Tui Motu

InterIslands

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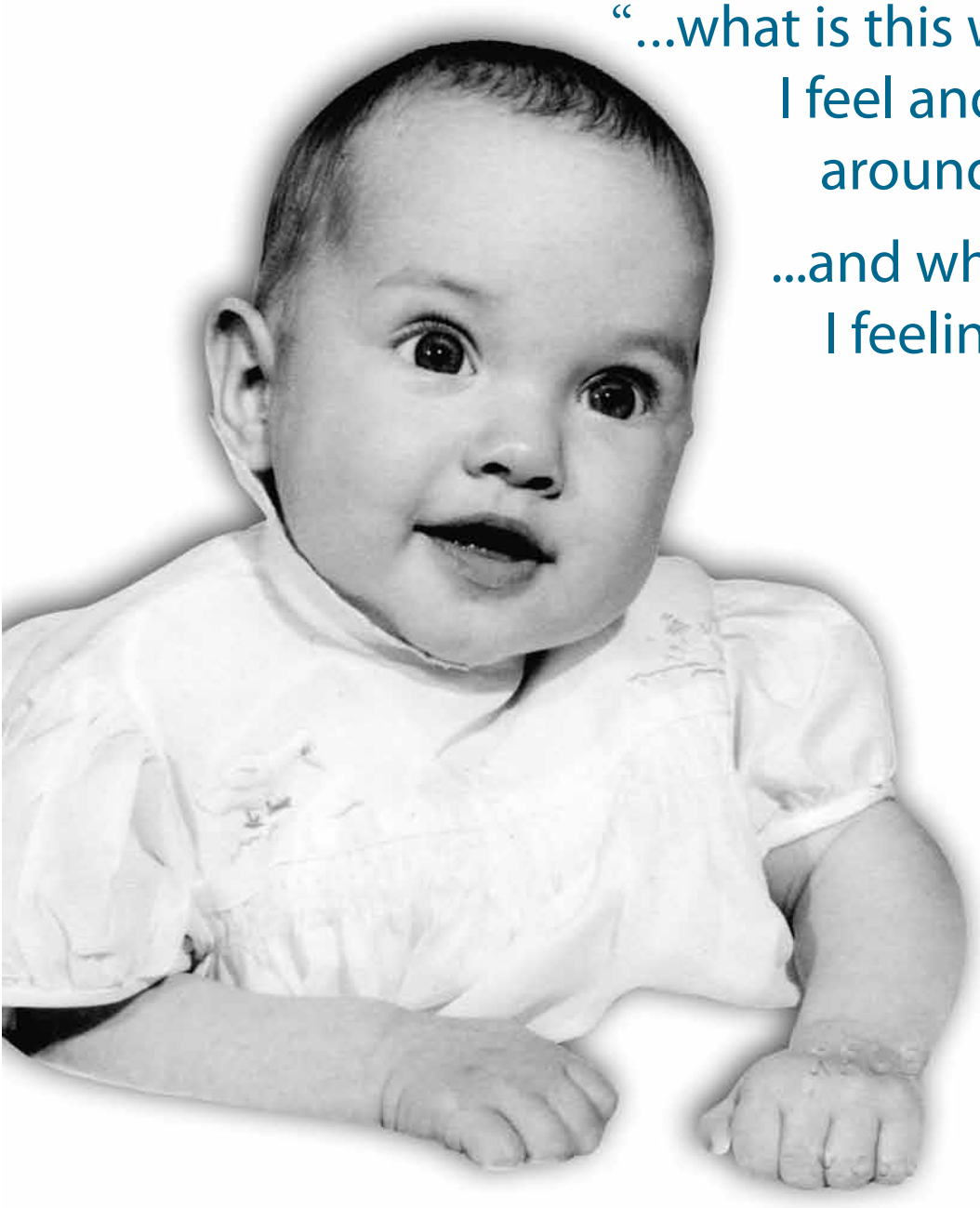

"...what is this world
I feel and see
around me?

...and who am
I feeling it?"

Contents

Thank you

This is the time of year when lots of *Tui Motu* subs are renewed. The Board and editorial staff wish to acknowledge the faithful support of so many readers in continuing to subscribe, for notes of support along with many 'extras' – donations large and small which keep us out of the workhouse.

Brave New World

The cloning of Dolly the sheep may be seen by historians of the future as heralding the dawn of a new age, as humanity discovers how to harness living material to its economic and health needs. Among these new discoveries, by far the most worrying is the prospect of using human embryos for therapeutic and other purposes. There is a bill due to come before parliament named the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology bill (HART), which will determine whether in New Zealand scientists will be permitted to access human stem cells for research and for producing drugs.

Stem cells are undifferentiated cells which in theory can change into any tissue in the body of a growing organism. Cells from an embryo in its early stages of development are stem cells. Human stem cells can be obtained either from surplus embryos produced during fertility treatment or from embryos specially made for the purpose. The ethical implications of these procedures are grave, and touch on the meaning of life itself and the status of the human embryo.

This is the theme of the leading article by Dr Anna Holmes (pp 5-7). She attended a conference in Dunedin earlier this year when the new bill and its implications were discussed, but, for her, the discussion fell far short of what responsible medical experts should have been debating. The ultimate issue which looms central to such deliberations must be: *what is a human being?* Is a fertilised human egg a human being? What are its rights? What sort of risks are being taken when this sort of research is continually being pushed to the limits of what is possible rather than what is ethical? Indeed, are these scientists concerned to ask themselves if what they are doing might be morally wrong – or is their ultimate concern simply whether it will work?

Before we panic into thinking that our labs may be peopled by Frankensteins, another aspect has been pointed out by John Kleinsman, in the April *Nathaniel Report*. He notes that few, if any, of those "in favour of destructive research on human embryos have no respect for its dignity". What these scientists argue is that this respect is outweighed by the huge advantages to be gleaned from the use of these stem cells: in the treatment for instance of cystic fibrosis and Parkinson's disease – and that is only a start.

However, the Christian ethicist must pose at least the following questions: (1)is this the only way – or is it simply the most convenient? (2)Are there other sources of stem cells which do not involve the destruction of life? (3)What are the risks of this research? (4)And what about this utilitarian argument? Can the end ever justify the means when we are talking of the destruction of human life itself?

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin proposed a *Consistent Ethic of Life* (See *Tui Motu* August 2002). His vision encompassed all living things as 'sacred, interdependent and whole'. To sacrifice one part for the intended good of another must always be suspect.

How important it is for a Christian voice like his to be heard, clear and articulate, on these vital matters! For this reason we must welcome the initiative of our bishops in setting up the *Nathaniel Centre*. And we have strong natural allies in the environmental movement, where respect and reverence for the earth and its creatures is basic: we should work with them. How good it would be if Rome were to stress more the integrity of life itself and the care of the earth instead of launching witch hunts after alleged irregularities into the way in which priests celebrate Eucharist.

M.H.

Worth waiting for

of a new bishop for Dunedin, Colin Campbell (right), and the confirmation of Bishop John Dew (left) of Wellington as coadjutor to Cardinal Williams with right of succession.

At the end of May two very welcome pieces of news came from Rome to the Catholic church in New Zealand: the announcement

Both have had rich experience in the New Zealand church and and have a reputation for sound common sense, are justly popular with the Catholic

laity they have served and with their fellow priests. We wish them both a long and well blessed period of leadership.
Ad multos annos!

letters

Theology at Victoria

The secularist tradition has been influential in New Zealand society and in education. This tradition was alluded to in the May *Tui Motu* as having led to a rooted objection to theology being taught at Victoria University, in Wellington. However, a more positive change has occurred. As reported in the Summer 2004 issue of *Victorious*, Victoria's magazine for alumni, a new position of Senior Lecturer in Christian Theology has been established. The inaugural appointee is Dr Chris Marshall of Auckland, himself an alumnus of Victoria with a PhD from the University of London. His recent book *Beyond Retribution*, on restorative justice in the New Testament, has received international recognition.

The position is initially funded through a generous grant from a Wellington church, St John's-in-the-City, where the Rev. Dr Graham Redding expressed delight at the broad appeal of the appointment of a lecturer well respected in both religious and academic circles.

Albert Moore, Dunedin

Yearning for the spiritual

After reading of the yearning of many young people for spiritual experience, I would say that mine came from yearning it, not earning it, and from the heart rather than the head. At 33 I was married to a good husband, had three healthy children, friends, a lovely home and was involved in community affairs. But inside I was dust and ashes. What was missing? Was it 'God', which so far I had managed so well without.

One morning I woke up and felt full of energy and very well. All my senses were keener – all of nature radiantly surrounded me. At this time my 7-year-old Lynn was rushed into hospital. I visited daily and she was very ill. I was not worried but was completely at peace. Within, I knew if she lived all was well. And if she died all would be well, that underneath were everlasting arms.

Lynn was no better. One day I arrived home and sat on the bed for a weep. A voice inwardly said to me: "You haven't enough faith!" Could this be God talking to me? It was as if I was being drenched by water – but this drenching wasn't water; it was love. I had found God. I was running over with joy. Lynn recovered shortly afterwards.

I began to read the Bible. I made the rounds of the church services. Catholics seemed to be mired in ecclesiastical goings-on. Protestants seemed to be largely interested in good works. At the Salvation Army I sang all the time. The emotional services of the Evangelicals embarrassed me. Finally my husband suggested I look up the Quakers, and there I found my group.

The 'presence' last many years before finally fading away. I was now out of the kindergarten and on my own. But the direction of my life and my family had changed. (***abridged***)

Vera Dickinson, Motueka

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Tui Motu-InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed. The name Tui Motu was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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The seabed and foreshore are their own

Des Casey

Panic would seem to have achieved a take-over among governmental benches at the time of the hikoi. How else do you explain some of those Prime Ministerial utterances? Panic responses first emerged when the High Court, arguably consistent with a status quo of 163 years, ruled in favour of Maori regarding the Marlborough foreshore and seabed. Since then the panic began running an ascending course. The Bill, which has become centre-piece, is already being described as an emergency and not well thought out construction by a Government intent on getting its show back on the road – a show which the Marlborough decision and the National Party's rising from the ashes has so successfully derailed.

Instead of acknowledging the fifth Labour Government for the positives it has achieved, history's chief memory may well be of a Government that reintroduced confiscation into the European/Maori relationship. Even more disturbing is the likelihood that a National Government would be remembered for very much worse.

A fundamental understanding of relationship with Maori is that you consult about difference. Foreshore and seabed solutions could only emerge through such a process. Sure, some would jump up and down about weak Government behaviour, and opposition forces would air their objections and re-definitions of the Treaty of Waitangi in bursts of unstudied history. Though it might be difficult for a Labour Government to reflect on opposition successes, consideration of Doug Graham's work, despite it having its own potholes, might have pre-empted the mess in which the Government finds itself. At least he worked at entering into a process with Maori.

Panic is fear on the rampage. A second factor worth knowing about Maori is that they understand partnership. While confiscation and back-water treatment continued at the beginning of last century and again into the '30s, Maori sent many of its young people to die on the battlefields of European wars. What else was that if not partnership with the new people of Aotearoa? What has beset Government to so quickly succumb to fear?

Whatever the outcome of where "ownership" may finally lodge there is a more fundamental issue needing inclusion. A central outcome of human activity this century will be the survival or non-survival of ecosystems, resources and species. Life may be threatened by nuclear fallout, or the extremes of bin Ladens or George Bushes. There are possibilities of mass viral holocausts or a meteorite or two. But the most concrete evidence of danger we presently have is the effect of human activity on land, water, air, natural resources and species.

Maori or pakeha, the language of ownership has to change. Ownership has been the language of Europeans for centuries, but are some Maori, in their attempts to be understood, being duped or seduced by the same language? At first instance the foreshore belongs to the foreshore and the seabed to the seabed. The forest is first owned by the forest. The kereru and the black stilt are first their own. Once inherent ownership is recognised and valued then talk of usage can be entered into, but always in the context of a right of the other, be it foreshore, forest or unpolluted ocean, to endure. All this with a thought for future generations of all species to enjoy, including Maori and pakeha.

For my part I would prefer that usage to be with the guardianship of Maori. They are closer to their indigenous roots than those of European descent. Of course, this does not automatically mean the environment will be cared for, since Maori as well as Pakeha are capable of damaging and exploiting it, the extinction of the moa being a case in point. But Maori developed a heritage of being part of the natural world rather than above it, and are presently closer to traditional understandings of what living alongside ecosystems and their inhabitants requires.

Continuing to put the natural world into human ownership, most of all to Europeans who have a penchant for selling it on to the highest bidder, is risky. Bidders may come from afar, wanting to escape the negatives of a homeland that leads the world in resource consumption, pollution production and disinterest about ecosystem and species survival, or homelands where these questions have yet to be asked.

Much wiser to talk of custom, tradition and sustainable usage, and to spread the idea of rights beyond the human enclave. Even customary rights, if the initial right of natural phenomena is firmly in place, might be included. Reaction to ideas of "customary rights" seems to imply that this idea has just been plucked from some Maori fantasy. Unacknowledged are the debates that took place, for example, in the Spanish Court centuries ago around this same concept when the Spanish invaded Central America. Might we do better with it than the Spanish? The natural world would seem to be saying: "You'd better". ■

Des Casey is a Counsellor and Family Therapist in Auckland

What is a human being?

Anna Holmes

What does it mean to be human? Three days of intensive discussion at the ***New Zealand Bioethics Conference on Ethics and Emerging Biotechnologies*** in February 2004 raised exciting possibilities for diagnosis and treatment of genetic diseases. They also left many urgent questions about the meaning and value of human beings. I came away feeling disturbed.

