

Common Theology

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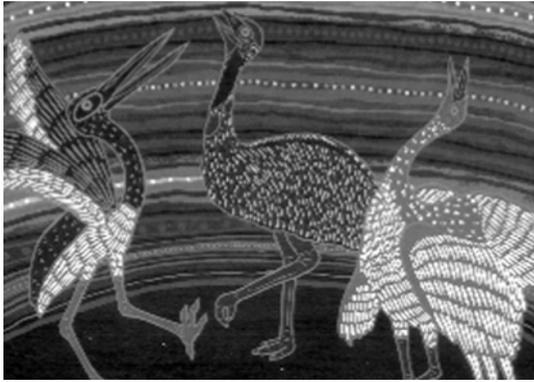
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INSIDE:

- A cool look at global warming
- Barry Jones on Faith and Ethics
- The Orthodox Church at home in the 21st Century

A Quarterly Journal for Australians



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Cover Photo by Stephen Webb
The photo of the male figure with a cross shape missing comes from the door of the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels and Martyrs, at the Diocletian Baths in Rome. It is described on its website as the last great architectural project from the genius of Michelangelo and a monument to history, to faith, to art and to science.

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From the Editor

Collecting this edition of *Common Theology* has been an unusually arduous task. We have an eclectic and discerning readership and it has not been easy to find a mix of content that will pique both the intelligence and imagination of subscribers.

I have a theory that the Stern report and this year's United Nations reports on climate change have subtly altered our world view. Just as 9/11 changed the worldview of the west six years ago – although terrorism had been with us since the early '70s, so climate change suddenly moved in with us this year – although the debate has been around for decades.

Jürgen Moltmann on a visit to Melbourne in 1987 told me that the world should stop worrying about nuclear proliferation because the problem of our rubbish would bury the planet by the turn of the century – how prophetic his words have proved to be.

My theory is that lectures and interviews and other opinion pieces which would normally occupy these pages seem suddenly irrelevant in view of the new reality of climate change. There has been a shift in the global balance of power. Writers, intellectuals, intuitives are busy digesting the new landscape and will need time to reflect and articulate a changed world view in the public discourse.

In the meantime, there is a danger that climate change will muster a quasi-religious following (as apocalyptic scenarios tend to do) and further obscure the practical opportunities of this challenge to the human species. In this edition Bjorn Lomborg offers a sober Danish perspective on the subject. He suggests a creative way through the minefield of commercial exploitation of carbon trading which we now face.

Eye Witness offers a very unsomber African perspective on the Hollywood movie *Blood Diamond*. Johannesburg columnist Binyavanga Wainaina satirises the west's perception that Africa needs to be rescued while ignoring the irony that some of Africa's biggest problems are a legacy of colonisation by the west.

The polymath, Barry Jones, is a public institution in Australia. His take on what Christianity means to him is a milestone in public life, if only because the subject of personal faith would not even have been broached in self-consciously secular Australia politics ten years ago.

Steve Hayes explains why Orthodox Christianity has a better chance of success in the contemporary mission field than has Western Christianity.

To mark the fortieth anniversary of Australia's acceptance of Aborigines as citizens in May 1967 Harry Throssell reviews in these pages a new book on indigenous health.

I hope you find this edition has been worth waiting for.

Maggie Helass

A cool look at globalisation

Bjorn Lomborg, author of the new book *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming*, and director of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, has been described as a greenie-turned-sceptic. His take on global warming has the advantage of a long perspective, as well as the Danish reputation for good research on statistical evidence.



In this edited conversation, one of a series aired on Jim Lehrer's NewsHour,¹ Professor Bjorn Lomborg is interviewed by **Ray Suarez** over his proposal to redirect resources from a general fight against carbon emissions to specific efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change in vulnerable areas.

Professor, you've called spending several hundred billion dollars a year to combat global warming a bad deal for the people of the planet. How would you spend the money differently?

B.L. Well, basically, Ray, the point is, we don't care particularly about climate change *per se*. We care about its impacts. We care about the people who are going to get more risk of flooding, the people who are going to get more exposed to malaria, the people who are going to die because of heat waves. And those are the people we actually want to help.

So the question is – can we do better? And my argument is, even if everybody did the Kyoto Protocol including the USA, it would have very little impact. It would basically postpone global warming by about five years at the end of the century – at a cost of about \$180 billion a year.

You could actually do amazing amounts of good to many of the people who are going to be hardest hit by climate change – through focusing

1. Broadcast on SBS television at 5pm EST on Tuesday to Friday; 4.30 Saturday.

on HIV-AIDS, malaria, malnutrition, free trade, agricultural research.

And that is what we've done at the Copenhagen Consensus Center, where we have some of the world's top economists, including four Nobel laureates.

They put all of those things I just mentioned at the very top of where you can do the most bang for the buck. And they said climate change, through Kyoto Protocol, is actually a bad investment. Simply, for every dollar you invest, you only end up doing about 30 cents worth of good.

R.S. So are you suggesting that the world should not create strategies to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere?

B.L. No, of course not. We should take climate change seriously. It is a big problem. It is only one of the big problems that we will face throughout the 21st Century, but it is a big problem.

If you focus on investing in research and development... both get a lot of benefits

But there is something fundamentally wrong about many of the approaches to climate change that we see right now.

They are very much about saying rich countries should cut a lot of carbon right now – that is going to be very expensive, so probably a lot of it will not happen. But even if it did, it would do very little good.

The point is that most of the impact throughout the 21st Century will come from emissions from third world countries like China and India.

As long as it costs \$30 to cut a ton of carbon dioxide, rich countries may do a little, but poor countries, like China and India, are not going to do anything. What we need to do is to cut the

cost of cutting carbon emissions from \$30 down to \$3. If it costs \$3, then maybe they would.

So this is about a long-term strategy. Instead of... “Let’s cut a lot now” (that makes us feel good, but ends up doing very little good) it is about making sure that we make much better technologies available to everyone in the world so that we can cut carbon emissions cheaply.

That is about investing in research and development, and that is why I am suggesting spend perhaps \$25 billion a year on research and development in low-carbon-emitting energy technologies. That will likely do much more good than the Kyoto Protocol, at a much lower cost.

R.S. But you do accept the proposition that human activity is changing the climate of the planet?

B.L. Absolutely. I think, as you also mentioned, we’ve seen huge United Nations climate panel reports come out – and they have been ever more certain that climate is changing. We do have an impact. And, therefore, it is important that we address the question – what should we do?

Bangladeshis have problems
right now that we can fix
cheaply and easily...

But we have also got to remember, just like we know that it is CO² that causes a part, at least, of climate change, we also know that HIV causes AIDS. We also know that mosquitoes cause malaria. We know that lack of food causes malnutrition.

Now, we know a lot of these things. We don’t fix all problems in the world right now. And so I urge people to start thinking – not just to go for the most fashionable problem, but to actually ask the very fundamental question, if you can’t do it all – and clearly we can’t – where can you do the most good first?

R.S. As you’ve already noted, the polluters that got us up to where we are today are different from who is going to be doing a lot of the polluting in the future. How do you get a global solution that works with some equity?

B.L. That is exactly the problem. If you go with cutting carbon emissions right now, you are essen-

tially asking people to give up a fairly large amount of money to do very little good – virtually only for everyone else.

If you instead focus on investing in research and development, you will make sure that you both get a lot of benefits – you basically get a lot of research, you get a lot of patents, you possibly get a lot of income, but you also make it a lot easier for everyone else downstream.

That is how we deal with big problems, and that is how we have dealt with them in the long run, and I think that’s a much smarter way of thinking about the future.

R.S. You’ve warned in a lot of your writing against overstating the problem. But how do you get the world’s attention? How do you get the governments of the world to work together unless you really ring the alarm bell over this?

B.L. I think there’s a problem in arguing that you should overstate your case. It shows a fundamental distrust in democracy, that people are just not going to take problems seriously unless we shout.

I would argue that it’s very unlikely we make sound decisions if we are just scared witless. I mean, look at the British government. They are arguably the most ferocious in climate change policies. When Labour came into power in 1997, they promised to cut carbon emissions by fifteen percent. Since then, carbon emissions have increased three percent. It is just very, very hard to do something about in the short run.

So it is about talking people down – as my book is also called “cool it”; to try to stop having hysteria, but start thinking smartly; how do we deal with these propositions?

And we also have got to remember there are many other problems in the world. If we over-shout, if we over-focus on some problems, it inevitably means that we end up forgetting or under-focusing on some of the other major issues that we should also be concerned about.

R.S. So give me a tour of some places like Dhaka, Bangladesh, or maybe Johannesburg, South Africa, in ten or twenty years under a Bjorn Lomborg scheme.

Would we see seawalls? Would we see mosquito eradication programs, instead of a strict concentration on cutting global warming, cutting greenhouse gases?

