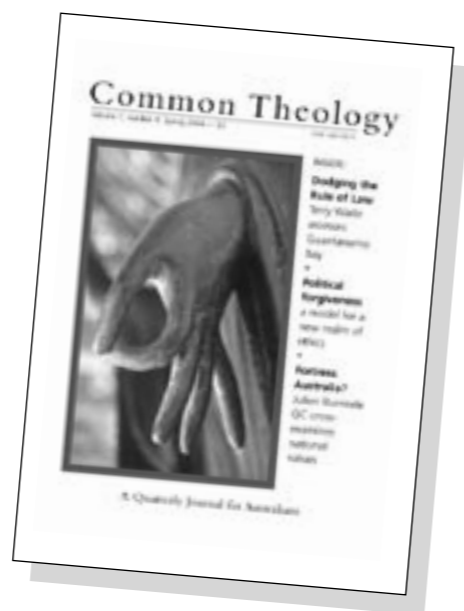
Alan Cooper, Tidewater, USA

Many thanks for such a wonderful ongoing contribution to the *doing* of theology.

The Revd Dr Christopher Newell, Hobart

Thanks for your latest offering. The lead story by Terry Waite was excellent. I met him when I became friends with Robert Runcie’s Chaplain (now the Bishop of London) and had little idea of his significance. A humble and truly impressive man.

Don Palmer, Sydney



Thank you for *Common Theology*. I got my copy of Autumn edition at my parish church, St Andrew’s Indooroopilly, and it was full of “meat”! The article on Justice Michael Kirby and that of Robert Braun should be required reading for some.

Glenda Mill, Jindalee

Common Theology is an independent publication funded by its subscribers.

readers' views

Luther didn't speak English

I still have the pleasure of reading *Common Theology* when it comes around, and I appreciate its pages. I have just picked up the latest copy at the Anglican General Synod.

Your latest issue has drawn me into making a comment about one of the articles, and I assume that you are happy if the journal creates debate.

While I agree with some of what Peter Sellick writes in Home Truths, it is unfortunate that he adopts a fairly stereotypical view of the Reformation and uses Luther to back up what he sees as the seeds of destruction of the church embedded in the Reformation principles. While I agree with him that the seeds of destruction are there—and probably are always there because no single view contains the whole truth—I think he misrepresents the views of Martin Luther.

As far as the opening comments about translations go, Luther did not work from any English translations of the Bible, nor from the Latin Vulgate, but from the Greek text as it had been recovered by Erasmus at that time. Luther predated the English translation of the Bible.

As far as I know Luther knew no English, and the medium of theological conversation at the time was Latin, so Peter’s remarks about Gal 2:16 and Luther’s use of it (‘this is the text’ is not accurate, as he would have been using the Greek) misses the mark. Peter’s comments are, perhaps, reflective of an Anglo appropriation of history.

Luther’s use of the equivalent of ‘in’ rather than ‘of’ was based on the scholarship of the time, not on popular translations. It is highly likely that subsequent English translations followed Luther, rather than the other way round, and it is most likely that both ‘in’ and ‘of’ can have some merit. It is spurious of us in this generation, however, to decide that we have arrived at the final version, and at the ultimate truth of the text in order to discard earlier readings.

I feel Peter misses the core of Luther. He consciously refused to adopt a linear, rational view of the doctrine of salvation by grace. He rejected the Aristotelian method that was popular at the time, and was used by Catholics, Calvin and others. He insisted that salvation is not by human work, but by the grace of God. He was strongly opposed to any interpretation of faith as a human work. In his theology faith was always and only the surprising creation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

Salvation by faith has been reduced in some contexts into a personal pact between the individual and God, and the focus falls entirely on the believer’s faith.

Anglican theology (if there is such a single entity) does not have as ‘low’ a view of human nature as Lutheran theology does—that is that we can do no good work in and of ourselves, and as soon as we think we can that is evidence that we cannot. Lutheran theology in the raw hovers over the abyss between paradox and total contradiction, and is only supported and saved by the Spirit that gives the gift of saving faith.


I am probably not putting this very well, and I would certainly not be one to say that Luther was right in all that he said and did. Far from it! Also, that there were flaws in the Reformation is hardly surprising. We should also be prepared for the flaws incorporated in our scholarship today.

