



# arvoice

A Report from Australian Reforming Catholics Inc.

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## The talk is over . . . it is time for action

Pope Francis now has to do some serious thinking and decision-making. He has become newsworthy and popular because of his simple and humble approach to life and his non-judgmental embrace of all the people he encounters. But, having set up an Extraordinary and subsequent Ordinary Synod on the Family, both now concluded, there is great expectation that he should take steps to overcome injustices brought about by institutional inflexibility.

This is the reason why we consider it so important to join with other Church reform groups in various parts of the world, as we have been doing, in expressing our support for the efforts that Pope Francis is making. It needs to be a concerted response because the reaction to any change is very strong from some very powerful influences in the Church, from voices that have much greater access to him. Nonetheless, the letter to the Pope that we, in conjunction with many others, have sent to him this month (see pages 2-3)) is both an expression of appreciation and, hopefully, a reminder that we expect a lot more.

Some would argue that we should only comment on matters that were part of the agenda of the Synods, but we maintain that it is astonishing that some matters did not come into the agenda by way of discussion, largely because of the impact on family life and, therefore, the life of the Church. It is a huge disappointment that there was no statement of acknowledgement or regret for the harm done by clerical sexual abuse of children and the cover-up undertaken by those in authority. We could not let this fact go unmentioned.

Those of you who attended our Annual General Meeting this year were most surprised to learn that the Church, through Canon Law, has prevented bishops from reporting instances of clerical abuse to the civil authorities unless a particular civil authority demands it. A motion was passed at that AGM that we write to the Apostolic Nuncio requesting that the Church follow the United Nations' request that all instances of clerical sexual abuse be reported to police for investigation. Our intention was to do this when Cardinal Pell appears once more before the Royal Commission, when the issue is more salient.

But this letter presented an opportunity to put it more directly to the Pope himself and with the backing of many more people. In addition to a Press Release, the letter has been sent to every bishop in the world for whom we have an address.

Pope Francis must know that Canon Law is preventing justice in this matter and so far nothing has been done. This, along with the underlying clericalism and institutional gender inequality, continues to hold back the genuine reform needed. Pope Francis does have a lot of thinking to do but we must continue to urge him to action.

*John Buggy*

### In This Issue

Editorial .... 1

Letter to Pope Francis ... 2-3

New book: Bishop Pat Power:  
*Joy and Hope* ... 3

Alan Clague: *Overpopulation,  
Anthropogenic Global Warming and the  
tragedy of Laudato Si'* ... 4-5

Margaret Knowlden: "Through my most  
grievous fault" ... 5

Noelene Uren: *Time for a Change (nine  
centuries ago!)* ... 6-7

Gabe Lomas: *Genesis and the Silmarils*  
... 8-9

Natalie Lindner L'Huilier: *Does Religion  
Cause Violence?* ... 10-11

Illustrator: Alan Holroyd

ARC Secretariat – Have Your Say –  
Subscription form ... 12

# ARC joins with other groups seeking Church reform in presenting the following letter to Pope Francis

November 9, 2015

Dear Pope Francis,

**T**hese are times of joy and vigour in our Church. You have called us to a path of accompaniment, of “walking with” the other, of evangelising and being evangelised by going to the peripheries.

In your opening remarks at the Synod on the Family, you called upon the bishops to listen to the Spirit and to openly dialogue, and that is what happened. Bishop after bishop, notwithstanding clear indications of strong disagreements on the floor of the Synod, affirmed that there was in these three weeks a sense of life and excitement that marks an openness to the Spirit. A positive and welcome fruit of this was a palpable appreciation among the bishops of the grass roots of the church and an acknowledgement that they are not simply to be treated with compassion and respect but as adults fully responsible for their right relationship to God.

One of the most telling signs of the working of the Spirit for us was, however, your personal involvement in bringing certain behaviours and lifestyles to the table which were formerly condemned as sinful. It helped so many people to feel worthwhile again. Thank you for being with wounded individuals and families and for being insistent with those leaders in the Church who tend to be deaf to the voices of those who are hurting. You have endeared yourself to young and old, baptised and non-baptised, believers and atheists, because of your openness to listen and understand people’s pain.

In your closing remarks, you described the role of the Synod as being about:

- ◆ “interpreting today’s realities through God’s eye”;
- ◆ “seeing [family] difficulties and uncertainties in the light of the Faith”;
- ◆ bearing witness to everyone for whom “the Gospel continues to be a vital source of eternal newness, against all those who would ‘indoctrinate’ it in dead stones to be hurled at others”;
- ◆ “laying bare the closed hearts which frequently hide even behind the Church’s teachings or good intentions, in order to sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families”;
- ◆ making clear that the Church is a Church of the poor

in spirit and of sinners seeking forgiveness, not simply of the righteous and the holy. . . .”