B.L. Well, Bangladesh is a great example. Actually, nothing is going to happen within the next ten or twenty years. But if we look a hundred years ahead, a lot of people suggest, we are going to see a Bangladesh where perhaps ten percent is going to be flooded.

Of course, the point is that Bangladesh, just like everyone else, will actually deal with much of this because they will be much richer in 2100 than they are today. That is certainly what the UN expects, and that is what most economists are expecting.

But the point is that Bangladeshis have lots of problems right now that we can fix easily and

cheaply and make sure that they get much better off right now; of course, also, that they get much richer so they can deal with future sea level rises.

The thing we often forget is that sea levels rose about a foot over the last 150 years. That is what they are projected to rise over the next hundred years, and we didn't really notice the last hundred years. It is not to say it's not a problem, but it is to say it's something that technology – and especially wealth – does deal with.

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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 page

Your winter edition is excellent – and not because the articles reinforced my own prejudices.

Invidious it is to mention one among the splendid quality and substance of the others, but 'The Eucharist as resistance to terror and torture' made me think – as I imagine it will all your readers – outside the square, as they say. Both 'torture' and 'eucharist' were defined in ways that made much unexpected sense in today's cauldron.

So thank you, and very good wishes for the future of *Common Theology*.

Bishop Alfred Holland
Canberra ACT

We have had many good comments, particularly on the Helda Camara lecture. We would like to put a link to it on our parish website.

Fr Steven Salmon
Sydney NSW

We really look forward to the arrival of *Common Theology*.

John & Margaret Waterhouse
Ashburton Vic

Excellent publication – keep up the good work. Loved 'The Man of La Mancha'.

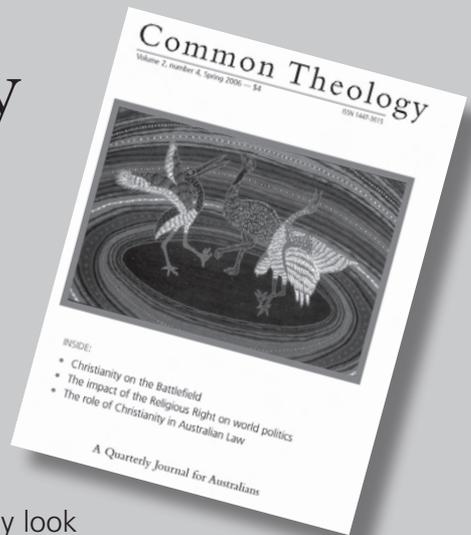
Fr David Chambers
Sandringham Vic

With great appreciation for your important contribution to our faith community.

Rev David Conolly
Richmond Vic

Many thanks for your wonderful account of Incarnational Theology.

Dr Christopher Newell
Hobart Tas



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Barry Jones on Faith and Ethics

In March Labor polymath and public intellectual **Barry Jones** spoke in Sydney on 'Building a Just and Compassionate Society'. He prefaced his address by saying how appropriate it was that a new chapter of the Centre for an Ethical Society should be launched in the week celebrating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.



That achievement had followed a short, vigorous, targeted campaign initiated by Quakers in 1788, and supported by evangelical Protestants of whom William Wilberforce was the best known.

The campaign, a model of its kind, succeeded in less than twenty years although many industries – especially in the West Indies – were dependent on slavery.

Barry Jones said the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade was an outstanding example of how a strong ethical case, supported by Christians, could lead to a major radical transformation in which the moral implications outweighed economic impact – a striking parallel to the current debate about global warming and whether Australia ought to risk its coal exports by campaigning for reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions.

When I wrote a chapter called 'Beliefs' in my autobiography *A Thinking Reed*,¹ it forced me to address my relationship with religion.

Australians often seem deeply uneasy about attempting to examine the range and depth of their beliefs. Like most people (other than fundamentalists) I feel shifty and inconclusive on the subject, because of a deep uncertainty about what I believe. That God exists? Probably. That Jesus was a uniquely powerful and charismatic

teacher? Yes. That he had a special or even unique relationship with God? Possibly. That the Church is a divine institution? Well, yes and no. That the Bible is infallible? No. That there is a soul, linked to a collective consciousness? Possibly. That there is life, as we know it, after death? Unlikely.

If pushed, I generally describe myself as 'Christian fellow-traveller' or sometimes 'a northern hemisphere Christian' because most of my transcendental experiences have been in Europe.

I am not confident enough to be an agnostic. I agree with rationality as a principle, but feel uneasy when it turns into dogma or rigid instrumentalism. Habitual mistrust is unattractive and dangerous, especially if linked with fear of difference/fear of the unknown.

an isolated position in Australia
where irony never took on,
except as a form of mockery

I am more of an ironist than a rationalist – an isolated position in Australia where irony never took on, except as a form of mockery.

It is hard to be precise about my core beliefs. I have serious difficulty with the Apostles' Creed, because it raises too many unanswerable questions.

Paradoxically, doubt takes me away from materialism and certainty. I cannot be satisfied with simple materialist explanations when too many elements fill me with awe or perplexity. Religious issues and philosophy are constantly boiling around in my head. So, '*Dubito, ergo sum*',² as René Descartes should have said.

I recognise that many secularists have a commitment to goodness, generosity, truth, justice and courage – they feel no need for a revealed religion.

So, I define myself as a sceptical Christian fellow-traveler of the school of Pascal, a follower of Jesus, hovering on the margins between religious experience and aesthetics: an ecclesiastical

1. *A Thinking Reed* (Allen & Unwin, 2006).

2. "I doubt therefore I am."

voluptuary transformed by the impact of music, architecture, liturgy and text.

Mainstream churches in Australia seem to have withdrawn, even recoiled, from serious involvement in great public moral issues, apart from support for foreign aid and disaster relief.

Australia is a strikingly secular society compared to the United States, where religious observance is high and fundamentalist religion is influential in politics, education, health and research – despite the clear separation of church and state set out in the Constitution.

In the United States, forty per cent of citizens claim to be ‘born again’. Nevertheless, rates of homicide, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and teen pregnancy are far higher in the ‘Bible belt’ of the USA than in secular Australia.

‘Creation science’ has only a marginal market share in Australia, while in the United States it is entrenched as a significant paradigm in some states.

Relentless commercialisation and commodification of life has not been inhibited by American religious observance. Religious polarisation is far deeper there than in Australia and the “them versus us” dichotomy more conflicted.

In ‘Made in England’ (2003), published as a *Quarterly Essay*, David Malouf distinguished between the mind-set and language of founding fathers in the American colonies and the colonisation of New Holland/Australia by act of state.

The American colonists from the 17th Century were “passionately evangelical and utopian, deeply imbued with the religious fanaticism and radical violence of the time...” Slavery was still an open question, and so was the concept of divine-right monarchy.

In the late 18th Century, Australia, originally a convict settlement, tough and pragmatic, lacked a millenarian element, and was overwhelmingly practical in its operations.

After the Enlightenment, slavery and absolute monarchy were no longer on the political or social agenda – they had become settled issues. We had no place for a ‘language of the transcendental’. Our religious practices, like so much in Australia, became more suburban than universal.

When the Australian Labor Party was founded in 1891, many of its supporters were Irish Catholics, many of them with a sense of marginalisation

and grievance – but encouraged by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of the same year, recognising the rights of organised labour.

There were other Christians in the Australian Labor Party – many of them Methodists – and many secularists indifferent to the claims of religion.

After the Labor split in 1916 Catholic influence became predominant until a further major split in 1954–55 over attitudes to Communism when many Catholics withdrew, and this kept Labor out of power nationally for a generation.

The terms ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ have been of diminished relevance since 1989 when only one economic model remained standing internationally

By the year 2000 the most dynamic political force in the United States was a coalition between evangelical fundamentalism, the neocons (neo-conservatives) and corporate power, strongly supported by mass-media ownership. This was not Fascism in the European context, but there were some disturbing ideological parallels, which Philip Roth took up in his novel *The Plot Against America* (2004).

President George W Bush claims Jesus as his ‘favourite philosopher’ and believes in the infallibility of Scripture. Bush, unlike his Episcopalian father, is a Southern Methodist, a group which broke away from mainstream Methodists in 1940 – strong only in the former slave states.

‘Prosperity Christianity’, while stopping short of insisting that God is American, sees the hand of God in establishing United States hegemony, and rejects analysis and argument.

Amanda Lohrey’s important essay ‘Voting for Jesus: Christianity and Politics’, published as a *Quarterly Essay* in 2006, argues that as society fragments in the pursuit of economic liberalism and ‘choice’, the newly emerging charismatic or fundamentalist churches provide a sense of community and engagement in rapidly growing outer suburbs. They create a network of support – child care, counseling, tennis clubs, entertainment, hobbies

– which local government and the mainstream churches are unable to provide.

Churches have sharp differences about the problem of poverty. Whose responsibility is it? Is poverty the result of personal failure in which churches are also deeply divided about the environment, resources and their exploitation?

