

MISSION AND JUSTICE

1/07

Produced for the Co-promoters of the Asia/Pacific Region of the Dominican Order by the Australasian Province.

Copyright: Cal Association Licence No. 3377 - for Private Circulation Only



Picture: See – Cry Freedom

- 2 CRY FREEDOM - THE MODERN GLOBAL SLAVE TRADE
- 5 A FAITH OF THEIR OWN
- I'LL MEET YOU 'ROUND THE BEND MY FRIEND, WHERE HEAR SOULS CAN MEND...
- 8 THE HUNGRY SPIRIT - WHAT THE HECK IS 'SOCIAL JUSTICE'
- 9 "TRICKY SITUATION" – WOMEN'S RIGHTS
- 10 THE WAY WE SEEK TRUTH – MARRIAGE
- BREAKING THE 'HOLY HUSH'
- 12 THE CHURCH AND FREEDOM IN THESE TIMES
- 13 PRAYING TO THE BUDDHA - LIVING AMID RELIGIOUS PLURALISM
- 17 THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE IS IN NO HURRY
- 18 WIKIPEDIA REFERENCES A SOURCE OF ANXIETY

John Crothers
Michael Whelan
Gail Martin;
Patty Fawcner
Peter C. Phan
Amira Hass
Eric Rauchway

CHECK THIS OUT

I like it when, a light bulb flashes on in my little brain and I see something from a different perspective. Such is the case with Wikipedia. Wikipedia is under attack

For those who don't know Wikipedia there is an article in this issue about it. I like Wikipedia. What clicked on in my own mind with this article is how institutions don't like it. Partly this is because you, or I, can add material to it. You don't need a degree - or years of study. There is a process of sorting out, but basically it is experience-centred and, of course, sometimes quite personal.

Now this really gets up the noses of the big conglomerate encyclopaedia people and seemingly people with at least four university degrees. The light bulb in my brain flashed even more when I read that evangelical Americans are unhappy with it – in particular because it uses non-American English. How extraordinary. Does the gospel only become gospel when translated into USA English?

But basically institutions don't like the Wikipedia-type of processing information – which the author suggests is very male-oriented. Institutions rely on an alarm sensor which automatically respond to freedom threats. Indeed they seem to have a whole series of such alarms. Yet the reality is that millions of people don't have to apologise for being human and passing on their experiences. Least of all individual Christians.

This edition of Mission and Justice is partially about issues which institutions don't like passing in front of their alarms.

One of my favourite websites is Baghdad Burning; [HTTP://RIVERBENDBLOG.BLOGSPOT.COM/](http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/). An anonymous woman – required if she is to stay alive - who writes from the heart of Iraq with tears dripping onto her fingers. There are long pauses, sometimes months, between her thoughts – but she is well worth waiting for. She has no time for the movers and shakers of this world. A women who lives daily with the bombs, rockets, rape, oppression, murder, despair - and men, whatever country they come from, including her own, who inflict their self-righteous rage on others with a hand held firmly over their "religious hearts" and the other holding a gun. She is a very courageous woman.

Also in this edition there are articles on women's rights and modern slavery including a small one on women and Islam. There are couple of small articles – one about marriage and the Catholic church, and one about the role of women and liturgy in the Catholic church. One about abuse - and it's good to match up that one with Baghdad Burning and the others because inherently sexism, and slavery, is a form of abuse an idea seems to be almost heresy to male-centered institutions. Have read also about the Israeli High Court's

decision. All of this doesn't say much for Catherine of Siena and Patty Fawcner. Catherine was blunt about male failure in the church – but she didn't flaunt her power.

Indeed sometimes I wonder how much of sexism, oppression, and whether chauvinism is about flaunting.

Recently the federal political opposition in Australia chose a new leader – a male. They also chose a female deputy. The following day the media-men spent a lot of time discussing the [female] deputy's hair-style, clothes, make-up and lifestyle. Most expressed disappointment. Not a word, however, about the male leader's clothes-style, hair, makeup, etc. – after all, he dresses stupidly, like a good, boring and British backgrounded male, in a very expensive business-man's suit and tie in blazing Australian heat. Nor did they discuss his ability to flaunt – which it seems was what under-pinned their attitude to his deputy.

Meanwhile, also here in Australia, we have already reverted to "slavery". However it goes under a deceptively different name - "Work Choices". Our government has decreed that a person is "employed" if they do one hour of paid work a week. Of course this had done wonderful things for its official employment rate. But they have also abolished the hard-won rights of the workers. Many workers, young and old, have been, and others are being, silenced, frightened, threatened and their rights removed - economic slavery exists again, and workers have reverted to being cogs in the machinery of greed.

As a letter in the Sydney Morning Herald says: " The current unemployment figures are based on the fact that you are classed as employed even if you only work one hour a week. Why is this never mentioned when unemployment statistics are given?

Also, the unemployment figures don't cover people who have stopped looking because the market won't employ anyone over a "certain age". Margaret Grace North Sydney"; <http://www.smh.com.au/letters/index.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap2>

Yet meanwhile the churches worry a lot about women (not men – god forbid) flaunting themselves on the sanctuary.

For a few minutes of pondering there is an excellent article on Buddhism.

I apologise for the delay in this edition of Mission & Justice - circumstances were beyond my control. LR

CRY FREEDOM - THE MODERN GLOBAL SLAVE TRADE

DAVID BATSTONE; 3/06; NO INTERNET TEXTS; SOJOURNERS; ; WWW.SOJO.NET/; DAVID BATSTONE IS A SOJOURNERS CONTRIBUTING EDITOR. THIS ARTICLE IS ADAPTED FROM HIS NEW BOOK NOT FOR SALE: THE RETURN OF THE GLOBAL SLAVE TRADE — AND HOW WE CAN FIGHT IT; HARPER SAN FRANCISCO.

Twenty-seven million slaves exist in our world today. Girls and boys, women and men of all ages are forced to toil in the rug loom sheds of Nepal, sell their bodies in the brothels of Rome, break rocks in the quarries of Pakistan, and fight wars in the jungles of Africa. Go behind the facade in any major town or city in the world today and you are likely to find a thriving commerce in human beings.

You may even find slavery in your own backyard. For several years my wife and I dined regularly at an Indian restaurant located near our home in the San Francisco Bay area. Unbeknownst to us, the staff at Pasand Madras Indian Cuisine who cooked our curries, delivered them to our table, and washed our dishes were slaves.

Restaurant owner Lakireddy Reddy and several members of his family had used fake visas and false identities to traffic perhaps hundreds of adults and children into the United States from India. He forced the labourers to work long hours for minimal wages, money that they returned to him as rent to live in one of his apartments. Reddy threatened to turn them into the authorities as illegal aliens if they tried to escape.

The Reddy case is not an anomaly. As many as 500,000 are trafficked across international borders annually, and up to 17,500 new victims are trafficked across our borders each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. More than 30,000 additional slaves are transported through the U.S. on their way to other international destinations. Attorneys from the U.S. Department of Justice have prosecuted 91 slave-trade cases in cities across the United States and in nearly every state of the nation.

Like the slaves who came to America's shores 200 years ago, today's slaves are not free to pursue their own destinies. They are coerced to perform work for the personal gain of those who subjugate them. If they try to escape the clutches of their masters, modern slaves risk personal violence or reprisals to their families.

President George W. Bush spoke of the global crisis of the slave trade before the United Nations General Assembly in September 2003. "Each year 800,000 to 900,000 human beings are bought, sold, or forced across the world's borders," he said. "The trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time." Of those individuals extracted out of impoverished countries and trafficked across

international borders, 80 percent are female and 50 percent are children, according to the U.S. Department of State's "2005 Trafficking in Persons Report."

South Asia Sex Trade worker

The commerce in human beings today rivals drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade for the top criminal activity on the planet. The slave trade sits at number three on the list but is closing the gap. The FBI projects that the slave trade generates \$9.5 billion in revenue each year, according to the U.S. Department of State's "2004 Trafficking in Persons Report." The International Labour Office, in the 2005 report "A Global Alliance Against Forced Labor," estimates that figure to be closer to a whopping \$32 billion annually.

"Ten Million Children Exploited for Domestic Labor" — this title for a 2004 U.N. study hardly needs explaining. The U.N.'s surveys found 700,000 children forced into domestic labour in Indonesia alone, with staggering numbers as well in Brazil (559,000), Pakistan (264,000), Haiti (250,000), and Kenya (200,000).

The U.N. report indicates that children remain in servitude for long stretches of time because no one identifies their enslavement: "These youngsters are usually 'invisible' to their communities, toiling for long hours with little or no pay and regularly deprived of the chance to play or go to school." UNICEF estimates that 1 million children are forced today to sell their bodies to sexual exploiters. In a single country, Uganda, nearly 40,000 children have been kidnapped and violently turned into child soldiers or sex slaves.

We may not even realize how each one of us drives the demand during the course of a normal day. Kevin Bales, a pioneer in the fight against modern slavery, expresses well those commercial connections: "Slaves in Pakistan may have made the shoes you are wearing and the carpet you stand on. Slaves in the Caribbean may have put sugar in your kitchen and toys in the hands of your children. In India they may have sewn the shirt on your back and polished the ring on your finger."