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat"

Matthew 25:35

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 **Voice of the Martyrs**

IM04

Where I do agree with Peter strongly (sitting as I am in the Anglican General Synod as I write this) is that salvation by faith has been reduced in some contexts into a personal pact between the individual and God, and the focus falls entirely on the believer's faith. Luther would totally oppose this. It is a rational deviation of the doctrine, but does not represent its intention. It is part of the battle I am seeing between two wings of the Anglican Church. Although Anglicans are well aware of Luther, and his formative role, and seem to greatly respect him, much of his theology seems reduced to clichés. I don't get a sense—as I also don't from many contemporary Lutherans—that they understand how radical and deeply transforming his theology is. It does not fit the categories we try to make.

Rev John Henderson
General Secretary
National Council of Churches in Australia

❖ As someone who regularly visits Baxter as part of an ecumenical team of clergy to support detainees, I was very interested to see Julian Burnside's excellent article on 'Fortress Australia' and his accurate portrayal of Baxter Detention Centre.

Much could be said, but I will limit myself to one question. If Baxter is the five star resort many would claim it to be, then why are there strict regulations in place to prevent people from committing suicide, people who have fled from their own country in order to save their life? Fear and depression is rife in Baxter, but detainees do manage some black humour. Tongue in cheek, their answer is that GSL (the management) get paid by the Government for each detainee and don't want to lose any money.

Archdeacon Michael Hillier
Whyalla, SA

❖ "He looked as though his mind had no surface. It looked as though it had been blasted away except for the depths where nightmares dwell." Words used by Rebecca West about Rudolph Hess and quoted by Julian Burnside in the text of a speech printed in the last edition of *Common Theology*.

I saw that face last week. But it was the face of a beautiful Hazara man living in a place called Baxter (Detention Centre). A human being, who once more had learned, after completing over three years

of indefinite mandatory detention, that his appeal for refugee status had been rejected by Amanda Vanstone.

Through his eyes I could see the depths of his despair—through his limp, sagging body the emptiness within.

"You must not give in," I told him. "You have done so well. Keep that hope alive."

"How can I keep it alive? It is already dead," he murmured.

And so my first read of *Common Theology* touched a raw nerve. Thank God for Julian Burnside who is trying heroically to lift the apathy pervading this 'lucky country'. Apathy that provokes asylum seekers to say, "Please don't forget us. We are human".

Jean Oates
Whyalla Norrie

'Middle way' is the better way

Thank you for your gracious letter in response to the irascible note I made on my renewal subscription form. I was hesitating about renewing *Common Theology*—there being many demands on one's short rations for papers and periodicals—for a further year.

I cannot remember my exact words. But I do remember the general drift, and you have helped me by quoting back to me, "a sort of political correctness in your contents and their authors", and my hope for balanced views from "the other sides".

First, a definition of political correctness to make it quite clear what I mean. It is 'an individual, or a group of individuals, or a party, or organization, or public institution who, while claiming explicitly or implicitly a monopoly of the qualities of virtue and compassion, press a point of view of its own while smothering the opposite viewpoint or acting risibly toward it'. My words.

The word 'political' betrays its origin. The various political parties who make up our democracy are steeped in this one-sidedness—it is their way of proceeding. The media, as an offshoot of politics, often follow suit. One would need to be a donkey or never to have read a newspaper over the last ten years not to see the hate-side that is applied to our

Prime Minister, for example. Now whatever the merits or otherwise of the haters' viewpoint—and for some he is everything that is evil (shades of George Bush!), the balanced view, that there is another viewpoint—that he could be a decent bloke after all—is nowhere to be seen.

A parishioner approached his parish priest asking for John Howard to be remembered in the Sunday Eucharistic intercessions. It was at the time when war with Iraq seemed immanent and there was unease throughout the country. The priest refused saying it was too political and therefore inappropriate. That is politically correct at the end of its tether, as well as being quite contrary to our Australian much vaunted claim that all must have a fair go. It is thoroughly un-Christian too. Neither is making demons of the other side a Christian option.

The Church, whoever leads it or writes about it, is always in danger of falling into this slough. For example, we all abhor those who have sexually abused minors, and our church leaders have rightly placed barriers of steel around those dealing with children, or who may be about to. These actions have dominated the headlines and ten second bites, and rightly so.