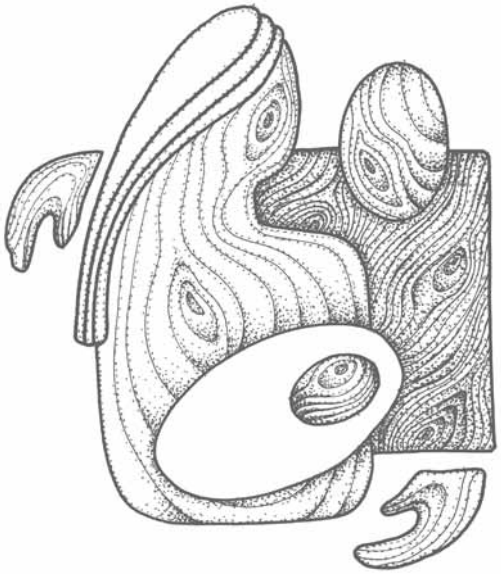
The church tells us we are created in the image of God and that all human life is to be valued. We are both physical and spiritual beings. It forbids the deliberate taking of human life from the time of conception. For many centuries, however, there have been philosophical and theological arguments about where the soul is and when it becomes part of the developing embryo. Two views are widely held. The official one is that we do not know, and therefore must treat all embryos as if they could be fully human. The other is that embryos cannot be fully human, with souls, until they can no longer divide into twins.

It seems to me that the theology and philosophy underlying human development is extremely male centred. Women will often tell stories about their inner knowledge of pregnancy before they have any objective tests to confirm this. Many years ago I was at a workshop about grief. In the final session one woman produced a little clay container with three tiny seeds in it. She said "This is my womb and these are the children I lost before they were born. I realise I have never allowed myself to grieve for them".

Women form a relationship with the child-to-be that persists even if the child is lost at an early stage. The womb space, the creative space, for each child, born or miscarried, remains for the rest of the mother's life. Such imprinting is not incidental but says something very important about the extent, quality and persistence of human relationships. This is identified in the wonderful meeting between Mary and Elizabeth in *Luke 1.28* when Elizabeth knows Mary is pregnant before she is told and John, in Elizabeth's womb, responds to Jesus in Mary's.

To be human is to exist in relationship to each other, to the environment and to God. These relationships both form and enable the further development of each person. What biotechnology is doing is altering those relationships in both obvious and very subtle ways. These alterations are already well under way and are not being reflected on by most people. The way people relate affects the social order in a society as well as the individuals within it. Possibilities are emerging for very new ways of relating and very different ways of the state imposing conditions on the existence of certain members of society.

Can a woman forget her baby . . .



and not love the child she bore?

June and Terry are a mother and son who were separated when Terry was adopted out at birth. They did not meet again until the law permitted them to make contact, 25 years later.

June maintains that nothing can take away the reality of being a mother. To have lost Terry was for her the most profound rupture. "Adoption left a wound in me that could have destroyed me. The years of separation made Terry more present to me rather than less, and the grief over his loss became more profound. But because of my faith we were never really separated!"

Terry was much loved by his adoptive parents. They impressed on him that he was special – he had been chosen. But there was also the dark side: the perception of others that he was adopted, and therefore odd or different. Sometimes he would look in the mirror and wonder "who am I?" He was loved, yet there was this fear – was he some sort of mistake, 'not right', 'unwanted'?

But when Terry met June again, he felt healed at once. All the fears were replaced by love and compassion. His heart went out to her. What was a tremendous risk, for both of them, turned out to be completely wonderful. It still is.

Biotechnology has already changed the relationships of children to their parents. Using IVF it is now possible for a child to have five parents. There can be the donors of egg and sperm, a surrogate mother to bring to birth and the social parents who raise the child. Recently I listened to someone who had been born as a result of sperm donation speaking of her passionate desire to know the anonymous man who made her life possible. The number of children born through new birth technologies continues to rise as child bearing is delayed for economic reasons by more women in Western societies. Will this leave many more people uncertain of their 'real' parents?

In the past children were accepted as unique gifts to their parents. Biotechnology now allows children to be designed for the use of others in their families. IVF is used and embryos selected so that the child may donate stem cells or organs. This has already happened in America. What does this do for a child who is specifically brought into being to be of use to another? What is the relationship of that child to their parents and to the person for whom they were created?

People who carry single gene diseases like Huntingdon's disease or cystic fibrosis can use IVF techniques to ensure that they do not have children who are affected. Cells may be taken from the early embryo and screened for disease genes. We do not know if this has any long-term effects on the embryo. Only healthy embryos are implanted. It may soon be possible for some genetic abnormalities to be cured by inserting healthy genes before implantation.

These uses of biotechnology to reduce severe genetic disease seem to be a real advance. It is the other implications that give pause for reflection. What does it do to a society to destroy some members for the good of others? Does it change the way we view the smallest and most vulnerable members? Will it alter the way people who do not want to use such techniques are seen by their neighbour or the state itself? Will such people be seen as problems rather than ethical human beings making informed choices?

It is usual for women at risk of having a Down's syndrome infant to have pre-birth diagnosis by amniotic fluid tests, blood tests and ultrasound scans. These may be offered only on condition that abortion is performed if the child is abnormal. The idea that a woman might want to carry an abnormal child to birth is seldom considered.

What will the possibility for eliminating genetic diseases do for those who already suffer from them? I have heard of parents with Down's syndrome children being asked why they did not get rid of them before they were born. Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche communities for mentally and physically disabled people has said often that those who are most wounded have important lessons to teach 'normal' people who do not acknowledge their wounds. If we eliminate those who now rouse compassion by their vulnerability, what will happen to our society as it becomes less compassionate, or maybe less human?

Governments try to control health budgets by reducing the number of expensive patients. Patients with genetic abnormalities who need full hospital care will definitely be targeted. Will more pressure be put on those who might have genetic diseases to use IVF, or early abortion, to prevent the birth of such children? Social control is at present subtle and hidden. Will it become an accepted part of government policy in the future as compassion becomes less common?

There are many diseases like diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, coronary heart disease and schizophrenia that have a complex genetic component. It is possible only to predict risks of these diseases within broad limits – 20 to 70 percent. Will it be justified to abort or select embryos on such risks? There are already countries where sex selection of children – either by IVF or by selective abortion of the unwanted sex (usually female) – is altering the sex ratios in society. What will this mean in twenty years time when there are no women for these men to marry? Could this destabilise social order through wife stealing from nearby societies?

One conference session discussed genetic enhancement of children who would be taller, brighter, stronger, more musical, or better athletes. What does it do to the relationship of a parent and child when the parent selects a particular sex, physical characteristics and talents for the child? It makes children seem just another commodity or possession. If they can be designed to suit the parent's wishes, it raises expectations for the parents and puts enormous pressure on the children. Coming to terms with the uniqueness of their children, and learning to value them for themselves, not for their usefulness or talents, has always been an important way for humans to grow. Are we wise enough to select

Playing with fire

You only see something as a risk after you appreciate it as a danger," says philosopher and scientist, Dr Royden Hunt, discussing the issues arising out of the new birth technologies with Anna Holmes. "The unseen dangers are becoming more and more pervasive.

"We see this also with GM planting. We know that once an organism is released, it cannot be prevented from spreading. There is no defence. The precautionary principle is not being applied."

Anna Holmes noted the seductive power of the new technologies. "The ethical issues are being bypassed. Thus multiple genetic systems are very complex and little understood. To interfere with them is dangerous. In the fields of medical research there is huge fertility of new ideas – but little reflection and less risk assessment."

the characteristics that will make a balanced, compassionate and fruitful community?

There is an issue of justice in all this. It is extremely expensive to have pre-birth screening or gene technologies. They are only available to those who can afford them. Thousands of normal mothers and infants die daily in countries that lack basic health and pregnancy care. Will enhanced children further deepen the divide between the haves and have-nots?

There were many other issues raised by the conference. Transplantation of human genes to animals to use them for production of human proteins was one. Transplantation of animal tissue into humans was another. The patenting of genes from particular patients or diseases was also relevant as it makes the difference between huge costs for new therapies and reasonable ones. These patients are being harvested and exploited in the same way that plants were harvested for therapies in the last century.

One paper looked at production of stem cells. Stem cells are cells that may become many different tissues – muscle, heart, brain and kidney. They may be able to repair damage in these tissues. The most flexible stem cells are harvested from embryos, killing the embryo in the process. What I found shocking was that no one on the panel discussing stem cells questioned the destruction of embryos to treat other people. It seems New Zealand legislation that allows abortion makes unnecessary any further discussion on the value of human embryos. Stem cells could be obtained from spare embryos left over from IVF, or embryos could be made just for stem cells. This is already being done in the United Kingdom and in private, though not public, institutions in America.

Legislation in the area of human biotechnology has not been addressed in New Zealand. The 1984 the Law Conference held in Christchurch looked at the implications of New Birth Technologies but came up with no new laws. Twenty years later The ***Human Assisted Reproductive Technology*** Bill is under discussion. This will address the use of stem cells.

We live in a rapidly changing world where reverence for human beings is being replaced by a utilitarian attitude to them It is a society where there is a danger that compassion will be progressively withdrawn from the weakest members. Are they really human if they are unable to think and reason? Is it sensible to keep alive those who will not contribute to the economy, or use up too many health dollars? What about the vast numbers of old people who will overload society over the next 50 years, as the 'baby boomers' grow old? Is it really coincidental that the euthanasia debate is winding up just at this time?

What is a human being? The more I reflect the less clear it becomes. Perhaps we need to humbly accept the mystery of our relationships and give the last word to Isaiah:

Does a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child within her womb?.. I will never forget you my people, see I have carved you on the palms of my hands (49,15-16). ■

Dr Anna Holmes is a Dunedin-based general practitioner with a special interest in bioethics

Womb to World

Caring for mother and child at childbirth, once the exclusive prerogative of family and local community, has in the West been increasingly taken over by healthcare professionals. Sophie Style pleas for a return to an earlier, more natural way

Recently my almost-nine-month-pregnant friend Leonie invited a group of her closest women friends to join her and her partner Johnny in a 'Blessingway', a ceremony in preparation for the birth of their second child. We all brought beads with a blessing for her and the baby, which she would wear on a necklace throughout labour. We were given candles to light as soon as we would hear that the baby had begun his or her journey into the world. At the end of the ceremony, Leonie announced radiantly that she felt ready to give birth.

A few hours later, she did indeed go into labour, in the very room that had been prepared with flowers and candles and images. She laboured through the night, supported by her midwife (a good friend), her partner and me, and gave birth the next morning to a beautiful, healthy boy. Within minutes, she was holding him to her chest, skin to skin, leaning against Johnny who had tears streaming down his face in awe and relief. The room was dark, warm and quiet, and we all sat in silence and wonder, welcoming this new being into a loving family and community.

Since the dawn of time, birth has been a powerful rite of passage. In Palaeolithic and Neolithic cave sites in Europe, the oldest images found have been of women with large hips, pendulous breasts, full and pregnant ➤

bellies, and exaggerated vulvas, emphasising their fertility and life-giving abilities. There is a palpable relationship between women's power to give birth, the elemental force of creation and the never-ending cycle of birth, death and rebirth in nature.

In most cultures, women are attended to by other women during their labour and birth – female relatives or friends, and a familiar midwife who also plays a spiritual role, a guardian of the threshold between womb and world. She may have specific prayers and invocations, and seeks to empower the mother with spiritual strength.

In many cultures the arrival of a baby is accompanied by joyful chants and songs which are sung once the baby has made his or her first sound or cry. With immediate skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby, and the first feed from her breast, the placenta is usually born within an hour. Known as the 'life force' in Bangladesh, or the 'baby's friend' in Nepal, it is treated with great respect, often buried ritually with thanksgiving for the vital role it has played for the child.

Across the vast majority of cultures, the period following the birth (anything between four and 40 days) has been one of special protection and nurturing for mother and baby, and sometimes father, who generally remain secluded from the rest of the community with the support of female relatives until their re-emergence is marked with a celebration of welcome.

Birth and modern medicine

In the modern West, a very different set of rituals surrounding birth has developed since the rise of the science of obstetrics in the mid-18th century. A range of medical interventions and practices across North America in particular, most of Europe, and increasingly throughout the Third World have turned birth into a medical event, separate from the rest of human experience, and devoid of awe, mystery and female power. From the moment a woman's pregnancy is confirmed, and much earlier at a deeper level, the process of undermining her trust and confidence in her own body to give birth begins, as health professionals focus on potential problems, risks, and tests for abnormalities.

Once her labour starts, a woman transfers to the place where people go when they are ill or for emergencies, where she is usually given a patient identification wristband and a hospital gown to wear, is led to a bare room full of bewildering technological apparatus, and is obliged to lie immobilised on a narrow bed. Until recently in many places, she has had to labour only in the company of strangers in masks who generally pay more attention to foetal monitors, intravenous drips and drug administration than to how she is feeling. Thousands of women have described their experience of hospital birth as an assault, after they have been routinely shaved, cut at the base of their vaginas with scissors, and forced to deliver their babies on their backs with their legs strapped into stirrups – all of this under bright lights, like a laboratory specimen.

These practices have meant that most of us in the Western world have been born drugged into an electronic and clinical environment, often forcibly pulled out of the birth canal with forceps or by vacuum extraction causing great pressure to our skulls, and suddenly exposed to harsh naked lights and loud noises.

Our umbilical cord will have been cut before we started breathing, making our first breath a response to shock and fear of death, rather than having the initial dual support of our lungs and a pulsating cord as nature intended. We will have been separated almost immediately from our mothers, and fed on artificial milk from a bottle. Our placentas, referred to disparagingly as the 'afterbirth', will have been swiftly incinerated with the rest of the hospital waste.