Widespread poverty and social inequality ensure a pool of recruits as deep as the ocean. Parents in desperate straits may sell their children or at least be susceptible to scams that will allow the slave trader to take control over the lives of their sons and daughters. Young women in vulnerable communities are more likely to take a risk on a job offer in a far away location. The poor are apt to accept a loan that the slave trader can later manipulate to steal their freedom. All of these paths carry unsuspecting recruits into the supply chains of slavery.

"The supply side of the equation is particularly bleak," says Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas. "While there are 100,000 places in the developed world for refugee resettlement per year, 50 million refugees and displaced persons exist worldwide today. This ready reservoir of the stateless presents an opportunity ripe for exploitation by human traffickers."

During the era of the American plantation economy, the slaveholder considered slave ownership an investment. The supply of new recruits was limited. The cost of extracting and transporting the slave, and ensuring that they would be serviceable by the time they reached their destination, was considerable. In the modern slave trade, the glut of slaves and the capacity to move them great distances in a relatively short period of time drastically alters the economics of slave ownership. Kevin Bales' description of modern slaves as "disposable people" profoundly fits: Just like used batteries, once the slave exhausts his or her usefulness, another can be procured at no great expense.

Notwithstanding these emerging trends in global markets, traditional modes of slavery also persist. Bonded labour has existed for centuries and continues to be the most common form of slavery in the world today. In a typical scenario, an individual falls under the control of a wealthy patron after taking a small loan. The patron adds egregious rates of interest and inflated expenses to the original principal so that the labourer finds it impossible to repay. Debt slaves may spend their entire lives in service to a single slaveholder, and their "obligation" may be passed on to their children. Of the 27 million people worldwide held captive and exploited for profit today, the Free the Slaves organization estimates that at least 15 million are bonded slaves in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

In my journey to monitor the rise of modern global slavery, I had prepared myself to end up in the depths of depression. To be honest, I made some unpleasant stops there. But my journey did not end at despair. The prime reason: I met a heroic ensemble of abolitionists who simply refuse to relent. I felt like I had gone back in time and had the great privilege of sharing a meal with a Harriet Tubman or a William Wilberforce or a Frederick Douglass. Like the abolitionists of old, these modern heroes do not expend their energy handicapping the odds stacked against the antislavery movement. They simply refuse to accept a world where one individual can be held as the property of another.

Kru Nam is one of those abolitionists who operate on the front lines in the fight against sex slavery. She is a painter with a university degree in art who launched a project to reach street kids in Chiang Mai, the

second largest town in northern Thailand. Once she turned the kids loose with paintbrushes, they created a series of disturbing images that added up to a horror story.

Kru Nam soon realized that most of the kids did not come from Thailand. Most came from Burma, with a sprinkling of Laotians, Vietnamese, and Cambodians tossed in the mix. The Burmese boys spoke of a well-dressed Thai gentleman who had visited their village in the south of Burma. Accompanying him was a 14-year-old Burmese boy who wore fine-tailored clothes and spoke Thai fluently. The man told parents that he was offering scholarships for young boys to attend school back in Thailand. "Look how well this child from your region is doing," he said, pointing to his young companion. "If you let me take your son back to Chiang Mai, I will do the same for him." Many families agreed to let their sons go with the Thai man. Once they reached Chiang Mai, the Thai man immediately sold them to owners of sex bars and brothels.

The boys living on the streets were the lucky ones; they had escaped. They told Kru Nam that many more boys remained captive. Her blood boiled. She could not stand by and do nothing.

Km Nam did not exactly have a plan when she marched into the sex bar for her first raid. Only her mission was clear: rescue as many of the young boys as she could find. One by one she approached a table where a boy sat and calmly said, "Let's go, I'm taking you out of here." Several moments later, she was leading six little boys out the door and to her safe house in Chiang Mai.

Kru Nam made several more impromptu raids. Eventually, owners put the word out that they would kill her if she walked into their bars. Deploying a fresh strategy, she organized street teams to scour the night market of Chiang Mai and connect with young children recently off the bus from the northern Thai-Burmese border. Recruiters for the sex bars also trolled the streets on the hunt for vulnerable kids. It became a life-and-death contest to find them first.

One day it struck Km Nam that if she moved upstream before the kids hit Chiang Mai she would have an edge over the recruiters. So she moved about 40 miles north to the border town of Mae Sai, a major thoroughfare for foot traffic between Burma and Thailand. In Mae Sai she set up a shelter to take in kids on the run. Nearly 60 boys and girls today find safe refuge each night at Kru Nam's shelter.

She as had to move her safe house several times. Neighbours on each occasion have forced her out; they do not want "these dirty kids" living on their block. So Km Nam purchased a block of land some 15 miles outside of Mae Sai. She does not have the money she needs to buy a proper residence, so for the time being Km Nam and the children will live on the land in temporary shelters.

Kru Nam is irrepressible. She does not have a large organization standing behind her — a skeletal staff of three assists her and she receives modest funding from a tiny non-governmental agency based in Thailand. What she does have is a burning passion to rescue young boys and girls so that they do not fall into the treacherous control of slaveholders. Her passage from a single act of kindness to fighting for justice on a grander scale is the quintessential story of the abolitionist.

The abolitionists working today are truly extraordinary, but they cannot win the fight alone. They are overwhelmed and beleaguered. The size and scope of Kru Nam's project is about the norm for abolitionist organizations. They sorely need reinforcements, a new wave of abolitionists, to join them in the struggle. All of us wonder how we would have acted in the epic struggles of human history. Imagine we lived in rural Tennessee in 1855 and Harriet Tubman came to our door, asking us to join the Underground Railroad. Would we have stood up and been counted among the just?

There are times to read history, and there are times to make history. We live right now at one of those epic moments in the fight for human freedom. We no longer have to wonder how we might respond to our moment of truth. Future generations will look back and judge our choices, and be inspired or disappointed.

Marketing Humans

Many people bristle to hear the word slave used to describe the modern practice of exploitation. Deeply engrained in the collective psyche of Western culture is the notion that slavery ended in the 19th century. It is not unusual to read a newspaper account of "slave-like conditions" in a copper mine in, say, Bolivia. The labourers were kidnapped, coerced to work without pay, and prohibited from leaving the mine. So why would the writer refer to the labourers' condition as "slave-like"? Because the writer buys into the cultural myth that "real slavery" was vanquished long ago. It certainly was a momentous day in 1833 " when the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, which gave freedom to all slaves held captive in the British Empire.

The establishment of laws that criminalized the slave trade meant a major advancement in the cause for human freedom. Though slavery persisted for decades thereafter, legislation gave abolitionists an effective tool to hold slaveholders accountable for their inhumane activity. Abolition laws eventually spread to nearly every nation in the world.

In our own day, however, a thriving underground market in human beings has emerged once again. It is a criminal enterprise involving both local scoundrels and sophisticated international syndicates. Corruption among law enforcement agents and government officials plays a key role in its success. And it's not limited to one specific region of the world — it respects no borders. Hence, modern slavery cannot be eliminated with a single stroke of the pen — it will take a concerted movement at least as powerful as the one that abolished the slave trade two centuries ago.

A FAITH OF THEIR OWN

ASRA Q. NOMANI — THE AUTHOR OF *STANDING ALONE IN MECCA: AN AMERICAN WOMAN'S STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF ISLAM*; HARPER SAN FRANCISCO, 2005 SEE; SOJOURNERS; 3/07; NO INTERNET TEXT; [HTTP://WWW.SOJO.NET/](http://www.sajo.net/).

On straw mats in a two-room building in the bustling city of Pudukkottai in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, a band of about 30 Muslim women in animated debate are making history. Dicing through tales of marital woes and family travails, streams of tears mixing with belly laughter, they could be extras in a Dixie Chicks music video. Instead, they are part of a radical new generation of "law breakers" in the Muslim world: women who are challenging laws written in the name of Islam by men. And they offer many people hope for realizing social justice, human rights, and even political reform in the Muslim world.

From Tamil Nadu to Toledo, Ohio, women scholars, activists, and community leaders — and the men who support them — are challenging traditional interpretations of Islamic law by going back to the four cornerstones of the law: the Quran (the holy book of Islam), the Sunnah (the traditions and sayings of the prophet), *Vilna'* (consensus of scholars), and *qiyas* (analogical deductions from the three).

In Barcelona, Spain, this past November, 10 Muslim women took to the dais for the second Congress on Islamic Feminism, this one focusing on the implementation of sharia (Islamic law) on matters related to family law. From Indonesia, activist Lily Munir, a Dr. Ruth of the Muslim world with straight talk about sex, challenged Islamic polygamy laws that allow men to have more than one wife. Off stage, Sudanese scholar Balghis Badri huddled with Tunisian scholar Amel Grami over how to effectively challenge the notion that Islamic law requires head coverings, or hijab.

Later that month, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Muslim women activists and politicians won passage of the "Women's Protection Bill," making rape a civil crime and rejecting laws written in the name of Islam that punished even rape victims for immorality. Not long after, in December, about 100 women from around the world descended upon the Westin at Times Square in New York City to create an international all-women shura, or council — which organizers called the first of its kind in the world — to issue Islamic rulings on personal disputes.