All of this was evident at the Synod. So, while we give a resounding “YES!” to the Synod’s resolve to build a church of adult Catholics, we are pained that there was not enough compassionate listening to allow the voices of hurting people to enter the final document, faithful who have left in anger or despair because they were not welcomed at the table of the Lord; we are pained that there were insufficient votes to be welcoming of all people into the Church, especially those who live with alternative sexual orientations; we are pained that the number of women represented in the Synod reflected their marginalisation in the leadership of the church notwithstanding their often extraordinary service in keeping families and local churches alive and fruitful under often daunting circumstances throughout the world, and for many their nurturing of families often in challenging circumstances; we are particularly pained that the Synod, notwithstanding your example in Philadelphia, did not find a place in the closing document to express repentance to the survivors of clerical sex abuse, and to all families damaged and disrupted by this abuse, for the institutional Church’s protection of paedophiles and the cover-up of their criminal acts from civil authorities.

The institutional Church as a whole must accept accountability for its institutional governance failures in the response to clerical child sexual abuse; in particular, canon law continues to prohibit bishops reporting paedophile priests to civil authorities unless a State law compels reporting. Those provisions should be immediately replaced with an unambiguous moral and legal duty to report paedophile priests to civil authorities to ensure the protection of children. We welcome and support your pledge made in Philadelphia that you “will follow the path of truth wherever it may lead. Clergy and bishops will be held accountable when they abuse or fail to protect children”.

The Church must recognise that its global governance structures and culture have permitted these abominations, and it is urgent that a Christ-like reform of these structures and culture be undertaken. These same governance structures and culture are also implicated in the clericalism that has infantilised the faithful and excluded women, a clericalism that the Synod implicitly rejects in their resolve to build a church of adult Catholics. We recognise that acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of the people to have a deliberative voice in the governance

of our Church will help bring about the reform of these governance structures and culture, a project which we heartily support.

While the Synod has concluded, the work of the Synod has just begun. As you have pointed out in your concluding speech, the Synod “was not about finding exhaustive solutions for all the difficulties and uncertainties which challenge and threaten the family, but rather about seeing these difficulties and uncertainties in the light of the Faith, carefully studying them and confronting them fearlessly without burying our heads in the sand”. Implementing the spirit of the Synod will be a long process, and we look with much anticipation to your Apostolic Exhortation to guide the church in the coming years, and hope that it will include the concerns we have raised.

In keeping with the mind of the Synod which has promoted an adult Church, we also request that all the People of God be invited to participate in what remains to be done. In the coming months and beyond, we ask you to encourage Church leaders to promote gatherings of people, pastors and bishops, in their local churches and communities, to dialogue in a spirit of listening and compassionate encounter, about “difficulties and uncertainties which challenge and threaten the family”. Such gatherings would be consistent with the Second Vatican Council’s endorsement of much neglected diocesan pastoral synods. They will also provide a means for your fellow bishops to take up the challenge that you put to them in your homily at the closing Eucharist while reflecting on Jesus’ encounter with the blind man, Bartimaeus. “We are with Jesus but we do not think like him”, you said to them. “We are in his group, but our hearts are not open...We are able to speak about him and work for him, but we live far from his heart, which is reaching out to those who are wounded.. A faith that does not know how to root itself in the life of people remains arid and, rather than oasis, creates other deserts.”

On our part we pledge to support these encounters and to urge Church leaders to attend to those in pain and take proactive steps to engage them as fully responsible adults. They are in pain because they have been marginalised and believe they are suffering at the hands of their own Church. In the course of such encounter and accompaniment, in the not-too-distant future we believe the tent of our Church will be enlarged to include all those who cry out in pain and longing to the Lord, and together we can “rejoice for the grace of a harvest which is beyond our strength and capacity”.

May the peace of Christ be with you, with our bishops, pastors, clergy, and with us all.

## Joy and Hope

### Pilgrim, Priest and Bishop

#### Pat Power

**B**ishop Pat Power spoke on many occasions and in many forums on many issues and themes. This book is a collection of such pieces. They come from homilies, occasional addresses, newspaper opinion pieces, letters and personal reflections. They cover a wide range of topics, and always with an openness and humble respect. Pat Power sees himself as part of the pilgrim church, ‘a people on the move, with a sense of adventure, supporting and encouraging one another, sometimes getting a bit lost or bloodied, sometimes questioning the path they have taken, but ultimately believing that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.’