The Judaeo-Christian tradition advanced two different teachings about man's relationship with nature, each receiving about equal space in the Bible:

- man sharing with God transcendence over nature and transforming it, that is, 'man (or woman) as developer';
- man as the good steward and trustee of nature, with a duty to tend the garden for all succeeding generations.

The second is more sympathetic to sustainability and preserving the environment with lower levels of consumption. I often quote the words of former US Senator Tim Wirth: "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, and not the other way round".

The environment is the totality of the world – the planet itself, soil, air, water, biota and minerals. Concerns for the environment cannot be regarded as mere discretionary matters after the economy has taken its share.

On the global warming debate, the Prime Minister [John Howard] simply doesn't get it. He sees environment and the economy as competing interests – strengthen one and you weaken the other – and ethics simply doesn't come into it.

He does not understand the total integration and mutual interdependence of the environment and the economy. A wrecked environment must inevitably wreck the economy.

Our prevailing policy line in the West is that terrorism has no cause – it is a baffling phenomenon, beyond rational analysis, an epidemic, a manifestation of evil, not seen as a political reaction to be resolved, or even understood, by rational processes.

Since terrorism is random, irrational and causeless, then negotiation is out of the question.

The threat – pervasive, permanent and unpredictable – is seen as totally unrelated to cause, hence the insistence of the Spanish and British prime ministers that terrorist attacks in Madrid and

in London were not payback against participation in the Iraq war.

Contrary to the popular stereotype, some suicide bombers and kamikaze pilots are not religious fanatics, brain-washed zombies, but are shaped more by political commitment than religious zeal, well educated, with some experience of the outside world (e.g. Hamburg, Leeds, Florida), committed to murder/suicide on the issue of dispossession and land rights.

some suicide bombers...
are shaped more by political
commitment than religious zeal

The case of David Hicks raises disturbing examples of double standards. It is inconceivable that Hicks could have been held by, say, the French, or the Russians, under comparable conditions as at Guantánamo Bay, without expressions of outrage from John Howard, or even [Attorney General] Philip Ruddock.

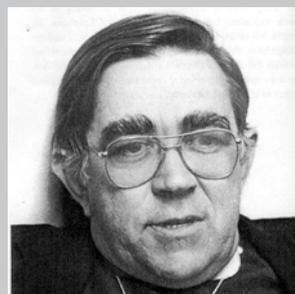
No American citizen could be detained at Guantánamo Bay because it would violate the US Bill of Rights – but Australian citizens were liable if its government made no protest.

Before the trial began, Prime Minister Howard and the US Ambassador Robert McCallum both declared Hicks guilty of unspecified but serious offences. They wanted him to be convicted of something (almost anything would have done) by some tribunal, anywhere but in Australia.

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Given the composition of the military commission set up to try Hicks, and its ability to rely on uncontested and unchallengeable evidence (some extracted by torture) it was inconceivable that Hicks could have been acquitted.

If such a miracle had occurred, an acquittal would have been profoundly embarrassing to the US and Australian governments. A 'fix' based on a guilty plea followed by rapid repatriation, and release after the 2007 election might be a way to bury the controversy.

The rule of law, presumption of innocence, access to courts and legal representation can all be withdrawn at will. Violence and sexual humiliation of prisoners has become routine. Moving prospective torturees to a jurisdiction beyond the reach of US courts is coyly described as 'rendition' or 'extraordinary rendition', meaning 'outsourced, privatised torture'.

Freedom of Information requests are refused and 'plausible deniability' becomes the norm. The Australian government has maintained a Trappist silence on torture, and seems to be far more relaxed about it than the US courts or the US Congress.

As prime minister, John Howard perfected the idea that compassion is an Australian export, but not an import. We were prepared to fight for the Iraqis, whether they liked it or not, but we would not let Saddam's victims come here as refugees. Nor would we admit refugees from Aceh whose habitat had been swept into the ocean.

It is paradoxical that the Australian Government strongly opposes barriers in trade, and strongly supports high barriers for people.

It has been disturbing to see Kevin Andrews, our Minister for Immigration, a barrister and practising Christian, referring to the need to apply 'deterrence' against refugees.

But the concept of deterrence belongs to the criminal law. Australia is a signatory to the Refugee Convention, which makes it clear that refugees are not 'illegal' for arriving without papers or authorisation. The Prime Minister has succeeded in persuading many Australians that refugees who arrive without papers or authorisation are guilty of breaking the law and should be imprisoned.

Our refugees are held administratively, not judicially. They are treated as outlaws, outside the protection of the law. We have created our own extraterritorial enclave in Nauru – which is outside the jurisdiction of our courts. We have had the absurd situation where Christmas Island is inside our jurisdiction for some purposes, outside it for others – and our boundaries move in and out at the government's whim.

Evidence? Rationality? Judgment? Compassion? – all have been downgraded.

Our institutionalised sadism is designed to destroy human dignity. In our detention centres, there are no longer 'suicide attempts': they have been redefined out of existence and are now called 'attention-seeking incidents' or 'blackmail'. A cause for compassion is now treated as a cause for humiliation, derision, censure or condemnation.

Refugees are mere numbers, deprived of access to MPs, lawyers, media – and me as a citizen. I am deprived of access to the refugees – I can't get close enough to feel the shock of recognition. Are they like me? I can't get close enough to tell.

The destruction of personal identity is unconscionable and acquiescence in that diminishes us all.

Iwelcome public discourse about 'values'. It is essential not to confuse 'values' with 'value', especially with a \$ sign in front of it.

Often it is hard to identify non-economic values and careful analysis of media reporting provides a rather unflattering view of Australia – harshly materialist, narrowly self-interested, obsessively short termist, eternally self-congratulatory.

Education and health are increasingly regarded as businesses. Universities have become trading corporations. Subjects which try to explain the meaning of life are struggling to survive.

The environment is seen as an economic resource, with forests seen as woodchips on stumps, the ocean as a dumping ground or a quarry, and threats to soil and water have a low political priority.

Citizens, students, patients, passengers, audiences have all become customers – the economic factor subsumes every other characteristic.

The Hon Dr Barry Jones is Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, at the University of Melbourne.

This is an edited text from www.ces.org.au.

Africa—the view from inside

The Hollywood movie *Blood Diamond* starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Djimon Hounsou, leads one to believe that Africa has to be saved from itself. **Binyavanga Wainaina**, who is African, sees things rather differently.

Intro: deep voice, in an English accent: “There is a beautiful valley, Kumbayaa, in a primeval forest, above the hills of Ixopo-on-Mara, where elephants, for millennia, have come to eat rich minerals on the cliffs. This was before they found the diamonds. Now, greedy black miners-poachers-mercenaries came and ruined everything...”

Synopsis: The elephants of Kumbayaa are noble and timeless, they do not have petty rivalries or jealousies. The children don’t play – they follow their mothers, trunk on tail in a long noble line. They walk to face their death at the hands of the dirty, evil miners of Kumbayaa, who have been cobbled together by a dirty old mercenary, Leonardo, who lost everything when his wife left him, his heart dried out and he got on a plane with some French adventurers to Kenya, to lead a life of debauchery and khaki and greed in Africa.

As the elephants walk towards their annual licking ground, ancient drums warn, acacias tremble, all the world music of African indigenous deserts gathers momentum, as all the indigenous peoples of Africa, watching the movie, are sending desperate ancient musical text messages to the elephants, saying nooooo. Don’t gooooooo.

But, alas, the elephants are timeless people. They trumpet their message back to the rest of the timeless people: “Ancient brothers, we will face our fate with dignity. You will understand, you timeless noble peoples you.”

The red sun sinks, the elephants stand together in a circle, performing an ancient ritual – silhouettes standing over Ixopo-at-Sunset, as the narrator (called Attenbara by the indigenous peoples)



eye witness

speaks in a deep voice to the world. Crickets scream in disbelief.

In the blood-red sky of the morning, they look down from the craggy cliff, upon the squealing, money-seeking mercenaries, their shantytowns and wild screaming markets, and the bad poacher/miner people turn and start to giggle gleefully, as bloodlust and money screams.

Flashback: The miner-people were once a good indigenous people, but became bad after eating of the fruit of school fees, plastic bowls and pocket radios.

In 1890, a colonial conservationist called Sir John – or named by the elephants, PHRU-UUUUU! the Saviour of Kumbayaa – a man with a deep and throbbing voice, boomed with surround sound anger at the miner-people, “Leave, fools! Leave the gardens of Kumbayaa!”

The miner-people heard, they fell to the ground with fear and ran, leaving behind their ancient artefacts, their skins and hides, the rock paintings and happy evenings dancing nobly round the fire. As they fled, they could hear him booming, “What happened? You were once such a noble and subsistence people. I helped you!”

The miner-people started farming cash-crops, trading, poaching. Then one day, Leonardo visited them and told them that their old homeland, Kimbayaa, was really King Solomon’s mines. Sir John’s Blood Red Diamond was found there...

In the early red dawn, the elephants descend.