But on the other side, what of the abusers and Christ's teaching of forgiveness? Does the freedom Christ brings—a freedom which the New Testament hammers home as being the forgiveness of our sins—mean anything? Why are we so silent? Or is it 'ecclesial correctness' not to talk publicly about the need for forgiveness?

Or, why should we, outside Sydney, not applaud Peter Jensen (Anglican Archbishop of Sydney) for his fingering the real problem facing our Church in Australia—that we have little time left and that an audacious urgency in our evangelism is needed, not only because of evidential decline but also because of the biblical imperative? Why should it be 'ecclesial correctness' to be snooty about the way things are done in Sydney and not want to know?

These three examples—and there are heaps more—have nothing specifically to do with *Common Theology*. So what did I mean when I applied the term to *CT*?

When I received the renewal request—I was well overdue—it contained the front cover of your Winter edition 2004. Terry Waite and Julian Burnside were named with the titles of their contributions, respectively 'Dodging the Rule of Law'

and 'Fortress Australia'. Anyone who knows the history of these two gentlemen will have heard their views often. I respect and admire them. But I knew pretty well what their point of view would be, and now I've read the articles I wasn't wrong. So I hesitated to re-subscribe because my mind was telling me that it would equally helpful to have an article from the other side to balance the picture. I accept that Guantanamo Bay has all the marks of horror like some prisoner-of-war camps in World War 2., and that there may well be legal irregularities. But might not the vast American Embassy in Canberra up the road from me respond to a polite call for a 500 word justification for GB?

And, of course, the detention centres, and the asylum seekers there. The agonising process of gaining refugee status, the sheer apparent inhumane treatment of human beings seems miles away from national civilised behaviour. Most would agree with your editorial, 'there is an awful probability that Jesus is with a stateless Palestinian in Baxter Detention Centre'. But does that rule out that He is *not* with those who impose the policy? Or that there is not another point of view? That sounds harsh I know, but the government must have reasons for adopting so seemingly dreadful a policy. Isn't there a Coalition politician in Queensland who could be encouraged to do some writing?

However, having said all that, your article-review of Russell Daye's *Political Forgiveness: lessons from South Africa* seemed to support the view I am adumbrating. Sandwiched between Waite and Burnside, you wrote, "Unless a balance between empathy and judgment is maintained during the healing process there is a danger of further fracturing the national community".

It is the sort of statement that we need to hear in adversarial Australia, and particularly in the Church. It is the balance between compassion and justice that is missing; and unless the bile that results from imbalance is emptied out, our communities will fracture.

As an aside, 'Common' is a much abused word, but it means, if I understand it correctly as used in the title of the 1662 Prayer Book, that the prayers in it are for all, and all are involved in its forms of worship. I take it that that was the sense behind 'Common' *Theology* too.

The Right Revd Alfred Holland
Canberra

Giving up trying too hard on life's great lake

by Jim Young

Three weeks after our fiftieth wedding anniversary Jean died. There was no disguising the pain of that parting after such a long and adventurous journey together, and for the first few weeks on my own I was immobilised in my grief. The longing to have Jean back with me, to see her smile, the light of her eyes, to touch her warmth, to smell her hair on the pillow was almost enough to stop me breathing.



Not long before she died, Jean and I had talked about our many shared years as a journey. We used the simile of a journey in the Canadian wilderness, which we had known. The shared decision to stop further treatment for the insidious cancer, which was strangling her life, appeared to be the crossing of the last portage. We saw our last days together as being in separate canoes on a placid lake, sometimes drifting apart, sometimes close enough to touch, sometimes disturbed in each other's wake.

But we knew we would leave the peace of that lake and by different outfalls and at different times. Our journey together was coming to an end. That made us sad, very sad.

Neither of us wanted to end what had been such a great adventure together—sometimes challenging, hazardous and fraught, sometimes overflowing with joy, fun and hilarity, sometimes placid and affirming, sometimes tumultuous and frightening but always, always what we would without a shadow of doubt choose for ourselves and each other.

No wonder we were sad as we faced the inevitability of our parting. But neither of us was afraid, because we could see, in the distance, the ocean into which all rivers flowed and we shared an unshakable belief that our separate journeys down

eye witness

separate rivers were to be further stages in our great adventure.

Then Jean died.

Left alone on the lake, I could do nothing but stare at the point at which I had seen her canoe disappear. I dared not look away. Where had she gone? *That's* where she had gone—the invisible point at which I stared.

