

MISSION AND JUSTICE 3/07

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All Cartoons: Woman Church; #40;Grahame English



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Check this Out

This issue of Mission & Justice highlights two losses for the church in Australia.

Women Church: a journal, to which I subscribed from its inception, always lively, always an instrument for growth, always a cause of repentance ceased publication. I knew the death was imminent but sorrow is still real. The article "**Australian Catholic Women: A Spiritual Trajectory**" gives you some idea of the quality of the material that was found in Women Church. Along with "**Australian Aboriginal Women's Religion**", and "**East Timor and Australia**" these articles are re-printed from the final and 40th edition. And those delightful cartoons of **Grahame English**; I am sure if you have never seen them the ones in this bulletin will give you a chuckle and realise what you have missed over the years.

Secondly: the newsletter, The Mix, which was a source of wisdom of committed, men and women in the church and excellent material from Michael Whelan SM. Those who know of Christianity in the Pub and those who were unable to attend those gatherings were always aware, through The Mix, of just how good the speakers were/are and what they were missing. The article **What is the way forward for religion?** is an excellent example of the material that was found in The Mix..

I was fascinated by the number of people who responded to the last edition of Mission & Justice - here in Australia and overseas. It seems it is not only Australians who are tired of religious bullies. For these and others I am publishing an interesting paper from Frank Brennan: **Pastors of the Flock in the Public Domain**

Finally. It is important to not forget West Papua - though both the Indonesia and Australian governments would love to see this issue die quietly: **Genocide, Military Operations & Islamisation under Special**

Autonomy in West Papua. Along with Timor, migrants, refugees and human rights the arrogance concerning West Papua of the current Australian and Indonesian governments remains visible to all.

Postscript: Along with the other priests in the diocese the local Bishop sent me a copy of a Roman document. Produced by public servants, beavered away in the tombs of their particular ministry in Rome, and after the appropriate minister had signed and sealed the original, it was forwarded to Australia and remains an important reminder that sometimes what happens in Australia cause a very tiny ripple in a big pond elsewhere.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN: A SPIRITUAL TRAJECTORY

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In my first year as a new priest, I took Holy Communion to a woman in the parish who was dying of stomach cancer. This was before Vatican II. One day she told me that a neighbouring woman who belonged to a local prayer group had come in and prayed with her and she had been comforted. 'Protestants pray more easily than we do, Father', she said.

Tight with the theology that had been poured into me in the Manly seminary, I delivered a little talk on the Catholic sacramental system, and how the objectivity of the sacraments might impede our subjective response to them – did I actually use the words *ex opere operante* and *ex opere operantis*? Alas, I fear I did – and so on.

'Oh, that's a bit much to take in on only half an apple a day', was her response. It was some years before I realized that she was right: Protestants did pray more easily than we Catholics.

Not that we were without prayers.

In the Catholic world, books of prayers abounded, replete with formulas for every occasion. The Green or Penny Catechism, that foundational document of the Australian Catholic experience, had seven pages of such formulas: from the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed and the Confiteor to the Memorare, the Angelus, the Rosary, an Act of Contrition and a prayer for the conversion of Australia. These we knew by heart. Or, if we forgot them, they could be found in any of the different prayer-books that were part of our religious culture.

Prayer-books had been with us from the start, brought here by the convicts. The priests gave them the books before their ships sailed and they used them well, meeting in groups and listening together while a literate convict read to them from the books, as Surgeon Cunningham, who made five trips to Sydney with convict ships, attested in his memoirs, or Vicar-General Ullathorne recorded of the convicts on Norfolk Island.

'In the remote wilds,' wrote Ullathorne of the convicts' prayer-book, 'it is to him in place of priest, and altar, and sacrifice.' And so it continued: Catholics were known by their books of prayers.

The dean of our historians, Patrick O'Farrell, reflected on this thirty years ago when, having been asked to speak on lay spirituality in Australia, he refused, saying there was no such thing as lay spirituality here; the laity took what they were given.

In one of her histories of South Australian Catholicism, Margaret Press has a visitor to an outback station shown to the guest room, where he notices on the bedside table a copy of the most popular Catholic prayer-book, *The Garden of the Soul*. He knows then that this is a Catholic household.

Structures and formulas were a natural part of this sacramental religion, a trademark of its spirituality.

Writing in the first number of *Women-Church*, in 1987, Erin White remembered the observances of her earlier life as a religious sister: Daily I performed the exercises of a spiritual life too full to be rich: morning prayers, meditation, morning office, Mass, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, stations of the cross, rosary, evening office, prayers after supper, night office. The timing and duration of all exercises were specified. Having to sample everything on the smorgasbord every day, I became spiritually fatigued.

There is no denying that an individual's spirituality could draw sustenance from these daily exercises – notice 'meditation', 'spiritual reading', 'examination of conscience', as well as the treasure trove of the psalms in morning and night offices – but the external imposition of these exercises together with their time-tabling and bulk might handicap individuality in the spiritual life, as Erin White suggests.

Convent life is important to consider here because the models for Catholic spirituality came from religious houses, just as the prayer-books were compiled by religious men and women. 'Lay spirituality', if it existed at all, was a less intense version of monastic life.

The dean of our historians, Patrick O'Farrell, reflected on this thirty years ago when, having been asked to speak on lay spirituality in Australia, he refused, saying there was no such thing as lay spirituality here; the laity took what they were given.

Sixty years ago, a woman whose family I knew well wrote a weekly column in *The Catholic Weekly* about their home life, under the pen name 'Patricia Mack'. Theirs was an ordinary Australian family of the time, with trips to the beach and the Zoo, birthdays and shopping, visits to the dentist and bouts of measles, games and neighbourhood encounters.

Catholicism was a vital presence in this family, a reality that peeps out of each column. There are mentions of saints and guardian angels and praying for the dead. They recite the rosary together each night and they say morning prayers. There is a 'sick call box' in a cupboard that holds a bottle of holy water to be sprinkled in the house. There is a Christmas crib, statues and pictures of saints. Each Lent offers a serious challenge, while a First Holy Communion day is a major event. The devotion of the Nine First Fridays is understood by all of them. (Some of these practices are now so remote that a modern edition would require footnotes.)

Here is rich historical material for anyone wanting to explore the everyday lives of everyday Catholics. The columns of 'Patricia Mack' open a rare window onto those lives, which are often ignored by standard historians who prefer to chronicle the doings of prelates and other church leaders.

Well, the prelates leave behind dense archives for historians to assay, while the laity leave little behind; so their stories are lost.

Which is why the columns of 'Patricia Mack' deserve attention, a rich resource of popular religion made more valuable by their rarity. Patrick O'Farrell may have been right: 'they took what they were given'.

But look what they made of it.

What else is there? Not a lot. Schoolgirl reminiscences, as in Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Solid Bluestone Foundations* (1983), Susan Ryan's *Catching the Waves* (1999), Anne Summer's *Ducks on the Pond* (1999), Helga Griffin's *Sing me that lovely song again...* (2006), or Janise Beaumont's bilious collection, *Reunion* (1997) on a Dominican boarding school.

There are the autobiographies of Hilde Knorr (1986) and Catherine B. Mackerras (1991) and among school histories, those by Susan Emilsen on Santa Sabina, Strathfield (1994) and Loreto Kirribilli (2006, completed by Margaret Callaghan). Katharine Massam's chapter on the chapel in the history of St Aloysius College, Angas Street, Adelaide, *Making Space* (2000), is magisterial.

Then there is *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* (1986), twenty women who grew up in Catholic families and were educated in the forties, fifties, and early sixties.

This is a landmark book, not least because its aim was to respond to the absence of women in Vincent Buckley's autobiographical *Cutting Green Hay* (1983) and my own *Rockchoppers* (1982). Having known some of these women, I revisit *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* from time to time, if only to mull over their photographs and muse on their journeys through life: where are they now?

Venetia Nelson's contribution is outstanding, as is her essay in a later collection, *On being human* (1990), both of them subtle, reflective, scholarly explorations of the virtues of traditional Catholicism; yet the last I heard of her, she had joined a New Age community in rural Victoria.

The subtitle of *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* is *Journeys from Catholic childhoods*, an apt description since many of them have travelled far. These were the *Humanae Vitae* mothers, whose disappointments with the church over contraception were an index of a wider malaise.

Frustrated by defeats of their Vatican II hopes, there now seemed to be no place for them except on the margins. *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* took the temperature of the church 20 years after Vatican II and its prognosis was not good.

Yet if much of the book seems about the public life of the church — its politics, if you like — there are glimpses too of life at a deeper, more intimate and personal level, what one of the writers, Veronica Brady, calls 'another kind of reality'.