*The journey of this book shows the missionary heart of Pat Power. He did not retreat into his own security or opt for rigidity or defensiveness, but got his feet soiled in the mud of the street by walking as a pilgrim with his sisters and brothers, hand in hand in the journey of life. He gave them a voice that was filled with hope, and shared their tears and joys as he walked and celebrated with them.*

*Bishop William Morris*  
(from the Foreword)

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# Overpopulation, Anthropogenic Global Warming and the tragedy of *Laudato Si'*

Alan Clague

In recent years, Christian churches have taken a very active stance against damage to ecosystems by human activity. Pope Francis has recently written an encyclical, *Laudato Si'* on this subject. The encyclical covers a wide range of topics, emphasising various adverse effects of human activity, with an emphasis on the disproportionate effects on the poor, and proposing remedies. It is a wide-ranging encyclical, and much of it is a welcome addition to the concerns of environmentalists and will not cause controversy. However, there are two areas that will be unacceptable to many Catholics.

Since a major cause of environmental degradation, and one that is increasing at an alarming rate, is the actual level of human population, the encyclical represented a perfect opportunity to back away from the ban on contraception imposed on Catholics by Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This was not recommended by his advisory committee, and has been comprehensively rejected by sexually active Catholics. However *Laudato Si'* implicitly criticised those who reject *Humanae Vitae* in a paragraph (No. 50) on population levels, summarily dismissing "demographic growth" as an ecological problem and blaming "extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some" (i.e. the West) and food wastage. This was greeted with disappointment by most commentators.

The encyclical attempts to deflect criticism of its dismissal of population growth as an ecological problem, by placing an emphasis on ecological damage due to global warming with a concomitant rise in ocean levels and increased acidification of the oceans (Para 23-26). It attributes this warming to the increasing atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, caused by human activity, especially electricity generation. It claims there is "growing poverty caused by environmental degradation" and that there is a "broad scientific consensus" for these statements.

A recent survey showed that a slight majority of Australians either disagree or don't know that anthropogenic global warming presents a major environmental hazard. This may be considered surprising in view of its relentless support by news media, political parties and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). A number of factors may be contributing to the survey results. The IPCC initially supported the now-discredited "hockey stick" graph of world temperature over the last millennium which denied the occurrence of the medieval warm period and the following "little ice age". This was proposed originally in a PhD thesis that was shown to use a flawed statistical method and to have "cherry-picked" data to support the results. The IPCC also admitted that its prediction of the rate of melting of Himalayan glaciers was erroneous. The final IPCC reports are written by political groups, not scientific groups, and their processes and procedures has been criticised by a 2010 report of the Inter-Academy Council, a peak science body. Proponents of devastating global warming have been embarrassed by its pause in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the failure of the predicted melting of Arctic sea ice and the Antarctic ice shelf to occur. Polar bears are thriving, not dying. Kiribati has blamed a rise in sea level for increasing salination of its fresh water aquifer, but has ignored over-extraction of water from the aquifer due to increasing population.

Release of emails from the University of East Anglia ("Climategate") revealed an agreement by senior climate scientists to prevent views different from their own from being accepted for publication in climatology journals. Dissenting scientists have been subjected to vicious personal attacks on their competence and their ethics. News media typically present projected global warming of more than 2°C with doubling of CO<sub>2</sub> as a proven scientific fact, and ignore that other scientists predict a rise of about 1°C, which does not present a hazard. They rarely acknowledge the fact that atmospheric water vapour and clouds have a larger effect than CO<sub>2</sub>. Some vociferous Australian protagonists do not have appropriate scientific qualifications (eg the economist Prof Ross Garnaut, and the zoologist Prof Tim Flannery), and only one federal parliamentarian, Dr Dennis Jensen, is a scientist (he rejects severe global warming). Thus, there are many commonly known facts that would cause Australians to question the truth of severe anthropogenic global warming.

The endorsement of severe anthropogenic global warming by the Pope has been taken up with enthusiasm by Catholic environmental groups, who might otherwise be critical of the concomitant rejection of the ecological dangers of increasing population. It is a brilliant piece of wedge politics, and seems to be working perfectly. The main question is ‘why?’. Why has the Pope attempted to maintain the status quo with respect to contraception when an encyclical on ecological problems presented an ideal opportunity to reflect the dissenting decision of the overwhelming majority of Catholics? Whether you belong to the group who does not support anthropogenic severe global warming or the group who does support it, *Laudato Si’* can only be seen as a major disappointment, and a tragic demonstration of the overwhelming power of religious conservatism in senior Catholic circles.

Alan Clague is a retired Chemical Pathologist who has a Master of Theology degree.  
He is a member of ARC Secretariat.