These practices prompted French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer to write his seminal book Birth Without Violence in 1974, sparking the natural childbirth movement in the West. His voice joined a growing critique of the many unnecessary and traumatic routine obstetric interventions, which were and still are being carried out without research into the long-term consequences. Once birth had been solely in the hands of midwives, who had a long-standing knowledge of massage, herbal infusions, and the ability to turn babies into the right position for birth to reduce complications, combined with specific prayers, charms and sacred acts designed to make the birth easier.

Gradually male doctors took over in the birthing room, generalising interventions that were initially used only in emergencies and which had more to do with their own convenience, such as obliging women to give birth on their backs. At the same time, birth became more dangerous: the more a doctor intervened with forceps, vaginal examinations and incisions, the greater the chance of spreading infection. It was only by the mid-20th century, as a result of improved sanitation and healthier diets, that infant mortality and maternal death in childbirth dropped to the low levels that they are now in the Western world.

Today we find that only a small percentage of women in the West manage to give birth naturally. One in four babies in the United States is born by Caesarean section, and in some Mexican hospitals, 90 per cent of middle-class women have Caesarean deliveries. Many factors related to the comfort of consumer lifestyles contribute to this: the sedentary lives we now lead, the lack of physical activity and stamina and bigger babies, to name a few.

Can the system be changed?

At a deeper level, however, we continue to live within a patriarchal belief system in which the male is superior and normalised, whereas the female is ultimately lacking and abnormal. Birth, so raw and physical, and at the same time so awesome, mysterious and frightening, had to be controlled. We need nothing less than a revolution in our attitudes towards conception, pregnancy, birth and parenting.

Whether women choose to bear children or not, children are the future of every society that exists. Whether we access them or not, we all store memories of our own birth experience which can shape our basic feelings about existence, our image of the world, our attitudes towards other people and ourselves, and our ability to handle challenges in life.

There are many examples of approaches to birth which combine the wisdom of traditional practices with scientific research to create safe and empowering birth experiences. In Holland and Denmark, one in three children is born at home under a midwife's care, and these countries have the highest percentage of normal childbirths and the lowest percentages of infant and maternal deaths of all the industrialised countries.

In many European countries, birth centres - a halfway house between home and hospital - provide a private, homely atmosphere. All of these point to the benefits of human-scale technology: the use of gravity, positioning, warm water, touch – and above all the need for a woman to feel safe, relaxed and supported in order for labour to develop without complications.

Birth is an opportunity for women to get in touch with their true power, and for us all to reconnect with a sense of awe and enchantment at the mystery of life. We can create simple yet meaningful rituals to resacralise birth and rekindle community. For the two weeks after Leonie gave birth, everyone who came to the Blessingway ceremony took turns to bring nourishing food to the family each day. Birth can then be reborn as a social, community event that we can all celebrate and honour. A key step towards creating a more peaceful and life-affirming world is to transform our birth practices. ■

Sophie Style is a trained birth companion, writer and activist.
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The article appears in their May/June issue

Practising what you preach

The Director of Caritas Aotearoa talks to Tui Motu *about projects to improve the status of women in developing countries and within Caritas management*

Anne Dickinson has been a teacher for much of her life, mostly in state schools. She became assistant Rector at St Patrick's College, Wellington, then she was the first woman to become Rector – indeed the first ever woman to be Principal of an all-male college in New Zealand. "At the beginning I sometimes felt 'watched'!", she says.

Five years ago she was appointed Director of Caritas Aotearoa; at the time she was only the second woman in the world to be a National Director, although now there are at least half-a-dozen. All told there are 162 Caritas organisations world-wide, all being agencies of their respective Bishops' Conferences.

"I have never sought these positions because of any feminist agenda", says Anne. "I have taken the opportunities as they came. Perhaps I've been fortunate to ride the crest of a wave which has given much greater career opportunities for women than was once the case. A woman director of Caritas was never an issue in New Zealand, but in many places overseas it can be.

"In Europe some people argue strongly that equal opportunity is the way to address the imbalance between women and men in decision-making positions," says Anne. "The fact is, often women do not get chosen for positions because it is a group of men who are doing the choosing, and they look to their own networks. Equal opportunity tends to perpetuate existing imbalances.

"Europe for instance has four representatives on the International Executive Committee of Caritas. Only one of the four is a woman, and it was quite a fight to achieve that! It's interesting that although the number of clergy on the Committee has steadily declined since 1990 – from 50 to 35 percent – they have almost invariably been replaced by men. The proportion of women has remained steady at roundabout 10 percent."

Anne chaired a Working Group set up by the 1999 Caritas General Assembly charged with the task of increasing the participation of women in decision-making roles and management in Caritas at the international level. In research carried out by the working group she found it was not just in the developing world that women reported stories of exclusion. One woman wrote:

"It does not enter the minds of those in authority that we could be appointed to high positions within our organisations. We watch men with less knowledge and experience being appointed to these positions. Because of our commitment to Caritas we help these men to meet the requirements of their positions, all the time being aware that we will never be given a similar opportunity to lead..."

Another said: *"...because I am a woman I am an insider who is on the outside. I work at many different levels, but when it comes to appointments to higher decision-making positions or for higher training, I am invisible to those who make the decisions... I wonder why the Caritas structures cannot be more inclusive in my country."*

Various reasons were adduced as barriers for women taking responsible posts. For example: *they do not have the education or training... particularly in theology and finance; they will need time off to attend to their families; they are fragile and need to be protected; it is not right for women to be in charge of men employees; "it is not part of our culture to give women leadership roles."* – and so on.

Women also spoke of the behaviour of men in group situations as a significant barrier to their participation. Men were described as being "*loud, dominating, competitive, and sometimes disrespectful of other men and women..."* The women spoke of their input as being "*disregarded or even treated with contempt"* – once again, they were 'invisible'.

Symbol of hope

In 2003 Anne attended the Caritas General Assembly, along with 110 women (out of 350 participants). The women had now found their voices and were contributing with panache and wisdom. Anne reports: "They kept giving me gifts and thanking me for opening the way for them, and for giving them confidence. I found that deeply embarrassing because of the relative ease of my life compared with theirs.

"I expressed this to a woman from Africa, and her reply is one which I think should be heard by the whole church in New Zealand: *Anne, you are a woman and you are so free. You are able to takes positions in the church and in your country. When we see you doing this, we know that our dream can become a reality. You are a living witness that we are not second-class citizens in the church or anywhere else.*
You are a symbol of hope".

In its report the Working Group said: "*When one group in an organisation has dominated the higher levels of management for a long time, its style of leadership can easily become the way leadership is defined within the organisation. This narrowing of the way leadership is perceived affects the selection of new leaders... 'There is a variety of gifts'. A filtering process means that over time an organisation can deprive itself of the variety of leadership gifts available to it. That variety of gifts enriches an organisation, deepening and broadening its responses to the challenges of a changing and complex world.*"

Anne Dickinson notes: "In New Zealand our bishops have encouraged laity to come through in diocesan structures and organisations, and women play a very significant role in the management of our schools. But if you have work to do in the Vatican City, where Caritas headquarters is located, you soon become aware of the clerical politics. You only have to walk down the street to notice the clerical preponderance.

The Pope has, however, recently appointed several women to high positions, and that is good. If executive positions are mostly held by the clergy, I have to ask: where is the lay voice – and especially the grassroots lay voice – being heard? How will the voice of women be heard?

"Throughout the world women are one of the most marginalised and unjustly treated groups. Seventy percent of those living in poverty are women. In many cultures they are the unprotected victims of violence, and in some societies they are at risk of abduction and slavery. Caritas organisations worldwide are working to improve this, and there is a lot said about it by Pope John Paul II.

"By instituting programmes to empower women, the improvement of their role tends to spill over to help families and the whole of society. Although Caritas agencies are deeply involved in those areas, some Caritas agencies have not always applied the lesson of empowering women to themselves. For instance, their governance and management structures have very few women, and while women do much of the work with the people Caritas serves, they do not have a substantial voice in the running of the organisation. This is the issue that the Caritas Confederation has undertaken to address.

Projects

"One successful project for women that impressed me was quite close to home – in Tonga. An initiative of Caritas Tonga saw a group of women set up a project to use their traditional skills in mat-weaving and tapa making: they sought to access a market both locally and among Tongan emigrants to North America.

Tongan woman beating tapa cloth: project funded by Caritas Aotearoa

"The scheme started in a small way on the main island of Tongatapu. The women pooled the money they earned, putting one-third to buying materials. The rest was spent to improve sanitation and housing for those in need.

"*Caritas New Zealand* funded the initial project and then supported it as it grew to cover 29 villages throughout Tonga. The women's groups were the drivers, and other projects grew out of it which involved the men, such as building market stalls and fishing. It was a co-operative venture.

"A worry was whether the women who were active in such a project might not be adding to what was already too full a working day. Their life is labour intensive, and we were wary of finding them weaving mats at 2 o'clock in the morning, after all their other chores had been done.

"We found that over time some of the men would start to help with the heavier chores to allow the women to get on with the project. This has helped change the way in which men regard women's work burden: once the men began to see the benefits, they moved in to help. Projects that assist women ➢

Village group of Tongan women painting tapa cloth

can often change the way men behave. But it is necessary that the women retain control of how the money they earned is spent if they are to be truly empowered. The whole family benefits because women invariably spend the money they have on addressing the needs of the family first.

In 2003 Anne conducted a workshop on gender issues for the 30-strong Executive Committee of Caritas in Rome. During the workshop one bishop said that in recent years he had become more and more aware of how his mother and sister were treated, and that had become very painful to him. He spoke about feeling powerless to bring about change, but in sharing his pain with others he now felt he would be able to start actively working to change the marginalisation women experienced both in his society and in the local church.

"In a number of countries women are treated as second-class citizens, even as non-persons. Yet it is the women who are often the agents of change in development. Change, especially cultural change, takes time. In Asian countries the church may be a tiny minority living in the midst of a huge Muslim or other religious majority. Only those who live in the situation can really make those sensitive decisions.

"That's another reason why it is vital for Caritas in those countries to make the changes within its own organisation so it can be an example both to the local church and the wider society."

Spirit who broods

Spirit who broods,
Spirit who sings,
mothering bird,
peace in your wings,
come from within,
come, make us one,
come and renew
the face of the earth.

Spirit of truth,
laser and light
searching the path,
seeking the right,
come from within ...

Spirit of love
larger than law,
quick to forgive,
keeping no score,
come from within ...

Spirit of hope
never subdued,
Spirit of God,
Spirit of Good,
come from within ...

Written by Shirley Murray and composed by Dr Nigel Eastgate. It can also be used as a weekly prayer with a solo voice singing the verses and the congregation responding with the refrain.
Found in Alleluia Aotearoa #126, published by the NZ Hymnbook Trust

A good shepherd

Kenneth Untener, Bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, for 24 years, died in March of leukemia. He was 66. Here are some of his sayings and doings. After all the negative stories which have come out of the US about the Catholic church, it is good to be able to print these.

The day of his consecration he introduced himself: "Hello, I am Ken and I am going to be your waiter."

...on where a bishop might live: (*Six months after becoming bishop he sold the bishop's mansion and starting boarding with his priests. His car became his office*) "Ken, you've got 107 houses. Why not sleep in all of them?... Most of these guys are alone in a big house. They like company and there's always room. They show me where the refrigerator is, and that's that."

...on being a shepherd: "The shepherd brings them to the wide open spaces, green pastures, wider horizons, where they can have a freedom they never knew before."

...on the church: "We're drifting toward a corporate severity," he said. "The posture we take toward the world, toward our own people, the images we present… all these tend toward corporate severity rather than softness."

...on fasting: "I call on all of us to make Lent a time of fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Human beings learned a long time ago that digestion consumes more energy than most anything we do in a day. Take away food, and the energy is available for something else – especially reflective thought."

...on the arms race: "The time has come to ask whether we're willing to stake our lives on the morality proclaimed in the Gospel, a Gospel that says, 'Love your enemies.' Has the time come for us to risk death rather than contribute to an arms race"?

...on depression: "It is our lot in life to be different. Our symbol is the cross, not a Gallup poll. If people just watch without joining or maybe even laugh at you, well, that's the way it is when you jump into this baptismal water.'

...on Easter: "The Easter homily ought to be brief. When you are dealing with something like the Resurrection, words will never do it. It's the hardest thing in the world to believe that there is life after death. It's also the most wonderful... We're asking people to bet their lives on it."

The church and the sexual revolution – 2

In the first part (see May issue) ***Luke Timothy Johnson*** *examined the sweeping changes in American society since the '60s: growing prosperity, the sexual revolution and the commercialisation of sex, political scandals, the women's movement, the move for gay and lesbian rights.*

In Part 2 he examines how and why the Catholic church failed to adapt to this cultural upheaval and proposes ways in which the church might change

Inconsistency and Confusion

It may be difficult now to appreciate how vibrant and confident the American church was in the early 1960s. Catholicism in the United States was prosperous, was growing together with the suburbs, was becoming American in its hierarchy, was increasingly assertive intellectually, and was attracting so many young men and women to religious vocations that huge new seminaries and convents were being built across the country. Few noticed that American Catholics were also thereby being carried into the cultural maelstrom of the times.

As much as the Kennedy presidency, Vatican II seemed to symbolise the new-found confidence of American Catholicism. The American Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray spearheaded the passage of the Council's decree on religious freedom. Imagine – the church of the Inquisition recognises the supremacy of the individual conscience before God! The Council advocated strong lay leadership, consultation, and decentralised decision-making by national organisations of bishops. Distinctively American values appeared to be influencing the universal church.

Notably, the Council did not address the sexual revolution. It said nothing about the role of women. It did not acknowledge the existence of homosexuals. Emphatically, it changed nothing in the rule of priestly celibacy. Still, it raised expectations, especially concerning the issue that was existentially most pressing for married American Catholics – artificial birth control. Among these expectations was the promise that the decision on this difficult issue would be reached on the basis of the values inculcated by the council itself. Change was possible because the authority structure of the church appeared to be changing.