Another writer speaks of religious observances being 'the filter through which the rest of life passed'. If spirituality is about the search for getting beyond oneself, for making contact with the Other, the Beyond, the Spirit who transcends everydayness and our own mundane experience, then *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* is also a book of spirituality.

Reading it again, I was reminded of Step Two, in the Twelve Steps program of that fire-tested school of spirituality, Alcoholics Anonymous: 'We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity'.

Here, for example, is a paragraph from Venetia Nelson's essay: 'When I came back to the practice of Catholicism in 1981, it was simply because my God was after all to be found there, in a way he was not to be found in the semi-wilderness in which I had been living. At my father-in-law's funeral in 1974 I had been moved by the sense that in this ceremony, and in these words, there was everything that the heart could desire, that here was where my spirit belonged, and that I was for some reason outside it. My experience, ten years later, is that here is the heart of things, the presence of God, known in a way I did not know it before.'

In reading history it helps to identify periods by one of their dominant symbols.

A good symbol of the pre-Vatican II church would be a mass rally or a religious procession: organized, controlled and directed by clergy, these attracted the attendance of many thousands of lay people, who drew religious sustenance from such public displays. For all their externality there was an interior dimension to these events which can escape notice.

One of 'Patricia Mack's' columns gets close to the heart of the popular Catholicism of the time, when she takes the family to the Manly seminary for the Corpus Christi procession, an annual event that drew tens of thousands of worshippers. With deft literary tact she captures the onlookers' vivid belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and their warm devotion to his person. No doubt about it, the Corpus Christi procession is a telling symbol of the church of that time.

A symbol of Vatican II Catholicism could be a small group of lay people. There were such groups before Vatican II of course — in the Young Christian Workers, the National Catholic Girls Movement and the university apostolates, for instance — which pre-figured and tested many of the major themes that would emerge from the council.

Small-group Catholicism came into its own when conciliar thinking impacted on a local church. Several things characterized the groups that now developed (often below the radar of 'head office' and beneath the notice of official historians). They were run by the laity, who set the agenda themselves. Not exclusively Catholic in membership or inspiration, they drew nourishment from many intellectual traditions.

They engaged seriously with the Bible. At their best they were not just discussion groups or book groups, being in fact transformative and productive of genuine spiritual growth. You could call them prayer groups; and liken them to the Protestant prayer group my dying parishioner had encountered at the beginning of this essay. In this era, Catholics were learning to pray in their own voices and to talk about it, as you can see over the decades in the volumes of the popular spirituality magazine, *Madonna*.

Greg Dening's new history of the Jesuit parishes on the northern side of Sydney Harbour, *Church Alive!* (2006), which allows the laity a full voice in telling the story, catches a glimpse of this transformative power of small-group Catholicism in the reminiscence of one of the local Sisters of Mercy. Holidays at the coast fostered a new spirituality for these sisters, who there could break from their routine duties, and the horarium that ruled every activity of the day: 'New forms of prayer became common. Informal, spontaneous prayer was a novel and fulfilling experience to those whose daily prayer consisted largely of recitation of the psalms, as well as a multitude of novenas, litanies and other pious devotions.'

Greg Dening's book is full of valuable raw material like that, as we may hope to find in future parish histories. Clearly there has been a shift from one-size-fits-all Catholicism to something more diverse, individualised and experimental.

This assessment of the historical significance of small-group Catholicism was confirmed with the appearance, in 2005, of *And the Dance goes on*, an anthology of Australian Catholic women's stories. Here is another landmark book that deserves serious attention by historians.

Compiled by the Commission for Australian Catholic Women, an advisory body to the bishops' conference, it selected 57 testimonies from a pool of 83 respondents to the commission's invitation to Catholic women. Previously, in 1999, *Women and Man: One in Christ Jesus*, from the same source, had reported on a far-ranging survey of Catholic women. Another valuable book. An example: women who were hospital chaplains told how they had often got close to patients, leading them to Christ, until they came to the point of desiring sacramental absolution; whereupon the chaplain had to go in search of a male priest, the only one under current practice who could impart absolution.

The first thing to say about *And the Dance goes on* is that it is a book of spirituality, whatever else you can find in it. These women may struggle to express what they have experienced — for how do you say in words what is in its depths inexpressible? — yet even an unsympathetic reader must admit that there is something real here, however they name it.

They call it *Life* or *That* or *Presence*, using capitals to underline its specialness, just as the book's title has *Dance* with a capital-D. At times this awareness becomes so intense that it seems to describe a mystical experience. These moments can be anywhere, in a swimming pool or before great art or on retreat (Now I find it difficult to describe: the moment of recognition, the inner silence that grew, the unfolding of layers of meaning and beauty, the being at the centre of something I could not name. Tears flowed. I knew somehow that love was beyond and around everything; it was like being part of a circle which went on for ever.' — Margaret Stanbridge Cody.)

Other writers chronicle a growth in awareness that may come from the care they receive in hospital or in mixing with others in the community or simply by working at it in daily prayer — for none of them ignores the truth that growth in the spiritual life takes time, it is not instantaneous.

Thus Nance Millar begins her two-part essay by writing that she had always felt she had with her a 'golden thread' or 'presence' which she loses for a time, then regains as a strengthener in her life. Only at the end ('in this late autumn of my life') of her essay does she feel able to name this thread or presence: in different guises it is God.

The novelty of this book should not camouflage the fact that its testimonies are products of traditional Catholicism. One notices how often saints are mentioned. Francis of Assisi, Clare, Catherine of Siena, Mary MacKillop, Scholastica, Mary Magdalen, Therese of Lisieux and the greatest of them all, St Mary herself.. . they are all here, in one essay or another.

Sociologists such as Andrew Greeley and Eric Hodgens tell us that lay Catholics stick with the church because they like the stories. Stories of the saints are church history in its purest form; so recognition of the saints, as here, is a sure sign of being in the mainstream.

Many of these essayists have lived in the world and church of 'Patricia Mack'. They went to daily Mass or Sunday Mass, belonged to the Legion of Mary, or the Altar Society, they confessed their sins to a priest, knelt before the Blessed Sacrament and rallied to Eucharistic processions and congresses. One of them, who made a pilgrimage to the Marian apparition site at Medjugorje (Bosnia), wears a 'Miraculous medal'. Another misses the 'transcendence' of the pre-Vatican II Latin liturgies. Nevertheless, even in these accounts there are signs of change.

A soldier settler's wife from a traditional background — 'Mass, the Rosary, regular Confession, the Sacraments, Novenas, Purgatory, Indulgences and Limbo were very important in my life' — recalls, as a schoolgirl, 'running in and out of the church and racing through a series of Our Fathers and Hall Marys, in order to gain a Plenary Indulgence.' Now she thinks this was silly.

There's a sentence in Greg Denning's book that seems apposite: 'Older women, with deep memories of who they were in the old Church, will talk of the enrichment of their spiritual lives in the devotions of those days, but will exclaim, "I feel free now!"'

For all that traditional religion which it acknowledges, *And the Dance goes on* is a record of change, even if the changes are not abrupt breaks with the past but developments of it. Here the small groups, symbolic of Vatican II, proliferated. I counted ten essayists who wrote that their membership of a small group was significant. Small groups crowd into their stories: groups for meditation, for prayer, for charismatic praise, Lenten groups and women's groups attached to the Sisters of Mercy or the Dominicans, a Cursillo group, a Paulian group, Vincent de Paul and the Family Apostolate and the Jesuits' Christian Life Community groups — this landscape is dotted with small groups.

At the centre of these lives is the Bible in many differing aspects. Diagnosed with leukemia, a woman encounters again the Gospel readings at Mass, which give her reassurance: 'All the parables and metaphors of the Gospel now took on a new meaning'. Others draw sustenance from Bible readings in the liturgy, whether heard at Mass or read at home with a commentary. Going on retreat, one of them pops her Bible into her bag, alongside her toiletries. One has the New Testament for bedside reading; another becomes immersed in scripture through her membership of a charismatic prayer group. Then there is the woman who writes, 'As I get older, I enjoy reading the Bible more and more.' Everywhere in this book you find the Bible.

With it goes a pervasive sense of prayer. Not so much prayer as petition (although there is this), nor prayer by formula (ditto); rather, what you get here are glimpses of a constant communion with God — praying as a cast of mind, an awareness, a connection. Meditation in some form or other has become a necessary part of these lives, which is what gives them a new spiritual dimension, opening them up to the Spirit. Previously you might have expected to find this in a Protestant prayer group; now you have Catholic evidence of it.

There are many more things to notice about this book. A handful of the essayists are converts to the Catholic church. Once upon a time their essays would have been 'Road to Rome' testimonies of how they found their way through error to truth.