Machetes and guns start to whirl and pump, the elephant matriarch falls, and from the distance, we hear the clip clop sounds of a horse. It is Bob, riding cowboy-style, hair flying in the wind, shooting noble bullets, while behind him, on other horses are: Bono, Angelina, Madonna and from cliffs and trees, all of Africa sings Kumbayaa in all their languages – the chorus rises to the hills. ET stands up to dance, all the indigenous people are now in a chorus, a Ladysmith Black Mambazo chorus, as Bob Geldof, played by Daniel Day-Lewis, confuses the dirty miner-people by throwing United Nations food parcels on the ground.

A giant, wild miner-person (Djimon Hounsou) leaps above Bob, about to bludgeon him with his cash register, and from the hills, Leonardo shouts to the world, “Oh Lord! What have I doooooone!” and shoots the irate cash-register-bearing leader of the Kumbayaa Miners Association.

All nature is silent, as Bob stands slowly and lifts the elephant queen in his arms. She puts a loving trunk around his neck. He walks up to the stone brick government office at the foot of the cliffs of Kumbayaa, and places it at the foot of the corrupt African politician, who opened Kumbayaa for trade. (Violins) The man stands, his head has bowed down in shame, for he had forgotten that he was a timeless and throbbing and noble person.

Sorrowful and caring Leonardo brings a Canadian company to Kumbayaa, to show how sustainable mining is possible. They save three hundred elephants by investing in satellite phones, laptops, radios and a team of trackers.

So as not to further corrupt the miner-people, the Canadians will extract, mine and export the blood-red diamonds of Kumbayaa, and start a small fund to help the miner-people learn how to make bags out of tourist bottle tops and recycled tinned food containers.

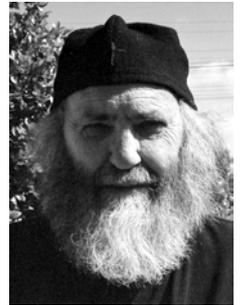
Leonardo will start a community empowerment organisation, and take a wife among them, and advise them to be true to themselves, and not deal with the nobility-polluting people who make world music records out of timeless peoples. Africa, again, has been saved from itself.

This column appeared in the Johannesburg weekly *Mail & Guardian* in February.

Orthodox mission in the 21st Century

By Steve Hayes

In the history of Orthodox mission, we have seen two kinds of approach to the world – there is one where the world is evaluated positively, and another where it is evaluated negatively.



In the first view, the world is seen primarily as God’s world – part of his good creation. In the second view, it is seen primarily as the fallen world – the world that lies in the power of the evil one.

These two approaches extend to cover the *ecumene*, the humanly inhabited world. They are found in relation to culture; to church and state; to the relation of the Church to human society.

I believe that both these approaches are authentic parts of the Orthodox tradition, and that both are in fact essential to the maintenance of that tradition.

In the First World, the predominant culture is post-Christian. Modernity has affected Christian thinking, and postmodernism has affected some of those who have abandoned the Christian faith altogether.

In the Second World,¹ several decades of Communist rule have effectively secularised society, leading to a modern post-Enlightenment outlook – though it has sometimes taken a different form to that of the First World.

In the Third World, Christianity has been expanding tremendously in Africa, and has been shifting from a Roman Catholic to a Protestant

1. ‘Second World’, like ‘First World’, is a back-formation from ‘Third World’. Third World was coined for the Afro-Asian bloc, the countries that were neutral in the Cold War between East and West. Since the end of the Cold War the terminology makes less sense but it is still used in missiological circles.

emphasis in Latin America, while remaining a minority religion in most of Asia.

There is a sense in which postmodern culture is spreading throughout the world, though taking different forms in different places.

How do Orthodox Christians evaluate these cultural changes in relation to mission?

In the negative, or pessimistic view these cultural changes exemplify the spread of nihilism. They are inimical to the gospel, and most Orthodox churches will lapse into apostasy as the world is prepared for the coming of the Antichrist. Mission, then, becomes the gathering of the faithful remnant out of the world, and out of those Orthodox churches that are seen as apostate.

In the positive, more optimistic view the world's culture is not seen so negatively. The Orthodox Christian faith can be incarnated in any culture. The positive approach of St Nicholas of Japan or St Innocent of Alaska to the local cultures in the countries where they were missionaries can also be used with the cultures of modernity and postmodernity.

In its extreme form, however, the effect of such accommodation can be to do away with the need for mission at all, such as when a prominent bishop was reported as saying that Mohammed was a prophet of God.

Orthodox Christianity then becomes nothing more than a way of "being religious" for people of a certain ethnic or national cultural background.

One of the things that keeps these two tendencies from falling apart completely is that they both look to the same missionary saints: Nicholas of Japan, Herman of Alaska, and Innocent of Moscow as examples, even though there may be different emphases in their interpretations of their life and ministry.

It is probably too soon to try to define the characteristics of postmodernism or postmodernity. It is sufficient to note that in many areas of culture the influence of the Enlightenment, or modernity, has begun to wane, or at least to be modified by new approaches that are in some ways incompatible with modernity.

The secular science of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on empirical verification, also gave rise to scepticism about what could not be

verified empirically. In the postmodern world, however, such scepticism is often found side by side with credulity.

It is said that G K Chesterton once remarked that when people stop believing in God, they do not believe in nothing, but they will believe in anything. So we find, for example, that people who are sceptical about the resurrection, or even the existence of Jesus Christ, are sometimes quite willing to believe the most amazing stories about flying saucers and the like.

In some ways the postmodern world looks very similar to the world in which the Christian faith first appeared. There is, for example, a similar religious pluralism.

The rapid growth of communications has made it possible for religions that were previously confined to one area to be found all over the globe.

Ordinary lay Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, neopagans, Mormons, Baha'i... meet on electronic networks

As a result of missionary activities and the *diaspora*² of members of different religions, people living in places where, a couple of centuries ago, they would have had little chance of meeting members of more than one or two religions in the normal course of their daily lives, can now encounter dozens of different religious views and outlooks.

Interreligious dialogue, which previously was regarded as the province of specialists, and involved meetings to which people travelled from all over the world at great expense, now also takes place electronically.

Ordinary lay Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, neopagans, Mormons, Baha'i and many others from different parts of the world meet and discuss their religious beliefs and practices on electronic networks.

There are also numerous new religious movements — and they too spread rapidly and widely.

2. The term 'diaspora' was originally used of the Jews who scattered all over the world, and is now also applied to Orthodox Christians who have emigrated to countries where they are a minority.

Many of the new religious movements are extremely eclectic. The neopagan religions of the First World are usually conscious attempts to revive the pre-Christian religions of northern Europe, especially the Celtic and Teutonic ones. But in North America they are often combined with elements of North American native religion.

Wicca, which also claims to be a revival of a pre-Christian religion of Northern Europe, is in fact nothing of the kind. It has reinterpreted and combined elements from many different religions, ancient and modern, including Christianity – and some of the elements were made up by twentieth-century novelists. Many Wiccans are solitary, and consciously practise a kind of “mix and match” religion.

There is also the New Age movement, which is even more eclectic. Many Christians characterise the neopagan religions as ‘New Age cults’, though most neopagans themselves do not see themselves as ‘New Age’.

These movements, however, even where they do claim premodern roots, have a radically different attitude. They cannot be regarded simply as a revival of premodern religions; they are primarily a reaction against modernism.

And they are therefore profoundly influenced by modernism.

One reason for the rapid growth of African Independent Churches could be their successful retribalisation of the Enlightenment-style Christianity preached by most Western Protestant missionaries.

In effect, they have reinterpreted the Christianity of modernity in premodern terms, and have rejected the ‘cult of civilisation’ in which it was packaged. And it is precisely among such groups that Orthodox Christianity is growing in Africa today.

Within the First World, many Christians who have been brought up in ‘Enlightenment’ denominations are discovering Orthodox Christianity, and Orthodox apologists are seeking to help these ‘Enlightenment’ Christians to understand Orthodoxy.

The religious pluralism of our time has brought these Christians into closer contact with each other.

Orthodox Christians from Eastern Europe and the Near East have migrated to America, those from Cyprus have gone as migrant workers to Western Europe, and stayed.

Refugees from the Bolshevik Russia have settled in other parts of the world.

In the past, the differences between them and Western Christians were explained ethnically. It was the difference between the Greek and German, the Cypriot and British, the Arab and American, the Russian and English, way of seeing things.

African Independent churches have retribalised Enlightenment-style Christianity

The new Orthodox apologetic literature takes a different approach, comparing the paradigms or worldviews, rather than national characteristics.

One example of such literature is Bajis (1989) *Common ground: an introduction to Eastern Christianity for the American Christian*. The book begins with a section called ‘Western and Eastern outlooks compared’, which starts at the levels of paradigms or worldviews or frames of reference. Bajis (1989:6–8) notes that:

- Eastern Christianity is communal, intuitive and holistic;
- Eastern Christianity sees the Church as a living organism of which Christ himself is a member;
- Eastern Christianity sees the Christian faith as relational, personal and experiential;
- Eastern Christianity sees the grasp of truth as dependent upon one’s moral and spiritual sensitivity.