Vatican II had explicitly called the church to engage modernity. In moral matters, though, the council offered little to help Americans through an overwhelming flood of change. By the late 1960s, while awaiting a decision that many thought could reasonably go only toward approval of birth control, American Catholics found themselves caught up in a cultural revolution with little moral guidance.

Catholics did not suddenly become sexual adventurers. Yet they were – many of them – sexually confused in a way they had not been before. Some priests and nuns went through a delayed adolescence of sexual experimentation. Some lay Catholics – confused by the news that eating meat on Friday no longer assured a place in hell – began to reassess other items on the code of forbidden behaviours.

In the 1960s, moreover, the most respected Catholic moral theologians had begun to shift from using a language of rules and law to a language of relationship and discernment, especially in sexual matters. They spoke of sex in marriage as serving relational values as well as procreation. At the same time, the most powerful new theological movement within the church, liberation theology, emphasised that Scripture is more concerned with ameliorating social oppression through economic and political systems than with how people arrange themselves sexually.

In hindsight, it is scarcely surprising that American Catholics – now more American than ever in their individualism and consumerism – began to choose teachers and tenets for themselves. Small wonder, also, that priests in the pulpit and in the confessional exhibited considerable variety of opinion on issues like birth control. It was at this moment that American Catholicism began to become, in effect, the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the country, precisely in its loss of a single vision and a single voice. Within the span of a decade, American Catholicism went from a clear and ➤

confident sense of sexual morality to a state of confusion and loss of self-confidence.

Incoherence and Corruption

The decisive moment was Pope Paul VI's 1968 Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Not only did the papal letter reaffirm, on the basis of patently poor logic, the prohibition of all forms of artificial birth control; it was above all an act of papal authoritarianism in the face of a participatory process of discernment the pope himself had supported. Contrary to the Pope's expectations, the Encyclical's linkage of artificial birth control and abortion did not strengthen the moral argument against birth control, but tended instead to weaken the persuasiveness of the church's prophetic stand against abortion.

The subsequent strenuous efforts by John Paul II to shore up *Humanae Vitae* through a 'theology of the body' have only sharpened the perception that, lacking a convincing theological basis, the Magisterium's intractability on this point is really about keeping women in their place and maintaining the aura of papal authority.

The birth-control issue enabled many American Catholics to see and name other forms of inconsistency and corruption in the church that, in the name of loyalty and obedience, had previously been ignored. The church's way of dealing with divorce and remarriage, for example, lacks moral coherence.

The prohibition of divorce is not really absolute. Everyone knows that some Catholics are allowed to divorce and remarry with the approval of the church, so long as they (or their ecclesiastical lawyer) can make a case for annulment even after years of cohabitation or if they are rich or prominent enough. The poor and the legally unrepresented, in contrast, can find themselves in disastrous or abusive marriages without hope of divorce and remarriage.

The moral incoherence is revealed particularly by the exception. If a first marriage was not really 'in the church', then it can be dissolved without consequence. People with serial non-sacramental marriages are still free to marry in the church and enjoy the benefits of full communion. Only if a sacramental marriage fails are faithful Catholics unable to seek another sanctified partnership.

Equally inconsistent and incoherent is the fiction of a totally celibate priesthood. I leave aside the anecdotal evidence that reminds us that theoretical celibacy is not always translated into actual chastity.

What challenges logic is Rome's insistence on a male celibate clergy in the face of the contrary evidence from Scripture and tradition, in the face of the experience of Protestant and Orthodox communions, and while accepting into the Roman priesthood men who are married, but who have converted from the Anglican or Lutheran denominations. Celibacy is a great charism and witness to the resurrection for those so gifted by God. It is not a prerequisite to faithful and holy ministry.

Humanae Vitae did not strengthen the moral argument against birth control, but weakened the church's stand against abortion

The Roman church's willingness to lose an ordained priesthood altogether – and with it the sacramental heart of Catholicism – rather than ordain married men or (horrors!) women may appear noble to some. To more and more American Catholics, it appears suicidal self-delusion. The willingness to ordain older men who are widowers to the priesthood, and married men to the diaconate, looks like a desperate avoidance mechanism, an expression of fear and loathing toward ordinary sexual behaviour and even toward women's bodies altogether.

It is now no longer even permissible for theologians to speak in favour of women's ordination. No wonder the suspicion grows that the obsessive protection of this male privilege owes something to its capacity to provide cover for homosexual men using their priesthood (and perhaps their episcopacy) as an extremely effective closet.

I mean nothing slanderous by this statement. Nor do I join in the ugly scapegoating of homosexual priests for the present abuse scandal. Some influential Catholics suggest that homosexual men are morally incapable of chaste behaviour or of maintaining celibacy. I hold exactly the opposite view. There is every reason to think that many fine and holy priests in the past and the present have been homosexual. My point, rather, is that if homosexuality among the clergy were to be honestly faced by the hierarchy, then other things would have to be addressed honestly as well.

The Magisterium might then need to assess the implication of the behaviour of some of its clergy. The current sexual-abuse scandal is only the latest variation on a theme of clerical sexual duplicity that goes back centuries. The only thing that has changed is the capacity of the clerical culture to sustain the duplicity.

Are such long-standing patterns of behaviour an indication of something more than predictable human weakness? Do they, in fact, point to a deeply distorted understanding of sexuality? Do they, in fact, indict an ecclesiastical practice that virtually guarantees a sexually immature clergy, or at the very least, one that encourages a caste mentality that is removed from and insensitive to the cares and concerns of those who are married and raising children?

Women in the church today

Finally, the all-male Magisterium has not grasped that its profound, deliberate, and systemic sexism compromises the capacity of the

church to speak prophetically about the sexual dangers now posed by the larger society. Everyone knows that most Catholic parishes in this country would close up tomorrow if it weren't for women. I don't mean this in the sense that women have always been more loyal and religious than men, attending Mass while their husbands waited outside smoking cigarettes. I mean this in the very specific sense that women are carrying out most of the work of ministry in many, if not most, parishes.

hope lies in more coherent sexual teaching and reform of structures of authority

The same abuse of power with which the male clergy exploited but never fully honoured the ministerial labours of vowed religious women in parishes, hospitals, and schools is now being perpetuated in the exploitation of single and married women in local parishes. This exploitation takes place even as such women are denied ordination with the argument that only males can really represent Christ!

Not all parishioners in the United States have yet awakened to this pattern of sexism. They worry over the fact that their parish now has one priest though it formerly had three. Yet they know they are better off than parishes that can celebrate the Eucharist only when a priest visits. They are so pleased to see (and to be) women acolytes and lectors and Eucharistic ministers and catechists that they do not yet appreciate how such accommodation simply continues with slight variations the traditional exploitation of women under male leadership.

An increasing number of American Catholic women do see the pattern, and they are angry. They correctly see that the rejection of women lies at the heart of much of the church's twisted and confusing sexual practice. While many of them fervently support the church's opposition to abortion, even they find it increasingly difficult, in the shadow of this pattern, to respond cogently to non-Catholic feminists' charge that the church's objection to abortion is only the most radical form of its demand above all that women be controlled. And if Catholic women finally get angry enough to walk out, the game is close to over.

Reform means change

My argument is that although the words about Catholic sexual morality have stayed the same, the actual content has not. The combination of cultural upheaval, inconsistent teaching and practice, and the corruption and abuse of authority has led to a patently fraudulent situation. The prophetic teaching of the church on sexuality is prophecy compromised.

If my analysis is even partially correct, hope lies not simply in the priesthood's becoming more holy (although that is always essential) but in a more coherent and clearly expressed sexual teaching, and a reform of the church's structures of authority. The two go hand in hand.

A more coherent sexual teaching will be one that maintains the church's firm rejection of *porneia* (sexual immorality) and the taking of innocent life, but it will be able to make distinctions between the essential and accidental. Such distinctions require discernment of God's activity in the world as well as – and even more than – logical argument based on prior opinion. The way toward such discernment is careful attention, not to people whose opinions support an indefensible lifestyle, but to persons within the church whose lives of holiness and witness command respect.

What do the lives and service of holy women teach us about ordaining women? What does the witness of the faithful married tell us about true openness to life within the complexity of an actual sexual relationship? What does the devoted and effective (and holy) ministry of married clergy within and outside Catholicism say to the argument that celibacy is necessary for the priesthood? What does the practice of covenanted and faithful love among persons of the same sex teach us about the moral character of homosexuality?

Such discernment, and such growth in coherent sexual teaching, will not happen if the conversation remains within a closed clerical circle. Here is where the reform of structures must be considered. This is not an argument, as self-proclaimed "orthodox" Catholics often insinuate, for a democratic church. It need not, indeed, mean radical changes in hierarchical structure. Let there be a pope, and bishops, and priests. It does demand participation in that structure by all of the baptised faithful – this means women, too – and it does demand of the hierarchy a genuine appreciation for and response to the experience and witness of ordinary priests and the laity.

Unless the leaders of the church begin a serious examination of conscience with regard to their practice and a serious process of discernment with regard to their teaching, the situation will only deteriorate further. Unless that process of discernment involves women and those who are married, neither the teaching on sex and marriage nor the integrity and credibility of the clergy can hope for much improvement.

At a time when a seriously disordered world most needs a prophetic word concerning humans as sexual creatures before God, the church's ability to speak and embody that prophetic word will be hopelessly compromised. ■

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Wars and run

Cassino Revisited

New Zealand's national military memory tends to focus almost exclusively on one, rather small, tragic campaign in the Eastern Mediterranean – Gallipoli, which for the Anzacs lasted some eight months in 1915. Largely forgotten is the important part played by the New Zealand Division in France and Flanders for the following months and years of the war – it took part in the first use of tanks on the Somme in September 1916, stormed Messines Ridge in June 1917, attacked successfully before Paschendaele in October 1917, and even used ladders to scale the ramparts of the town of Le Quesnoy during its distinguished part in the Hundred Days that led to the armistice in November 1918.

Gallipoli also overshadows the feats of the men and women that took part in the campaigns of the Second World War. The Second New Zealand Division was the principal military formation of the nation, and its history (for most of the war under the command of Bernard Freyberg, VC) brought triumphs, certainly, but also setbacks.

The triumphs came in North Africa, most notably at the Battle of El Alamein in October and November 1942 and the subsequent pursuit of the Africa Korps, in the early days of the invasion of Italy and in the final months of the war, with the Division ending up taking Trieste, in the north-west of the country. The setbacks came earlier in the war, in Greece against the German onslaught that started in March 1941, and then subsequently in the defence of Crete.

The worst moments, perhaps, came on the Gustav Line, in fighting in February and March 1944. This fortified line proved to be both difficult and costly to overcome; it provided the forward defences of Rome and the defenders defied the best effort of numerous British, American, French, Indian and Polish attackers for several months. The most famed part of the line was Monte Cassino, some 1700 feet high, with the ancient Benedictine monastery perched upon its summit. Here Western monasticism had been established almost 1400 years earlier.

The Second World War was the first great conflict to affect civilians on a hugely destructive scale; the bomber ensured that there was no escape for any segment of a nation at war. Many Italian civilians were caught up in the bombing of the town of Cassino in the early stages of the battle; regretfully – and controversially – the allied commanders decided that the monastery also had to be destroyed as it offered perfect positions for the defenders. Not only were the Germans not doing this (a few transgressions were later identified, but of a minor nature); but the monastery ruins offered the heroic and determined defending forces excellent cover and made it practically impossible to attack the monastery. The New Zealand assault of 15 March did make some progress, notably in the town of Cassino, but the Germans held on despite pressure from several Allied divisions; and after the sufferings inflicted on the first failed attempt in February, the Second NZ Division was withdrawn to rest and re-equip.

Cassino is a name that has a great resonance even today, as we recall the 60th anniversary of the battle and the subsequent fall of Rome. We err if we say that war is futile; war is about human failure. Men and women are called to serve their countries to the extent of giving up their young lives. Nations have an obligation to reflect on war and its cost; it has a responsibility to acknowledge a debt to those who served and to their families; it has to appreciate the price of war – and perhaps the price of not waging war; it certainly has the responsibility to remember.

When you go home
Tell them of us and say
For their tomorrow
We gave our today.

(*Inscription on a memorial to the 2nd (British) Division, Kohima War Cemetery, India*)

This brief history of New Zealanders at war was written for *Tui Motu* by the British war historian Nigel Cave IC.

One of five war cemeteries situated in the valley below the Abbey of Montecassino, Italy

nours of wars

Gaza, city of horror

With the Israeli Occupation still brutal, Gaza remains a territory caught up in the grip of fear. There is the daily struggle of living under occupation and the constant fear of attacks. All over Gaza, from Rafah in the south to Gaza City, the Middle East Council of Churches/Near East Council of Churches (MECC-NECC) Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) is active, working in relief and supporting those who most need help.

Many factors contribute to the sense of despair in Gaza. Overcrowding is a tremendous problem: 1.3 million residents live within just 210 square km, making this narrow stretch of land the most densely populated area in the world. Over 50 percent of the population are children of 15 years of age and below. Few of the roads are paved and due to inadequate sewage and garbage disposal, untreated refuse and rotting food line most streets.

"Gaza families are under tremendous tension," says Constantine Dabbagh, Executive Secretary of the Near East Council of Churches. "Unemployment is said to be at a staggering 70 percent for Palestinians in Gaza. More than 80 percent live on or below the poverty line." Dabbagh says that one of Near East Council of Churches main tasks is to empower and strengthen vulnerable and marginalized Palestinians.