Not here: these women are getting on with their lives, enjoying the rich possibilities now opened to them. Like the other women here, they are intent on living their own lives for, as Moira Gordon writes, modern lay spirituality means accepting responsibility for your own life.

These women are not looking over their shoulders, to see whether some higher authority approves of what they are doing. It is page 193 before anyone cites a papal encyclical.

The wisest of my women friends gave me *And the Dance goes on*, an enlightening gift.

So I came to be challenged by the essay of Maureen Flood, parts of which were included in the readings at her Requiem Mass, in 2006.

She started out trying to do tough things for God, joining the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, then quite a rigid order, and travelling a hard road to holiness. Along came Vatican II, which softened the rigidities for these women. At her end, she would just sit still, contemplating the green leaves of a pot-plant, where she found the divine as surely as she had found it in the monstrance in her convent chapel.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR RELIGION?

PETER MAHER; 16/6/07; PRESENTATION AT WAITARA, SPIRITUALITY IN THE PUB; THE MIX PETER MAHER IS PARISH PRIEST OF NEWTOWN, NSW, AUSTRALIA; NO INTERNET TEXT

In the present climate we need to reclaim the golden religious tradition of compassion and humanity that is not afraid to speak prophetically. We need the voices of liberation that speak to the hopes and experiences of all humanity. Religions must rise above the fear of their own small future that produces destructive and compulsive behaviour that comes from being primarily inward looking.

True religion looks out beyond itself fearlessly in search of the liberty of persons, not stopping for self preservation. True religion is in the tradition of Isaiah, Rebecca, Jesus, Mary, Buddha, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Mary McKillop and Mum Shirl - all people who sought to foster the common good.

It can be argued that these greats were trailblazers and critics of religion calling all to move beyond the constraints of religion. But each saw the place their tradition played in giving them inspiration and hope. However I fear that religion, especially in its institutionalised form, or worse, in the guise of fundamentalist fear, is becoming more irrelevant than ever, if not downright dangerous.

The cultural religion of the West in our time is some kind of warped Christianity that has affirmed all that Jesus' Beatitudes oppose.

Too often, it is aligned with extreme violence and war, possessed by greed and acquisitiveness, racist; sexist; homophobic and prejudiced and lacks any thoroughgoing practice of peacemaking, dialogue, compassion, understanding, care for the poor and economic or environmental justice for the world.

Too often it values conformism, seeks growth in numbers and promotes tribal survival over creative and imaginative ways to curb the alarming rise in the rate of war, address poverty and the devastating effects of climate change.

Too often it is more likely that Christianity, at least in its virulent cultural form, will back Howard and Bush in their extreme short-sighted form of capitalism and warmongering rather than critique their mean-spirited capitulation to the worst of western decadence and greed which is highly antithetical to the gospel.

Let me speak about the Catholic church at this point because it is my own. My religious tradition seems to be peddling backwards in enormous fear. I can't see any daring beyond trying to outdo others. World Youth Day has much to recommend it as a way of valuing youth and young voices in the church. But if it is turned into a competition to see who can get the most people to turn up and whether we outdo Hillsong or Bishop Peter Jensen. It becomes the worst kind of propaganda fuelling dangerous forms of sectarianism.

Sydney diocese comes late to a Pastoral Plan but better late than never they say. However is it? There is no mention anywhere in the 30 page (draft) document of Aborigines, ecumenism, other faiths, climate change or

gays and lesbians just to mention a few glaring omissions in a plan for evangelisation under the patronage of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) so proudly quoted.

The poor and marginalised are mentioned in the platitudinous tones of social welfare, concentrating more on setting up structures and getting the words right, like a Catholic Humphrey Appleby, than providing a practical hard hitting critique for justice in civil society.

Catholic fundamentalism, that reduces the strength of the Western intellectual tradition to mindless conformism, is a betrayal of the tradition. To suggest that good religion consists of the repetition of sexist, racist, homophobic and unimaginative formulae in the name of biblical purity, is not only to suggest that modern biblical scholarship, psychology, science, anthropology and archaeology have nothing to add to the working out of things in the world in our time, but it is to deny the work of God being present in the process of the unfolding human and cosmic mystery.

My religion means a lot to me" — we hear people say. What do they mean? Do they mean the religious ritual practice; the comfort of "knowing" a loving God; the support of a community of faith; a moral guide; an authority to trust; doctrines and dogmas or a sense that it is right because it is all I know? I have enjoyed the comfort of the Catholic religious tradition as long as I can remember. It was the comfort of a mother's prayer as we lay down to sleep; the pride of helping Father at Mass as an altar boy; the boldness of being a part of a group that did good in the world when I was a teenager and the priestly vocation to a life of religious, spiritual and pastoral activities.

So is religion a psychological practice to comfort those who struggle? The sense of assurance about the mystery we call life? A knowledge of God? A hook on which to hang my troubles or a truth on which to pin my hopes. I guess it can be all of these.

In a world that is increasingly complex and multidimensional, fractured and at war, individualistic and selfish, concerned with economics of wealth at the expense of global environmental economics, willing to settle for money as a substitute for happiness, a world that offers denial and lies for political expediency as the way ahead, there is a greater need for true religion than ever before.

So is there a way forward for religion? I believe there is. There are many religions and many possibilities but let me make a few remarks tonight about Christianity.

The Christian religion has carried the gospel story through 2,000 years and is likely to do so for many years into the future. There are many dangers for Christianity at the moment. Once again let me begin with Western Christianity.

To the extent that it maintains its alliance with Western empire-building it will increasingly become irrelevant and discarded by those who care about peace, the future of the planet, human relationships, healing and transformation.

Large numbers of people, young and not so young, have abandoned the institution because they see it as unable to address the needs of our times and their personal hopes. This trend will continue in the West in direct relationship to the extent that the church continues to look inward and focus on numbers.

We must stick to the gospel and let the process take its course. In times of fear the human thing to do is to seek certitude in conformity to doctrines. This is eroding the charisms of ingenuity and imagination and thus blocking the very energy of the church itself to transform society by confronting the culture of death armed only with the daring of the gospel.

Let me say, finally on this point, that the clergy system, as we have it in the Catholic Church, is very vulnerable. In its present form it is in grave danger because our seminaries are in denial about the skills required for pastoral care and in regard to the issue of sexuality. This will lead to greater numbers leaving the practice of their religion because the clergy will make the practice increasingly irrelevant and unbearable.

These issues can be overcome by allowing married and women priests. But I wouldn't hold my breath. They will come however because ultimately the church is pragmatic and it will change to survive.

So what might be the way forward for religion? There are many strengths already present. Catholicism in the West is all but collapsed. We could ask whether such a "collapse" is a bad thing. I believe it will, in fact, be the new Pentecost. There will be an outpouring of new and ground-breaking ideas from its strength – its international nature. The Catholic religion will survive with much of its resurgence coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

I don't know whether its massive assets will enable the church in the west to survive as an institution but I believe its spiritual strength is in its international nature where there is energy and vitality; ingenuity and imagination.

In the developing world religion may seem culturally conformist but they have recent knowledge of breaking from traditional cultural practices to practice Christianity. They know how to do it. The new Pentecost in the developed world I hope will be accompanied with surprising resilience and creativity in Asia, Africa and South America.

Other ways forward for religion are going to be found in reclaiming the gospel. Once again this is a big task in the West where gospel values critique our war-mongering and greedy ways. But gospel values give hope to those who are increasingly being left out of the global economy. Climate change will favour those who can live simply and thus will benefit those already living simply by choice or poverty. We will see true religion emerging in these societies while the wealthy will continue to fight to the death for the right to gobble up what is not there and is not their's.

Sometimes the crippling and domineering hierarchical nature of the structure and decision making apparatus in the Church blinds us to the reality of the Church which is of course ultimately the people. Those of us who live so close to the power of the Church can sometimes forget that the real life of the Church is happening in peoples' hearts and minds and practices.

No matter what the hierarchy say, people are listening to the gospel and they are listening to God in their hearts. They are maintaining their core Catholicism which is the right to belong, participate and contribute. And I dare say this is mirrored in other Christian denominations, if not religions. This is the hope of the Church. This is why in a sea of grief, war, alienation and distraction, in the struggle for religion to survive in any worthwhile form – especially a form that is aligned to the gospel rather than temporal or religious power – there is a way forward.

Religion can grow and be strong because of the common sense of the people who maintain watch, not at the gates, but in subversive action for justice and true holiness – not on this mountain or in Jerusalem but in every heart that believes.

Where people meet regularly, pray in diverse ways, chat about their lives and celebrate Eucharist both in the Sacrament and in sacramental ways, the Church is alive and true religion is alive. Where believers, on the basis of what they have gleaned from the truth of their faith traditions, are supporting the worker, the sick, the poor, women, victims of violence, gays and lesbians, true religion has triumphed.