The women from Tamil Nadu had sent their leader to the New York summit: Sharifa Khanam, director of a non-profit women's rights organization called STEPS. Not long ago, tired of sexist judicial rulings from male-only jamaats (gatherings) that met in mosques in which women weren't allowed to enter, Khanam created a women's jmaat. Now, women emerge from their houses in the pre-dawn to ride for hours from their villages to adjudicate disputes based on progressive interpretations of Islamic law. They eagerly listened to Khanam's report from New York City, enjoying the Hershey Kisses she packed for them. In this effort, women are wrestling with laws created in the name of Islam by men, specifically eight men.

The Muslim world of the 21st century is largely defined by eight madhhabs, or Islamic schools of jurisprudence, with narrow rulings on everything from criminal law to family law. But the first centuries of Islam's 1,400-year history were quite different, characterized by numerous schools of jurisprudence, many of them progressive and women-friendly. These schools govern the way Muslim communities define themselves, from criminal law to family law.

Yet, the schools surviving into the 21st century have largely failed in giving the Muslim world a moral and ethical compass with which to realize the highest principles of Islamic teachings of compassion, justice, women's rights, and tolerance.

The efforts of women reformers underscore a deeper point: In much the same way that the Catholic Church saw the Second Vatican Council in 1962-65, it is time for a new school of jurisprudence for the Muslim world of the 21st century. Unlike the personality-driven male schools that have defined Islam for centuries, this school of compassion, social justice, women's rights, and tolerance is being sown by women from the ground up starting in places such as Tamil Nadu, India.

BAGHDAD BURNING - ... I'LL MEET YOU 'ROUND THE BEND MY FRIEND, WHERE HEARTS CAN HEAL AND SOULS CAN MEND...

20/2/07; [HTTP://RIVERBENDBLOG.BLOGSPOT.COM/](http://RIVERBENDBLOG.BLOGSPOT.COM/)

Maliki's Reaction...

As expected, Al Maliki is claiming the rape allegations are all lies. Apparently, his people simply asked the officers if they raped Sabrine Al Janabi and they said no. I'm so glad that's been cleared up.

"Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nouri al-Makiki moved quickly to try to defuse a scandal after a Sunni woman said she was raped by three officers of the Shiite-dominated police.

The government's response — siding with the officers and trying to discredit the allegations — threatened to bring even more backlash.

A statement by al-Makiki's office accused "certain parties" — presumably Sunni politicians — of fabricating the claims in an attempt to undermine security forces during the ongoing Baghdad security operation, which began last week.

The statement was issued only hours after al-Maliki ordered an investigation into the case Monday night.

The 20-year-old married woman said she was assaulted after police commandos took her into custody Sunday in the western Baghdad neighbourhood of Amil, accusing her of helping insurgents. She said she was taken to a police garrison and raped.

"It has been shown after medical examinations that the woman had not been subjected to any sexual attack whatsoever and that there are three outstanding arrest warrants against her issued by security agencies," the government statement said, without giving details.

"After the allegations have been proven to be false, the prime minister has ordered that the officers accused be rewarded," it said without elaborating."

Author's comments

I hate the media and I hate the Iraqi government for turning this atrocity into another Sunni-Shia debacle- like it matters whether Sabrine is Sunni or Shia or Arab or Kurd (the Al Janabi tribe is composed of both Sunnis and Shia). Maliki did not only turn the woman into a liar, he is rewarding the officers she accused. It's outrageous and maddening.

No Iraqi woman under the circumstances- under any circumstances- would publicly, falsely claim she was raped. There are just too many risks. There is the risk of being shunned socially. There is the risk of beginning an endless chain of retaliations and revenge killings between tribes. There is the shame of coming out publicly and talking about a subject so taboo, she and her husband are not only risking their reputations by telling this story, they are risking their lives.

No one would lie about something like this simply to undermine the Baghdad security operation. That can be done simply by calculating the dozens of dead this last week. Or by writing about the mass detentions of innocents, or how people are once again burying their valuables so that Iraqi and American troops don't steal them.

It was less than 14 hours between Sabrine's claims and Maliki's rewarding the people she accused. In 14 hours, Maliki not only established their innocence, but turned them into his own personal heroes. I wonder if Maliki would entrust the safety his own wife and daughter to these men.

This is meant to discourage other prisoners, especially women, from coming forward and making claims against Iraqi and American forces. Maliki is the stupidest man alive (well, after Bush of course...) if he believes his arrogance and callous handling of the situation will work to dismiss it from the minds of Iraqis. By doing what he is doing, he's making it more clear than ever that under his rule, under his government, vigilante justice is the only way to go. Why leave it to the security forces and police? Simply hire a militia or gang to get revenge. If he doesn't get some justice for her, her tribe will be forced to... And the Janabat (the Al Janabis) are a force to be reckoned with.

Maliki could at least pretend the rape of a young Iraqi woman is still an outrage in today's Iraq...

The Rape of Sabrine...

It takes a lot to get the energy and resolution to blog lately. I guess it's mainly because just thinking about the state of Iraq leaves me drained and depressed. But I had to write tonight.

As I write this, Oprah is on Channel 4 (one of the MBC channels we get on Nilesat), showing Americans how to get out of debt. Her guest speaker is telling a studio full of American women who seem to have over-shopped that they could probably do with fewer designer products. As they talk about increasing incomes and fortunes, Sabrine Al-Janabi, a young Iraqi woman, is on Al Jazeera telling how Iraqi security forces abducted her from her home and raped her. You can only see her eyes, her voice is hoarse and it keeps breaking as she speaks. In the end she tells the reporter that she can't talk about it anymore and she covers her eyes with shame.

She might just be the bravest Iraqi woman ever. Everyone knows American forces and Iraqi security forces are raping women (and men), but this is possibly the first woman who publicly comes out and tells

about it using her actual name. Hearing her tell her story physically makes my heart ache. Some people will call her a liar. Others (including pro-war Iraqis) will call her a prostitute- shame on you in advance.

I wonder what excuse they used when they took her. It's most likely she's one of the thousands of people they round up under the general headline of 'terrorist suspect'. She might have been one of those subtitles you read on CNN or BBC or Arabiya, "13 insurgents captured by Iraqi security forces." The men who raped her are those same security forces Bush and Condi are so proud of- you know- the ones the Americans trained. It's a chapter right out of the book that documents American occupation in Iraq: the chapter that will tell the story of 14-year-old Abeer who was raped, killed and burned with her little sister and parents.

They abducted her from her house in an area in southern Baghdad called Hai Al Amil. No- it wasn't a gang. It was Iraqi peace keeping or security forces- the ones trained by Americans? You know them. She was brutally gang-raped and is now telling the story. Half her face is covered for security reasons or reasons of privacy. I translated what she said below.

"I told him, 'I don't have anything [I did not do anything].' He said, 'You don't have anything?' One of them threw me on the ground and my head hit the tiles. He did what he did- I mean he raped me. The second one came and raped me. The third one also raped me. [Pause- sobbing] I begged them and cried, and one of them covered my mouth. [Unclear, crying] Another one of them came and said, 'Are you finished? We also want our turn.' So they answered, 'No, an American committee came.' They took me to the judge. Anchorwoman: Sabrine Al Janabi said that one of the security forces videotaped/photographed her and threatened to kill her if she told anyone about the rape. Another officer raped her after she saw the investigative judge.

"One of them, he said... I told him, 'Please- by your father and mother- let me go.' He said, 'No, no- by my mother's soul I'll let you go- but on one condition, you give me one single thing.' I said, 'What?' He said, '[I want] to rape you.' I told him, 'No- I can't.' So he took me to a room with a weapon... It had a weapon, a Klashnikov, a small bed [Unclear], he sat me on it. So [the officer came] and told him, 'Leave her to me.' I swore to him on the Quran, I told him, 'By the light of the Prophet I don't do such things...' He said, 'You don't do such things?' I said, 'Yes'.

[Crying] He picked up a black hose, like a pipe. He hit me on the thigh. [Crying] I told him, 'What do you want from me? Do you want me to tell you rape me? But I can't... I'm not one of those ***** [Prostitutes] I don't do such things.' So he said to me, 'We take what we want and what we don't want we kill. That's that.' [Sobbing] I can't anymore... please, I can't finish."

I look at this woman and I can't feel anything but rage. What did we gain? I know that looking at her, foreigners will never be able to relate. They'll feel pity and maybe some anger, but she's one of us. She's not a girl in jeans and a t-shirt so there will only be a vague sort of sympathy. Poor third-world countries- that is what their womenfolk tolerate. Just know that we never had to tolerate this before. There was a time when Iraqis were safe in the streets. That time is long gone. We consoled ourselves after the war with the fact that we at least had a modicum of safety in our homes. Homes are sacred, aren't they? That is gone too.

She's just one of tens, possibly hundreds, of Iraqi women who are violated in their own homes and in Iraqi prisons. She looks like cousins I have. She looks like friends. She looks like a neighbour I sometimes used to pause to gossip with in the street. Every Iraqi who looks at her will see a cousin, a friend, a sister, a mother, an aunt...

Humanitarian organizations are warning that three Iraqi women are to be executed next month. The women are Wassan Talib, Zainab Fadhil and Liqa Omar Muhammad. They are being accused of 'terrorism', i.e. having ties to the Iraqi resistance. It could mean they are relatives of people suspected of being in the resistance. Or it could mean they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. One of them gave birth in the prison. I wonder what kind of torture they've endured. Let no one say Iraqi women didn't get at least SOME equality under the American occupation- we are now equally as likely to get executed. And yet, as the situation continues to deteriorate both for Iraqis inside and outside of Iraq, and for Americans inside Iraq, Americans in America are still debating on the state of the war and occupation- are they winning or losing? Is it better or worse.