It felt as though, if I looked with enough intensity and persistence, if only I could recall with enough clarity and precision my appreciation of her presence, somehow she would come back.

And then, quite suddenly after a few weeks, something unexpected happened. I suppose it's just the way in which the mystery of grief unfolds, but fatigued, cried-out or whatever, my fixation relaxed and at that very moment my sense of Jean's presence still with me became real.

I don't mean a ghost or anything dramatic in that way. It's just that she's somehow not so 'distant'. I don't miss her as much, at least not all the time, as I did before. I was (and am) no longer afraid that I'll lose the vividness of my remembrance of her. Maybe I will lose that, but it doesn't trouble me any more. Because she's here, in the back of my mind, in everything I do, and I'm comfortable with that. I don't have to try any more.

I realise that I shouldn't be surprised at the change. Many people who have written about their experience of grief have reported the same sort of thing—C S Lewis's *A Grief Observed* reports it more eloquently than most. But it occurs to me that the experience underlines a truth which had until now escaped me—one of the ways in which we frustrate the achievement of what we truly want is by *trying too hard*.

For me this has been an important realisation in the resolution of my grief, but reflecting on it has

also given me a clue into a theological truth which has much wider application.

The instance that first comes to mind is the question of forgiveness—both given and received.

I think of instances in which I have been responsible for some devastating hurt to another, sometimes as a result of ignorance and neglect, sometimes, sadly, in a thinly disguised effort to cause as much pain as I could.

In those cases in which I have become aware of my guilt I have on occasion truly repented in as far as I have been able and have desperately (I use the word advisedly) sought forgiveness.

Yet it has only been when my desperation has waned and I have come to terms with what seemed like the inevitability of having to live the rest of my life dragging round the burden of my guilt that I have received a sense of relief and absolution—not only from the individual I have hurt but also a sense of God's absolution and peace.

And I have been aware of the obverse. I have on occasion found myself deeply hurt by the actions of others.

Later those who have hurt me have come to me seeking my forgiveness and, though I have really wanted to forgive them and have believed that, as one who would follow Christ, such forgiveness is the right thing, I have found myself unable to do so. Of course saying, "Yes, I forgive you" was easy. But the harder I tried, it seemed, the less real my forgiveness of the offender would be. Only when I have stopped trying and resigned myself to no further contact with the person who had hurt me have I received, as a gift of God, the grace to forgive.

Of course psychologically that makes some trivial sense. If I say to you, "I want you to disregard the big toe on your left foot", the one thing I can guarantee is that you will pay attention to that toe, and the harder you try to follow my instruction, the more aware of the toe you will become! But what I am trying to say is a good deal more significant than that.

Sometimes Jean and I, facing life-changing decisions sought, with increasing urgency as some time-line approached, God's clear guidance. I remember, for example, years and years ago, the agony of trying to decide after the invitation had been offered us, whether or not we should go to live and work in Canada.

Together and separately we prayed, we tried to discern a clear sign. It was our earnest intention

to do the will of God if only God would tell us! But the harder we tried, the further God's presence seemed to recede. In the end, time forcing us and feeling a bit abandoned, we took the leap. And, miracle, when we had done so, the nearness of the God's presence, which we had cherished and seemingly lost, returned. Perhaps we were trying too hard.

My experience since Jean's death has had some resonance with this same frustration. One of the delights, which we shared when, as part of our partnership, we have prayed together, has usually been a real sense of God's presence. Often we would start our devotions with the Celtic injunction, "Be still, and aware of God's presence, within and all around," and in silence together we would be bathed in a sense of peace, calm and comfort, even though it might be only a pause in lives filled with clamor. We had no doubt that God was with us.

In the bewildering days after Jean's death, how I longed for that peace and comfort! Yet no matter how hard I tried, no matter how intense and earnest my longing for that comfort, there was nothing—a blankness, and absence which plunged me further into despair.

This aloneness, this sense of desertion is, I read, not unusual, though it seemed at the time intensely personal to me. Again, C S Lewis described it better than I can. He said it seemed as though a door had been shut in his face. It was only when my fixation on the point of Jean's departure lapsed, when I stopped trying so hard, that the peace of God passing understanding began to return.

In all these dimensions—keeping Jean's memory vibrant, seeking God's comforting presence, forgiving and accepting forgiveness, following Christ's commission to witness—if trying too hard is counterproductive why have I expended so much useless effort?