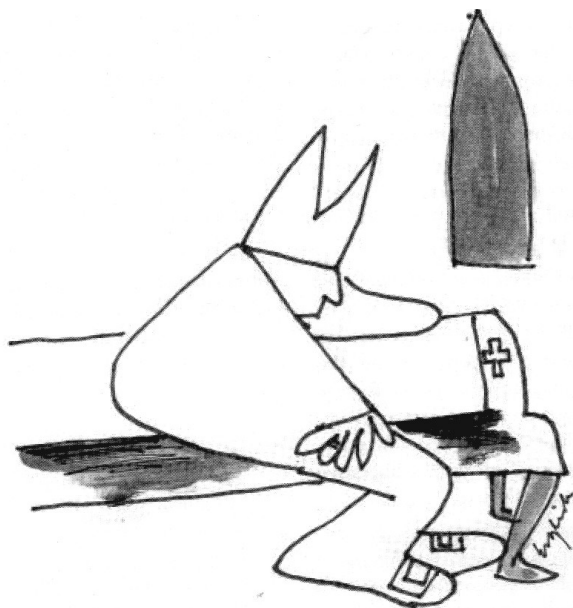
When peoples' religious traditions help them confront the culture of fear and violence so that they oppose war and militarism, the detaining and abuse of refugees and asylum seekers, the judgement of those different from us and the lies that maintain these practices, then religion has triumphed.

I suspect many religions could have similar stories. The dangers and possibilities are similar depending on the extent to which the religion capitulates or aligns it-self to the dominant political power and thus fear and fundamentalism. Bravery and imagination are required by the people to rescue religion from fear that it may continue to carry the story and practice of compassion for emerging generations and cultures.

Paul Collins wrote in a recent article: "People are not looking for pat answers and don't need a religious authority to tell them what to do. They are suspicious of institutions with all the answers. They are content to live with the questions and certainly want to take charge of their own spiritual lives." ("Australians quietly spiritual, not Godless," in Eureka Street, May 2, 2007)

I believe many will continue to do this most effectively in community, supported by and in support of their religious traditions. Indeed, it is in this practice people intuitively know they pass on the story of healing and hope to a new generation.

But those who espouse religion and hope it has a future will do so at their peril, if they believe people can't do it



Lord you can't want women
to be priests!

without the currently operating religions or the way religions – Christian and other – currently operate in the Western world. If these don't leave space for true religion someone will simply create another one they think will. There's plenty of evidence for this.

ONLINE PETITION

TO: THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

We, the undersigned Australian Catholics, wish to express our support for our bishops who are preparing the Australian Catholic Church for new forms of ministry and leadership. We request the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference to place the following items on the agenda for their plenary meeting in November this year, 2007.

We ask that the Bishops:

1. Acknowledge that there is a major crisis in ministry within the Australian Catholic Church.
2. Acknowledge that there is no doctrinal or theological barrier to the ordination of married men. The Australian Church has already ordained married former Anglican priests.
3. Take practical steps toward ordaining suitably qualified married men.
4. Encourage a wide-ranging discussion of the role of women in ministry and in the authority structures of the Church, including the question of women's ordination.
5. Establish appropriate scriptural, theological and pastoral training programs (campus, distance and online) to prepare suitable women and men for ministry. These candidates should have the recommendation of their parishes and communities, and should participate in mentored pastoral work.
6. Invite priests who have left the ministry to return to active priesthood, subject to negotiation with the local bishop.

We do this because of our growing concern that three serious issues are putting the future of the Catholic Church in Australia at risk:

- the increasingly acute shortage of suitable priests to maintain our Mass-centred, Eucharistic spirituality and the celebration of the other sacraments;
- The increasing drift of young people from the Church because of the difficulties we face in our ministry to them;
- the lack of full leadership roles for women.

See: <http://www.petitiononline.com/PF2544/petition.html>

PASTORS OF THE FLOCK IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

FR FRANK BRENNAN SJ AO - PARRAMATTA CLERGY DINNER - 19/6/07

I hope I am not one of those clergy who, according to His Eminence Cardinal Pell, "on questions of public morality strut around like peacocks and would certainly never dream of mentioning that those who differ from them on issues of public morality have any right to a primacy of conscience, and then when they come to matters of personal morality, on sexuality, marriage, family life, abortion, euthanasia, stem cells, immediately appeal to this chimerical primacy of conscience."

Having publicly argued the church case in recent national debates on euthanasia and stem cells as well as on Aboriginal and refugee rights, I hope I can be seen as one with a consistent life ethic and a consistent approach on the primacy of the formed and informed conscience. In light of my experience as a participant in the national debate on embryonic stem cell research, let me offer some constructive and respectful reflections on the happenings here in Sydney this last fortnight.

The public consternation has focussed on the comments of Cardinal Pell and the reaction of the politicians to his initial press conference. So that will be my focus, but with a view to drawing some general conclusions applicable to all pastors and church leaders in relation to all issues debated in the public square. Over the last couple of weeks, I have gone to some pains to avoid the Murdoch press's initial depiction of a conflict between Cardinal Pell and myself as "divisions between church heavyweights over the primacy of conscience". I am pleased to note that the Murdoch press then reported under the headline "Jesuit priest raps cardinal's critics".

The ABC radio news on the evening of 6 June 2007 carried this report: 'New South Wales MPs have used a debate on new stem cell legislation to attack the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, after he warned parliamentarians against supporting the bill.

NSW Emergency Services Minister Nathan Rees accused the Cardinal of blackmailing Catholic MPs.

"He can apologise, or he can invite further comparisons with that serial boofhead, Sheikh Al Hilali," he said.

State Planning Minister Frank Sartor says the comments border on zealotry. "The days when the church burnt people in pots of oil are over," he said. Health Minister Reba Meagher says they were disturbing.

"That the Cardinal would choose to intervene and threaten Catholic MPs in New South Wales demonstrated just how out of touch he has become," she said.'

The previous day, the New South Wales Catholic bishops had issued a statement opposing a NSW bill which would permit the creation of human embryos only for destructive experimental purposes. The NSW bill was similar to laws passed previously by the Commonwealth and Victorian Parliaments. The bishops said, "'No Catholic politician - indeed, no Christian or person with respect for human life - who has properly informed his conscience about the facts and ethics in this area should vote in favour of this immoral legislation'."

At his press conference on the release of the bishops' statement, Cardinal Pell went on to warn "It is a serious moral matter, and Catholic politicians who vote for this legislation must realise that their voting has consequences for their place in the life of the church." Some politicians read this as a threat. Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Cardinal later classed it as "hinting at sanctions for Catholic legislators who reject important teachings".

I agree with the New South Wales bishops that persons with respect for human life should vote against this legislation. As an aside, I note my own preference for the style of statement made by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference at the time of the national stem cells debate. It was directed to all politicians and not specifically at Catholic politicians. Advocating a law for all citizens is a different exercise from preaching morality to the Church faithful.

If I were a politician I would be voting against this law because it will permit scientists to create human life for the purpose of destroying that life, while admittedly hoping to achieve good for others.

However, I will continue to respect the conscience of those politicians who say that they have to legislate for all citizens including those who do not share their religious and philosophical presuppositions. Many Australians claim to respect human life while supporting embryonic stem cell research, distinguishing between human life, human beings and human persons. There will be some politicians who respect human life who will be prepared in our pluralistic society to permit individuals to make their own decisions about the sacredness of the human embryo. I concede to them that there is a world of difference between voting for a law to remove criminal sanctions from morally contested behaviour by others and committing those morally contested acts yourself.

Recently Pope Benedict said the Catholic Church's social doctrine "'has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just." The same must go for the Church's moral teaching based on contested philosophical questions about the status of the human embryo.

Truth enjoys primacy. The problem is when truth is contested.

What then is to enjoy primacy of method for the individual Catholic wanting to act in accordance with the truth? Is primacy to be accorded to the formed and informed conscience of the individual or to the non-infallible statement of the Pope, Vatican dicastery or bishop?

I opt for the former, insisting that the conscientious Catholic would seek guidance from the latter while not acting in accordance with the latter should such a directive be contrary to the individual's formed and informed conscience. I have not seen this merely as a personal view but as an expression of Church teaching.