The organisation runs several clinics and vocational projects aimed at promoting health and education. The Council employs both Muslims and Christians; most of the employees are Muslims doing a tremendous job. When you step in to the offices of the Near East Council of Churches in Gaza, it is difficult to tell who is Muslim and who is Christian. This is the real dialogue of life, and it reflects a long tradition of good relations between Muslims and Christians in Palestine. The total number of Christian Palestinians in Gaza does not exceed 3,000 but they have always been there, an integral part of Gaza society and communal fabric.

"Our goal," says Constantine, "is to help people become knowledgeable and self-sufficient. It's very important that the young people learn a trade. At least then they'll be able to earn a living later."

Through the noise of the machines, you can hear teachers shouting and young boys making jokes and laughing. "My family encouraged me to learn a trade," says 17-year-old Fadi, "I picked carpentry because I like working with wood." Fadi is realistic about the future. "The school is very good. When I've graduated I can depend on myself. I can go to any workshop and I can do anything they ask me. Even if I don't get a regular job I can get short-term jobs for some weeks or months. This will give my family a much-needed income."

Ali, who is 18 and the oldest son in a family of 9, lives in Bet Hanoun: "My father has been unemployed for the last three years, but I have a part time job after school". Seven days a week he works until 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening earning about $US2 a day which is the family's only income. "After 5:30–6:00 pm, we are not allowed to leave the house. Coming back from school and work I have to sneak in through the backdoor. My brother got a bullet through his stomach, and my friend was shot in both legs, but it's becoming a habit – we don't think of it as dangerous any more."

Over the years, the training centre in Gaza City has trained over a thousand young men. Since the second Intifada, things have changed according to Mr. Dabbagh. "They are trained, but with nothing to go to, as they are not allowed to work in Israel. The psychological and economic effect of the occupation is severe."

Jameel Tulba and his family live in the Gaza Beach Camp. They are living ten people in one room. His family had a house in Jaffa where his father was a fisherman. "In 1948," he says, "we left for what we believed was days or weeks. Now I've been living 56 years in a camp.

"Things were better before the Intifada. Then there was more money among other families. In our culture we have a tradition of sharing. Whoever has something shares it with those who don't have. But now nobody has anything to share. The economic situation has never been as bad as today." ■

April 23, 2004
Arne Jor, *Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees*
Middle East Council of Churches, Central Office, Jerusalem

"Come and join the sinners"

Louis Suffolk has seven children and eight grandchildren. His wife Mary died suddenly in 1999. A year later his parish priest said to him: have you ever thought of becoming a priest?

Louis is at the Beda College, in Rome, where Tui Motu *interviewed him. He is due to be ordained priest in Bristol on 26 June*

Tell us about your journey towards the priesthood

It started with my parents. I was blest with Catholic parents both sides. My father was determined that we should have a good education. I had a wonderful experience of Catholic schooling in the '50s: it was a great time to grow up anyway. The war had finished and its problems had been put behind us.

I didn't know what I was going to do when I left school in 1960. I resisted the idea of becoming a Rosminian, but consented to be an Ascribed member! I worked in London and kept up with a lot of my friends from school. During this time I met Mary. I met her through the parish drama group who were putting on a play called *Bonaventure*, all about a nun – played by Mary. So the first time I saw her, she was in a wimple!

We married in 1965, lived in London until 1976 when we moved back to Bristol with a family of six. One still to come. I was determined they too should have a good education, although with a mob like that, we could not afford Ratcliffe. I worked in Insurance, then as a news agent. I had to work hard to keep a big family, but as they grew up and began to leave home I was feeling a bit burnt out, so we moved further into the city into a smaller house. I went into the car hire business, which allowed me more of a life outside work.

The church was always part of my life. One could say the church sat easily on my shoulders. I never had any trouble with Vatican II. I'm looking forward to the day when it's put into action! I was now able to take more interest in the parish, helping with Confirmation and as a catechist for RCIA. I had always read quite a bit, and Mary supported me fully in whatever I chose to do, because she had similar interests.

We invested what money we had in our children, so we never had a 'flash' home or went on expensive holidays. We couldn't afford to. The children explored the world – but we never did. We couldn't even save for retirement, but it never worried us.

I remember, whenever Mary said: "I'm pregnant again", my first reaction was to say: "Oh God...!" But then we accepted it straight away. People used to say to her: "You ought to get him seen to!" But we worked together, we were healthy, and we were happy. Our children were unplanned. They just arrived!

What about your experience of parish?

The parish we moved to in Bristol was St Nicholas of Tolentino, and that was where we met the neo-Catechumenate. We arrived there in 1987, this movement had been in the parish since 1980. I had never heard of them before, but immediately we sensed something odd about the parish. To start with, because we arrived with a swag of children some people assumed we were another of these 'catechumenal' families – and they avoided us.

I discovered there was a lot of bitterness; it was a divided parish. I felt a 'sense of the sinister'. Some had already written to the Bishop and asked him if he would sort the situation out. The priest was himself a member of the neo-Catechumenate, and the Bishop and he were great friends – so the Bishop did nothing.

They had become dominant in the parish. They had set up three or four communities, each having 20 or so members. Each community was led by a leader, known as a 'responsible'. The parish priest belonged, but he was not a 'responsible'. So the power of leadership in the parish had been tranferred from the parish priest to the 'responsible' in his community.

Our parish priest was a good and holy man. He was one of those people who was searching for a more perfect way, and he thought he had found it in the neo-Catechumenate. They call themselves *The Way*. It was the one way to Christ. It is a catechetical process, founded by a Spanish artist called Kiko Arguela. They often attract people with problems:

marriage problems, psychological or sexual problems etc. They say: 'give us your problem. We will look after you. Come and join us'. During their catechesis in the parish – and I attended two – you are not allowed to ask questions. The course lasts about six weeks. It ends with a penitential service. The challenge was: *are you for Christ or against Christ?* And the implication is: if you reject the neo-Catechumenal way, you are rejecting Christ. There is a lot of moral pressure, and this is very hard for people with problems, like recovering alcoholics. It is so demanding on people it will destroy families, especially when one partner joins and the other doesn't.

Neo-Catechumens often tend to have plenty of money. They are people with clout, and they use it as a weapon. 'If you don't go along with us, we will withdraw our financial support'. Yet they are not all well-to-do. When the community meets they pass round the hat, and the wealthy ones will make up for the less so. I call them 'the poor man's Opus Dei'. Like Opus Dei they are exclusive. It's a secret 'church'. The groups met in secret. You had to become a member before you could attend one of their meetings or Eucharists. They said: "If you want to know about us, join us."

Eventually it became so obnoxious to me, I thought of leaving that parish altogether. Then, in 1990, I went to an RCIA conference, and discovered that the neo-Catechumenate were starting in other parts of the diocese too. I met an American there, and he had come across the same problem in the States. He realised that groupings like this in a parish become exclusive. If you join such a group, in the end they take over your life.

We formed a diocesan group, with the Vicar General as our father-figure. We felt we had to counter the insidious effects of this movement. We wrote letters, but we made sure that everyone knew what we were saying. It was all out in the open.

Meanwhile our parish had become totally divided. Mass attendance fell to barely 100, of whom 60 were neo-Catechumens. All unity had been destroyed. We were not allowed to run the RCIA in the parish; it had to be the neo-Catechumenal version. The Bishop tried to pacify the situation. There was an inquiry, properly set up by the canon lawyers. It took a year. The result was the activities of the neo-Catechumenate in the diocese were suspended. In fact they continued to meet, but outside the diocese.

In my life I have always been happy to contribute to the parish, like playing the organ or helping with catechesis, but I avoid parish politics like a minefield. So I did not enjoy this battle one little bit. What really got to me was seeing a really good Christian community being destroyed. If that happens, then there is something fundamentally wrong and it has to be stopped. I was helped through this by a Rosminian priest friend and by Peter Smith, who is now Archbishop of Cardiff. But we received no support from the parish priests generally: they did not want to be involved. They supported us, but would not act.

Tell us about Mary's death and your new vocation

In 1999 Mary developed angina, and within seven months she was dead, at only 59. I think I had prepared for her death. Boarding school had prepared me for breaks with people you love. The children have been a wonderful support to me.

We knew the parish priest well. One night I was playing the piano for St Patrick's night concert in the parish. The PP came over, and asked me how I was. It was a year since Mary had died. I said I was okay. He said: "There must be 20 years in you still." I said: "I jolly well hope so: I've still got a mortgage to pay off!"

"Have you ever thought of becoming a priest?" I was shattered by that question, and I heard myself saying: "Yes, all the time". So he said: "You'd better do something about it then."

I thought: "Oh shit!" That was Friday. On Sunday I played the organ at all the Masses, and the PP came up and said: "Have you written away yet?" So I wrote. An application form came, and they wanted to know everything about me. At this stage I told nobody else. If they had rejected me, it would have remained a secret to this day.

A few weeks later I spoke to the priest vocations person. I went along spoiling for a fight. But he was as nice as pie. And he said: "By the way I was in Rome last week, and I booked you in!"

This was the first I knew where I was to go. I received a welcoming letter from from the rector of the Beda, Fr Rod Strange. So it was official. Then the PP asked me: "Have you told the kids?"

Every Sunday the family who lived locally came to us for Mass and lunch, so this Sunday I said to them: "By the way I've got a new job." "Fine," they said; "where is it?" I said, "Rome". "Something to do with the church?', one of them asked. "Are you going to become a priest?" "Yes." "Oh!"

So I told the PP that the kids had been informed – and they couldn't care less! I'll tell you, it is a damn sight easier than bringing a new woman into the family! It was no problem; it was fine by them.

And now I've been at the Beda for three years, and have absolutely no regrets. Perhaps I don't take it seriously enough!

What sort of a church do you hope to be a priest in?

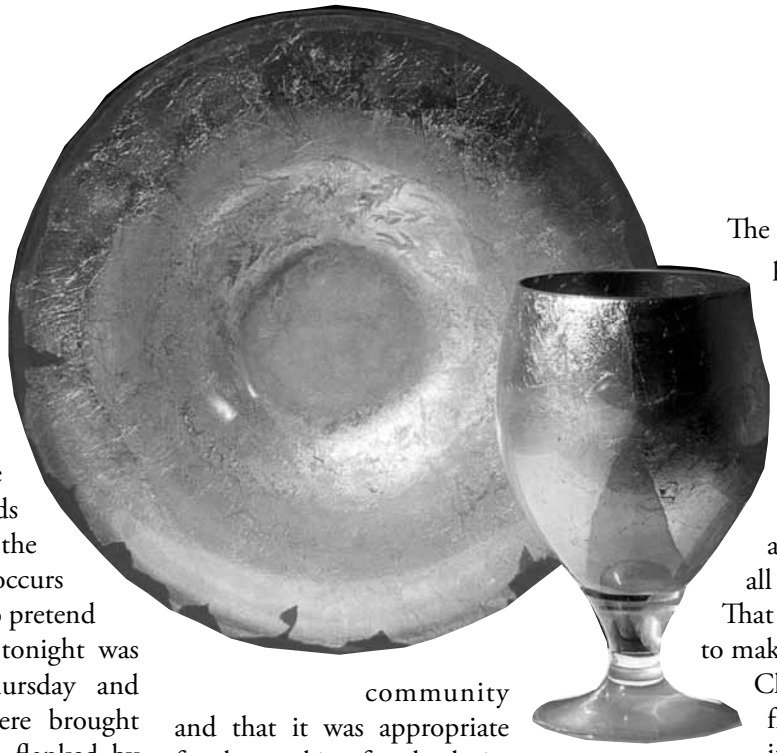
A human church. People who are a complete mix, who tell the truth, who are not hiding from their problems. There comes a time in church when you have to be honest. I think you see a lot of honest faces in church.

Yet most people have tremendous problems in their lives and never tell anyone. It would be good to say that there's an opportunity within the church to share some of those problems. If you are honest, it will happen. And that is when parish community develops.

The parish is a place where people can give something. For some it's money. Some give their personal gifts. You may be an accountant or a doctor, a builder or an electrician. You can all do something. What you can offer is time rather than money. There are lots of people who are screaming to belong to a community, but for one reason or another – a broken marriage or separation – they feel guilty and excluded from the church. And they're *not* excluded! Parish is about knocking down the barriers. We have to say: there are greater sinners inside the church than outside. Come and join the sinners! ■

Actions which speak louder than words and convey a false message

Jo Ayers



I have just been to yet another Mass where just before the distribution of communion one of the communion ministers brings a ciborium laden with hosts from the tabernacle and proceeds to distribute these to the congregation. When this occurs at Mass mostly I just try to pretend it is not happening but tonight was the Mass for Holy Thursday and the consecrated hosts were brought from a central tabernacle flanked by candelabra and flowers. While it all looked beautiful the messages that it gives are quite wrong.

Quite wrong and theologically speaking downright dangerous. It is dangerous because in religious ritual – in any ritual in fact – actions speak much larger and louder than any words. It is dangerous because in the Catholic Church at the present time we have lost touch with this very basic and important truth about ritual celebrations. Our approach to our ritual has become so dominated by words that we have forgotten the power of actions. We think that we learn our theology from the words but in fact we learn most of it from our actions.

Catholic folklore is full of liturgical stories that bear this out. There is the story of the religious educator who spent weeks running a parish programme about Rite Two of Reconciliation. She had geared everyone up to appreciate that this form emphasizes the community and that it was appropriate for those asking for absolution just to nominate one area in their lives where they realized that their failure showed that they needed God's loving support. On the night, in order to show by example, she approached 'the chair of mercy' first and nominated her area of need. A single admonishing finger from the P.P, who thought that she should confess more, undid weeks of work. On- lookers were quick to recognise that 'confession' was still in and things had not changed. Only the brave followed her example.