Could it be after all my years I have yet to learn that I can't really do a better job of organising things than God, and that God's profligate generosity will provide more than I could desire or deserve anyhow, if only I would open my clenched and grasping hand?

Jim Young is a retired Anglican priest/clinical psychologist in the Diocese of Tasmania.

book review

A dictionary definition of 'radical' is 'fundamental'

Radical Brisbane, an unruly history, Raymond Evans, Carole Ferrier, eds, with Jeff Rickertt, the Vulgar Press 2004.

Reviewed by Harry Throssell

Let's cut to the quick. What does it mean to be 'radical'? This is the question that remains hanging after this detailed history of Brisbane since European occupation.

The account divides into two. There's the town you don't know because you didn't live there at the time. Then there's the place of which you have personal memories to measure against written descriptions—in my case pre and post February 1966, when I arrived to work at Queensland University, the era described in this volume as 'the better known "radical times" of the 1960s and 1970s', with a chapter entitled *Student Revolt, 1960s and 1970s—The University of Queensland, St Lucia*.

Academia looms large. The foreword, introduction, afterword, 49 other chapters and a couple of brief essays are written by 22 authors of whom 16 have been closely connected with Queensland University, and a further three with other universities. Historian Ray Evans is author or co-author of 19 chapters, associate professor of English Carole Ferrier of seven. Makes you wonder what non-academics thought about the events described.

The period before 1966 is a fascinating story of an original prison colony settlement—then part of New South Wales—battling with traditional owners of the land who had hunted these regions for tens of thousands of years, then gradually emerging as a modern city coming of age at World Expo in 1988.

This volume is valuable as a contribution to its history, 'radical' or otherwise, intriguing because so many traces of the story are still about. The melding of new settlers with Indigenous people has remained an important issue.

Until recently Brisbane has long been regarded as a conservative country town with governments representing business and rural interests, often using the police force to put down opposition.

But there are also many—perhaps unexpected—accounts of exploited workers and the poor standing up for themselves in organizations and on the streets. They have their say in these pages, although surprisingly there is little mention of poverty after the 1940s.

Particular episodes are of special interest, such as the period at the end of the 19th century when American Henry George was in Brisbane on a world lecture tour to spread the gospel of his Utopia—how to 'transform the world from one of

This volume is valuable as a contribution to its history, 'radical' or otherwise, intriguing because so many traces of the story are still about.

capitalist cycles of boom and bust, with cut-throat competition, poor housing and health, insecurity for all but the rich—into a cooperative, progressive, moral and innovative society where everyone would be prosperous and secure in a clean and healthy environment'.

He had many supporters, but, alas, it hasn't happened.

Then there's the 'Battle of Brisbane' in 1942, when American and Oz troops fought violent, sometimes lethal mini-wars for the hearts and minds of local women. Commentators seem to conclude the Yanks won because they had more money and more charm. But I'm not sure how radical this was.

Coming to my own experience of the city.

By the 1960s radical action seemed to be more about civil rights than social conditions, 'the strug-

gles against the Vietnam War, military conscription and Apartheid and for women's rights, indigenous rights, gay rights, union rights and the Right to March'.

Then there were censorship and a ban on leaflet distribution except by businesses.

The Queensland Council for Civil Liberties formed in 1966, the trade unions were active, but many protests emanated from the only university campus—at St Lucia.

Of considerable significance was the Tower Mill riot in 1971 when a large Queensland police force attacked thousands who were protesting against the Springbok rugby tour as a way of opposing the apartheid regime in South Africa (reviewed again in ABC television's *Rewind* in September).

Perhaps the authors of *Radical Brisbane* refer to action by people who *defined themselves as 'radicals'*

Later that year, an academic made a characteristically honest speech admitting 'I still know very little about the Aborigines' and referring to 'our historical shame'. Evans writes 'the Brisbane protests of July 1971 were destined to provide a potent impetus for that gradual, enlightening rediscovery'.

This comes as a surprise! In 1965, the same year Merle Thornton and Ro Bognor famously chained themselves to the bar of the Regatta Hotel, Toowong, to protest against their exclusion from the public bar, striking a blow for women's rights, Margaret Valadian graduated from the Department of Social Studies (later Social Work), Queensland University, to become the first Aboriginal person (along with the more heralded Charles Perkins at Sydney University) to gain a university degree in Australia. Dr Valadian, OBE, OA, the 1996 Queensland University Alumnus of the Year, as she now is, thus made a significant educational breakthrough, particularly for Aboriginal women, and in Brisbane.