Let me clear it up for any moron with lingering doubts: It's worse. It's over. You lost.

You lost the day your tanks rolled into Baghdad to the cheers of your imported, American-trained monkeys.

You lost every single family whose home your soldiers violated.

You lost every sane, red-blooded Iraqi when the Abu Ghraib pictures came out and verified your atrocities behind prison walls as well as the ones we see in our streets.

You lost when you brought murderers, looters, gangsters and militia heads to power and hailed them as Iraq's first democratic government.
You lost when a gruesome execution was dubbed your biggest accomplishment.
You lost the respect and reputation you once had.
You lost more than 3000 troops.
That is what you lost America. I hope the oil, at least, made it worthwhile.

THE HUNGRY SPIRIT - WHAT THE HECK IS 'SOCIAL JUSTICE'?

ROSE MARIE BERGER; SOJOURNERS; 2/07; AN ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF SOJOURNERS, IS A CATHOLIC PEACE ACTIVIST AND POET;
[HTTP://WWW.SOJO.NET/](http://www.soho.net/)

2007 is a Sabbath Year. Every seventh year, according to biblical tradition, the people of God are invited to observe a "Year of Remission" (Shmita, in Hebrew). It is a year in which land and crops and domesticated animals rest, when creditors refrain from collecting debts, and when the Law of the Lord is read in the hearing of all (marking the completion of the Torah liturgical cycle).

These ancient biblical customs and covenants form the foundation for the Christian concept of social justice. In Christian tradition, particularly Catholic teaching, social justice and social charity form the horizontal axis, and individual justice and individual charity form the vertical axis. All four elements work in harmony for individuals and communities to live out the commandment: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

Justice is the moral code that guides a fair and equitable society. When an individual acts on behalf of justice, he or she stands up for what is right. Charity is a basic sense of generosity and goodwill toward others, especially the suffering. Individual charity is when one responds to the more immediate needs of others — volunteering in a women's shelter, for example.

The goal of social charity and social justice is furthering the common good. Social charity addresses the effects of social sin, while social justice addresses the causes of such sins.

Brazilian Catholic Archbishop Helder Camara famously said, "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist." His phrase indicates the societal pressure to separate charity and justice. The two can not be separated. It would be like taking the heart out of a body — neither would live for long.

Social charity is sometimes called compassionate solidarity. A church's decision to buy only fair trade coffee might be considered an act of social charity. It is a communal economic act that addresses the immediate needs of those who are oppressed by an unjust economic system. However, it doesn't fundamentally change or challenge the unjust structure.

The principle of social justice, according to Catholic social teaching, requires the individual Christian to act in an organized manner with others to hold social institutions accountable — whether government or private — to the common good.

The "common good comprises the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily," according to Pope Paul VI. However, social justice can become hollow if it is not constantly in touch with real people's experiences. Social Justice Issues are determined by "discerning the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3), a careful process of social analysis.

- First, we listen to and observe the experiences of those closest to the problem.
- Second, together with those closest to the problem, we look at the context.

What's the history and what are the root causes? Are there political and/or cultural forces at play? We take the expanded information (experience plus context) and examine it in light of biblical values and Christian teaching. What would Jesus do in a situation like this?

- Third, we ask: What action might successfully make this situation more just?
- Finally, we take the action and evaluate the results. The evaluation takes us back to step one.

Social justice almost always has an economic, as well as a policy, component. Our lives are organized around basic goods and services that we exchange in order to grow as healthy human beings in families and communities. When we listen to the experiences of poor people in the U.S., for example, we learn that many are working full-time but can't afford the basics of food, housing, and health care.

The context includes spiralling costs of medical insurance and an inadequate federal minimum wage. We reflect on the experience and context in the light of Jesus' healing ministry and Jesus' parable of the worker getting a just wage. Campaigns for health care reform and a living wage have arisen from such analysis. Success is evaluated by how the lives of America's working poor have improved. Have these actions helped to restore justice and reveal more clearly the reign of God?

The Sabbath Year is a good time to review (and renew) the social justice ethic of the church. Salvation Army leader Evangeline Booth's comments on the women's movement in 1930 are pertinent for social justice movements today. For what we call the movement, she says, "is not social merely, not political merely, not economic merely. It is the direct fulfillment of the gospel of the Redeemer."

"TRICKY SITUATION"

FR JOHN CROTHERS; PARISH PRIEST – PEAKHURST AND PENSURST PARISHES; 4/07; 825 FORREST ROAD, PEAKHURST, 2210, AUSTRALIA – NO INTERNET TEXT

Dear Acolytes and Readers, I am writing to explain a development that has occurred regarding your ministries. First a little background. As you are aware in both the parishes of Peakhurst and Penshurst many of our readers and acolytes are women. It may not be so well known that according to the Church's rules women are not allowed to be formally instituted into either of these ministries. The relevant Church decree states that "in accordance with the venerable tradition of the Church, institution in the ministries of reader and acolyte is reserved to men."

In recent years the Church has tried to deal with this tricky situation in a number of ways. Bishops have refused to institute any readers at all, rather than instituting only the male readers. The formal institution of male acolytes has been quietly dropped. Parishes have introduced informal welcoming ceremonies for the ministries of reader and acolyte to allow for the inclusion of women. Women have been allowed to exercise the ministry of reader on a temporary basis, but not permanently. Some parishes have changed the name of the ministry when it is exercised by women eg "senior server" instead of "acolyte."

The situation has now changed. In a recent notice from the Archdiocesan Liturgy Office we have been informed that the formal institution of acolytes is to be brought back. (There has been no mention at this stage of the institution of readers.) Parish Priests have been asked to send in a list of those they recommend to be instituted as acolytes. The list of course must include only men.

One might ask why in 2007 the Catholic Church still excludes women from lay ministry. (Remember we are not speaking here about the ordained ministries of deacon, priest and bishop.) Part of the answer lies in the fact that prior to Vatican II the ministries of reader and acolyte were seen as stages to priesthood and were known as "minor orders." This was in fact a misnomer and Pope Paul VI clarified the situation when he said that the ministries of reader and acolyte "are no longer to be reserved to candidates for the sacrament of orders and may be committed to lay Christians."

There is no theological argument to suggest that women should be excluded from the ministries of reader or acolyte, or indeed from any lay ministry in the Church. To defend such a position theologically one would have to assert either that the baptism of a woman is somehow inferior to that of a man (and so women are not full members of the laity), or that the ministries of reader and acolyte are not lay ministries, but constitute the sacrament of Holy Orders (and so acolytes and readers are really clerics.) Each of these propositions contradicts basic sacramental theology.

This is precisely why the Church's statement excluding women from these ministries relies solely on the argument from tradition, which by itself can be a shaky basis for argument. I remember the late Bishop John Heaps saying once at a conference I attended — "Just because the Church has been doing something in the past, it is not necessarily a good reason to continue doing it in the future." If we held blindly to every Church tradition we would still be saying mass in Latin and forbidding Catholics to attend weddings of their Anglican friends in an Anglican church.

At the local level Cardinal Pell's decision to bring back the formal institution of acolytes has brought out into the open the whole question of women's exclusion from lay ministry in the Church. Ironically it may be good that the question will now be debated more publicly. The bishops will have great difficulty defending their position. Women are not associate members of the laity — they are full members in every sense.

Here in our parishes of Peakhurst and Penshurst we pride ourselves on our fairness and inclusiveness. That will continue. We will not have two classes of laity in our parishes and no one will be excluded from any lay ministry on gender grounds. Our women acolytes will be invited to continue exercising their ministry. Our women readers will also be welcome to continue reading even if the formal institution of readers is brought in.

Consequently any current acolyte, male or female, who wishes to apply for formal institution please let me know and your name will be forwarded to the Liturgy Office with my recommendation. I would also be happy to speak with those who feel they might like to become an acolyte.

In life there are times when you simply have to stand up for what you know is right. This is one of those times. I am confident that the vast majority of Sydney Catholics believe that women should not be

excluded from lay ministry in the Church. Let's hope that we can bring about a change to this out-dated rule and help ensure that women in the Catholic Church get the recognition and respect they deserve.

THE WAY WE SEEK TRUTH

MICHAEL WHELAN; SEE THE MIX; 4/07, PO BOX 139, GLADESVILLE, NSW 1675, AUSTRALIA – NO INTERNET TEXT -
[HTTP://WWW.CATALYST-FOR-RENEWAL.COM.AU/](http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/)

On March 13 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released the apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, on the Eucharist. The exhortation is the concluding act of the eleventh synod of bishops held in Rome in October 2006. Because the document is intended to represent the mind of the synod, it is not possible to say just what was and was not actually written by Benedict. (These synods are the highest expressions of collegiality in the Church today.)

However, the opening paragraphs seem to be the work of Benedict. There he explicitly links this exhortation with his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. The following statement is probably his also: In the sacrament of the altar, the Lord meets us, men and women created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27), and becomes our companion along the way. In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom.

This statement invites further reflection.