Bishop Anthony Fisher has put the issue well for all Catholics in his speech delivered in Rome in February. He said:

"The Church maintains its high view of the dignity of conscience. From this several things follow:

- that we must do our best to cultivate a well-formed and well-informed conscience in ourselves and those we influence;
- that we must take responsibility for our actions and thus always seek seriously to discern what is the right choice to make;
- that we should seek to resolve doubt rather than act upon it;
- that we must follow the last and best judgment of our conscience even if, unbeknownst to us, it is objectively in error;
- that we must do so in all humility, aware that our choice may be wrong and so be ready, if we later realize it is, to repent and start afresh; and
- that we should avoid coercing people's consciences: People should if possible be persuaded rather than forced to live well and so be given a certain latitude."

In good conscience I have to decide that to do, once I have given due weight to the views of religious authorities. I am one priest who is delighted to learn that the New South Wales Premier attends mass and communion from time to time. I hope he keeps doing so.

If Mr lemma or Malcolm Turnbull (A Catholic Federal Minister who supported similar legislation) were to attend any mass at which I was presiding, I would not have the least hesitation in giving them communion. The religious consequences of these politicians' voting patterns in Parliament should first and foremost be private, pastoral matters for discussion with their pastors.

I presume that there will be no problem or embarrassment if Mr lemma or Mr O'Farrell present themselves for communion from Pope Benedict at Randwick Race Course on World Youth Day, despite their voting behaviour on embryonic stem cells. If any pastor were seriously wanting either of them to consider abstaining from communion, surely he would first take the initiative and engage in private pastoral conversation.

Cardinal Pell has said that on the issue of politicians voting wrongly and then presenting for communion, "We'd cross that bridge when we come to it." Surely it is best that we all acknowledge that there is no bridge to cross in this instance and for the reason so well articulated by His Eminence: "We don't, when people come to us to communion we don't say, you know, you in the state of grace, you doing the right thing, we presume that people have worked this out in their own conscience and so we give them communion."

When considering the Church's voice in the public square, we need to distinguish questions of principle, prudence and pastoral solicitude. On an issue such as embryonic stem cell research, a church leader is surely entitled to take a stand on principle, informed by his religious tradition, opposing legislation aimed at permitting scientists to create human life for destructive experimentation.

We move from questions of principle to issues of pastoral solicitude when a church leader chooses publicly to give hints of sanctions against co-religionist legislators as Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hickey have done this past month. Some pastors, myself included, think such suggestions should take the form of private advice rather than public hints; and public hints should always be preceded by private dialogue.

There is also the pastoral consideration to be paid to those legislators and scientists who, in good faith, do not share our theological and philosophical presuppositions. There are good pastoral reasons for not classing them as "anti-lifers" and for avoiding analogies between a church and a political party, suggesting that "just as members of a political party who cross the floor on critical issues don't expect to be rewarded and might be penalised, so it is in the church". No it is not so in the church, or it ought not be. We are not like "a football club, a political party or a business". We are the church, the people of God.

Then there is the prudential side of every such public dispute.

Media attention is more assured if one simplifies the protagonist's position as Cardinal Pell did again this week when speaking of "today's fashionable notion of the primacy of conscience, which is, of course secular relativism with a religious face." But is it prudent to so simplify the protagonist's position as to caricature it? Is it prudent to hint in the public square at internal church sanctions when that could distract from, and even drown out, the coherent church statements of principle addressing a legislative or policy proposal?

As a Church we need to learn lessons of political prudence when it reaches the stage that a government minister sees fit to inform the Parliament, "As a Catholic I am saddened by the published stance of Cardinal Pell and I make it clear that my decision to vote against the bill should in no way be interpreted as an endorsement of the Cardinal's statements earlier this week." In the public square, church authorities are armed only with public argument informed by and consistent with their religious tradition.

Cardinal Pell is surely right when he says, "What we have to do is to try to establish rational principles that will be recognised as such by people of little religion, no religion or plenty of religion." Persuasion by argument, not coercion by authority, should be our religious hallmark in the public square. Greater ecumenical co-operation usually ensures that our message in the public square is more marked by persuasion than coercion.

There must always be room for diverse viewpoints on pastoral solicitude and prudent political action, even when there is unanimity within a religious tradition on questions of moral principle. To adapt slightly the words of Cardinal Pell in his interview on national radio this last Sunday night: Our role as pastors and teachers in the public domain "is to state what is the Catholic position and to explain the rational basis for that position so that people of no religion, or a lot of religion, or a little religion can at least understand What (we are) saying and potentially agree with (us)."

Greater dialogue within the church could only enhance the prospects of our message being heard and taken up beyond the confines of our own pews.



AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S RELIGION REPRESENTED AT THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

CONGRESS IN MONTREAL 2006: AN

HISTORIC EVENT LEE MIEN A SKYE; IS A TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL (A PALAWA), DESCENDED FROM THE LAST FULL BLOOD' BEFORE THE GENOCIDE. IN 2005 SHE PARTICIPATED IN THE HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL CONFERENCE MARKING TWENTY YEARS OF PUBLICATION OF THE JOURNAL OF FEMINIST STUDIES IN RELIGION.

Introduction

Elaine Lindsay gave me a copy of Women-Church in 2005, where I read that the Parliament of the World's Religions Congress was meeting in 2006, in Montreal, and there was a call for abstracts.

As I had mentioned in my PhD thesis on womanist theology, Australian Indigenous women's religions have never been represented at the Parliament, and this concerned me.

Because I had documented Australian Aboriginal women's Indigenous Christian spiritualities/theologies in my Masters and PhD research theses, these women could be represented at the Parliament for the first time in history, their unique voices heard. I had no idea how I would raise the money, so I thought I would present the abstract and, if it was accepted, then begin the fund raising journey.

The Fund-Raising Journey Begins

I was so excited when the abstract was accepted. I found I would be included in the company of Bishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama, patrons of the Parliament: it was such an honour. It was even more of a personal honour to me to represent our women, the voice of the least. This was a project I dearly wanted to fund myself, but I had just graduated with my PhD and had not yet established a lucrative income — the Australian universities were not clamouring for a womanist (black feminist) theology lecturer. I contacted the Indigenous section of the National Council of Churches but to no avail, as well as the World Council of Churches, various women's groups, church and secular.

Having had little success I spoke to my professor/ supervisor for the PhD thesis, and he suggested the 'Friends of the Society of the Quakers throughout Australia'. When I spoke to the Society here in Adelaide, they gave me some hope by funding the registration fee for the Congress day of presentation. I had still to raise another \$4,000 but it was a start.

After several attempts at various philanthropic organisations, the Adelaide Quakers decided to fund the next stage, which was the airfare and the full conference attendance, with some help from the national Friends organisation and 'Business and Professional Women Australia'.

This generosity truly overwhelmed me: I was certain to attend now. There was still accommodation to consider, and one of the Adelaide Quaker women emailed the Friends of the Society in Montreal, who replied with exuberance, stating that providing accommodation is something she does for visitors to Montreal.

It was amazing to see the interconnectedness of the Society on a global scale, as it provides assistance for those with important concerns which would not otherwise be realised. A gift of hospitality that had indeed come to fruition in this organisation. Wow! I was on my way.

The Paper That Formed

The focus of the Parliament meeting was on the anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, and how religions of the world can deal with such a situation in outlook and healing.

I could see the overall benefit of my presentation in that our women mirror the situation of the world, they are facing the prospect of genocide, and in their holocaust they have developed strategies for healing and survival. Such strategies may help others facing the same threat.

My task was to outline those strategies and bring the hope this Congress was trying to offer. To develop healing, our women found it necessary to inculturate Christianity into their Indigenous spiritualities to make it relevant to their life situation. This resulted in the title of the paper, 'How Australian Indigenous Women Transform Christianity'.

From this transformation not only was virtually a new religion being offered to the Parliament to be celebrated in its uniqueness but also, as mentioned, ways of dealing with holocaust.

How Australian Indigenous Women Transform Christianity

The women's inculturation has produced Indigenous Christian doctrines that contribute to what I call the new universal academic area of Indigenous Christian theology/spirituality. The data revealed definite contributions to Christian theology and distinct themes emerged naturally upon analysis.

The doctrines where contributions were made were: 'Christology, soteriology, eschatology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, theology and creation theology.'

To understand the Indigenous women's theologies and the definite themes that emerged, it is necessary to understand their ontology. They possess a deeply spiritual ontology — as I define it, ontology is 'way of being in the world'.

It is an ontology that makes them spiritual theologians. They are powerful theists.

It is in opposition to white Western ontology which is more intellectual/ cerebral in comparison.

This depth of spirituality, therefore, changes the nature of Christian theology.

In this powerful theism, 'God is', there is no doubt in the existence of God. God's spirit runs through all of natural life. All that is living, animate and inanimate.

Therefore all of life is 'interconnected'.

Because God's spirit is in all animate and inanimate life then all of Creation is 'sacralised'. This perspective anchors God in Creation, and so their theologies are 'creation-centred'.