So what is the message about bringing consecrated hosts from the tabernacle? Many people have told me it is like being invited to a meal only to find that the host has not provided enough so that some of the guests are served with leftovers from a previous meal. We all get fed but there is a distinct feeling that not enough care and preparation took place beforehand. It's all the real presence of Jesus though isn't it? So why is that a problem?

The problem is that many people have taken the renewal of sacramental theology seriously. They come to Mass, as I do, believing that their presence there and their faith and the faith of the others gathered with them are significant. That we are all needed for this celebration. That we all have a contribution to make. That the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the fruit of all our faith. We are intimately involved in this Eucharist, now. We want to take seriously the message of the readings and face up to the challenge that we hear there. We want to pray together and together recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

We want to be the body of Christ and we want to recognize that by receiving communion.

To be given Eucharistic bread from some other celebration cuts us to the quick. It says very plainly that your contribution here is not really necessary.

It also says that the presence of Christ in the reserved sacrament is more significant than that which is used at this current Mass. It also says that in spite of years of renewal the priest is the sole gatekeeper of Eucharist. It's what he does that matters. We the laity have only a secondary role. Our presence is not really required.

I know that that is not true. Most Catholics also know that is not true.

The practice is not only exclusive and hurtful it also perpetuates a dangerous imbalance in our Eucharistic tradition. We are getting our two quite distinct traditions about Eucharist confused. One tradition is that Christ is present in the reserved sacrament. The other is that Christ is present actively, dynamically and challengingly in the celebration of the Eucharist. In one tradition the sacrament is reserved – kept in a dignified manner – to be taken to those who are unable to join the community for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Also in very early times – when there was no daily Mass Christians would gather mid-week in their homes to read the scriptures and receive some of the sacrament from their Sunday Mass.

In later years there developed the practice of prayer in the presence of the reserved sacrament. It is a tradition that was encouraged by the church and enthusiastically followed by its members. Out of this practice grew other 'devotions' to the Eucharist. Most familiar to New Zealand Catholics are processions, exposition and benediction and being encouraged to 'make a visit'.

This tradition has it origins and its popular support from a time when lay people were virtually excluded from regular reception of the Eucharist. We were excluded by poor theology that taught that we might not be worthy. We were excluded by the fact that the liturgy had become the preserve of the clergy. Only the clergy could approach the altar, only the clergy knew the language of the Eucharist. Our exclusion was reinforced by symbols that spoke of magic rather than meals. The drinking of the cup was removed completely and the bread had become the little sliver of flour and water.

We were additionally excluded by fasting regulations that made receiving communion only achievable once in a while for ordinary working people. Receiving communion was not something Catholics got into, so much so that the Church had to legislate to try and rectify this by insisting that we receive communion once a year at least.

In this context Catholics, with a true instinct about the centre of our faith, tried to keep in contact with the Eucharist. They did it by developing the cult of the Eucharist that I have described above. For many Catholics the centre of their spirituality was Jesus in the tabernacle.

For generations down to our own time the priest could not guess by looking at the numbers in the church how many would be likely to go to communion. The restrictions listed above meant that often Catholics would be at Mass but not be 'going to the rails' as our Irish relatives used to say. Best practice then was to have large amounts of consecrated hosts in the tabernacle so that any number of communicants could be accommodated. Also communion then was often distributed before and after Mass so that all who wanted could be accommodated. The emphasis was on individual piety and reception of the Eucharist, not on the Mass.

All very curious perhaps to us who have, thanks to the Second Vatican Council, been part of the rescuing of our second tradition of the Eucharist. That is the Eucharist celebrated around the altar. The Mass.

In the last forty years we have very successfully regained the real sense of what the celebration of the Mass is about. Much of this is due to the reassertion of the Mass as a meal. We see the connection with Jesus and his ministry where he used meals as an opportunity for teaching and for conversion. Sharing a meal with Jesus changed the participants. Often, being included in a meal allowed the participants to see the failure in their own lives and/or the suffering they had to address in the lives of others. These meals changed relationships and changed communities. We understand meals because they happen everyday in our homes. We know how a good meal can create community. So we really understand Eucharist as meal where the whole gathering participates. Just look what happens at communion. Row after row empties as people come to communion. It is now unusual for some one to come Mass and not to receive communion.

Lay people now really believe and experience that they are essential to the celebration of the Eucharist because, like a meal it is an inclusive event and depends on everyone taking part.

We also know quite clearly what makes an unsuccessful meal. One where the guests get the distinct feeling that they are some sort of imposition. Where it seems that the preparation was just too difficult. And if this was the only result of ➢

Church documents as far back as the 18th century with Benedict the XIV have recommended that the people receive the particles which have been consecrated at the same Mass.
(See: Pius XII in Mediator Dei No.118 *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 1963*)

INSTRUCTION ON EUCHARISTIC WORSHIP (Sacred Congregation of Rites 1967)
III. The Communion of the Faithful

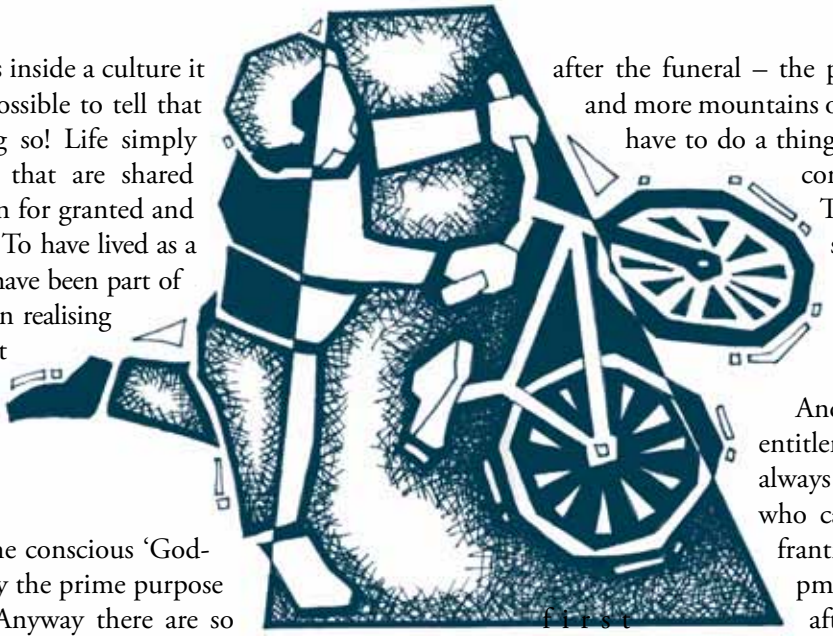
31. The Communion of the Faithful during Mass

Through sacramental Communion the faithful take part more perfectly in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is strongly recommended that they should normally receive it during the Mass and at that point of the celebration which is prescribed by the rite. namely immediately after the Communion of the celebrant.

In order that, even through signs, the Communion may be seen more clearly to be participation in the sacrifice which is being celebrated, care should be taken to enable the faithful to communicate with hosts consecrated during that Mass.

Dancing with gratitude

Trish McBride



When one lives inside a culture it is often impossible to tell that one is doing so! Life simply has norms and givens that are shared with those around, taken for granted and believed to be 'normal'. To have lived as a Catholic Christian is to have been part of a culture, and I have been realising recently how an almost life-time in this culture has made distinctive contributions to my life.

I'm not talking about the conscious 'God-seeking' that is obviously the prime purpose of the whole exercise. Anyway there are so many ways of doing this as a Christian and a Catholic, that those with whom my journey has significant common ground may not be a large proportion of the whole. But there are three significant 'subliminal' areas which I have recently become very aware of that are universally shared: community, the liturgical cycle, and the use of symbolism and metaphor. I recognise God-at-work in our lives through these experiences as well. And I'm more deeply aware now of the good things that have come my way.

There's the basic parish community ethos: if there's a birth, go; if there's an illness, go; if there's been a death, go; if there's a celebration, go! There was the parish roster to take me to hospital daily to visit my premature baby when we had no car. When my husband died suddenly, people came, came in staggering numbers. I didn't know we knew so many! They came with gifts of food and tactfully-offered money. The parish women took over the afternoon tea at my home after the funeral – the parish urn and crockery and more mountains of food appeared. I didn't have to do a thing – it was all quietly and compassionately 'seen to'. The next week a friend sent her husband up with their motor-mower to do the by-then shaggy lawns.

And some sense of entitlement to ask for help: I'll always bless the parish friend who came in response to my frantic phone call at 11.30 pm on Christmas Eve, the first after my husband had died. I'd bought the six year-old a second-hand bike which was in great condition, but when it was brought out from its hiding place under the house one tyre was flat! It wouldn't have been a happy way to get it, even with tales of puncture-by reindeer-antlers! It was duly mended, received with Christmas morning excitement, and subsequently maintained for a few years by the same man. All this kindness, amazing at the time, and still a huge memory! I learned that it can often be more blessed to receive than to give; and that it is rarely possible to repay kindness, but it is possible to 'pass it on'. And, yes, I have at times been involved with others in their times of need. And the ties from those years are still strong.

Then there is the annual liturgical cycle – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Ordinary time, and then Advent again. I hadn't realised how deeply this had become part of my psyche until I worshipped in a setting where this Holy

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➢ distributing reserved sacrament at Mass then maybe we could turn a blind eye. But the little journey to the tabernacle to get the ciborium shouts much more significant messages and they are, 'Eucharist is the possession of the clergy' and 'reserved sacrament is somehow more significant than the Eucharist of the Mass we celebrate together.'

It means that in this church the 'real presence' of Jesus is most perfectly to be found in the tabernacle and not on the altar in the faithful people who gather around it.

It seems to me that the solution is as simple as the effects will be profound.

Could we just count how many people are there? And can we have the hosts already packaged in dozens or whatever so that the correct number can be easily put on the altar. And if there are too many surely that will be obvious before the end of communion. Nobody would mind being given two or even three hosts instead of one. In fact explaining that this could happen to you would be the occasion of wonderful catechesis on the Eucharist. So if you are a communion minister or a sacristan or a clergyman could you please provide this opportunity for your community! ■

Spiral is not observed. And in the background beyond formal liturgy is its connection to the earth's cycle. It is much easier to connect with the original meanings in the Northern hemisphere, as Christmas was the Light coming into the darkest time, and Easter truly coincides with the new life of Spring. In Aotearoa New Zealand we have to use our imaginations and adapt: our Christmas is a celebration of the presence of warmth and the Son/Sun. Our Easter is a time of planting and promise of new life sprouting in the tomb-darkness of the approaching winter. And Pentecost is our fire festival of new hope and courage in the darkness of the year. And so we participate in rituals in some respects not so very different from those of the countless generations who celebrated their wonder and hope in the millennia before the Christian era.

And amongst that cycle we remember the anniversaries of deaths and births and weddings; and feast-days celebrate year by year those whose memories are cherished in the universal community, and in more local areas. None of this is news – but, perhaps along with many, I had taken it all for granted. Now I see it as a precious gift which has year by year harmonised my being with the earth and the community, as well as with the cycle of the Christ-story.

Recently I recognised another jewel of a gift from this Catholic Christian culture when someone commented on my facility with symbol and metaphor. Surprised, I wondered where this could have come from. It didn't take long to realise that this too comes from the same source: the community of faith has metaphor and symbol as primary tools of communication. These are simply the shared language in which we express beliefs and truths and understandings. We speak of the journey of faith, of deserts, of exodus, of crucifixions and resurrections. The Gospels no less than the Hebrew Scriptures are a veritable compendium of metaphors – Jesus is Living Bread, Living Water, Living Word, the Way, the Truth, the Life. So many words bring their stories with them: we all know the significance of rainbows, of guiding stars, of Job's comforters, and the images of the 23rd Psalm.

How enriched our language, our common understandings, our lives are with all these images! Being taught to think and pray and describe life in these ways has been a fabulous gift and one which I am just beginning to really appreciate. It had not occurred to me that not everyone has access to all this treasure! Yet with Aquinas we eventually recognise that all God-language is metaphor – no words can contain the Mystery! In St Paul's famous metaphor, we see through a glass darkly. With this recognition comes a new freedom in the naming of the Divine, and the ultimate need for simple silence.

So I am dancing with gratitude that these three wonderful strands of life have been woven into the fabric of my being. I can't imagine who or how I would be without them! To my Catholic ancestors, to the parish of Northland, Wellington, which was my home, my community and language nest for 30 years, to teachers, retreat facilitators and spiritual directors, to my companions-in-faith – for these three precious gifts, thank you and thank you and thank you! ■

God, I vote
Out!
Out into this hunting wind
amongst dervish dancing trees
whose delirious sound
sings that here, they have seen
Him –
For all that is living, as
sun, moon and star,
brilliant resounds with
His own profound
laughter –
So too here we
ultimately must
by Him be found

Beatrice Hoffmann

Floating between two tides

Joy Cowley

It is sometimes said that we as Church, focus too much on sin. Do we? Or could it simply be that our view is limited? Do we get caught in the circle of sin and forgiveness, instead of moving in a spiral of growth? Because growth is the fulfilment of repentance, the mystery of Grace so profound that we accept it with awe and deep gratitude. Indeed, we realize that if we were without sin, we would have no room for growth. Jesus chooses us as we are. He keeps company with us, sits at table with us. He makes it clear that the Pharisees, caught up with concepts of their own holiness, have no room for Him.

So why do we keep missing this bit of good news? Where do our preoccupations with guilt, come from?

Some of the old severe teachings don't help. As a teenager, I listened with bewilderment. Someone else (Satan) tempted me to sin, and someone else (Jesus) died so my sins would be forgiven. I felt a bit like a jellyfish floating between two tides. Where was my responsibility in all this?