In many ways, these are characteristics of premodern thinking as opposed to modern thinking.

Bajis seems to be inviting his readers to suspend their modern worldview, and try to see things through premodern eyes.

Modernity tends to be analytic rather than synthetic. It seeks to understand things by breaking them down rather than by building them up.

It relegates religion to the ‘private’ sphere. It is individualist rather than communal.

Modernity is not holistic – its analytical approach seeks to reduce wholes to their components, to disassemble and dissect, and to see the whole as purely the sum of its parts.

The holistic view of Orthodoxy (and many premodern societies) is quite alien to this approach.

In the modern world – that is, the world of modernity – Orthodoxy finds itself misunderstood.

Modernity has faced ideological battles between individualism and collectivism, which to the Orthodox appear to be two sides of the same modernist coin.

But to collectivists, such as the Bolsheviks, Orthodoxy, with the value it gives to the human person, seems to be yet another manifestation of bourgeois individualism.

To individualists, Orthodox communalism seems to be another manifestation of totalitarian collectivism, and many Western observers of Russia have seen a continuity between the Orthodox vision of ‘Holy Russia’ and the political messianism of the Bolshevik regime – while to the Orthodox the Bolshevik regime was the logical conclusion of the ideas of the Western Enlightenment, imported and imposed by Peter the Great.

In this way Western professional ‘Russia-watchers’ still give a picture of the Russian Orthodox Church in which many Orthodox Christians find it difficult to recognise themselves.

Orthodox communalism, expressed in such terms as *kinonia* and *sobornost*, is hard to express in English. ‘Fellowship’ has become trite, ‘conciliarity’ is too abstract, ‘community’ is too vague. But at its root, it means something similar to the Zulu saying, “*umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu*” – a person is a person because of people; or as the English poet John Donne put it, “No man is an island”.

In the light of this, one might expect Orthodox mission to be more effective in premodern societies, and this does appear to be the case.

In Alaska and East Africa, for example, Orthodoxy could become part of the culture of people. Even where it changed and influenced the cul-

ture of the people, it did so in an organic and internal way, so that baptism replaced initiation ceremonies such as female circumcision – even where Orthodoxy had been accepted in a protest movement against a missionary ban on female circumcision.

In the *diaspora* among people from Eastern Europe or the Near East who emigrated to North America, Australia, and other places, Orthodox mission has been less effective.

In itself, however, the greater effectiveness of Orthodox mission among premodern people, particularly in hunting, gathering and pastoral societies, is not necessarily unique.

Western mission has also tended to be more successful among such peoples in Africa and South America, while spreading more slowly among people who follow the great religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam. But Orthodoxy does seem to have been more easily contextualised in premodern cultures, and to become part of the culture of such people.

Ideological battles between individualism and collectivism appear to the Orthodox to be two sides of the same coin

In the *diaspora*, Orthodox people, many of them coming from villages in the Balkans and the Near East with a premodern worldview, have emigrated to cultures where modernity is part of the culture. The cultural milieu has tended to be assimilative and hostile to tradition.

Orthodox immigrants have often sought to identify with the host culture, and Orthodoxy has tended to become a relic of the past, or a mark of ethnic identity or nostalgia for one’s ethnic roots.

In such societies, Orthodoxy found it difficult to contextualise the Christian faith – unlike Western Christianity (and Protestant Christianity in particular) which both helped to produce modernity and was in turn a product of it.

Postmodernity has been bringing a change in this. It is less hostile to tradition, and has often

led people to search for traditional wisdom outside modernity.

The danger is that the eclectic postmodern approach, while valuing tradition more than modernism does, can also destroy the traditions it seeks to adopt, by appropriating the superficial forms, but not the worldview they are based on.

Thus it can sometimes come as a surprise to Orthodox Christians in the *diaspora* to find that attitudes in the surrounding society towards them are beginning to change. They may find that some people, at least, no longer regard them as irrelevant relics of the past, but as somehow “cool” and counter-cultural.

The West, after centuries of using terms such as ‘navel gazing’ as a term of abuse, symbolic of all that is backward and out-of-date about the Orthodox Church, has suddenly begin to show an interest in such things.

An age that has begun to look to gurus – Hindu holy men from India – for advice, is more open to the message of monastic spiritual elders from places like Mount Athos, whose long hair and beards have now become a symbol of ancient spiritual wisdom.

In Russia, one of the characteristics of the religious revival of the late Soviet era, particularly among the intelligentsia, was that it was driven by a search for the roots of Russian culture.

Marxist materialism was somehow unsatisfying, and people began a spiritual search in traditional Russian culture.

Though this was in many cases a religious search, it was not necessarily a Christian one.

Russian culture, however, was profoundly shaped by the Orthodox Christian faith, and thus led many of these searchers to Orthodox Christianity.

One of the mission strategies being followed in the current religious revival in Russia, therefore, is the promotion and teaching of Russian Orthodox culture. As time passes, however, I believe that such an approach will prove to be inadequate.

In the Soviet era, pre-Soviet Russian culture was sanitised and Bowdlerised to fit the Marxist ideology. Those who discovered the Christian faith by exploring Russian culture did so as a

deliberate choice – which was an act of rebellion or non-conformism according to the values of the dominant culture.

The collapse of the Soviet system, however, has opened the floodgates to a much wider range of cultural choices. There are many more choices, and young people who have grown up without knowing anything of the restriction of life under the Soviet system might be less inclined to seek answers in the Russian culture of the past.

The generation of the under-25s might be more difficult to reach by such a method, or might – if they do adopt it – lapse into nationalism and xenophobia, covered with a very thin veneer of Orthodoxy.

The collapse of communism has not yet led to its replacement by anything else. The glowing picture of the virtues of capitalism and the free-market system painted by Western propaganda has created a lot of unfulfilled expectations.

What it has done, and what Western Christian missionaries to Russia have sometimes unconsciously reinforced, has been to implant Western values of individualism and greed, which find little outlet in Russia, except in a life of crime.

The tensions in Russian society are also to be found in the Russian Orthodox Church. There are groups within the Church that have adopted a xenophobic and nationalist attitude, and have rejected even Orthodox Christians from outside Russia.

Orthodoxy does seem to have been more easily contextualised in premodern cultures

The leaders of the Church are under constant pressure from such groups to suppress foreign influences, to discipline clergy who are seen as “modernist” and so on.

As the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest Orthodox Church in the world, this is bound to affect Orthodox mission, not only in Russia, but elsewhere as well.

It could easily cause a kind of paralysis, and a concentration on external and political considerations.

Questions such as participation in the ecumenical movement, for example, could be decided on

the grounds of political expediency, on whether it would promote or block the influence of this or that power bloc or pressure group. Such an attitude will not promote Orthodox mission.

The Orthodox Church needs to avoid the error made by so many Western Christians in self-consciously seeking to make the church “relevant to modern man” by the wholesale adoption of modern culture, values and attitudes.

It also needs to avoid the pseudotraditionalism of making certain selected traditions badges of identity, and therefore marks of self-righteousness.

The religious eclecticism of the New Age is not confined to the First World. It is universal.

One of the students at the Orthodox theological seminary in Nairobi was from a country town in Cameroun. He had been baptised a Roman Catholic, and at the age of sixteen had become a Rosicrucian, and had tried Ekankar, Wicca and several other Western religious movements, before becoming a Hindu and travelling to India to spend some years studying under a guru.

On his return to Cameroun he had a vision in which his spirit guides told him to worship the Triune God, and he travelled to Yaounde, the capital, to look for a trinitarian church. The first one he found was the Orthodox cathedral, so he became an Orthodox Christian.

But postmodernity, as a reaction against modernity, can also impose the values of modernity. Traditions can become diluted by eclecticism, and the salt can lose its savour.

The traditions need to be strengthened so that they are not diluted and overwhelmed by eclecticism. This means that monasticism needs to be restored, as is happening in parts of Greece, Russia, Serbia and other places. It also needs to be returned to Africa, where it started.

The obstacles to this are great.

Where, in the Orthodox *disapora*, Orthodox Christians have sought to accommodate to modernity, monasticism has not flourished. Some have tended to be embarrassed by it, and have at best regarded it as a quaint survival, or not quite in accordance with the image of a modern church. >

Susan Ryan was the Minister for Education in the Federal Labor Government from 1984-1987. She is an old girl of the school run by the Sisters of the Brigidines and in March addressed the 200th Anniversary celebrations of the Brigidine Religious Order in Sydney.



When Bishop Delaney founded the Brigidines, with just six Irish women in Tullow, in 1807, he did so in response to the wholesale, root and branch devastation inflicted on the people by the Penal Laws.