Firstly we must note three minor points in passing. It may be the first Roman document of this status to use inclusive language. And the use of the nuptial metaphor to explain the celibacy of the priest does seem strange (see 24), as does the metaphor of "nuclear fission" (see II) to explain the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

More noteworthy is the reiteration of the discipline concerning those who are divorced and remarried — they are "not to be admitted to the sacraments" (see 29). The explanation is given as follows: their state and their condition of life objectively contradict the loving union of Christ and the Church signified and made present in the Eucharist

The document says "this represents a complex and troubling pastoral problem". Pastors are urged to act out of "love for the truth" in supporting them. Further, they are "to live as friends, as brother and sister." Again, the phrase, "love for the truth" is repeated as the basis for this teaching.

Is it possible that the truth we seek, the truth we will ultimately meet in the Eucharist, might in fact be revealed to us in and through the living experience of the Body of Christ in the world? Is there not some validity in disposing ourselves to be surprised by the truth revealed in the tension between the abstract and the concrete, between theoretical ideals and the discovered facts of human experience? Might the Spirit of God reveal truth to us if we listen to the pain and honest struggles of a man or woman who has grown through a bad first marriage, been purged in the crucible of life, and found a more mature loving commitment in a second marriage?

Far from demeaning marriage, such an honest conversation could in fact enhance both our appreciation for marriage as an institution and the lives of those directly involved. It might also enhance the lives of those entrusted with the responsibility of teaching in the name of the Church.

BREAKING THE 'HOLY HUSH'

GAIL MARTIN; SOJOURNERS 1/97 - A FREELANCE WRITER IN CHARLOTTE, N. C. SHE DIRECTS THE REFUGE PROJECT, A PRIVATELY FUNDED RESEARCH AND EDUCATION PROJECT HELPING THE FAITH COMMUNITY UNDERSTAND THE LONG-TERM SPIRITUAL REPERCUSSIONS OF ABUSE IN ORDER TO BECOME MORE ACCEPTING OF AND WELCOMING TO ADULT SURVIVORS; [HTTP://WWW.SOJO.NET/](http://www.soho.net/)

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that about 1.5 million women in the United States are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner every Year. Nearly one-third of American women report having experienced physical or sexual abuse by a husband or boyfriend at some point during their lives, according to the Commonwealth Fund's 1998 Survey of Women's Health.

Christians are no exception to these alarming statistics.

"The rate of abuse in Christian homes is exactly the same as in the general population," says Catherine Clark Kroeger, co-founder of Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (PASCH). "If we could tear off the secrecy and then allow God's grace to work, that would be the greatest gift." Krueger, an adjunct associate professor of classical and ministry studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has written, co-written, or contributed to eight books about women and domestic violence from a Christian perspective.

She became aware of the need for a response to domestic violence that the evangelical community would hear and respect after she founded Christians for Biblical Equality, an organization rooted in evangelical circles that promotes an interpretation of the Bible supporting the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnicities and all economic classes.

She noticed that many women appeared more interested in the biblical roots of equality for the home than within church roles.

In 1992, Krueger and Denver Seminary professor of counselling James R. Beck held a symposium that led to their publication of *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal*.

Over the course of her involvement with the issue of domestic violence and the church's response to it, Kroeger felt a growing sense of frustration at the church's flawed approach to domestic violence counselling. She observed a disturbing degree of silence on the topic among church leaders. When clergy became involved in family counselling on domestic violence, they were more likely to side with the batterer, counsel reconciliation, chide the woman for attempting to leave the relationship, and consider the case closed.

In response, Kroeger has formed partnerships with other Christian experts and advocates in the field. At a meeting of religious leaders interested in domestic violence during the late 1990s, Kroeger met Nancy Nason-Clark, a professor of sociology at University of New Brunswick who researches the relationship between faith and domestic violence.

More and more, my work began to explore how faith communities are responding to domestic violence," says Nason-Clark. As she studied domestic violence from an academic perspective, she was constantly asked whether or not the incidence rates were different within the faith community.

"There are very few differences," says Nason-Clark. Those that exist are not positive. Women of faith, says Nason-Clark, are less likely to leave an abusive relationship, more likely to look first to the church for counselling, and more likely to wait longer to take action than women outside the faith community.

Networking connections with scattered clergy, researchers, and advocates convinced Kroeger and Nason Clark that their efforts would yield better results if a network could be formed.

The result was the creation of PASCH, which describes itself as "a coalition of internationally renowned Christian researchers, scholars, and theologians" who have come together to "increase peace and safety in the Christian home and in the world it serves by addressing and decreasing domestic and sexual abuse in those homes."

PASCH held its first international conference in Orange County, Calif., in 2005. More than 200 attendees from around the world and from denominations ranging from Mennonite to Episcopal gathered at the "Beyond Abuse" conference for a weekend of resource sharing, networking opportunities, and presentations by advocates, survivors, and experts.

Al Miles, author of *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* and two other books on abuse, was one of the keynote speakers at the first PASCH conference.

According to Miles, until pioneers such as Catherine Clark Kroeger, no one had pointed out that "there is a faith-related connection; there are things we're doing and not doing that contribute to [domestic abuse]." As a pastor, Miles felt comfortable with PASCH's theology and language, and he knew their qualifications were sound. He also notes that the group's evangelical approach helps address the way some conservatives may use distrust of theological liberalism as an excuse to avoid the topic of domestic violence.

"The issue of domestic violence is messy," says Miles, who is an ordained minister in the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) and is based in Hawaii. "It's incredibly messy. It's saying particularly when people are in my congregation that I as a pastor need to deal with this. We've known about it for a long time, even if we didn't name it. The insidiousness is when you know the people and it's right here. It's amazing that we still tend to blame women for men's behaviour."

Domestic Violence Resources for Faith Communities

- **PASCH: www.peaceandsafety.com**
- **FaithTrust Institute: A multifaith organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. www.faithtrustinstitute.org**
- **Task Force to Stop Abuse Against Women: An international effort to educate evangelical clergy about issues of abuse and to reduce domestic violence, arising out of the Commission on Women's Concerns of the World Evangelical Alliance. www.abuseofwomen.org**
- **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: The USCCB's Web page on domestic violence includes links to preaching and counselling resources for priests, deacons, and pastoral staffs. www.usccb.org/laity/women/violence.shtml**
- **The National Domestic Violence Hotline: I -800-799-SAFE (7233); TTY: 1-800-787-3224; www.ndvh.org**
- **Note that computer use can be monitored and is impossible to completely clear. If you are afraid your Internet and/or computer usage might be monitored, please use a safer computer or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline.**

Miles says that most pastors, when confronted with a situation of domestic violence, shy away because they lack training in the issue. According to Miles, pastors say things like, "I don't know what to do; it's messy; I wish it hadn't been brought to my attention." There is also denial. Miles describes the train of thought as "It couldn't happen here because we're so spiritual." Others, he says, deny because their church is "too something" — too rich or too educated or too successful.

PASCH is committed to creating an "international prayer network" of concerned partners dedicated to the elimination of domestic and sexual abuse in Christian homes. PASCH hopes to accomplish this goal through facilitating collaboration among formerly isolated advocates and researchers, linking them to each other and enabling them to build on each other's work. From this, PASCH hopes to encourage the creation of educational and training programs, as well as a steady flow of new resources from a distinctly evangelical perspective.

Kroeger is excited about the next steps for PASCH. One of the group's newest ministries is the creation of a "shoe card" — a card small enough to be hidden under the insole of a woman's shoe. The card is distributed in women's restrooms, and includes a definition of what constitutes abuse, instructions, and the phone number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

"They're absolutely flying," says Kroeger, reporting that the cards disappeared so quickly from one church that organizers wondered whether they were being stolen.

In 2007, Kroeger hopes to host a training institute on Cape Cod to help clergy interact more successfully with social service resources. Both clergy and social service professionals have a long history of regarding each other with distrust.

Many social service professionals report that when clergy are involved in a domestic abuse situation, they often make it worse by making the women feel pressured to remain within the relationship. Some members of the clergy are uneasy with social service professionals' secular approach. Kroeger hopes to ease that tension and help both sides gain more productive dialogue.

"A lot of it was about women and empowering women," says Kroeger. She dreams of a continuum that reaches "from the steeple to the shelter," and that finally re-moves the "holy hush" of silence and secrecy that Kroeger says supports and enables abuse.

"We want to pass the good news that the Bible provides a warrant for responsible conduct," says Kroeger.

THE CHURCH AND FREEDOM IN THESE TIMES

THE MIX; 11/06; PATTY FAWKNER IS A GOOD SAMARITAN SISTER IN SYDNEY; [HTTP://WWW.CATALYST-FOR-RENEWAL.COM.AU/INDEX.HTM](http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/index.htm).

...We build freedom by pursuing truth. Catherine of Siena, born in 1347 knew this. Catherine's times — marked by violence and an uncertain future — were similar to our own. During her lifetime the papacy fled to Avignon splitting the Church and states into warring factions.

If Catherine ever had a motto it would be the line from John's Gospel, "The truth will make you free" (John 8:32). She called God "Gentle Truth", and Jesus was her model of truth and freedom. For her, Gospel freedom is freedom from illusion, ignorance, fear and selfishness, in order to be free for love and service to the world, especially to those who are vulnerable.