I was much older when I realised that the two tides were not out there but within me. One part of me had the voice that shouted, "Me first! Me first!" while the other murmured gently, "Love the Lord your God with all your mind, and all your heart and all your soul, and love your neighbour as yourself." The gentle voice also reminded me, that the tensions between sin and the desire to love God and neighbour, were two sides of one coin, opposite and yet working together, and that I couldn't separate them if I wanted to. They are part of the human condition.

Life is a birthing struggle. It's meant to be hard work. But the struggle is also glorious, exhilarating, and cocooned in God's love. Always, the growing point lies not in our strength, but our weakness, that shadowy area where we imagine that we meet failure. But this is the place where we meet Christ. This is where Grace overwhelms us and takes us to a new stage of understanding.

For those of us who have grown up with the old severe teachings, it is often useful to find new words and definitions. Guilt? That word can go out on its own rubbish heap. It serves no useful purpose. Sin? We could substitute the word 'error'. It was a mistake, a bad choice, it hurt someone else and it hurt me. If I call it 'sin' the old tapes will suggest that I reject it, but when I name it 'error' I am ready to accept responsibility for it and learn from it. Three questions come to me: how can I put this right? What skills can I employ to prevent it from happening again? What have I learned from this?

Putting it right involves a two way forgiveness: the other person and myself. Shakespearian breast-beating belongs on the rubbish heap with guilt; it doesn't help me to move forward. I can be reasonably good-humoured about the error. "Oops! You silly old thing!" But that doesn't diminish my responsibility to patch up the damage to myself and others.

How can we prevent it from happening again? Of course, there is a package of errors that will keep occurring because they are integrated into our personalities. We all have strengths which are attached to weakness. The person with the gift of discernment is likely to be judgmental. The natural leader can become controlling. The generous person can be wasteful of resources. A person with high energy and instant reflexes is also likely to have a quick temper.

When "Oops!" moments occur, part of the putting right is to concentrate on the strength, using it for the greater good.

What do we learn from it? A deeper understanding of ourselves and others. A knowledge of the way good and evil work together for ultimate goodness in God. Compassion for those who find it hard to forgive. Above all, gratitude for the ongoing miracle that can turn weakness into strength.

So, does the Church spend too much time on sin? No, perhaps not enough. We need to get past the superficial view that is attached to our notions of comfort, and see a bigger picture of the soul's struggle for growth. It is a law of nature that there can be no growth without tension, no birth without labour. But what makes this struggle so glorious, is that we are never alone in it. God-is-with-us. Always. ■

Reflecting on Luke

Susan Smith

Luke 10 ends with the story of Martha, who welcomes Jesus into her home, and Mary, her sister, whom Luke commends because, unlike Martha who busies herself with tasks associated with offering hospitality, Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him.

When I was a novice, a plastic-covered prayer exhorted us as we washed the pots and pans associated with preparing food for over a hundred people, to have, 'a Mary mind' and 'Martha hands'. This was to remind us that while we toiled over food preparation and dishes, we should be like Mary listening to the Lord. This is not as easy as it sounds!

This story has been interpreted in different ways. For example, Origen, a Father of the early church, understood Martha and Mary as symbols for the active and contemplative life, while two centuries later, Augustine held that it was about the toils of this world (Martha) and the bliss of the world to come (Mary). Ten centuries or so later, Luther thought that Martha with her desire to work represented the Catholic (and wrong) position of salvation through good works, while Mary's belief that faith in God alone was enough (the right position), represented that of the Reformers. A favourite Catholic interpretation was that women were given the choice of two lifestyles in the church: the active life whereby they looked after men as wives and mothers (Martha); or the contemplative life represented by those who served God alone as "nuns" (Mary).

It is unfortunate that Luke offers two contrasting descriptions of women disciples, and it is obvious that Martha's work-oriented approach is wrong. There are two ways whereby this story can be reinterpreted for women. First, in Luke 10, Jesus is instructing his disciples, women and men, about discipleship. In vv. 1-11, the disciples learn that they should not be preoccupied about possessions, they should heal people, and should proclaim the Reign of God. In 10:25-37, the story of the Good Samaritan, we learn about love in action, and in vv. 38-42, the story of Martha and Mary, we learn of our need to listen to the Lord. We have important characteristics of discipleship: detachment from goods, preaching, serving and listening.

Second, it can be interpreted in ways that are helpful for women specifically. Jesus' words make it clear that women can be affirmed and praised when their lives are not wholly given over to domestic activities. Busy mothers need time out for retreats – spiritual and physical – away from the family. When did your mother or wife last have real time out? ■

All the kids are reading it

Susan Smith

Recently I finished reading *Desecration: Antichrist Takes the Throne,* the ninth fictional work of American Christian fundamentalists, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. They are co-authors of the *Left Behind* series of novels about the end time, of which 60 million copies have been sold at the last count. Two young theology students assured me that I should read them as "all the kids are reading that kind of stuff."

My difficulty in reading *Desecration,* best selling American novel in 2001, was not caused by the authors' style but their appeal to fear and hatred that could be used to unite people around a right wing, fundamentalist, political agenda. LaHaye's followers could be fittingly described as the 'prayer wing of George Bush's Republican Party'. LaHaye, aided by Jerry B. Jenkins, decided that the most effective way to propagate their apocalyptic message of doom and judgement was to write the *Left Behind* series.

Seventy-seven-year-old LaHaye studied as a young man at Bob Jones University. He first came into national prominence when he joined a fellow American fundamentalist, Gerry Falwell in starting the Moral Majority. His rise to power was compounded in the 1980s by his brief flirtation with another strange religious leader, the Korean millionaire, Sun Myung Moon whose Unification Church, commonly known as the 'Moonies', was viewed with concern by most Christians. LaHaye supposedly received large sums of money from the Rev. Moon, and this led to his temporary absence from the national scene.

He rose to new life after a 1994 experience. When travelling by plane in the States, he observed a married pilot flirting with one of the stewardesses. This behaviour led him to ponder on the fate of the pilot and the stewardess supposing the '*Rapture*' were to happen then.

Talk about 'Rapture' and 'Tribulation' is not part of your average Catholic's conversation, and derives from *1 Thess 4:16-17.* LaHaye and his followers believe that God will suddenly take up into heaven all believers of Jesus – this is the 'Rapture' – while the unbelievers among whom are numbered Muslims, liberal Christians, Catholics, Jews and billions of others, remain stranded on earth.

God then visits 'Tribulation' on such people who are afflicted with devastating plagues, beside which the plagues of Egypt pale into insignificance. Fortunately, a new community of believers, the Tribulation force, emerges to wage war against Satan and his minions. LaHaye argues: "God intends that the terrible plagues and judgements of the Tribulation might cause the people of the world to repent and to turn to him."

In *Desecration,* the good guys, also known as the Tribulation force, are ranged against the bad guys, the Global community led by the Antichrist, Nicolae Ceausescu, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, who is assisted by the Most High Reverend Leon Fortunato and Supreme Commander Walter Moon. The names indicate LaHaye's position regarding Communism, as the name, Nicolae Carpathia, directs attention to Nicolai Ceaseceau, dictator of Romania (1965-1989); while Moon is surely a reference to former friend, the Rev. Moon. Fortunately the Tribulation forces overcome all.

The *Left Behind* series is concerning in several ways:

• An extraordinary number of people are buying and reading such books. They are taking on the status of inspired word, and tapping into the fear that many people have about the future. It is a worrying notion that the *Book of Revelation* is replete with coded references to Saddam Hussein and Afghanistan and justifies wars against them.

• Most biblical scholars would argue that LaHaye's eschatology is one that is flawed by doom, fatalism and escape from this world. Renowned New Testament scholar Tom Wright comments: "Paul's mixed metaphors of trumpets blowing and the living being snatched into heaven to meet the Lord are not to be understood as the literal truth, as the *Left Behind* series suggests, but as a vivid and Biblically allusive description of the great transformation of the present world of which he speaks elsewhere" (*Bible Review*, August 2001). LaHaye's flawed theology, and its commitment to escapism means that there is no point in Christians working for social justice and social change.

• LaHaye's religious belief seems to be grounded in fear and hate, rather than in hope and love. It is about exclusion, and indeed most of us are excluded. For example, those who believe in a literal 'Rapture' understand that believers will be taken up into heaven, leaving cars to crash on the road, and children arriving home from school to find that their parents have been snatched up by Jesus while they have been 'left behind'. This possible scenario is developed in another novel *Home Alone*.

• LaHaye's real agenda is covertly political. In 1999 (and here I am indebted to an American ejournal, *Rolling Stone* (www.rollingstone.com/features/nationalaffairs/features) he argued that Saddam Hussein could be the forerunner of the Antichrist. LaHaye has had privileged access

Spirituality and Rites of Passage

The Spirituality Revoluition
David Tacey
Harper Collins 2003, 228pp
Price: $34.95
Review: Michael Hill

In the May issue of *Tui Motu* the leading article by Fr John Broadbent took as its springboard David Tacey's recent book which explores the hunger for an authentic spirituality among young adults. Tacey, a Catholic layman, teaches literature at La Trobe University, Melbourne. In 1999 he received the University's blessing to launch a new course for First Year BA students entitled "Spirituality and Rites of Passage". It attracted 70 students in the first year, 90 in the second and 120 in the third.

A few of those who came were already involved in what is sometimes disparagingly termed New Age pursuits. Some were firmly wedded to fundamentalist convictions. These tended to become contentious and critical of what he was doing, and often pulled out of the course early. The majority, typically, were of no religious background or had abandoned practising the faith they were brought up in; often they were confused, usually they were critical of the inadequacy of contemporary secularism to answer their questions, always they were searching for something to give meaning to their lives.

Possibly the most interesting and valuable part of Tacey's book is where he describes this audience and quotes, sometimes at length, from their essays. Tacey is a disciple of Jung and cites Jung's dscription of the midlife crisis where the adult, having achieved many of his or her life's practical goals, becomes dissatisfied and changes direction. For Jung, the task of the second half of life is the inner journey, the voyage of the spirit. But Tacey speaks instead of the 'quarter-life crisis'. In Jung's day Western society had not advanced as far down the path of social and religious fragmentation. Today's young adult may already be thoroughly disillusioned with secular values and is already ripe to embark on the inward journey.

Although I found this, in parts, a somewhat rambling book, it is full of profound insights and his main thesis is compelling. Here are a few gems:
"The young (today) seek an 'engaged spirituality'. They are turning their back on the greed and egotism of modern life to be concerned with the welfare of the world and the sacredness of endangered nature." (p66)

"For St Paul and the early Christians 'spirit' was a term of protest... 'spirituality' is a return to the radical, original and primitive uses of the word 'spirit' in the early Christian church." (p88)

"Secularism is a mask or pose which hides our longing for the sacred." (p122)

"In order to see spirit at work, we have to see through the literal and the concrete to the unseen forces that rest at the heart of creation... these express themselves through image, symbol and myth..." (p211)

This book offers an invaluable resource to religious educators, especially University chaplains and anyone who is ministering to this age group. But it also struck me that bishops, moderators asnd educationalists would do well to read it. In the spirit of the parable of the lost sheep, it might prompt them to revise where financial and human resources need to be focussed. David Tacey would surely be a good person to invite over the Tasman and hear firsthand.

In view of the relentless decline which most or all churches are experiencing, *The Spirituality Revolution* is also recommended reading for clergy and parents, indeed for anyone who is concerned for the future spiritual health of our society. It is a book to return to, and one of its virtues is that it includes a rich and varied bibliography. I recommend it ■

to the White House and played a key role in ensuring that George W. Bush was elected in late 1999, after he had met personally with Bush. He also receives extraordinary financial support from wealthy conservative American businessmen.

LaHaye is gloomy about Earth's future, and believes that ours could be the last generation since "Jesus founded his church 2000 years ago." However, he finds hope in the fact that the United States has a Republican president, a Republican dominated congress – both opposed to the United Nations, an Israel that seems bent on destroying Palestinian Muslims, some 144,000 Jews who have accepted Jesus, and right wing militia groups who resist all attempts at gun control. His co-author Jerry B. Jenkins comments: "every Christian ought to be happy that we have someone in the White House who says he believes what we believe." ■

The pursuit of human perfection

Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness
A Report of the President's Council on Bioethics
Dana Press 2003
Review: Anna Holmes

This book is edited by Leon Kass, Chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, but has contributions from many other people. It looks at current wishes to pursue happiness and excellence in the USA. It makes a clear distinction between therapy for illness and enhancement to improve on the natural state of a person. It looks at dreams of perfection and happiness and the human aspirations that drive these.

Three members of this committee left around the time this book was published. One, Elizabeth Blackburn, publicly accused the committee of distortion of facts in a report on Bioethics and Political Distortion of Biomedical Science in the New England Journal Of Medicine.

The first section considers better children. It looks at pre-natal diagnosis, genetic engineering of desirable traits and the selection of embryos with desired traits, including sex. It considers the equality, safety and consequences of such action. It then considers the use of drugs to improve behaviour and intellectual performance. It considers the pressure on parents to enable their children to do well. It reflects on social control and moral education and the medicalisation of life. It finishes with a reflection on the meaning of childhood.

The next section looks at superior performance in athletes by using enhancing agents like steroids and hormones. It goes on to consider genetic enhancement. It considers the meaning of competition and the disgnity of human activity.

Ageless bodies is a section dealing with genetic and other ways of reducing ageing and perhaps enabling longer life spans. It considers the impact of this on society and on the individual. It looks at the meaning of the life cycle and attitudes to mortality.

The final section, Happy Souls, looks at human happiness and the use of mood enhancers, memory enhancers and antidepressants. It considers the effect reducing normal sadness to a medical condition. The final section of this book looks at freedom and coercion, respect for give and human dignity.