Those laws, enforced with the severest of penalties, were aimed at wiping out entirely all aspects of Irish and Catholic life – political, cultural, religious and economic – including the Irish language.

In the Second World, monasteries have to overcome the deliberate attempts to destroy them made by Communist regimes.

As we look forward to the 21st Century then, the Orthodox Church in its mission is faced by both opportunities and dangers.

For the first time since the 6th Century, more Orthodox Christians in more countries are free to engage in mission, unhindered by hostile and repressive governments.

The Orthodox Church's unique experience of modernity, and its stronger base in premodern culture, gives it more opportunities than Western Christians to make its message heard, both among those who are becoming somewhat disillusioned with modernity, and among those who have been, rather reluctantly, dragged into it.

Dr Steve Hayes is a Deacon in the Orthodox Church. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1970 in Namibia, but deported under the apartheid government's Suppression of Communism Act. Since then he has worked in the mission field and as an academic.

Time for a Bill of Rights?

Australia is now the only western democracy that has no law to protect the human rights of citizens and others in our country.

It comes as a shock for Australians to realise that the civil and political rights we have long taken for granted – the right to liberty, to a fair trial, the right not to be detained without charge, the right to vote, the right to free speech, freedom of movement, freedom to pursue the religion and culture of choice – none of these rights is protected by law in Australia.

Of course, most of us have been able in the past to exercise such rights. The common law and decisions of parliament have supported those rights.

Things have changed.

Recent government practices and policies, and new laws aimed at combating terrorism have overtaken and undermined our traditional protections. Instead of effective protection we have been left with a huge gaping hole.

Australian governments have signed and ratified the most significant United Nations Rights conventions – the convention on Civil and Political rights, the convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Refugee convention, the convention on the Rights of the Child and other important instruments designed to protect the vulnerable.

Despite international commitments actions of government contravene these conventions again and again.

Think of the eighty-two Sri Lankan asylum seekers, rejected, arbitrarily transported to a camp on Nauru, denied compassion, legal assistance, rendered homeless – all in breach of the Refugee convention.

Think of the women asylum seekers over the last few years; mothers held in detention centres, without health care, their children denied education or appropriate activity, driven to physical and mental illness, sometimes to suicide.

A couple of years ago the children were released from detention, but there is no law in place to prevent all this happening again.

Think of the desperate asylum seeker Al Kateb. He arrived in Australia a few years ago seeking refuge but without the right documents. Government policy prevented his release into the community, even when he became very ill.

After some years of detention, his case went to the High Court. His supporters believed his detention to be illegal. It certainly contravened UN conventions which Australia had long since ratified.

The High Court found that despite these conventions, Australian law gave Al Kateb no protection. The High Court concluded that legally the government could keep him in detention forever.

Finally a more compassionate Scandinavian country took him off our hands.

This was a crucial episode in persuading me that the law had to be changed. Our existing international obligations had to be put into a statute so that the intended protections could actually be provided.

It was thinking of all such injustices that inspired our New Matilda community campaign

We ensured that
Parliament would remain
in control of this law

which we launched in October 2005.

With the assistance of experts we drafted a bill for a human rights act for Australia. The bill puts into law all the obligations Australia has already signed up to under the UN conventions. It is similar to the UK law, and other human rights laws in New Zealand and European countries.

We ensured that parliament would remain in control of this law and any necessary changes down the track would be in its domain. This is a crucial point. Many critics of human rights laws, of for example the US Bill of Rights, oppose them on the grounds that they give unelected judges the power to overturn acts of parliament.

Our campaign recognises and supports the supremacy of parliament and our act does not take that power away.

We propose that courts get the power to find actions of the government or its agents incompatible with legislated human rights.

In the current case of the Sri Lankans, if our act were in place, a court would be likely to find the decision to force them off Australian territory and into detention in Nauru does contravene the UN Refugee convention. This government action would thus be determined incompatible with the Human Rights Act.

Such a finding would put the obligation back on parliament to reconsider the decision, and on the Attorney General to report to the parliament and the public within six months.

It would be possible that parliament decided to continue its contravention, to continue acting in a way that was incompatible with the Act. But, because of the extensive scrutiny, the required public reporting, the opportunity for the media and the community to express views, it is much less likely that such a decision would be maintained. Especially in an election year.

With children in detention (if our proposed Act had been in place) because of mandated parliamentary scrutiny and increased accountability, including of the bureaucracy, it is unlikely that the children would have been put into detention in the first place.

Would our act assist David Hicks?

Clearly he has been denied basic human rights, especially the right not to be detained without trial and the right to a fair trial. Probably his right not to be tortured has also been violated.

He has been held in prison outside Australia, and our act covers Australia. But, it is important to recognise that the existence of the UK Human Rights Act 1998 – on which ours is closely modeled – was instrumental in the British government's insistence some years ago that their citizens be released from Guantnamo Bay and returned to Britain to be dealt with there.

Our government has been supine and negligent in a way that could not have continued so long had we had our own Human Rights Act.

Since October 2005 our campaign committee has travelled around Australia holding public meetings. We have had many meetings with MPs and plan more. Numbers of MPs across all parties are sympathetic to our approach.

At this stage of the campaign we are seeking support of both major parties (minor parties having already agreed) for a Senate inquiry into the need for an Australian Human Rights Act, with our bill as a model.

I began by referring to the penal laws which devastated Ireland through the 17th and 18th centuries and gave rise to Bishop Delaney's decision to set up the Brigidine order.

The Irish language was never to be spoken

If you look closely at these laws, you will see that they denied to Irish Catholics all the civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights we aim to protect under our proposed bill.

Under the penal laws, to choose to remain Catholic meant loss of property, loss of the right to vote, to hold public office, to enter or practice the professions.

Catholic farmers were forced to divide their land into uneconomic plots for their sons, thus ensuring economic failure and ultimate loss of the land.

The practice of the catholic faith was forbidden along with any contact with priests.

Catholic education was outlawed. Even sending children overseas to be educated was illegal and was punished by penalties ensuring economic ruin.

The Irish language as I reminded you was never to be spoken.

Our proposed Human Rights act would have protected the Catholic Irish against these terrible injustices.

But that was two hundred years ago. Our act did not exist then, nor did the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 – the basis of all modern human rights laws.

Now in 2007, there are millions of human beings (no longer in Ireland, or the island of Ireland I am happy to say) whose human rights are violated every day. Some manage by dangerous and terrifying means to get to Australia to seek our help. Without a human rights act in place, we will continue to deny them that protection.

www.humanrightsact.com.au

reviews

An Inconvenient Truth

Featuring Al Gore, this film now available on DVD is produced by Laurie David, Lawrence Bender and Scott Z Burns. Executive producers Jeff Skoll and Davis Guggenheim.

Reviewed by
Maggie Helass

I thought this was a movie about climate change and couldn't be bothered to watch it – I was, after all, one of the converted.

But one afternoon, on the Sabbath I try to keep each week, I felt inclined to watch *An Inconvenient Truth*.

It turned out that this is not first and foremost a movie about climate change; it is a documentary about a politician with impeccable connections traveling around the USA (and the world) with a slide show under his arm – and being increasingly ignored by his own peer group.

“I feel as if I've failed to get the message across” remarks Al Gore, after spending five years peddling his slide show. And the message is impressive – persuasive, unforgettable and, unfortunately, life-changing. Because that is the reason it fell on deaf ears.

The producers have taken the story of this man and his message and turned it into a documentary of the ups and downs of a contemporary prophet. Not an heroic prophet; just someone like you or me, wanting to share important information about the future of the human race.

Educational excerpts of the slide show itself are combined with anecdotes from Al Gore's own story – his moment of revelation in 1968 through his teacher, the physicist Roger Revelle; the years of formation and political success; the disappointments; the personal tragedies; finally, on losing the White House in 2000, his realisation that this message was his vocation.



Late last year when the Stern report was published I felt a sense of relief: “Good, now we can leave climate change to the politicians.”

But since then I have visited South Africa and been painfully reminded of the powers of government disinformation during the apartheid era. I have also watched *An Inconvenient Truth* and realised how successfully I have been prejudiced against this man and his message.

One of the reasons I did not see this documentary earlier was

because of a vague discomfort about the credentials of Al Gore himself; a discomfort reinforced by remarks from a United Nations official who cast doubts on his motives at Brisbane's Earth Dialogue last year.

I now remember that disinformation in the apartheid era routinely progressed from destroying the message to destroying the messenger – preferably in the minds of his/her peers.

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democracy are there to be
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Al Gore first saw the figures showing the increase of CO² in Earth's atmosphere back in the 'sixties. In the mid-70s he was instrumental in Congressional hearings on global warming; in 1984 he wrote a book on the subject; he was part of the Kyoto initiative in 1997.

“I had such faith in our democratic system I actually thought and believed it would cause a real sea-change,” he says.