Also because of their view on interconnectedness, Christ's spirit is one with God and Creation. He is their very 'breath', the 'pulse and breath of life' and thus, their everything'.

Christianity is transformed by ontology and Indigenous spiritualities/theologies that produce deeply spiritual beliefs that are creation-centred. Thus Christ is active in the healing of all of Creation. This produces virtually a 'new religion' that is not the product of an intellectual/cerebral ontology and fall-redemption theology.

Christ is one with and living in all Creation.

The women found they had to make Christianity relevant to their context in order to find the salvation and healing they needed to deal with the racism, classism, sexism and naturism (abuse of nature) in their Site im Leben (life-settings). It is powerful 'theology of the least'.

Our women are exemplary, they are victims of abuse but don't perpetuate abuse, and they uplift their communities in the task of healing.

The Conference Begins and Manifests

With the paper ready to be presented it was time to sit back and enjoy the Congress. To be included in the company of men of peace, like Bishop Tutu and the Dalai Lama, was indeed an honour. This atmosphere of peace was very strong. I attended sessions by many academics, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu, male and female, but unfortunately not very many Indigenous representatives.

The overall attitude of these people was one of inclusiveness of all peoples and faiths. There was also unanimous support for the newly created Declaration of Human Rights. I was overwhelmed to be in a place where everyone thought as I did in what really matters in religious practice. It was one of the most beautiful spiritual experiences of my life. Also very encouraging in the healing that religion can bring to the world, bringing hope for the future.

I knew my paper could be part of this healing process. It was received amazingly. They so celebrated what I had to say. There was wonder at the fact that there are Indigenous peoples who, through their belief systems, are surviving a holocaust. This seemed to give hope to those under the threat of genocide. There were

professors from the USA involved in mission, seminary and theological teaching, and generally interested people who requested copies of the book, and from what I understand it will be used as a text in some academic situations.

It was such an honour to share the wonder of the women and have others see it as well. Our women are overwhelmed that the theologies that form from their life-situation can benefit others.

I had made our Indigenous contribution to the Parliament with its theological/spiritual suggestions for survival from genocide through religious beliefs. People were so gripped by what I offered that the questions went way overtime, and fortunately for this situation the next session had been cancelled so all questions could be answered. I had so many requests for the photocopies I had to use in my presentation (there being no PowerPoint facility in the seminar room) that I was busy well after the end of the session.

People who attended continued to express gratitude well after the presentation, and others who had missed it asked for information. I had achieved what I had come for. I had such a strong sense of completeness in my spirit.

Conclusion

The Parliament of the World's Religions had been seeking ways in which religion can help to heal our present terrorist global situation.

Theologies/ spiritualities to contribute to world peace were being offered from religions around the world. Also, as I mentioned in one session that I attended, and like the task of womanists, religions have to develop theologies for human wholeness. In this, religion can be a force for inner and community healing where psychology is failing.

Total inclusiveness of human beings and religions was the highlight of the Congress. This was so encouraging, as such liberal thinking gives hope for the healing contribution religions can make to our world. There also has to be discerning of religions to meet the needs of the human condition in fullness.

Our women give these messages in their contribution.

Thus, there is hope in the face of genocide; it is necessary to practice a theology of peace, for the individual and community; and one must form theologies that help meet the needs of the uniqueness and context of the human being. It was wonderful to reveal the strategies our women use to find their wholeness. There is 'theology of the least', dynamic theology I have had the privilege to express. It reveals God is indeed alive and well in the face of genocide.

ENDNOTES

-See Australia's first academic Aboriginal womanist Christology, Lee Miena Skye, 'Kerygmatics of the New Millennium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women's Christology', Masters thesis, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 1998 (in press), ISPCCK publications, 2006.

-For the other documented doctrines, see Lee Miena Skye, 'Yiming (Spirit) Calling: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Christian Women's Creation Theology', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, 2004 (forthcoming).

-To see this analysis in more depth and its connection to 'genetic memory', also my proven second hypothesis, read, 'Set the Spirit Free: The Need for an Australian Aboriginal Womanist Research Methodology', in Yiming (Spirit) Calling, ch. 2.

EAST TIMOR AND AUSTRALIA - SPIRITUALITY FOR OUR TIME AND PLACE

CHRIS DOYLE HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES FOR WOMEN-CHURCH OVER ITS YEARS OF PUBLICATION. SHE ENJOYS WRITING AND WISHES TO THANK THIS MAGAZINE FOR ONLY REJECTING ONE ARTICLE (THAT CRITICISED THE POLICE ASSOCIATION). SHE CONTINUES TO EXPLORE WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY, ESPECIALLY AS IT RELATES TO HER TIME AND PLACE.

For this final version of Women-Church magazine I have been asked to complete a triptych, following two earlier articles on East Timor, one which was about the life of my adopted East Timorese son and the second about a visit to his country. Since then I have returned to East Timor and will go again when the situation allows.

My son was born six months before Indonesia invaded and his whole life was involved in the struggle for independence. For the last five years he has been writing down the story of his life and it will be published by the University of Queensland Press in early November this year. Its title will be 'Resistance. A childhood fighting for East Timor', by Naldo Rei.

It is not only a rattling good yarn, but also an inspiring, account of the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity, as well as an experience of earth-based spirituality.

Having read his story, the publishing and editing staff at UQP all asked Naldo the same question: 'How did you survive all that?'

Indeed this is the question that any Australian could ask of East Timor, so close to our shore and so different in recent experience. Naldo always answers, 'Anyone can do what we did, if they have no other choice'. I can only disagree with him.

Aboriginal people and recent refugees maybe are tough enough, but not the majority of affluent Australians.

'Resistance' is the book to read to measure the toughness of your spirit, your resolve, your integrity. What would you do in a similar situation?

So why is there such a problem in East Timor now, I hear you asking. Why are our troops up there endangering themselves? Everywhere you look, Pacific people, Africans and Arabs are stuffing up their lives, and ours. Or such is the received wisdom of the Australian press.

In Australia we tend to think colonisation wasn't such a bad thing: 'Australia's all right and it was a colony'. I doubt that you'll find a single Aboriginal person to agree with this.

History is written by the winners, not the losers. Intrinsic to invasion is racism. It is much easier to exploit and kill if you can view the invaded as less than human, inferior to oneself.

The story from the other side is radically different.

This has been beautifully explored by Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss*, her 2006 Booker prize winning story about India and Nepal. Colonisation is destructive of culture, language, family, power, land, ownership and lives.

It takes centuries for the colonised to recover from the experience, to rebuild.

It takes time for a people to extract themselves from the clutches of past colonisers and their economic controls.

It takes a huge effort to rebuild one's own identity and to identify and deal with the unconsciously absorbed internalised racism.

And geo-politics, which can blithely write off small countries or communities with the slash of a pen, is constantly impacting.

This is also the story of East Timor. After 450 years of Portuguese exploitation, 24 years of Indonesian brutality and the continuing 'sheriff-hood' of Australia, life is extra-ordinarily difficult.

This is not our first historical connection either. Most Australians do not realise that more East Timorese died in World War II than Australian soldiers, directly as a result of Australian troops landing there, on neutral Portuguese territory, to fight the Japanese army. The toll the local men and women paid, keeping Australian soldiers alive, was very grim.

Naldo's grandfather was one. Yet when the opportunity came to benefit from the Indonesian invasion and a divvying up of the Timorese oil fields, Australia was the only Western country to recognise the take-over, against UN opposition. After East Timorese independence, the Australian government would not accept a normal median maritime boundary, falling half way between the two countries, so it could continue to cream off millions of dollars of East Timorese resources, invaluable in times of decreasing oil reserves.

This is modern colonisation, a system that benefits each one of us in Australia because almost every product we consume uses oil somewhere in its production and because we all drive cars.

Though both leaders and people are struggling with post-traumatic stress, East Timorese are trying to get on with their lives. The ordinariness of peace is a powerful medicine.

And although he carries scars, my son has emerged whole. Since Independence he has studied at the University of Queensland for a Graduate Diploma, gone on to complete a Masters in International Communications at Macquarie University and has just delivered his book to the publisher. He has been sent to different countries by the United Nations to attend development courses for future leaders. He has worked for the UN and for the European Union, is planning to marry and wants children. This is success by anyone's standards. He is very distressed by the events of the previous year, hates living in an unsafe place again, but he understands it. He looks to the long term and is still hopeful.

Oppression is always like this — whether it be of women, groups or of whole countries. It allows the worst in the human personality to rise up to the surface and flourish like a virus. But it also can bring forth, in response, the best in a person: courage and the will to overcome adversity, the capacity for endurance and a focus on a long term vision.

Are you feeling confused by what you hear and read in our press about East Timor?
Remember the view of the sheriff is different to the 'sheriffed'.