Catherine never pulls any punches. In a letter to cardinals who were supporting the anti-pope, she wrote, "What made you do this? You are flowers who shed no perfume, but stench that makes the whole world reek."

She wrote to Pope Gregory XI urging him to leave Avignon and return to Rome, even though he was afraid of being poisoned. "Be not a timorous child, but manly." She spoke to him like a loving daughter affectionately referring to him as Babbo, which means Daddy.

Catherine even dared to tell God what to do: "I plead with you to restore the warmth of charity and peace and unity to holy Church. It is my will that you do not delay any longer." Obviously she who must be obeyed!

Feisty and direct though her words always were, Catherine spoke with courage, love and an inner freedom. Her words attempted to unite rather than divide, to illuminate rather than obscure, to heal rather than wound.

Catherine's respect for, and obedience to, the hierarchy was unquestioning. But loving obedience to the church doesn't mean an uncritical silence. She, herself, could never be silent. She wrote to some cardinals, 'Be silent no longer. Cry out with a hundred thousand voices. I see that the world is destroyed through silence.

Christ's spouse is pallid, her colour has been drained from her."

Catherine called church authorities to be ministers rather than teachers of truth. She believed that they didn't own the truth, but that they were servants of truth. For her Christ alone is the teacher of truth. She writes beautifully to Cardinal de Luna: "Oh dearest father, fall in love with this truth so that you may be a pillar in the mystic body of holy church, where this truth must be administered. Truth must be administered by truthful persons, persons who are in love with truth and enlightened by it."

What can we learn from Catherine?

- First, be a critical lover, not an unloving critic of the Church. To critique honestly and lovingly in one's search for the truth is not a sign of infidelity, but a sign of an adult faith.
- Second, freedom won't be won by silence.
- Third, be ministers, servants of the truth and not owners and dispensers of the truth. There is a disease in our church, and in society generally called the disease of certainty. It negates any possibility of dialogue. To grow and learn, to pursue truth and inner freedom, I must surrender certainty and the need to be right.

As Jewish poet Yehuda Amichai says in his poem:

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow in the Spring.
The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled like a yard.
But doubts and loves dig up the world
Like a mole, a plough.

The hard certainties of religious rhetoric can be crucifying, but "doubts and loves dig up the world".

PRAYING TO THE BUDDHA - LIVING AMID RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

PETER C. PHAN; [HTTP://WWW.COMMONWEALMAGAZINE.ORG/ARTICLE.PHP3?ID_ARTICLE=1828](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/article.php3?id_article=1828); 25/1/07

In 2000, twenty-five members of my family returned to Vietnam, many for the first time since leaving the country as refugees a quarter of a century earlier. Our nostalgic tour included a visit to the buildings of the Catholic high school where I used to teach. That visit was disappointing because the school had been seized years earlier by the Communist government and no longer existed. But our curiosity was aroused by a nearby Buddhist pagoda which, in contrast to the school, seemed to be prospering, with a beautiful garden and several new buildings.

As we entered the courtyard, dominated by a huge statue of the reclining Buddha surrounded by his five disciples, we were greeted by a smiling and gentle-looking nun in her late twenties. She was dressed in a light-grey habit, her head clean-shaven, a necklace of brown wooden beads hanging down from around her neck. She immediately recognized that we were viet kieu-foreign Vietnamese, the government's designation for expatriates-and offered to give us a tour of the pagoda. She showed us various buildings, her voice soft and soothing, her demeanour radiating warmth and peace. When my mother asked her about her life, she replied that she had entered the monastery as a girl and had lived there ever since.

Finally she led us into the pagoda itself. In the dimly-lit sanctuary a huge golden Buddha sat cross-legged on a high lotus-flower throne, his eyes peacefully closed, his hands touching each other and resting on his lap in the traditional gesture of meditation. In front of the Buddha, offerings of fruit were artfully arranged in golden bowls, along with flowers, incense, and red candles.

On the side stood a statue of the female bodhisattva, or the Buddha of compassion, known in Vietnamese as Quan Am. The whole place was suffused with a prayerful silence periodically punctuated by the muffled sounds of a gong. Never had I had as deep an experience of stepping on sacred ground and as overwhelming a sense of what Rudolf Otto calls the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, not even in Catholic churches. My mother stood reverently in front of the Buddha, her eyes fixed on him, her palms held together at her chest, her lips murmuring a prayer. When she finished, she rummaged in her handbag, took out a handful of American dollars, and dropped them into the coffer. As we left, she turned to me and said: "The Buddha is a holy man."

Just a couple of decades earlier, my mother's gesture would have been condemned as idolatry. In her youth (she is now eighty-two) she had been taught that only Christianity-more precisely, Roman Catholicism-was the true religion, and all other religions the work of the devil. To avoid contamination by such superstitions, Vietnamese Catholics usually lived together in so-called "Catholic villages," separated from the "pagans."

For nearly four centuries they were strictly forbidden to practice ancestor worship, the most sacred ritual of the Confucian tradition, which the church condemned as idolatry. The correspondence between the bishops of Vietnam and the Propaganda Fide (now the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples) over

those centuries contain repeated queries about the permissibility of venerating ancestors and of contributing money for the building of temples-queries to which the Propaganda Fide consistently replied with a firm, curt negative.

How, then, could an old woman like my mother, God-loving and church-fearing, a twice-a-day churchgoer raised to believe that no one except Catholics can be saved, do what she did that day in that pagoda? And what, exactly, happened between the 1960s and 2000 that enabled her to honour the Buddhist nun, pray to the Buddha, and contribute money to the maintenance of the pagoda? The answer lies in the dramatic expansion during our era of inter-religious dialogue, particularly as it has been espoused by the church since Vatican II.

Being religious inter-religiously

Lest it be thought that recent theologies of inter-religious dialogue are responsible for my mother's change of mind and heart, I must confess that she is illiterate (in her youth, girls were not allowed to go to school, and she has never even seen any of my books on theology-apparently to no spiritual harm). In the West, especially in academic circles, the word "dialogue" usually evokes images of a learned conversation among intellectuals at conferences and symposia. One envisions interfaith dialogue as an intellectual give-and-take among professional theologians, scholars, and religious officials such as rabbis, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, imams, and mullahs.

To distinguish between this kind of intellectual exchange and a broader conception of dialogue, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, taking a cue from a joint 1991 document of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, describes a fourfold activity: the "dialogue of life," in which people engage others in their community in a neighbourly exchange of daily joys, problems, and concerns; the "dialogue of action," a call for Christians to cooperate with those of other faiths in projects of mutual interest; the "dialogue of religious experience," in which people share spiritual practices, such as prayer and contemplation, with others of different faiths; and the "dialogue of theological exchange," involving specialists who undertake to enrich each other's conception of their respective religious and spiritual traditions.

Contemporary religious pluralism, in Asia and increasingly in the United States, requires inter-religious dialogue not only at the theological level, but at the personal level too. It challenges one to be religious inter-religiously. Consequently, pride of place must be given to the dialogue of life, in which, as the 1991 document prescribes, people of different faiths live together "in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations." This life-in-common with non-Christians, I have discovered, is what opened my mother's mind and heart to other faiths and made her reject the older view of non-Christians as "pagans" destined to eternal damnation.

My mother lives in an apartment complex where most tenants are Vietnamese. Among her close friends are two women who, she assures me, are holy and devout Buddhists. One of them, who is younger and can drive, helps my mother with shopping and visits to doctors. The other is older and calls my mother em, or "young sister," while my mother in return calls her chi, "older sister." They accept each other as "ba con ruot thit" – (flesh and-blood) - relatives. My mother also had a close Catholic friend who shunned all contacts with non-Christians and strongly disapproved of my mother's friendship with the two Buddhist women. Ironically, after this woman's death, one of my mother's Buddhist friends gave money to the local priest to have a Mass said for her.

Another form of inter-religious dialogue that deserves equal emphasis is the dialogue of action, the collaboration between Christians and other believers "for the integral development and liberation of people." Here in the United States, Vietnamese Catholics and Buddhists in Mississippi helped each other rebuild both a church and a pagoda destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. In Asia, where Christians make up only 3 percent of the population, a dialogue of action is not an intellectual luxury but a basic necessity for survival; learning to live harmoniously with non-Christians and to work together for justice and peace are essential parts of the church's evangelizing mission. In recent years, Vietnamese Catholics and Buddhists have worked together to help victims of natural disasters and to protest against infringements of religious freedom in Vietnam, especially in cases of persecution against Catholic priests and Buddhist monks.

The most challenging and spiritually fruitful form of inter-religious dialogue is the dialogue of religious experience, in which believers, while "rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute." This can entail either an intellectual conversation with others about one's spiritual traditions, or a common act of "religious experience," in which Christians and non-Christians come together to pray, meditate and contemplate, profess faith, and search for God or the Absolute (the latter expression takes into account non-theistic religions such as Buddhism and Jainism).

Pope John Paul II's meetings with leaders of various religions in Assisi in 1986 and in subsequent years to pray for peace are often invoked as an example of this dialogue of religious experience. Yet even Pope John Paul's actions, symbolically and doctrinally significant as they were, fell short of what the dialogue of religious experience could be. In Assisi, peoples of diverse faiths gathered together in one place to pray, but not to pray together.