Audiences at Al Gore's slide show are shown as mostly young people – students whom Gore describes as being in the business of separating the truth from the fiction. Nowadays he presents his message as more of a moral than a political issue – one that it is deeply unethical to ignore.

reviews

He says forthrightly that attempts to fog global warming are unethical; and he calls gainsayers of climate change “so-called sceptics” – perhaps calling attention to the motives of lobbies for whom climate change is an economic threat.

In this scenario, where the human race has become a “force of nature”, Gore says, it is the conservatives who are utopian. Our technologies are bigger than the human scale (the word Promethian came to me when I saw the new Airbus coming in to land over Moreton Bay in November 2005).

Gore presents evidence that scientific findings on climate change have been tampered with to obscure the truth rather than reveal it.

The goals of disinformation at the highest levels of industry and government are to present climate change as theory rather than fact; to create doubt in the mind of the public; and to promote the misconception that there is disagreement about the science.

this challenge looks set to
call out all that is best and
worst in humankind

Since watching this brave little movie, I do not expect to die of old age; but this is proving, paradoxically, to be an energising experience. There is work to be done.

Gore is adamant that the human race has everything we need to effectively tackle the problem of climate change; except perhaps the political will.

But the political levers of democracy are there to be used by every citizen, given the will (and resistance to despair in the clear-eyed prospect of global catastrophe).

I grew up in Europe under the paralysing threat of annihilation in a nuclear war (to say nothing of the paralysing philosophies of Jean Paul Sartre and Nietzsche). Climate change at first glance leaves one feeling helpless, but this challenge looks set to call out all that is worst and best in humankind – and will certainly sort the brave from the fainthearted.

www.climatecrisis.net

Social determinants of Indigenous health

eds. Bronwyn Carson, Terry Dunbar, Richard D Chenhall, Ross Bailie
Allen and Unwin, 2007

Reviewed by Harry Throssell

This collection of papers shows once and for all that severe ill-health among Indigenous Australians has its basis in loss of culture, racial prejudice, social inequality, poverty.

It is not an ideological statement – although there are important political implications – but a comprehensive, compelling account of serious health problems told by eighteen indigenous and other scholars in the medical and social sciences.

Indigenous Australians have lived on this continent for more than 50,000 years but have had difficulties surviving the past two hundred years. Why?

The average lifespan for all Australians is eighty years but for Indigenous folk only sixty years (shorter than indigenous lifespans in New Zealand, USA and Canada). Why?

Australia is the world's third richest country but many Indigenous people struggle with serious poverty and associated diseases. Why?

An adequate living standard is a principle of international human rights agreements but has not become part of Australian law. Why?

The thirteen essays are based on a series of courses in Darwin in 2004/5, with fifty pages of references, chapter summaries and questions for discussion. They are ideal for further study.

This is much more than a study guide, however. It has serious messages for social justice.

Indigenous leader Lowitja O'Donoghue puts the issues in a nutshell. “When considering health, you need a model that ... acknowledges a history of oppression and dispossession, and a history of systematic racism”.

She refers to the *Bringing Them Home* report – racism that is “still deeply embedded in the structure of our society”, felt powerfully in economic disadvantage; young people alienated

from family and community; the lack of Aboriginal representation at all levels of government.

Indigenous health has been aptly described as Third World health in a First World nation, and she quotes the National Aboriginal Health Strategy: “health encompasses the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community”.

The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control”.

This principle was also the basis of other international covenants and conventions. However, unless such treaties are incorporated into Australian law by domestic legislation they are not enforceable in this country.

It begins with the act of recognition... that it was we who did the dispossessing

Indeed, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights placed specific obligations on the Australian government and required it to “refrain from interfering ... with the enjoyment of the right to health ... and adopt appropriate ... measures towards the full realisation of the right to health”.

But there remains no statute which imposes a responsibility on Australian government to ensure Indigenous people have access to the social determinants of good health. Indeed, by dismantling the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and limiting the power of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the current government “has largely disabled any formal and independent criticism of its approaches to human rights and the Indigenous population”.

It is argued the forced separation of children from their natural families as described in the *Bringing Them Home* report had human rights implications which could have breached international conventions to which Australia was a signatory.

But in one case the High Court held that as the policy of the time cited that the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was “in their own best interests”, the necessary intention to harm them was not established.

One author concludes pessimistically “it is highly unlikely [the Australian government] will choose to consider itself bound ... by the human rights implications of its public health and social policy”.

Politicians have often gone AWOL on Indigenous matters, so should pay particular attention to a message from a former prime minister:

“It begins with the act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional ways of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion.

“It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?”.

Paul Keating at the Australian Launch of the International Year for the World’s Indigenous People, Redfern, Sydney, 1992.

Indigenous Australians suffered illnesses common in tropical climates prior to 1788, but British colonists brought new diseases like tuberculosis and venereal infections. There was even some controversy “within the general climate of frontier violence” as to whether smallpox was spread deliberately.

Introduced illnesses were a major cause of Indigenous depopulation during the 18th and 19th centuries. Aboriginal Protector James Dredge in the 1840s said, “While we hesitate they die. Their condition is indescribably awful and perilous”, and he blamed government incompetence and settler maliciousness.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s, there was a dominant European belief in the ‘doomed race’ theory, that Indigenous extinction was ‘natural and unavoidable’, part of ‘natural evolution’ with Europeans emerging as the highest form of human development (a view still heard in 1960s London).

Even government and mission compounds were often characterised by poor hygiene, inadequate

nutrition, and epidemic illness, described as stemming from ‘colonial attitudes’. Some cattle stations were also notorious for high levels of infectious disease.

In 1936 Western Australia’s Chief Protector found rural hospitals that refused to take Indigenous patients, including women in labour. In the 1930s authorities often sent leprosy patients to Darwin in neck-chains, sentenced to life imprisonment in leprosariums, a practice continuing until 1955.

Pastor Doug Nichols returned from the Warburton Ranges in 1957 traumatised, saying “My people are starving ... everywhere we went they pleaded for food and water ... I wish I hadn’t seen the pitiable squalor... never, never can I forget”.

In the 1960s student Freedom Riders on country tours found hookworm, ear and eye infections, unclean drinking water, lack of proper toilet facilities.

Author Frank Hardy wrote in 1963, “No white man, even in the depths of the depression, has suffered as much as the black man suffers now in the height of the nation’s boom”.

Increasingly activist groups labelled the system genocidal.

Inequality in itself also affects health. General research has shown those higher up the chain of command have less sickness than those lower down regardless of finance.

There’s not only a difference between the boss and the lowliest office junior, but even between top brass and deputy top brass who might share the same lifestyle.

Work is more than income. For Indigenous people the loss of traditional occupations like hunting and fishing all too easily resulted in an existence without meaning or sense of pride.

Occupation absorbs the largest amount of active time in adult life, but Indigenous Australia is still significantly located in the welfare economy.

This reviewer recalls an isolated Aboriginal group discovered in the 1970s living in the desert as they had for thousands of years: unclothed, no buildings, finding food and water where others would starve, sleeping during the day, walking great distances by night. Extraordinary knowledge.

Then into their world came somewhat similar creatures who covered their bodies, moved on noisy, god-like machines, found their food in boxes and bottles, and forced Indigenous folk to move into compounds, issuing some meaningless material called money.

One can only imagine how they would experience ‘anomie’, a sense of alienation and purposelessness caused by a breakdown in the culture, which, it is argued, can lead to suicide.

It’s not difficult to understand the temptation to ease the pain of so many frustrations with drugs, sniffing, grog.

One can only imagine how they would experience ‘anomie’

The importance of this book is that it brings together not only environmental and physical factors like chronic poverty and environment but also social and emotional conditions like unequal chances in life, hopefulness and pessimism – all affecting the physical body, the individual’s state of health and ultimate life-span.

Underlying the research, scientific data and professional judgements in this collection are ethical issues: what is right and just in dealing with fellow human beings, not only in the past but now?

It is not easy to be optimistic when you read in the chapter on human rights: “Given the approach of the Australian Government to date, it is highly unlikely that it will choose to consider itself bound either by an international legal obligation to consider the role of violations of human rights in creating and perpetuating poor health, or by the human rights implications of its public health and social policy”.

The editors of this excellent collection refer to their ‘next edition’. I encourage them to consider adding a companion volume telling the same story but with translation of some language into forms more accessible to a less highly educated readership. This is not a criticism, more a tribute to the book’s importance and the hope it will be read widely.

The original text of this review appeared in *On Line Opinion* in March and is posted on *Journospeak*.

book news

From Hugh McGinlay

Irish theologian Sean McDonagh was in Australia and New Zealand earlier this year to promote his new book *Climate Change: the challenge to us all* (Columba Press, 1856075621). This is a significant book for our times and offers a Christian perspective on an issue that affects us all.