## “Through my most grievous fault”

Two letters to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, on 4 & 5 November 2015 (printed below) are worth considering. The reintroduction of the archaic form of Confiteor must be one of the worst aspects of the changes to the English Mass translation. So it is good to learn from the second letter that the “light beating of the breast with one hand” is omitted by the majority of priests, in favour of the other two suggested Confiteors. However, for those of us whose parishes are served by overseas priests (no doubt trained in pre-Vatican II values), Sunday Mass can be a weekly affront and a reminder of all that “Catholic Guilt” from younger days. Judging from the ageing of our congregation, one wonders if many have the energy or inclination to indulge in the shenanigans (or peccadilloes) which once were classified as “Grievous Sins”! The disappearance of the confessional shows how little the subject concerns most of us these days. Let us hope that, just as “knights and dames” have been discarded as archaic, so too will Pope Francis get rid of this outmoded language. What do other ARC members think?

*Margaret Knowlden*

### Mass words are abuse

Initially I thought Paul Ehrlich (Q&A 2.11.15) was drawing a long bow equating religious education in schools with child abuse (Q&A: US academic Dr Paul Ehrlich compares religious education to child abuse, smh.com.au, November 11). But then I considered the recent changes to the English Mass translation inflicted on Catholics, including school children. At one point they say that they have sinned “*through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault*”. I would ask the proponents of this olde/new Mass translation, including George Pell, in what way do children “grievously sin” from one Sunday to the next? Tell impressionable children repeatedly they are bad, and they will start to believe it. Now that’s what I call psychological abuse. We can just hope that Pope Francis gets rid of this idiotic language.

*Bruce Stafford, Tascott*

### Independent children

The Mass as psychological abuse of children (Letters, November 4)? I’m not buying it, and I’m a weekly Mass-goer (and truth be told, something of a parish-hopper). First, you’d need to get some children to Mass, which these days outside of Communion or Confirmation ceremonies, entails some sort of participative extravaganza orchestrated by their school teachers and attended by hordes of happy-snapping relatives.

Second, you’d have to find a priest who includes the revised Confiteor (“...*through my fault*...”), which enough of them inexplicably omit these days so the requisite “light beating of the breast with one hand” that accompanies that line is still a novelty to many parishioners. Finally, you’d have to convince a child to believe something they don’t want to, and one only has to observe a parent “counting to three” to see that’s damn near impossible.

*Michael McIntosh, Little Bay*

# Time for a Change (nine centuries ago!)

Noelene Uren

The review of Kieran Tapsell's book, *Potiphar's Wife*, by Harding Burns (*ARCVoice* 58) resonated for me with some history I have been reading, even though the events in the book occurred in c1164.

Alison Weir's biography, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, by the Wrath of God, Queen of England*, covers not only Eleanor's life but that of her husband, Henry II of England, infamous because of his involvement in the murder of St Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury.

When Henry came to the throne there were several ways of determining a person's guilt. There were two procedures invoking divine judgement: trial by ordeal either by water or fire, or trial by combat where the loser was hanged. However, the old Anglo-Saxon process was Trial by Jury which, in Henry's reign, became the accepted procedure.

The Church administered its own courts, presided over by archdeacons or bishops, which adjudicated on matters such as 'civil crimes, heresy, sexual misconduct and other cases touching the cure of souls'. Usually more lenient sentences were imposed. Even the lowliest clerks could claim this benefit of being heard in the ecclesiastical courts. Henry thought this was unfair and an increase of crimes committed by clergy, including rape and murder, led the King to attempt to reform the system. It became one of the major causes of his quarrel with Thomas Becket.

Henry had radical plans to reform abuses within the Church. He claimed his new code of sixteen laws, known as the Constitutions of Clarendon, merely enshrined the customs of his ancestors. But a few of the constitutions were his own, including: 'That criminous clerks should be handed over to the Royal courts for sentencing.' Becket saw the new laws as an attack on the Church and its power. He was supported by the majority of bishops. William of Newburgh concluded: 'They were more intent upon defending the liberties and rights of the clergy than correcting and restraining their vices.' Pope Alexander III agreed that the liberties of the Church were under threat and Becket told Henry: 'I did not become a priest to submit to the will of a layman.' and Henry is claimed to have said, 'I will not submit to a low cast cleric...'

Of course Becket's murder ended Henry's attempts at reform. He submitted himself to the judgement of the Church and, although it was found that the 'evil deeds' had not been committed by his will, he was required to do penance and renounce any laws he had introduced that were detrimental to the Church.

Harding Burns said that Tapsell's book is 'a leadership text on widespread clerical abuse, but also on an out-of-date system of governance and arcane practice in the Catholic Church'. Is it time for change? Henry II of England certainly thought so, nine centuries ago.

**NOELENE UREN** trained as a Primary School teacher in the fifties and, apart from a three-year stint working for the London County Council, her career was spent working for the NSW Department of Education. In the latter years she was a Primary School Principal. She is a Member of ARC.