Traditionally, a fear of religious syncretism has made religious leaders-and not only Catholic leaders-hesitate to recommend merging prayer rituals. But a number of theologians argue that praying together is possible and highly desirable, especially for believers of theistic faith (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism), and particularly in situations of violence and conflict caused in the name of religion.

Although it may sound like a strange thing for a theologian to say, as the final means of effecting a better awareness of God's saving presence in all religions, theological dialogue is less important than the other three forms of dialogue. It is by necessity limited to a narrow circle of experts and often deals with subjects too recondite for the average believer. More crucially, theological exchange presupposes the other three dialogues, and ideally is deeply rooted in them.

As is clear from the history of theology, dogmas and doctrines are almost always framed in controversies and frozen in texts that are intelligible only in their historical contexts. It is only within the dialogues of life, action, and religious experience that one can obtain an accurate gauge of the relative importance-or, to use an expression of Vatican II, the "hierarchy of truths"-of these doctrines.

For example, *Dominus Iesus*, the declaration issued in 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, asserts that "if it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation."

As I was writing this essay, meanwhile, the Washington Post reported that official Saudi first-grade textbooks for Islamic studies affirm that "every religion other than Islam is false." My point is not that *Dominus Iesus* and Saudi religious textbooks are parallel. Rather, it is that the *Dominus Iesus* statement will be read and understood one way in the corridors of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and in another, quite different way in the context of a dialogue with Islam-and specifically in a contemporary geopolitical context inflamed by the notion of a "clash of civilizations" that pits Muslim against Christian. Furthermore, it is only after serious and prolonged dialogues of life, action, and religious experience that one can say with any degree of certainty whether a devout Muslim is always and "objectively speaking" in "a gravely deficient situation" and necessarily worse off than a Catholic who has at his or her disposal "the fullness of the means of salvation."

Such dialogues will also determine whether and when one should compare Christianity with Islam or any other religion, given the serious possibility of misunderstanding and violence. Imagine, for instance, that you are in Nigeria, a country with a longstanding and violent history of conflict between its Muslim north and Christian south. Suppose you inform a Muslim Nigerian, with full fervour and conviction, that in comparison with Catholics he is in "a gravely deficient situation" with regard to salvation.

What is the chance of your convincing him of the salvific advantages of the Catholic Church-a church whose primary meaning to him may be that it once led the Crusades and is currently awash in sexual scandal?

How would you answer if he countered your assertion with the Saudi textbook's assertion that "every religion other than Islam is false"?

Such an exchange might exacerbate the already violent tension between Nigerian Muslims and Christians. Unless it is deeply rooted in genuine and sincere dialogues of life, action, and religious experience, your description of his religious condition, inspired by an innocent affirmation of an ecclesiastical document such as *Dominus Iesus*, would be the equivalent of shouting "Fire" in a crowded theatre.

A Christian theology of religion

I am not suggesting that the dialogue of theological exchange should not be undertaken. Indeed, such a dialogue can be mutually enriching, dispelling the misunderstandings of teachings and practices that complicate relations between different faiths, even as it clarifies the teachings and practices of one's own religion. However, such a dialogue must be accompanied by a reflection, on the part of Christians, on the role of Christ and the church with regard to other religions.

How are we to understand this role? The answers tend to fall in one or another of four groups, as Paul Knitter has helpfully explained in *Introducing Theologies of Religions*: replacement (there is only one true religion), fulfillment (one true religion fulfills other religions), mutuality (there are many true religions

which are called to dialogue), and acceptance (there are many religions which have different ends). More simply, theologies of religions are often categorized in three models: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Exclusivism holds that there is only one saviour and one true religion or church and that no salvation is possible outside of them.

At the other end of the spectrum, pluralism holds that there are many saviours and different paths leading to salvation, none necessarily superior to the others. Inclusivism maintains that although there is only one saviour and one true church, salvation remains possible outside them-though it is always ultimately dependent on them.

Respected Christian theologians advocate each of these positions, making credible appeals to both Scripture and Tradition to bolster their views. (Incidentally, these three positions occur also among theologians of other religions, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism.) The official teaching of the Catholic Church, at least as articulated in Dominus Iesus, favours inclusivism while warning against the dangers of pluralism.

It categorically affirms the “fullness and definitiveness of the revelation of Jesus Christ” and the “unicity and unity of the church,” stating that “it would be contrary to the faith to consider the church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the church toward the eschatological kingdom of God.”

Does this mean that other religions cannot be regarded as “ways of salvation”? The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India gives a very nuanced answer:

Christ is the sacrament, the definitive symbol of God’s salvation for all humanity. This is what the salvific uniqueness and universality means in the Indian context. That, however, does not mean there cannot be other symbols, valid in their own ways, which the Christian sees as related to the definitive symbol, Jesus Christ. The implication of all this is that for hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings, salvation is seen as being channelled to them not in spite of but through and in their various socio-cultural and religious traditions. We cannot, then, deny a priori a salvific role for these non-Christian religions.

Does comparing Dominus Iesus with the statement of the Indian bishops merely show a distinction without a difference? Or do the Indian bishops provide a ground for saying that non-Christian religions are also in a certain sense “ways of salvation,” without thereby jeopardizing the universal relevance of Christ and the church? Is it not likely that the Indian bishops could arrive at this conclusion only as the result of their dialogues of life, action, and religious experience with peoples of other faiths?

Another way of approaching the issue is to ask whether religious diversity is simply an accidental fact of history—a de facto religious pluralism—or something willed positively by God. In Christianity and the Religions, Jacques Dupuis (whose earlier work *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* was censured by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) holds that members of non-Christian religions may be saved through the “elements of truth and grace” found in their religions, and that these religions have a positive meaning in God’s single overall plan of salvation.

They are, in Dupuis’s words, “gifts of God to the peoples of the world.” Strong parallels exist between Dupuis and the Indian bishops, and Dupuis himself says, “If I had not lived in India for thirty-six years, I would not preach the theology which I am preaching today.”

Comparative theology & dialogue

Theologians such as James Fredericks have suggested that the ideas developed by Dupuis and others, variously dubbed “fulfillment theology” or “inclusive pluralism,” test the limits of faithfulness to the twin doctrines of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus as saviour and the universality of God’s saving grace in the Holy Spirit. Fredericks also argues that this theology of religion, though “faithful to the depth and scope of Christian tradition,” is not useful to the Christian community today as it seeks “new forms of social and religious solidarity with those who follow other religious paths.” In *Buddhists and Christians*, Fredericks maintains that this theology distorts other religious traditions, minimizes the significance of religious differences, and actually hinders inter-religious dialogue.

This critique misses the point.

First, it is premature to call for a moratorium on this theological discussion—as if the “inclusive pluralism” of Dupuis were already a common doctrine, or a *sententia communis*, as we used to say in the old scholastic days. But more important, blaming inclusive pluralism for hindering inter-religious dialogue is a little like blaming a chainsaw for messing up a juicy sirloin.

This theology was never intended as a tool for inter-religious dialogue. The attempt to understand how non-Christian religions may disclose “ways of salvation” is not part of an inter-religious dialogue but of

an intra-religious one; it is Christian theologians talking to other Christian theologians in a necessary discourse about a matter of great significance.

A pluralistic theology serves as a strong reminder to Christians that non-Christian religious traditions may and indeed do contain teachings and practices that will help Christians know and love God more faithfully-and encourages them to enter into inter-religious dialogue with a great veneration for those traditions.

The call of theologians like Fredericks and Francis Clooney for “comparative theology” as a form of inter-religious dialogue is nevertheless well taken. A theological exchange deeply rooted in the dialogues of life, action, and religious experience is one in which all doctrinal and religious differences must be honoured and all attempts at homogenization resisted. It is only by means of a patient and painstaking investigation of particular texts, doctrines, liturgical practices, and moral precepts that both differences and similarities between Christianity and other religions may emerge. Only in this way can there be a mutual understanding, full of challenge, correction, and enrichment, for both Christians and non-Christians.

For even if Christ embodies the fullness of God’s self-revelation, the church’s understanding of this revelation remains imperfect, and its practice of it remains partial, at times even sinful. Pope John Paul’s repeated begging for forgiveness was no empty charade. Might it not be precisely through inter-religious dialogue that the church comes to an awareness of its errors and sins-and, with the assistance of people of other faiths, sets out on the path of renewal?

Inter-religious dialogue can be practiced by people of faith, irrespective of educational level, social standing, and religious status, and is urgently needed in the conflict-ridden political and religious climate of the post-9/11 United States. Such dialogue is not merely a preparatory step toward peacemaking and reconciliation; it constitutes the very process of peacemaking and reconciliation itself, a process that occurs precisely in the acts of living together, working together, and praying together. These dialogues are powerful means to correct biases, erase deep-seated hatreds, and heal ancient wounds. By promoting communication, grassroots activism toward peace and justice, and above all, shared experiences of the Divine or the Absolute in spite of religious differences, such dialogue helps forge a new way of life.

Finally, it should be noted that openness to other religions is not a modern invention. As early as the third century, Clement of Alexandria, a father of the church, wrote: “Among the Indians are those philosophers also who follow the precepts of Boutta [Buddha], whom they honour as a god on account of his extraordinary sanctity” (The Stromata, Book I, Chapter XV). Later, in the Middle Ages, the Christian calendar began to mention a Saint “Josaphat” or “Iodasaph.”