The head of the Social Studies/Social Work department from 1955 to her death in 1970 was Hazel Smith, a personal friend of writer Kath

Walker (later Oodgeroo Noonuccal) who came with her son Denis to address the department.

A particularly useful chapter in *Radical Brisbane* is *Always Will Be*, by Joanne Watson, about the central role of the Yuggera people's Musgrave Park in South Brisbane in Murriss' struggles for basic rights ever since first confrontations with white settlers in the early 19th Century up to the present.

A common dictionary definition of 'radical' is 'fundamental', referring to roots, and 'favouring basic social or political change', although one dictionary defines a 'radical politician' as 'a member of the advanced section of the Liberal Party'!

Of course there are those on the 'radical right' of politics like the 'neo-cons' in USA. It depends what you mean by fundamental change.

Perhaps the authors of *Radical Brisbane* refer to action by people who *defined themselves as 'radicals'*—a sort of loose-knit movement of like-minded people espousing mainly 'left wing' ideologies, and, apparently, sharing a lifestyle.

Intellectualism might be a feature too, which would explain the focus on the university, although clearly others were also involved in action.

It would have been interesting to read an exploration of the role of the university as a privileged, middle class elite likely to have priorities different from people in other sections of society.

Then again does 'radical' refer to the *methods* chosen to bring about social change, mainly public shows of dissent like street marches, sit-ins, confrontations, opportunities to express defiance in public, in contrast to quieter, less obviously confrontational methods?

Public demos may well be useful in expressing emotion, but is that enough? Did a particular event work, was it sufficient, did it attract the support in the general community which is vital for real change? Or did it alienate that wider support?

An internationally known writer said something worth thinking about. 'There came a day—it was during the anti-nuclear days—and there I was on a street corner, handing out flowers, as I did on a regular basis. And some guy spat on me and called me a dirty commie. And I thought to myself, this isn't working. This just isn't worth it. You are not changing anything. This is just for me. I'm just doing this for me to feel good. I'm not changing the world'.

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book review

Faith and Feminism—An introduction to Christian Feminist Theology, by Nicola Slee
part of *Exploring Faith Theology for Life* series,
Darton, Longman and Todd. ISBN: 0-232-52486-6.
RRP \$28.95

Reviewed by Christine Woolner

This book was easy to read and gave an overview of a blossoming field of theology. It assumes no prior knowledge of feminist theologies and gives a comprehensive and easy to understand introduction to the topic.

The text begins with a history of the development of some feminist theologies and identifies key concepts. Succeeding chapters take a key area and survey feminist critiques of the traditional understanding.

The book covers religious language and models of God, sin in feminist perspective, the issue of a male Saviour for women, and the Holy Spirit as the feminine in God. It then offers constructive attempts by a variety of feminist theologians to restate the traditional Christian doctrines and practices which dominated in a patriarchal society. The final chapter reviews and evaluates the achievements of feminist theologies and looks to the future, asking what shapes feminine theologies may take.

In one small book it is impossible to be comprehensive, but the author has sketched broad brush strokes which identify the thoughts and work of some significant thinkers, and shows a diversity of perspectives, mostly from Christian feminists but also including some thoughts from post-Christian, and post-traditional feminist theologians.

The author writes from the perspective of a white, middle class, British woman and so has many differing ideas from black, oppressed, feminist theologians. However she writes from her own experience.

Women use their own experiences of oppression, relationships, sexuality, motherhood and the like as major sources of reflection and this book encourages those who are not confident in their own reflections.

Theology must be allowed to take root in the experiences of all people, not only those in male

academic areas. For those looking for something other than the traditional understandings of scripture this book would be very suitable.

Slee introduces us to Christian feminists, Liberal feminists, Romantic feminists, Radical or Marxist feminists, Post-modern feminist as well as Womanist theology which has been claimed as a distinctive form of black theology, and there is a mention of Asian and Indian feminist theologies.

This book alerts us to the problems many women have with androcentric and patriarchal readings of the Bible, and raises many questions, demonstrating some of the problems of the 'invisibility of women in scripture' and the inferior position that those women, who actually receive a mention, are assigned.