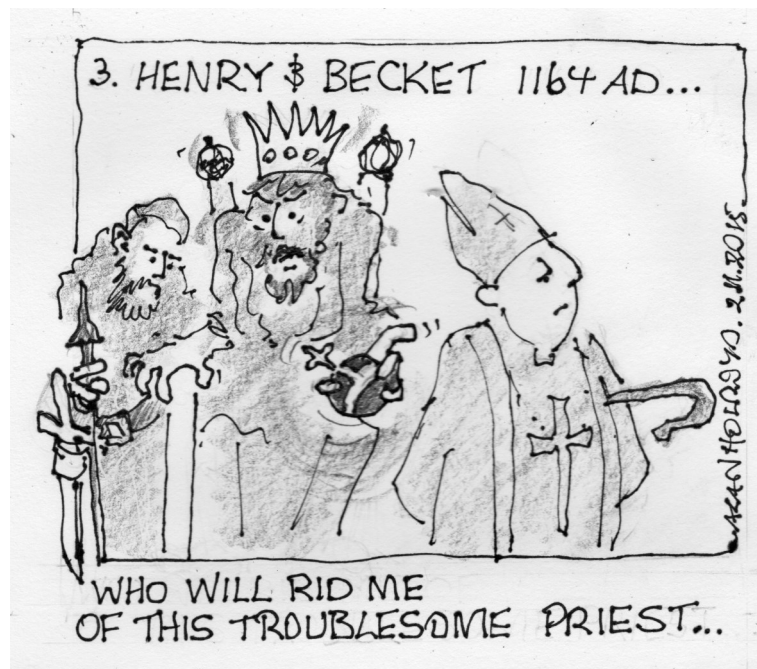
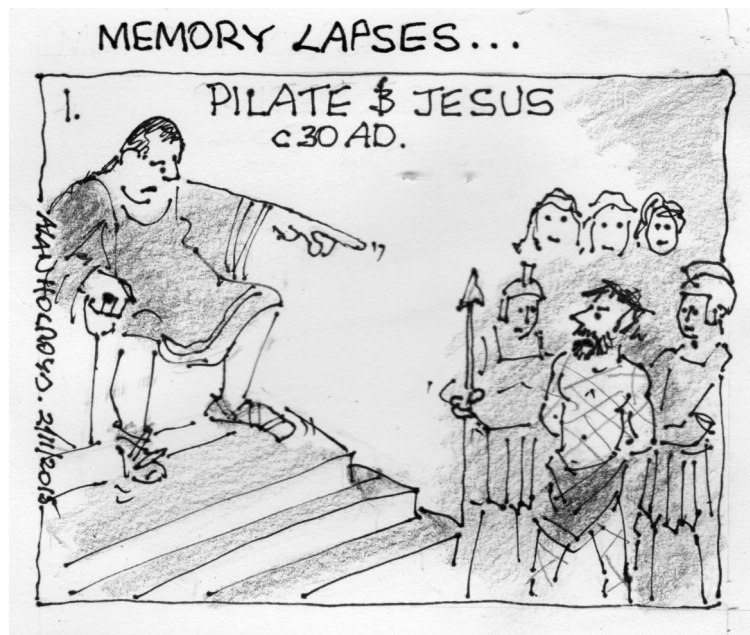
## Editor's Note

Asking our cartoonist (and art historian) Alan Holroyd to illustrate this article, further research revealed compelling background to Noelene Uren's writing.

The Thomas Becket (1118-1170) and King Henry II (1133-1189) story is legendary with varying points of view ranging from cultish, hagiographical, theatrical and academic literature. What started as a supposed close relationship between king and clerk eventually led to an irreconcilable falling out between Church and State, leading to Becket's slaying in Canterbury cathedral – reputedly linked to Henry's either rage, inebriation, or both. In this state the legend has it that Henry uttered the famous quote, "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Whether this was a directive or an expression of frustration is subjective. Henry's remorse is also legendary

Interesting findings are that Henry was known for his volatile tempers and Becket for being proud, arrogant and self-indulgent. Many priests in that era were not officially ordained which links to the angst of Henry's wanting to 'civilise' the court proceedings. Becket de-camped for France without approval from Henry and while there, Becket excommunicated several bishops in England loyal to the king.

The cartoon shows Henry grappling with the Sovereign's Orb – a symbol of the Monarch's role as Defender of the Faith and as a Supreme Governor of the Church in England. The legend extends to Henry VIII reportedly destroying the bones of Becket in the Dissolution of the Monasteries between 1536 and 1541.



## *Berešit bara' 'elohim*

# Genesis and the Silmarils

Gabe Lomas

**T**he Hebrew book of Genesis says: *In the beginning Elohim created ...* and goes on to give some versions of the story of creation and its consequences.