Historians now acknowledge that, like “Bodisav” in sixth-century Persian texts, “Budhasaf” or “Yudasaf” in eighth-century Arabic documents, and “Ioasaph” in eleventh-century Greek texts, “Iosaphat” or “Josaphat” in Latin documents are garbled forms of “Bodhisattva”- that is, Gautama the Buddha.

The story of how the Buddha became a Catholic saint is, for inter-religious dialogue, a curious but felicitous one. I wonder if my mother had an intuitive inkling of all this when she was praying to the Buddha in that pagoda in Vietnam years ago, and afterward explained to her son the theologian, “the Buddha is a holy man.”

THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE IS IN NO HURRY - ISRAEL

AMIRA HASS; 18/1/07; [HTTP://WWW.HAARETZ.COM/](http://www.haaretz.com/)

Had Defense Minister Amir Peretz wanted to prove in his actions that he views racism as despicable and dangerous - as it was possible to understand from his remarks on Monday to his colleague, Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Lieberman - he would have used his authority to cancel in a timely manner an instruction issued by GOC Central Command Yair Naveh that will go into effect on Friday. He has not, however, done so, and starting on January 19, 2007, Israelis and foreigners will be prohibited from taking Palestinians as passengers in their cars throughout the West Bank.

Had Education Minister Yuli Tamir truly wanted to change patterns that have become fixed in the education system during the course of 40 years of occupation, she would have already used her exalted position to raise an uproar in the Knesset and the government against the GOC's instruction, which undermines the right of Palestinians and Israelis to develop relationships on a friendly, familial and ideological basis. She has had sufficient time for this: The instruction was signed on November 19, 2006.

Had Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, who is shocked, shocked, by the situation in Hebron, and has come to the conclusion that the law does not operate effectively there, been interested - he could have blocked the instruction that adds another building-block to the rule of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank: Naveh's instruction allows only Israeli employers (mainly settlers and people who live inside Israel

proper) to drive their Palestinian workers. That is, it makes explicit a perception whereby the only possible natural relationship between a Palestinian and an Israeli and Jew is that of employee and employer.

Had members of the Israeli media, who were appalled by the sight of the young Jewish settler woman cursing her Palestinian "neighbours" in Hebron, in master-like gestures, been interested in being effective as well - they would have organized in time to express their shock at Major General Naveh's instruction, which will make a criminal of every Israeli who gives a ride in the West Bank to a Palestinian friend or a family member who is not a first-degree relative. But the media as a whole, and the Journalists Association and jurists who specialize in media law, have left the fight to the human rights organizations and a few lone journalists. Had the media not forgotten the innumerable reports that it itself has published about the doings of the settlers in Hebron and the military government there - it would have concluded that the demographic separation that Naveh's new instruction imposes is the offspring of the same mode of thinking and action that has brought about ethnic cleansing in the old city of Hebron.

Had the chorus of shock at a single filmed settler woman not been a matter of "ratings," but rather the expression of a moral stance accepted by society, the High Court of Justice would have issued an interim order to delay implementation of Naveh's instruction. But it has not issued any such interim order, even though eight human rights organizations, represented by attorney Michael Sfard, have given it the opportunity to do so. Nor did the High Court's Justice Edmond Levy feel any urgency about the matter, and he postponed the hearing on the petition until February 12.

The Court has been in no hurry because Naveh's instruction is logical and very obvious, and the road to it has been carefully and gradually paved in recent years, in a series of orders, instructions and laws, as well as the policy of separate roads and the route of the separation barrier. Always with the approval of the High Court.

The instruction concords with other prohibitions on movement that Israel has imposed on Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in the very same territory where Jews have unimpeded movement, and residential, economic and trade rights.

For years now, these prohibitions on movement have been preventing thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank from visiting family and friends in Gaza. They are responsible for thousands of sagas about people who are not permitted to live with their families in their own homes or to care for their parents on their deathbeds. They prevent students from pursuing the studies of their choice at decent institutions of learning. They keep sick people away from clinics, women about to give birth from maternity wards, children from schools and workers from their workplaces.

These prohibitions have transformed about one-third of the area of the West Bank - the Jordan Valley - into a region that is empty of Palestinians, apart from about 50,000 whose official address, as it appears in their identity cards, is in the valley.

The instruction under discussion complements and completes one that was issued in October 2000 - and which under the well-known excuse of security prohibited Israelis from entering Areas A in the West Bank.

The new instruction is particularly efficient because it mainly endangers the Palestinians who may disobey it: For various legal reasons, it will be difficult to bring the Israelis to trial in a civilian court. The Palestinian "criminals," however, will be shunted in and out of military courts, be blacklisted and pursued by the Shin Bet security service, and find themselves facing prison terms of up to five years. This fact will deter Israelis from choosing to practice non-violent civil disobedience, as taught by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., by disobeying this flagrantly illegal command. The founders of apartheid in South Africa would have been proud

WIKIPEDIA REFERENCES A SOURCE OF ANXIETY – HUMAN RIGHTS - EDUCATION

THE NEW REPUBLIC; THE AUSTRALIAN; 12/4/07; NO INTERNET TEXT; ERIC RAUCHWAY IS A PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

The history department at Middlebury College in Vermont, the US, has banned students' citation of Wikipedia, saying the free online encyclopaedia that anyone can edit "suffers inevitably from inaccuracies deriving in large measure from its unique manner of compilation".

What's at stake here isn't error. It's how we in the professional knowledge business greet our new overlords: the plain people of the internet.

Right now, we're lobbing fibs at them of just the kind the internet is good at puncturing and, indeed, of just the kind the losing side used the last time our civilisation endured a revolution in the ownership of knowledge.

Wikipedia's founder Jimmy "Jimbo" Wales agrees with the Middlebury historians. "Basically, they are recommending exactly what we suggested: students shouldn't be citing encyclopaedias. I would hope

they wouldn't be citing Encyclopaedia Britannica, either." All encyclopaedias stand several degrees of separation away from the events on which they report.

But by "barring Wikipedia citations without mentioning other encyclopaedias", as Middlebury American studies professor Jason Mittell says, "it would seem that their problem is with the Wiki, not the pedia".

Yet in pitting Wikipedia against the Britannica, British journal Nature found: "The exercise revealed numerous errors in both encyclopaedias, but among 42 entries tested the difference in accuracy was not particularly great. The average science entry in Wikipedia contained around four inaccuracies; Britannica, about three."

Wikipedia lets anyone write or edit it, which makes it vulnerable to vandalism. But Wikipedia relies on this openness to defend itself. Its (mostly) upstanding citizens don't take kindly to rotten kids ruining their encyclopaedia and they quickly stop it.

In contrast to this reliance on openness, consider Britannica. Nature critiqued Britannica by conducting a peer-reviewed comparison of the reference works, acting as academics are supposed to: by getting expert opinion, then getting other experts to go over the conclusions. Britannica's response was to buy ad space in The New York Times lambasting Nature.

People with money, reputation and control over public information have historically used their power to retain control over the means of producing knowledge, as philosopher Jurgen Habermas noted. During the Middle Ages, the only public things were the symbols of authority, displayed to the people by kings and the church, who told them what to think and do. As market towns arose, so did a new public culture. Now information didn't just move down from above; it moved horizontally and, by the 17th century, vigorously, in print journals, coffee houses and taverns where political and literary discourse flourished.

As Habermas noted, the rise of public opinion annoyed the experts: "The conflict about lay judgment, about the public as a critical authority, was most severe ... where hitherto a circle of connoisseurs had combined social privileges with a specialised competence."

But, once public, knowledge became so cheap to make and spread that it demanded attention.

Everyone who was anyone was reading and listening. And, throughout the period of liberalisation in the West, the great and good, the ambitious and the worthy, learned to reckon with "the sense of the people". The rise of the modern state and the expensive apparatus of modern media undid this revolution in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Al Gore noted, borrowing from Habermas, it meant a refeudalisation of the public sphere.

Now the internet is de-feudalising it again. There's no point romanticising what's going on, de-feudalisation doesn't mean democratisation. Like the coffee-house culture, the internet's public sphere is noticeably male, crude and given to the concerns of the rich middle class. But it's not subject to the control of press barons, either.

Professors can no more undo the public sphere of the internet than the embattled experts of the early modern era could undo the coffee houses. That doesn't mean our days are numbered (although Britannica's may be). As Habermas noted, deft politicians learned to use "the knowledge of the millions".

And scholars still have a role to play in the world of Wikipedia. It needs us: Wikipedia articles need to cite reliable sources that use "process and approval between document creation and publication". In other words, academic work: Wikipedia is on our side.

The God I don't Believe In –

"The God who is not ironical about the new Pharisees of history...

The God who does not save those who have not known him but who have desired and searched for him...

The God incapable of making all things new...

The God who does not have a different, personal, individual word for each person..."

The God I don't Believe In; Juan Arias;1975

Mission and Justice is produced four times a year for the co-promoters of the Asia/Pacific area of the Dominican Family, their friends and those interested. It is produced by the Justice & Peace Promoter for the Australasian Province. Editor: Fr. Luke Rawlings OP. All are invited to send contributions which they feel may be of interest to: The Justice & Peace Promoter, PO Box 224, Westmead, NSW, Australia 2145.

- Email: lukeopjp@ozemail.com.au; Website - www.missionandjustice.org