Strategies for re-reading the scriptures have been developed, so that feminists can find a way forward.

Along with the reflections and discussion points for groups, a variety of understandings emerge, which allow a totally different reading of the text. Strategies shown in the book cover such areas as recovery of neglected texts, and reading texts 'in memoriam', as well as 'the golden thread' approach.

Just as the Christian faith has grown and changed over time, so too has the feminist approach. If you are looking for an easy to read and interesting account of contemporary women's faith issues you could not go wrong with this book. I would recommend it to anyone interested in keeping up with current trends in theology as well as for those looking for a fresh approach to the traditional reading of scripture.

The book is ideal for either individual or group use. The author has provided exercises and reflections during and after each chapter. These exercises are not simply questions to ponder but include a variety of creative options such as creative writing and artistic tasks which allow the reader to enter more deeply into the aspects of feminine theology discussed. At the end of each chapter, Slee has thoughtfully listed several books for further reading. The book has a well referenced Glossary and biography.

book review

MARCUS L LOANE A Biography, by J R Reid, Acorn Press, Melbourne 2004, ISBN 0 908284 47 0, RRP \$34.95.

Reviewed by Gerald Davis

It is early days to attempt to assess the place of Archbishop Marcus Loane, standing alongside Howard Mowll and CH Nash in obvious claim to significance in Australian Anglicanism in the 20th Century. I'm glad John Reid has made this careful memoir, which thankfully does not address that question. It is too soon.

German historian Joachim Fest has perceptively noted—"History is a far more open field than it may seem to the historian looking for clues to the origins of a phenomenon after it has occurred. His insights are necessarily determined by questions he would never have asked had he not known the outcome."¹

One might speculate how Christian faith would have developed without the first-hand writings of those who saw the major Christ events. We need first hand records to provide a grounding for later reflection. Fest, writing in Holocaust circumstance (from a non-Jewish perspective), seems to prove the point.

This biography is a labour of love. John Denton (former General Secretary of the Anglican General Synod) pointed out to me many years ago that John Reid was playing a Timothy role to Marcus Loane's Paul, and that has seemed quite true over many years. I write in respectful reflection of that insight.

Sir Marcus *does* seem enigmatic. But be careful! It is cheap to say he might have been more comfortable in an earlier time, but that requires choices—between the early 19th Century and the Clapham Sect, or earlier times back. Perhaps to before the Elizabethan settlement of the Reformation in England, or perhaps to the Edwardian Reformation a century earlier.

When we think of consigning someone to centuries gone, isn't it rather outrageous to suggest

he/she might have fared better without modern dentistry and medicine, for starters?

Reid helps us to understand this better (see Page 137), offering perceptions without judgement.

It is not an uncritical biography as the careful chapter on Matters of Principle & Doctrine (pp102–113) attest.

In May when I first read this book I wrote immediately to Bishop Reid—"Many of the more complex situations you have economically described had me thinking hard, as I tried to recollect and think back into what I knew of the times. I concluded you have done well indeed, significantly articulating some helpful explanations, appropriately allowing a few enigmas to stand".

MLL is enigmatic, and yet transparent. His secretary's note (p 117) is that on an occasion when he did not need the cut lunch Patricia usually provided, "he took it out into Sydney Square and laid it beside a man asleep on the seats so that when he work up there would be a meal beside him". That's a wonderful insight, and I could match it several times over, of MLL's personal care of people.

Gerald Davis was managing editor of *Church Scene*, national Anglican weekly, 1970-95

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Family skeletons in the bible closet

by Don Palmer



The increasing rise of the religious right could well roll right through the political landscape. Don Palmer feels it is based on many false premises, the nuclear family being the central one.

Religion has always played a part in the political landscape of the USA. God is called upon by all parties as though he were an aging patriarch who regrettably was not able to attend rallies and media conferences in person. None the less, He endorses every candidate and their policies and they in turn endorse Him. In recent times, as our political culture is drawn towards an American presidential model, God has been increasingly reported to be seen in the background.

The visits of John Howard and Peter Costello to the Hillsong Church prior to the election, the clandestine visit of Tony Abbott to Cardinal Pell and the presence of the Assemblies of God inspired Family First Party are all manifestations of this.

One thing each of these groups has in common is the central belief in "the family".

For "family" we are meant to read husband, wife and children.

This understanding of how society ought to be organized is said to be based on the teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But is it?