Australian Jesuit theologian Gerry O'Collins is now teaching in London and has two new books to add to his impressive list. In *The Lord's Prayer* (from DLT, 0232526842), he explains what the prayer meant to Jesus himself and to his first followers, and he also describes what the 'Our Father' has continued to mean over the centuries and what it means today. His other new book *Jesus our Redeemer* (from OUP, 019920313X) is subtitled 'A Christian approach to salvation' and tackles such questions as: How can redemptive events in the past (Christ's life, death and resurrection) bring about saving effects in the present? Why do human beings need redemption, both individually and collectively? What images of God are implied by the saving action of God and by human needs?

Consuming Passions – Why the killing of Jesus really matters (0232526076) is in the same theological area as *Jesus our Redeemer* but from a variety of authors, all asking basic questions about the meaning of redemption. Edited by Jonathan Bartley, it has contributions from an impressive list of contemporary theologians, including James Alison, Simon Barrow, Jonathan Bartley, Steve Chalke, Giles Fraser, Kathy Galloway, Stuart Murray, Ched Myers, Michael Northcott, Anne Richards, Kevin Scully, Vic Theissen and J Denny Weaver.

Irish theologian Diarmuid O'Murchu was in Australia over the summer and we now have ample stock of his latest book *Transformation of Desire* (from DLT, 0232526915).

There is a growing interest in iconography in Australia. Traditionally associated with the Orthodox Churches, many 'Western' Christians have discovered the beauty and the power of this form of art.

Recently, we have taken delivery of two spectacularly beautiful, Australian collections. *Icons and Art* from Sydney artist Michael Galovic is the first icon art book featuring an Australian artist and has been widely praised for the beauty of the originals and the quality of the reproduction. The hardbound book retails at \$80 and would be an ideal gift for anyone interested in contemporary Australian art. ISBN is 1876158034.

The other book we have is more focused. *Mary MacKillop – A Tribute* (0646224999, \$25) is a beautifully crafted book with more than eighty full colored images related to Australia's first saint and her times.

We have a deeply moving new book from Anglican priest Michael Mayne, former head of religious broadcasting at the BBC in London. Michael began his book *The Enduring Melody* (0232526877, \$34.95) as a meditation on a lifetime's faith and experience but during the writing he developed terminal cancer so that the book became an autobiography of dying. Alan Bennett describes it as 'humbling and inspiring'.

We have acquired a new book from Indonesia called *Why Muslims participate in Jihad* (9794333999) by Dicky Sofjan which describes how jihad is firmly embedded in Islamic religious thought, practice and ethos. The book will be useful to academics and others trying to come to terms with a concept that is integral to the self-understanding of Islam.

To mark the 200 years since the campaign by William Wilberforce to abolish the slave trade reached its climax in 1807, there has been a reissue of Garth Dean's biography of Wilberforce. Called *God's Politician* (0232526907, \$34.95), the book is a remarkable tribute to the man and brings to life the personalities and the politics of the fight against the slave trade.

Australian Frank Maloney's collaboration with Jeffrey Archer to write *The Gospel According to Judas* (Macmillan, 0230529011, \$24.95) has received lots of publicity. It is a beautifully produced book and commended if only because of its popularity. The glossary at the end of the book provides useful commentary on key elements

of this ‘gospel’ as well as material found in the canonical gospels.

One of the joys of my job is to help launch new books by Australian authors. Recently, we launched Neil Ormerod’s new book *Creation, Grace and Redemption* (Orbis, 1570757054, \$32.95). This is a very fine book and an excellent synthesis of what contemporary theologians are saying about key issues in theology. An impressive feature of the book is how Neil grapples with the limitations of established ways of expressing basic truths in the tradition, acknowledging that how faith is expressed is inevitably conditioned by the metaphors, language and experience of the times. With our vastly increased understanding of the universe, it calls for imagination and courage (and faith!) to look for new ways of expressing deep truths in ways that are sensitive to the tradition yet cognisant of cosmic reality.

Paulist Press has a new book in their series ‘What are they saying about.’ This series allows the editor to summarise as well as critique current literature in various aspects in theology and Scripture. The new book *What are they saying about the Historical Jesus?* (Paulist, 080914445X, \$24.95) allows US author David Gowler from Emory University to analyse current influential portraits of Jesus. The book has an interesting chapter on the Jesus Seminar, assessing as dispassionately as possible the contribution and limitations of the Seminar to the current debate.

Templeton Foundation Press continues to publish interesting and challenging books in the area of faith and science. One of their latest titles is *Cosmic Impressions – Traces of God in the Laws of Nature* by Walter Thirring, (Templeton Foundation Press, 1599471159, \$29.95) translated from the original German edition first published in 2004. At a time when there seems to be a rise in confidence among atheists, it’s refreshing to have yet another internationally renowned scientist examining scientific issues such as coincidence, randomness and order; raising questions like ‘Where does all the energy come from?’ and ‘What was the initial spark?’, and reaching quite different conclusions from those advocated in *The God Delusion* and elsewhere.

All of these books are available from your local Christian bookshop which can provide further information about any title.

www.rainbowbooks.com.au

Busyness

By Kylie Crabbe



Family planning, it seems, doesn’t mean what it used to. Now the planning keeps on going and going – endless negotiations around every aspect of family schedules.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report on balancing work and family, titled ‘It’s About Time’, has taken us into a series of Australian family homes. And it’s confirmed that there’s a dizzying array of ways to structure family life: who works when, drives whom where, cooks and cleans between which other tasks, and negotiates exactly what with their family-friendly employer.

It’s all important stuff – of that there is no doubt – but the report is not really about time at all. It’s not even about general arrangements for all employees, or about balanced lifestyles.

What it’s actually about is family. And when the structures of nuclear family start to be equated with ‘life’ – and as that portion of our time which is not ‘work’ – then we would do well to start feeling a little nervous.

Such a narrow family focus prompts me again to wonder about Jesus’ attitude to family.

Perhaps religious views of family are often trotted out in these kinds of debates, so it’s probably worth starting with a couple of qualifications.

Firstly, and perhaps obviously, family space and time really didn’t mean the same thing in first century Palestine. We’re talking about a time when meals were conducted with open doors at the side, through which complete strangers could enter at any time and take a seat in the background.

And, sure, blood being thicker than water would be a good way to describe the priority for care for kinship groups – but this was a far cry from mum, dad and 2.4 kids.

The Jewish tradition from which Jesus hailed contained clear responsibilities for quite extended branches of the family tree. It was a set-up designed to protect people from falling through

—a modern form of violence?

Home Truths

societal gaps – making sure that widows and orphans, for example, were provided for.

Of course, the extent to which the reality reflected these values might be an open question.

This leads us to Jesus' attitude to family. His comments on family, as the gospels record them, aren't the kind of family-values-with-a-religious-gloss that we occasionally get around the religious edge of contemporary politics.

On the contrary, instead of rushing to see his own family, he said: "who are my mother and brothers?... Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3:33, 35).

But this is not meant to be an unhealthy rant prompted by latent family issues; it's Jesus' acknowledgement that there are more important things than just sticking to our own.

For all its emphasis on kinship, there's another important strand within Jesus' tradition – care for a stranger.

Challenging and controversial, Jesus knew such priorities could spark conflict within families.

So, as important as creative work and family arrangements may be for facilitating care for older and younger family members, the problem with the conversation around the HREOC report is that it seems to have completely overlooked the other social problems that come with overworked, time-poor adults.

If people are just squishing in time to supervise school readers and provide the after-school sports taxi, then where is the time for participation in broader community concerns?

If we're all just hemmed in by the busyness of our closest kin, then people fall through the gaps.

Who hasn't wanted to stop and talk to the older woman we don't know but see daily on her pilgrimage to the shops, or to know more about the actual experience of asylum seekers living in our community, or to find out about the local council strategy for better bike paths— but when is there time for that?

If we're hoping for a better work-life balance, then how do we start developing an equation for this kind of balance?

The conversation is only just skimming the surface when it talks about childcare, because we need to talk about how to structure employment arrangements to allow for social justice, citizenship, for befriending the stranger—and, frankly, also for a bit of a rest.

We may not be able to work out what particular work-family arrangement Jesus may have settled on. I suspect something pretty flexible, with an emphasis on working out how to put energy into what was most important.

But we can say that he'd factor in some space – take the boat out, go up onto a mountain – to rest and pray.

And then, all the while still looking out for his closest companions, he'd keep on with the work of the kingdom, proclaiming a vision of a world in which people do not fall through the cracks.

Kylie Crabbe is training in theology with the Uniting Church in Sydney.

This article was posted on the online journal *Eureka Street* in April.

A Common Core in Ethics

Many people from different life philosophies and belief systems have similar ethical views. This has led Doug Everingham and me (both members of the humanist movement) to set up a project to express and publicise what is held in common.

The result may be a declaration of ethical values—an inspirational document that may attract signatories. Towards this end we invite people to join an email discussion group.

Details may be found from the website <http://lists.topica.com/lists/ethics/>

Doug Everingham is a secular fellow-traveller with religious people and a former Australian Minister for Health. I am a physicist and a former university lecturer.

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