Be very sceptical. Many complex forces are at work and the economic stakes are significant. The East Timorese people just want what we have — an ordinary life in a peaceful country.

Rather look to ourselves, mostly beneficiaries of colonisation, internal and external, and be critical. This is our work. This is what our spirits need.

I have learnt a lot about the fishbowl that is Australian society through my relationships with East Timorese people, especially those that are built on love.

Few non-Aboriginal people know any Kooris, let alone have loving relationships with them. Love challenges and changes everything.

I remember the first walk over the Harbour Bridge for Reconciliation in 2000. I was struck by the stunned look on the face of the Koori walkers, that so many apparently indifferent non-indigenous people, at least 25,000, had come to show they wanted a resolution to our own inheritance of loss.

After a history of invasion and slaughter, the stealing of little children, continuing deaths in custody and entrenched disadvantage, we non-indigenous were there, in our awkwardness and ignorance, in our lack of loving relationships with Kooris, but there.

It was a huge display of hope that the past could be addressed and its inherited injustices overcome.

The tragedy was that this expression of hope was ignored and stifled by our political leaders and an opportunity to move the nation forward was lost.

The second Harbour Bridge walk for reconciliation took place recently, taking up the opportunity of the 75th anniversary walk over the Bridge.

An even larger crowd was walking over the Bridge, such a powerful symbol of connection, of movement from our inherited northern heritages to our southern selves — selves that have to be firstly reconciled to the land, and then to its traditional custodians, selves that need to be redefined so that each of us can discover the indigenous self within. This time the feeling during the walk was quite different.

We gathered below the Bridge, outside Milson's Point train station, under a huge Aboriginal flag, a mix of Kooris and others. Uncle Max Eulo, the key ceremonial person, his face traditionally painted, was shivering in the early evening air and hugging his bare chest. Stephen Page of Bangarra Dance Company had organised what would happen.

A young dancer went around with a bucket to everyone gathered and offered to paint their faces with white ochre too. This simple gesture gathered us into one, and I found it very moving. I think I was painted with possum prints.

Eventually our mob started off up onto the Bridge, following the flag and Uncle Max who was to start the smoking under the northern pylon. On the way we joined the other stream of walkers and all received orange caps.

At the northern pylon we stopped and a sonorous male voice began singing in language. There was a shift into a sacred place. Marie Bashir, our wonderful governor, met us and a circle formed around the lighting of the gum leaves and Uncle Max. Despite its high position above water, there was no breeze that evening inside the Bridge. All was still, as if the earth was holding its breath. The smoke curled up above our heads and headed south along the Bridge.

Ninety four-gallon drums were lit at various stages down the bridge span and below it, and the singing was resonant inside its shell. It became an arching cathedral filled with eucalyptus-scented smoke, its unlit steel span charcoal grey against a cloud-blanketed night sky. On its top another Aboriginal flag, emphasized by a spotlight, waved proudly.

With the darkness, the previously unnoticed lights on our caps came on, transforming the people into a river of floating candles. The ancestors began moving.

The soundscape, composed by David Page and the didgeridoo player Matthew Doyle, used the traditional Gadigal language of the harbour people to bring their spirits strongly amongst us, peeling away the two centuries of invasion and colonisation like an orange skin. The smoking was a traditional blessing and cleansing of the Bridge and those on it. Walkers began hooting and punching the air with elation.

The second stream of walkers who had unexpectedly been included in the smoking could be heard on their mobile phones exclaiming about what was happening around them.

This time there was no feeling of division between walkers, between descendants of colonisers and colonised.

The feeling was one of ease, of 'we can do this' together, a recognition that reconciliation has not been killed but rather it has gone to the grass roots level to survive and grow. It was another exhilarating, if small, step along the path to true freedom. And it was significant that the control and inspiration came from the culture and people who were colonised, not the reverse. So simple – just smoke, sound, light and movement – but so potent with meaning. A gift from a compassionate culture.

Here we Australians are, 200 plus years down the track from invasion and colonisation, still taking small steps. How difficult life remains for the majority of the descendants of the colonised. How ignorant are the descendants of the colonisers – still. East Timor has only had independence since May 2002. They have barely begun to lift their collective foot in the long, long walk to true freedom.

Who are we to interfere and exploit, to criticise and comment adversely?

Who are we to speak at all? Our job as affluent Australians is to listen, to examine our hearts rigorously for integrity and compassion, to look critically how our systems operate. We are not very good at that.

This is the spiritual challenge of our time and place.

CANBERRA DIGS IN OVER INDIGENOUS RIGHTS - UN/HUMAN RIGHTS/AUSTRALIA

12/9/07

In what Labor has called "another very shameful moment for Australia", the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is expected to pass the UN General Assembly this week without the support of the Howard Government. Australia is one of seven countries that still opposes the declaration, which is the result of 24 years of consultation, negotiation and drafting - a record for a UN document. It will set targets for the treatment of indigenous people worldwide in areas such as self-determination, education, cultural identity, and the use of lands and resources. SEE; [HTTP://WWW.SMHL.COM.AU/NEWS/NATIONAL/CANBERRA-DIGS-IN-OVER-INDIGENOUS-RIGHTS/2007/09/11/1189276719743.HTML](http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/canberra-digs-in-over-indigenous-rights/2007/09/11/1189276719743.html)

GENOCIDE, MILITARY OPERATIONS & ISLAMISATION UNDER SPECIAL AUTONOMY IN WEST PAPUA

REVD SOCRATEZ SOFYAN YOMAN; PRESIDENT OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTIST CHURCHES OF WEST PAPUA; WEST PAPUA, MARCH, 2007; DISARMING TIMES; WWW.PAXCHRIST.ORG.AU; PAX CHRISTI AUSTRALIA: WWW.PAXCHRIST.ORG.AU; REV SOCRATEZ YOMAN:

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Special Autonomy Law No. 21 Year 2001 was meant to be a wise, respectable and just solution to the issue of West Papua's political status and was expected to bring peace to the people of West Papua and the people of Indonesia. It was born as an offer and a decree from the Indonesian government that realized there was a demand for self-determination from the people of West Papua who demanded that their right to sovereignty, which was historically granted on 1st December 1961, be returned.

The people of West Papua also condemned the illegality of the Act of Free Choice in 1969 which was conducted undemocratically and unjustly in West Papua. The status of the Special Autonomy Law No 21/2001 has given the West Papuans a good opportunity to manage a special governmental system that could re-vitalize and protect the basic rights of the indigenous West Papuans.

However, the questions are:

1. Has Special Autonomy stopped the tears and blood of the indigenous West Papuans which still continuously drop and flow on the land of West Papua because of the torture and the cruelty of the Indonesians for 43 years?
2. Does Special Autonomy really guarantee the protection of the basic rights and the survival of the West Papuans in the future?
3. Does Special Autonomy give proper space and opportunity for the indigenous West Papuans in the field of education, health and economy?
4. Could Special Autonomy control the flood of migrants from outside West Papua who migrate to West Papua every week? There are three Royal Line passenger ships each with a 5,000 passenger capacity which bring 15,000 people to West Papua every week. (This figure does not include those who travel to West Papua by air every day.)
5. Has Special Autonomy ended the military and the police mobile brigade (Brimob) operations in West Papua? In reality, Special Autonomy has become a new problem and has brought suffering and has created more cruel oppression. Any guarantee of security, safety and the future survival of the indigenous West Papuans is threatened by a systematic genocide of the West Papuan people.

The future of the indigenous West Papuans now seems even darker. The Indonesian police and military's violence, oppression, terror, and intimidation that has been carried out against the indigenous West Papuans has

become the dominant Indonesian policy and has been successful on the Melanesian land of West Papua, whereas Special Autonomy has failed..

Basically, the indigenous West Papuans have realized that Special Autonomy will neither protect nor improve their lives. The truth is that Special Autonomy simply gives the Indonesians more of a chance to use more cruel and inhuman policies to oppress the indigenous West Papuans through its military and police forces. Based on this realization, nearly 100% of the indigenous West Papuans refused Special Autonomy five years ago for they have had a long, dark and bitter experience living under Indonesian rule for over 43 years.

6. However, the indigenous West Papuans were forced to accept Special Autonomy, when a number of ambassadors from the USA, 13 European Union countries and Australia came to West Papua to put pressure on and influence the will of the indigenous West Papuans. Now from the deepest parts of our hearts and minds and to the best of our knowledge which is based on truth and honesty, we would like to inform the international community that the Special Autonomy Law which you have supported has created even more complex problems.

7. Special Autonomy has created violence, oppression, and created a killing field for the indigenous West Papuans. It has also created an opportunity for the Islamisation of West Papuans.