A good while ago, a Scripture scholar at Bomana Seminary in Papua New Guinea pointed out to me that a similar and even more beautiful creation story is to be found in J R R Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. There Tolkien writes of creation as being a mighty theme in which each creature proclaims what it knows of the mind of the Creator – Ilúvatar, the One.

At first Ilúvatar so amazes the creatures with the splendour of the story's beginning and the wonder of its ending that they bow down and are silent. Then Ilúvatar bids them each and every one sing that part of the theme they have been given, and "their voices began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar to a great music, interchanging melodies woven in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights".<sup>1</sup> And, as time unfolded and the creatures grew in their understanding, Ilúvatar revealed ever greater and more wonderful things to them.

However, one creature, Melkor, inserted into the theme some ideas of his own that were not from the mind of Ilúvatar, and there arose a terrible discord. Those around Melkor were dismayed, and the dissension he had introduced began to spread. Then Ilúvatar rose up and began a fresh theme that gathered power and had new beauty in it. Melkor tried to disrupt this in the same way, and so Ilúvatar introduced a wholly new melody, in which Melkor's aberrations were drowned out and overcome by the counter-harmony of the rest of creation.

The battle between Ilúvatar and Melkor had begun, and *The Silmarillion* plays out the struggle between Good and Evil that's been set up – just as the book of Genesis after its poetic introduction records the continuing conflict between Yahweh – or Elohim – and the Devil.

Neither account would claim to contain eyewitness reports of what took place, but each could claim to be true. Each could claim to tell the story of

how Yahweh / Ilúvatar made all things pure and beautiful, and how sinning and self-centred creatures sullied the magnificence of the Creator's work, so that things began to go wrong. Each account is a story that – among other things – attempts to explain why there is evil in the world, and why this evil is so powerful and all-destructive.

Tolkien drew on the imaginings of his own deep knowledge of Scandinavian folklore and linguistics to fashion *The Silmarillion*. Genesis is likewise constructed from the folklore and imaginings of the people from whom it emerged, mirroring what those people thought of the world and their own place in it. They were restricted to the languages and ideas of the communities in which they dwelt, so that the background against which they recorded their tales was informed by folk beliefs, tribal superstitions, and the accepted wisdom of the day. Concepts present in folklore and traditional beliefs found their ways into the Book of Genesis..<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, we have allowed this Genesis account, the word of Yahweh, to become frozen in time, locked away in the idiom and cosmology of long ago, out of date and out of the reach of our generation. We've been slow to follow the example given us by the compilers of Genesis – people like J R Tolkien are few and far between. In a sense, Melkor seems to be winning right now.

The universe<sup>3</sup> that Yahweh created 'in the beginning' is far more splendid than the scribes of ancient Israel could have imagined, holding billions of galaxies each composed of billions of stars, everything stretching for billions of kilometres into infinity. As we come to know the unfathomable mind of Yahweh more and more so we can understand more and more how small and incomplete we ourselves are, and how vast is this cosmos of which we and our concerns are but a very small part.

We also know now far more about how miniscule our fellow creatures can be: the cosmos is home to many, many creatures different from ourselves, some of which we call animate, some inanimate, each one known and loved by Yahweh, each one a cause of rejoicing and gladness. Even our human bodies are home to thousands of little creatures far smaller than we, each one present to Yahweh and celebrated for its beauty and wonder. In our searchings we've gone way past the atom and its components, way past quarks and bosons,<sup>4</sup> and fetched up with vibrating strings of 'matter' as possibly the basic constituents of all material beings.<sup>5</sup> Are they the tiniest ...?

Time itself has taken on a new perspective, since

we've come to know of events – such as the birth of planet Earth – that happened billions of years ago, and can predict what could happen billions of years hence. In this wonderful cosmos that Yahweh has made there can be creatures that live for millions of years, like the dinosaurs,<sup>6</sup> and others whose existence is measured in millionths of a second, like Higgs boson.<sup>7</sup>

We have come to realize with increasing awe how humankind is dependent upon and connected to all other creatures, so that the flapping of a butterfly's wings in the Australian bush can affect a glacier in the Arctic, which can in turn influence the climate of the Deccan plateau.<sup>8</sup> Along with our mindfulness of the vastness of the cosmos comes a growing awareness of how we and all of Yahweh's creatures interact with each other willy-nilly, whether we want to or not.