This is an interesting book that raises a number of very important questions about biotechnology and humanity. "The concerns we raise here emerge from a sense that tremendous new powers to serve certain familiar and well intentioned desires may blind us to the wider meaning of our ideals, and may narrow our sense of what it is to live, to be free, and to seek happiness." ■

Testament to Raymond Brown

Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the Gospel of John, edited by Francis J. Moloney.
New York: Doubleday, 2003.
(NZ $54.95)
Review: Damian Wynn-Williams

Raymond Brown's two volume commentary on the *Gospel of John* (1966, 1970) is considered by many to be one of the truly great 20th century commentaries on the Fourth Gospel. Brown, who died in 1998, was an American priest renowned internationally for his impeccable scholarship and theological orthodoxy. He was named a member of the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* (1972-78) by Pope Paul VI and again by Pope John Paul II in 1966 until his death.

The Johannine literature remained a passion for Brown throughout his life and upon his retirement from teaching in 1990, he set himself the task of revising his original commentary in the light of the developments in biblical criticism in the intervening years. Unfortunately by the time of his death only its *Introduction* had been reworked with any completeness. Now thanks to the careful editing of Frank Moloney, a noted Johannine scholar in his own right, Brown's revised *Introduction* has been published posthumously as a full-length book (356 pp). It might be noted that in his 'retirement', Brown also produced two other major works: *The Death of the Messiah* [1608 pp.,1994] and *An Introduction to the New Testament* [879 pp.,1997].

The issues treated in this revised *Introduction* and the order in which they are considered are much the same as in the original work (e.g. composition of the Gospel, relationship with the other gospels, background influences, authorship...). The material however is substantially reworked and there are several significant additions, such as sections dealing with Christology and the Son of Man. Perhaps of particular relevance today is the expanded discussion of the portrayal of ***the Jews*** in John – is the Gospel anti-Jewish? Distinguishing between the historical situation in Jesus' lifetime and that confronting the Johannine community decades later, Brown concludes that the expression 'the Jews' must be understood in terms of their role within the narrative rather than simply their historical identity. To replace 'the Jews' with such expressions as 'the Jewish authorities' or 'the Jewish crowd' (as does the NRSV Lectionary) is to make unduly specific what *John* has deliberately left vague.

As with all his writing, Brown's style is clear and succinct. He provides a sure guide to the maelstrom of scholarly debate about the Gospel and offers his own conclusions without polemic or denigration of others. In this respect it is worth recalling the observation he expressed in the Preface to his commentary in 1966: "There is no reason why scholars of different denominations cannot agree on the literal meaning of Scripture, even though they may disagree on the import of certain passages in the evolution of theology."

Besides editing Brown's nearly finished text and updating the extensive bibliographies, Moloney has contributed to this work by providing further elucidation and (sometimes critical) comments, either in footnotes or in several clearly delineated excursuses of his own. What is particularly helpful is the way Moloney draws attention to areas where Brown's thought has developed. For example, while Brown continues to explore the history behind the text (its origins and stages of development), in his revised *Introduction* there is a new emphasis on interpreting the final text as it is. Where previous generations of scholars had interpreted apparent discontinuities as indications of different sources, contemporary critics are more inclined to discern a narrative unity.

Moloney also draws attention to certain inconsistencies in Brown's *Introduction*. Given the fact that this new work is the outcome of over 30 years of continued reflection and study, the existence of such tensions is not necessarily surprising. As a further reflection of his own, however, Moloney tentatively asks whether the recognition of such tensions in Brown's own writing over several decades might not render unnecessary the distinction Brown makes between the personage standing behind the Johannine tradition at its oral stage (the 'Beloved Disciple' between the 40s and 70s) and the evangelist who composed the written gospel years later, some time around the end of the First Century.

Brown's new *Introduction* is a most valuable resource for all who wish to come to grips with *John's* Gospel. The more general reader might be glad to note that a concise (and very readable) summary of Brown's approach is to be found in chapter 11 of his masterly *Introduction of the New Testament*. Also to be recommended is his brief but delightful *A Retreat with John* (1998) in which a lifetime's scholarship is distilled into a profound spirituality. ■

Expanding Europe

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

Last month, the European Union celebrated the addition of ten new members to its ranks, the biggest intake of countries in the history of the common market. Of the greatest importance are those countries from the western part of the old Soviet Union, Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states. Their significance comes from Donald Rumsfeld's idea of a new Europe as against the "old Europe". America hopes that "new Europe" will act as a preventive to the EU becoming a real rival to American interests. It is to be hoped that his designs will be proved wrong.

It should be seen as a triumph for Europe and a counter-balance to American hegemony. These additions create a genuine opportunity for the people and economies of Eastern Europe to hasten their development and to discard more rapidly their Communist inheritance. Despite difficulties of language, customs and ideologies, the expansion of trade must help redress socio-economic imbalances created during the cold war. This writer can report on a textile company, which he represented in New Zealand, closing down an uneconomic plant in the North of France and constructing one in Hungary. French managerial expertise with Eastern European manpower illustrates the spirit and the potential of the EU.

This expansion of cross-border private investment, and the implicit business confidence to do it, augers well for the ten new countries that joined the EU on May 1. There is no reason why the economic miracles experienced in Ireland, Portugal and Spain should not be repeated in Eastern Europe. The ten new members must look to "old Europe" not to America.

Tony Blair's Dilemma

The political fallout from the war in Iraq is weighing more and more heavily on the world leaders who supported the US determination to control Iraq. Spanish Prime Minister, José Maria Aznar, a more than willing member of the coalition, has been ousted. The pressure on White House supporters, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and Paul Wolfowitz is intense. The spotlight is now focused on Tony Blair who, unequivocally, chose to align himself and his country with George W. Bush.

Tony Blair became Prime Minister of England in 1997 on the promise of a clean break from the Thatcherite Tory leadership. He was popular, he was trusted, and he promised to reform the public services and re-engage with Europe. He has done none of these things. More ominously, he has committed the British people to a disastrous war in Iraq and has continued to blow the trumpet for George W. Bush. He claims the moral high ground despite mounting opposition both in Britain and inside his own party.

Blair has become the typical example of a misguided politician who seems mesmerised by his own rhetoric. He has an all-consuming sense of self-importance and a hubristic view of his role in history. He states that it is his moral duty to support the US, come what may. He seems destined to continue on this suicidal course and is unable to extricate himself from Bush's influence. His grand vision for the future is a mirage.

In two years, Blair has destroyed not only his political reputation, but also cheapened politics and left England isolated from Europe. People no longer believe in Tony Blair, and see no reason for voting. An interesting statistic is the decline in voter turnout which has fallen from 72 percent in 1997 to 59 percent in 2001. Blair's 'new way' has taken a wrong turn in Iraq.

'National' Tailspin

In a perverse way, the political fallout from this support for the US is evident in New Zealand with the unbelievable utterances coming from the National Party leading lights (or tail-lights, depending on your point of view). At least, they are all singing the same song, albeit totally out of tune.

Firstly, it was Don Brash, fresh from the tidal wave created by his Orewa speech. He proposed that New Zealand ditch its ban on nuclear-powered ships and nuclear weapons in order to curry more favour with America and secure that mythical trade deal. He called it the 'Danish solution'.

Don Brash also stands accused of telling a visiting US delegation that "if the National Party was in Government today, we would get rid of the nuclear propulsion section today - by lunchtime even". Naturally, he cannot remember saying this.

Previously, he had stated that he would have sent fighting troops to Iraq as part of the coalition of the willing. Lockwood Smith agreed wholeheartedly. But, there was more to come.

Simon Power, ranked number 3 in his caucus, then gave his version of undying fealty to America: "without reservation we will support our close allies, Australia, the US and Britain, when and wheresoever our commitment is called upon". Together with Jim Bolger's "no ifs and no buts", Power's words will be filed under 'Albatross', in the lexicon of political blunders.

However, total subservience to America is obviously National Party policy. It should be noted that Don Brash is without artifice, so thank you for that Don – and good-bye. Don Brash has left the building. ■

Crossing yourself the 'right' way

Dr Andrew Kania, of Ukrainian background and lecturing at the University of Notre Dame in Western Australia, tells of a query put to him by a colleague. "You are Ukrainian.That means you are Orthodox. How come you are lecturing on the School of Religious Education in a Catholic University?" Andrew had to point out to him with some vigour that he was a member of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and that this was one of the 21 Eastern Catholic churches which, along with the Western (Latin) church, are in union with the See of Peter.

Dr Kania further recounts what happened to him in class, years ago, in a Catholic boys school in Western Australia. As a class in Religious Education was ending with a final prayer, the teacher drew attention to him as a boy who in her words *"has crossed himself the wrong way!"* Bringing him to the front of the class she proceeded to force his hand open (it had been positioned with three fingers joined together), and drew on him the sign of the cross – left shoulder first then over to the right.This was something that the boy out of pride for his Eastern Catholic Church and for the religious formation his parents had given him, resisted, to the great amusement of the class. As Dr Kania retold this incident in a recent article, it is clear he is still angry at the humiliating experience he suffered at the hands of a teacher, who was not just insensitive but downright ignorant.

In New Zealand, has our practice of religious education been much better? I grew up being told that wherever I went in the world, the Mass would be the same as the Latin Mass I was accustomed to attend in New Zealand. This was one of the fruits and expressions of the universality of the church. No one bothered to tell me (for the simple reason that most did not realise themselves) that the church I belonged to was the Latin church, just one of the more than 20 'autonomous ritual churches' making up the church in union with Rome.

The Latin church might in numbers be the biggest of those churches and its faithful might in fact outnumber those belonging to all the other Catholic churches put together. But it did not constitute the entire church. Others celebrated the Eucharist in quite different languages and followed a spirituality that differed markedly from that of the West, and yet were just as truly Catholic.

New Zealand has long had Catholics who belong to churches other than the Latin. Maronite Catholics have been amongst us for over a hundred years, with a notable presence in Dunedin. Our immigration intake of recent years has added notably to the diversity of Eastern Catholic churches represented here. Ukrainians, Syro-Malabar Catholics from India, Chaldean Catholics from Iraq, are among the several varieties of Eastern Catholics now among us in numbers

This gives a richness to the life of New Zealand Catholicism. For an account of what Eastern Catholics have to offer to us of the Western church, see the New Zealand bishops booklet length statement, *Eastern Catholics in New Zealand* (available from *Catholic Communications*, Private Bag 47 904, Ponsonby, Auckland, price $10.00).

The presence amongst us of fellow Catholics not of the Latin church brings with it, it must be confessed, problems. Provision of pastoral care for what are often minuscule communities is just one of them. But at least we can start by acknowledging they have as much right as we Latins to a distinctive religious heritage. ■

Humphrey O'Leary CSsR

A 'martyr' for peace

In late 1986, in London, a 32-year-old Israeli nuclear technician was drugged, gagged, bound and bundled off to Israel, where he was convicted of treason and espionage and sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment. Mordechai Vanunu's crime was to supply the British *Sunday Times* with details of Israel's programme of clandestinely producing nuclear weapons. Israel has always been non-committal about the possession of nuclear weapons – a policy that has never been questioned by the United States. It could be extremely embarrassing to admit that the massive funds being poured into Israel were helping to produce weapons of mass destruction.

Vanunu felt a moral obligation to "blow the whistle" and he has suffered the consequences. No prosecutions were ever attempted in Britain or Italy, where his kidnapping originated. The trial in Israel was held in secret, and he spent 11 of his 18 years' imprisonment in absolute solitary confinement.

After serving his sentence, he was released in April this year, but is not allowed to leave Israel or speak to foreign nationals without permission. His feeling of alienation is increased by the fact that he was disowned by most of his family when he converted to Christianity in 1986. "I am not a spy," he says, "but a man who helped all the world to end the madness of the nuclear race." And Mordechai Vanunu, now 49, has become a symbol for the international peace movement and has been nominated for a Nobel peace prize.

In May 2000 the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France and China, in a review of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, pledged to make "an unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals." Israel refused to sign the 1968 agreement.

The Bush administration has vehemently condemned nations for acquiring nuclear weapons, justifying the war with Iraq on the grounds that Saddam Hussein was supposed to have had weapons of mass destruction. But at the same time it has virtually scrapped its own nation's policy of nuclear disarmament and is careful not to ask too many questions about what Israel is doing. As one commentator said: "If Bush and Blair want to find weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, Vanunu has told them where to go."

The Non-Proliferation Treaty is to be reviewed again next year. The world is faced with the dangerous possibility that it will be "tossed into the dustbin of history". Let us hope that the courageous stand of Mordechai Vanunu, and others like him, will be listened to – and heard. ■

Jim Neilan

Catholic Caring Foundation

Budget service helps halt cycle of despair

When personal finances become unmanageable and stress levels rise, a whole host of downstream social issues begin to develop. For this reason the East Auckland Home & Budget Service knows it needs to deal with more than the financial side of the ledger when it comes to providing real help for its clients.

Service co-ordinator, June Sinclair, says there is a clear cycle of debt, depression and divorce. She says it's essential the service provide a base from which people can grow and develop.

Last year the service dealt with 335 families or individuals that received one-to-one budgeting and related social support. Ongoing clients were assisted by budgeting advice, general support and related social work.

Jean Briscoe and Emma Graham-Green review statistics.

Clients were saved from repossessions and evictions, taught to become more independent and skilled at handling the money they had. "Some clients just stop opening the mail," says June, "because they can't face another reminder notice or threatening letter."

The budget service concentrates its efforts in the Orakei, Glen Innes and Panmure areas of Auckland.

When it comes to the wider issues surrounding the need for their service, both June Sinclair and budget service trust chairman, Peter Young, are united. They say many of the people they come across would be much better off if New Zealand's hire purchase and loan regulations didn't make it so easy to take advantage of the poor and the ill-informed. They say the long term solution rests in education.

Their hope is to eventually find funding for an audio visual presentation for schools.