8. Special Autonomy has successfully increased the number of troops and the number of migrants which has changed the balance of the indigenous and migrant populations in West Papua. The migrants are pre dominantly Moslem. Local indigenous West Papuans live continuously under heavy terror and intimidation because of the military's harsh control. Indonesia is trying to commit massive killings of the indigenous West Papuans by allowing them to live in fear and hunger.

Many towns are heavily guarded by military and mobile brigade personnel. Every passing indigenous Papuan is searched thoroughly and their belongings seized. As recently as 20th February 2007, the Indonesian military attacked community villages in Yamo. The military and police, dressed as civilians, stay in the village and began terrorizing and intimidating the native community. In 2003 the Papuan Regional House of Parliament, the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP) and all the people of West Papua rejected the extension of the West Irian Jaya provinces.

However, Jakarta never listened to the voice of the Melanesian people of West Papua. So in effect, West Irian Jaya Province was established for the benefit of Indonesian intelligence, political and economic interests but not for the protection of the indigenous West Papuans. Military operations are still killing West Papuan, causing them to starve in the jungle or burning down their hospitals, churches, schools, houses and gardens.

Migration: Another issue for West Papua is the sharp increase in the number of migrants. Nearly 5000 migrants move to West Papua every week by sea and air transports. The uncontrolled flow of migration has changed the balance of the population, between indigenous West Papuan and the migrants. The migrants, who are predominantly Moslem, now make up 70% of the total population in the towns, whereas the indigenous West Papuans are 30%. There needs to be a serious research/investigation into this issue.

Education: The future of the indigenous West Papuans is dark and threatened. There has not been any improvement or changes in the field of education during the time of Special Autonomy. In fact, all that has happened is that some teachers have been appointed to new bureaucratic positions in the newly extended regencies (which have been established as a result of the Special Autonomy policy).

Freedom of Speech: For the Papuans, there is no freedom or opportunity to speak freely and give opinions freely. The power of the Indonesian military and police has oppressed and closed down the freedom of the indigenous West Papuans to speak their voice in open forums.

During the Special Autonomy era, there has been no democracy, justice, peace or respect for the dignity and rights of the indigenous West Papuans. Special Autonomy has become a cruel hell for the indigenous West Papuans. Their future seems darker and frightening. What the indigenous West Papuans have experienced in the Special Autonomy era has been extreme policies to force Papuans to accept any policies that the Indonesians produce.

Furthermore the policy of creating new provinces and regencies is an Indonesian military project to develop the communication network of all the regions in West Papua and aims to reduce the space of movement of the indigenous West Papuans. An obvious result is that land is taken for the purpose of the "development" which in turn gives more opportunity for the military and promotes an increasingly Islamisation process. In other words, the process of ethnic genocide of the indigenous West Papuans has occurred through human rights abuse and through education, health, economy, language and culture policies.

Appeal to International Community: Having observed the human tragedy in West Papua and the dark future of the indigenous West Papuans due to violence and the threat of the Indonesian military operations as well as the process of Islamisation in West Papua, I would therefore like to urge my international brothers and sisters to do the following:

1. I urge the international community to put pressure on the Indonesian government to open a door of dialogue - conducted wisely, honestly, and respectfully, to find a complete solution to the problems of West Papua. The international community should mediate this dialogue, using a similar method such as the one conducted for Aceh. The most peaceful and respected solution will be to give the indigenous West Papuans an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination according to the
2. United Nations' international standards. The referendum must be conducted honestly and democratically. I urge the international community to put pressure on the Indonesian government to open access for the UN humanitarian workers, foreign journalists and human rights observers to visit West Papua and see directly what is happening to the indigenous West Papuans.
3. If there is to be visits of ambassadors from the USA, EU countries, Australia, New Zealand and other states, it is important that these delegations not only visit government, military and police officials in Jayapura but also listen to the indigenous West Papuans who live in the towns and villages..
4. If the government of Indonesia does not allow the human rights observers and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights into West Papua, then, the question we must put to the Indonesian government is; what are you trying to hide and what are you going to do to the indigenous West Papuans?
5. I also urge the international community to put pressure on the Indonesian government to withdraw all organic and non-organic troops from West Papua because their presence now outnumbers the indigenous West Papuans.
6. I also urge the international community to put pressure on the Indonesian government to stop the extension of new provinces and regencies in West Papua. The extension of new provinces and regencies in West Papua is a new effective strategy to systematically carry out the military operations and the Islamisation process in West Papua. This strategy must now be investigated and measured. This is also a new version of the old transmigration strategy to kill and wipe out the indigenous West Papuans.

POSTSCRIPT: MICRO CONTROL

TO PHILIP WILSON, PRESIDENT, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE

Circular - 20 Aug 2007/12 July 2007/ Your Excellency,

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has received reports of an initiative according to which parishes in Australia are encouraged to enter into "covenant agreements" with comparable groups of non-Catholic Churches and ecclesial communities, and that some such "covenant agreements" include proposals exemplified in one such document as "The sharing of pulpits — that each of the

Ministers would be invited to preach annually at a Liturgy in the other two Churches in the covenant group."

Concern has arisen on the part of this Dicastery because of the suggestion that such a "sharing of pulpits" has occurred within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist in some Catholic parishes.

If the reports are accurate, then such occurrences would of course not be in accord with canon 767 § 1 of the Code of Canon Law, or with n. 66 of the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani.

The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, published by the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity on 25 March 1993, likewise



specifies that the preaching of the homily by non-Catholic ministers is not to take place during the celebration of the Eucharist (n. 134).

Also instructive on the matter are articles 2 and 3 of the Practical Provisions contained in the inter-Dicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio* "On certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the Sacred ministry of the priest", published by eight Dicasteries of the Holy See on 15 August 1997.

This Congregation would be very grateful if Your Excellency would communicate to the Bishops its concerns in this regard, and ask that any policies touching upon the matter should be examined and, if necessary, revised in light of the above-mentioned documents of the Holy See.

This Dicastery thanks you for your valuable assistance in this matter.

With every good wish and kind regard, I am,

Sincerely Yours is Christ, Albert Malcolm Ranjith

LUKE 9:49f

JUAN ARIAS; THE GOD I DON'T BELIEVE IN; 1974; 23ff

The Gospel text to which we are referring, and which today deserves special meditation on the part of more than a few ecclesiastics, reads like this: "It was John who said, 'Master, we saw a man using your name to expel demons, and we tried to stop him because he is not of our company.' Jesus told them in reply, 'Do not stop him, for anyone who is not against you is on your side' " (Luke 9:49f.)...

The parallel text of St. Mark adds: "No man who performs a miracle using my name can at the same time speak ill of me" (Mark 9:39). Both of these texts recall the passage from the Old Testament...(Num. 11:26-30). Moses was not scandalised because those on whom he had not imposed his hands were also able to prophesy, because he knew that Yahweh was greater than he and could send His Spirit freely down upon anyone. And his generous heart rejoiced at that...

Even the apostle St. John was disturbed by the fact that someone who did not belong to their company was working miracles, although it was in the name of Christ. It not only bothered him but he even tried to stop that person, thus misusing his authority as an apostle.

Hence it is not surprising that down through the course of history this temptation has occurred again and again in the Church, and that more than once we have condemned others and forbidden them to use the name of Christ, His words, His teaching, because they were not "of our company." ...

But even though we may not be surprised by these weaknesses and temptations in the Church, we should not forget that the word of Christ continues to be vivid and alive: "Do not stop him!"

Christ comes to the defense of the freedom of anyone who honourably seeks the truth, who casts out any demon that enslaves man, who discovers the truth in the name of Him who is Truth itself.

When Christ said "Do not stop him!" it is my opinion that He was giving us a commandment, a grave, solemn commandment. Everyone who is not against the Church is for her, above all if he invokes the name, the power, and the message of Christ.

How far Christ was from demanding badges or identification cards of any kind before He would allow someone to do good.

By reprimanding His apostles, Christ was showing us that even someone who does not belong to His hierarchical Church can perform miracles in His name...

He is present in the heart of anyone who calls upon Him.

Can we say that we have mined all the riches contained in this Gospel truth? That we put it into practice in our apostolate? Certainly the Second Vatican Council was very much aware of this page of the Gospel, and with very concrete results. But in everyday life, in the actual apostolate, there is much ground still to be covered before we dare to put into practice, with faith and boundless hope, Christ's command, "Do not stop him!"

Because the fact is that the temptation of St. John remains alive in us.

It still bothers us, and we make a thousand excuses to forbid certain people from working miracles, casting out devils, and fighting for the human, and even the religious, rights of men...

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All are invited to send contributions which they feel may be of interest to:

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