It's sobering to realise, for example, that our attitude to the use of water can impact not only on us and those around us, but also on remote communities in Kiribati, as well as on animals such as whales, dolphins and camels. If we are sparing in our use of water, it's not only those around us who will gain. Such inter-dependence is beautifully caught and reproduced in the *Silmarillion* in its description of the early days of the earth. Thus, the Queen Yavanna has countless forms or shapes, one of which is a tree that has its roots in pure water supplied by another god-like being, with yet another supplying the breeze that rustles through her leaves. She herself spills golden dew onto the barren earth, from which green corn then springs.<sup>9</sup>

Our planet is itself growing and changing all the while, evolving with quickening pace. We seem half-

way through 2015 to be in the midst of a huge human population movement, caught up in the swirling, shifting turbulence that is sweeping across the globe. People are moving around, whole tribes, even nations, on the roads, seeking shelter and refuge, fleeing from human-caused strife – just as in Biblical times. Indeed, just as the ancient Hebrews picked up their tents and fled before hostile armies, so nowadays several nations are in the act of fleeing persecution, looking for refuge. Our family, the human family, is under considerable stress.

How far our stress is the result of our own doing is much debated. Generally, we have not treated each other well, nor have we treated this earth well. Our attitude to the 'have-nots' has been called in question. And our Sister the Earth has been labelled one of the 'have-nots'.<sup>10</sup> In Tolkien's creation story, Nienna, the lone dweller, grieves for the evil that Melkor spreads upon Earth, and her lament is woven into the unfolding music of creation, bringing strength to the spirit of humankind and turning sorrow into wisdom.<sup>11</sup> Out of suffering and turmoil, insight and understanding can emerge and we can learn how better to shape our lives and live together.

There is evidence in Genesis and in *The Silmarillion* of human intolerance,<sup>12</sup> and of our scrambling after power and wealth. Perhaps that is a trait of humankind that we shall never control properly nor fully overcome. People such as Lovelock<sup>13</sup> seem to believe that there's not much time left to put things right, and maybe we've left it too late.

We shall see.

<sup>1</sup> J R Tolkien 1997, p14, *The Silmarillion*, The Folio Society, London. The book was originally published in London by George Allen & Unwin in 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Genesis 6.4 speaks of members of a class of divine beings, the Nephilim (common in the religious texts of Canaan) who were attracted to human women and sired giants with them. Genesis 1-11.26 largely consists of three or more redactions of oral folktales about the origins of the world and its nations, while 11.27 - 50.26 comprises three blocks of traditions about the origins of Israel and its place in Canaan.

<sup>3</sup> Prescinding for now from the possibility of there being more than one universe.

<sup>4</sup> J Allday. 2001. *Quarks, Leptons and the Big Bang*. Oxford: OUP. Quoted in D O'Murchu. 2004. *Quantum Theology*. NY: Crossroad.

<sup>5</sup> K Becker, M Becker & J H Schwarz. 2007. *String Theory and M-Theory*. Cambridge: CUP

<sup>6</sup> Cfr B T Swimme & M E Tucker. 2011. *Journey of the Universe*. NY: Yale UP.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs\\_boson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higgs_boson).

<sup>8</sup> Cfr J Gleick. 1988. *Chaos*. NY: Penguin Books.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr Tolkien *op. cit.* pp. 28ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Laudato Si'*. 2015. Encyclical of Pope Francis.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr Tolkien *op. cit.* pp. 29

<sup>12</sup> Cfr Genesis 6.8ff ; Tolkien *op. cit.* pp.164-169, 307-310etc.

<sup>13</sup> J Lovelock 1988. *The Ages of Gaia*. NY: OUP.

# Does Religion Cause Violence?

Natalie Lindner L’Huillier

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*I suspect we don’t think about the question of religious violence enough in Australia, and when we do, I worry that our gaze is fixed on other people and other religions rather than ourselves.*

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**D**oes religion cause violence? It’s a blunt, often loaded question that can evoke polarising perspectives. A cursory glance across a newspaper or a romp through almost any period of history suggests the connections between religion and violence are not new, nor easily untangled.

Arguments for and against religion as a cause of violence easily default into oversimplification, avoiding the complexities of history and of the human condition. Tamils and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Muslims and Jews in Israel and Palestine, Christians and Muslims in Syria: the tragedy and human suffering is overwhelming. It’s true that the relationship between religion and violence is an uncomfortable subject. And, to my mind, that’s why it’s essential we think about it.

When I hear someone identify religion as a cause of violence in conversation or in the media, I’m immediately hesitant and a little nervous. Where is this heading, I wonder? What agendas are at play?

As a person of faith, I am a participant in ‘religion’; I have skin in the game, it’s true. But if I sit honestly with my response a little longer, it’s not just the external debates that run the risk of sliding into unexamined biases. Despite my desire to be informed, to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14), I realise that ultimately this question leads me face-to-face with my own capacity for violence.