Curiously it is almost impossible to find in the Bible the kind of relationship described these days as an "ordinary family". Even a cursory look at the heroes of scripture provides an unusual basis for role modelling.

Take King David, for example. As the man who established Jerusalem as Israel's capital, he stands head and shoulders over all other religious monarchs.

The Bible reveals information that could hardly be acceptable to Family First. It begins with a

home truths

homoerotic encounter between David and his best friend Jonathon, the King's son.

He marries Michal, then more than six others. He has children with most of them.

When he becomes King the court historian gives up naming the wives and simply says he took "more concubines and wives". He commits adultery with Bath-sheba—then murders her husband in a botched cover-up. In his last months he sleeps with a beautiful young girl "to keep him warm".

As a father he raises a highly dysfunctional family. His first wife shuns him after he dances naked in public. His son Amnon rapes his own sister. Another son, Absalom, then assassinates Amnon in revenge. Absalom later publicly and systematically rapes all his father's concubines.

David is a remarkable man, and it's to the Bible's credit that it is so frank and revealing about him.

Thank You

On behalf of the Friends of Sabeel Australia Incorporated I wish to say a heartfelt thank you for the advertisement for Friends of Sabeel that you have printed in recent issues of *Common Theology*. We appreciate very much the exposure that your decision to make such an inclusion brings.

We wish to congratulate you on the quality and interest sustained in the content of the articles printed in *Common Theology*. It meets an important need in the landscape of Christian publishing in Australia.

Ray Barraclough

President of Friends of Sabeel Australia
Incorporated
St Francis Theological College, Brisbane

¹ In *Inside Hitler's Bunker: the last days of the Third Reich*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York, 2002–4, translated from German.

Perhaps he is just not our best choice for Father of the Year.

What about his son, the legendary Solomon? Seven hundred wives of royal rank, three hundred concubines—one son! The basis for his marriages was not so much love but simply military and economic alliances. Was that really wise?

There is almost nothing in the Bible that describes families in terms that would make sense to most Australians in the twenty-first century.

Solomon's own son was more circumspect. He only had 18 wives and 60 concubines.

So what of the Ten Commandments?

Wives are grouped with the other possessions of a husband including servants, oxen and donkeys. Perhaps not a helpful touchstone for family values.

Is it possible will find more productive soil by moving forward into the New Testament?

The role model *par excellence* for Christians is Jesus. He was conceived before his mother married. Her fiancé was not the father. Jesus grew up in a society where most men were married, by the time they were about sixteen. If they weren't married they were suspected of anti-social sexual dysfunction and shunned. Unions were arranged by the parents. Conventionally Jesus was understood not to be married. Increasingly scholars propose that he married Mary of Magdala. Some scholars say he later divorced her.

For those who take Jesus as their model and attempt the difficult task of walking in his footsteps, mainstream wisdom would lead them to eschew the institution of marriage. For those who accept the new understandings there is no issue.

Even Paul, who was a widower when he wrote his famous letters, counselled that followers of Jesus avoid marriage and only wed if they can't control their physical urges. He wrestles with advice about marriage but his comment "those who have wives should live as though they had none" gives some idea how he felt about family life generally.

The simple fact of the matter is that there is almost nowhere in the Bible that describes families in terms that would make sense to most Australians in the twenty-first century. The family that the churches and even some politicians talk about today is largely a fiction as far as the Bible is concerned. It is a culturally constructed institution that has evolved from social practice. It is not sanctioned by the Almighty but is an agreed human arrangement which is agreed upon less and less.

So when we hear people talking about the "traditional family" it is worth enquiring, "Which tradition do you mean?"

When people talk about being "pro-family" ask, "What kind of family would that be?" And when people talk as though family means something approaching Dick Van Dyke married to Doris Day and their happy offspring, you can just smile.

We'll all be hearing a lot more about "the family" in coming years but the model won't be David, Solomon or probably even Jesus.

Don Palmer served as an Anglican priest. He has been a documentary film maker, television director and media trainer based in Sydney.

Paget's parable

With the change of millennium, there arose a new sign, which many embraced. It was believed that it would bring change through warm feelings. No-one actually needed to do anything. The sign was believed to be able to bring down dictatorships, heal the sick and change the hearts of the unjust.

In this sign gesture.



Most of all it absolved the wearer of any further responsibility.

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