There is a certain incomprehensibility about the horrendous crimes carried out in the name of religion and the holy ways of those same traditions. I remember traveling in Poland and standing on the snowy, solemn ground at Auschwitz, looking up at that chilling sign “work will make you free”. How is it that Christianity became co-opted in the systematic murder of millions of people on the basis of their faith and ethnicity? How did the people running

those concentration camps deny their own humanity and that of the Jewish people in such absolute ways?

In the words of US theologian Robert McAfee Brown, “Not all Christians were perpetrators, but all the perpetrators were Christians”. It is true that we are beneficiaries of several decades of attentiveness to the requirements of just relationships between Jews and Christians, post Shoa. Great advances have been made.

Yet, it is my sense that as Christians continue attending to “the only great ecumenical question” – our relationship with Judaism – our grappling must run deeper still. We remain challenged by thinkers like John D’Arcy May who ask us to consider the degree to which we have inherited a Christianity that may have “repressed its original Jewish identity, only to project its remorse at having done so back onto the Jews”. In our beginnings, have we violent tendencies that, unresolved, continue to echo in the sinister tones of racism and dehumanisation? Think of Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers, and even our struggle to move beyond the insidious legacy of terra nullius.

In fact, on the whole, I suspect we don’t think about the question of religious violence enough in Australia. And when we do, I worry that our gaze is fixed on other people and other religions rather than ourselves.

Perhaps it’s the complexity of the issues involved, or that we somehow perceive religious violence as external to us? (Note that I didn’t name Australia in the first paragraph’s list, though I could have.) Perhaps it’s that we are still coming to terms with our violent history of colonisation, or that many of us still live in religiously homogenous ways, despite our growing multiculturalism? Or maybe it’s simply that we live full and busy lives in an information-dense environment and competition for our attention is fierce.

Whatever the reason, in recent months, domestic and international acts of violence – served with thick lashings of religious language, dress and symbolism –

mean that whether named or unnamed, our social discourse is navigating the terrain of religion and violence.

Biting commentaries, such as Waleed Aly's, highlight a type of poverty that is present in some dominant ways of thinking in Australia – "legitimising our most thoughtless instincts and debasing even the most sober criticism". It's a poverty that all too easily sees others as violent, while dismissing the violence we ourselves participate in when judgement slides into the murky waters of unexamined bias and discrimination.

Yes, religions, including my own, and religious people, including me, can be a fundamental influence in terrible violence, and extraordinary good. This acknowledgement is not to ignore the capacity of religion to nurture holiness, or to carry truth and wisdom, but on the contrary, it is to strengthen our capacity, as believers, to live compassionately and build peace.

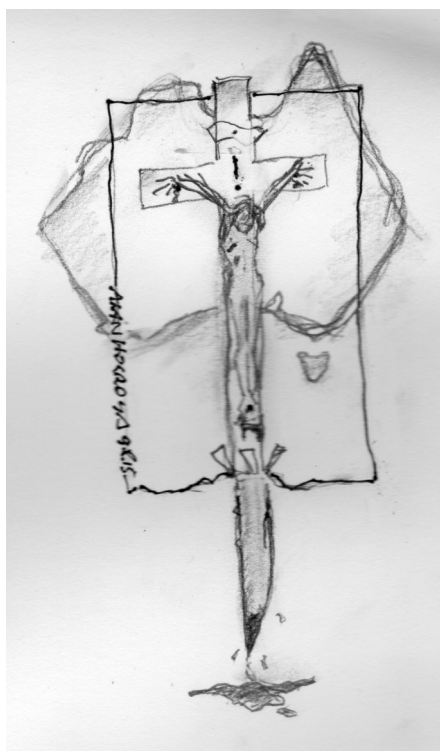
Like many others, I'm encouraged by the work of interfaith movements, be they well-known networks, such as the Charter for Compassion, or the lesser known grassroots networks, such as Believing Women for a Culture of Peace. I am grateful also for reminders from folks like Good Samaritan Sister Mary McDonald to find like-minded others and "push". It seems obvious to say, but our journey beyond violence can only be in relationship with others. So often it has been the wise insights offered by dialogue partners that have allowed me to understand myself and my own tradition better.

By the same token, and again, from a position informed by faith, my capacity for dialogue which is attentive, compassionate and transformative, is only possible when grounded in the largeness of God's love.

For me, it is the image and language of God as Trinity that supports and sustains our movements forward in peace. Despite the complexities, brokenness and violence in our world, it is love that leads the way – love, not only for the others with whom we seek to dialogue, but also for ourselves and our traditions. It's a love that is patient, moving inch by inch, often slowly and tentatively as we feel our way forward through the darkness. The challenge and gift of God's radical love is one that allows us to feel secure enough that we can face our shadows.

Only as we face those parts of ourselves – individually and collectively – that are violent to ourselves, our families, our communities, and those who we perceive as different or other, can we hope to honour the religious truth that we proclaim.

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