



The Journal



July - September 2010

Two Competing Views of Christianity

by Dermot A. Lane, President of Mater Dei Institute of Education and parish priest of Balally, Dublin

At present there are two different conceptions of Christianity vying with each other. There is the self-understanding of the church as a community of interpretation dedicated to guarding a body of truths handed down from revelation and tradition. This body of truths is often referred to as the deposit of faith, though there is some confusion as to what constitutes the deposit of faith as distinct from secondary cultural accretions to the faith. This understanding of Christianity sees faith primarily as an intellectual assent to a body of truths given in revelation.

In contrast there is also an understanding of Christianity which sees the church as a community of praxis (doing), dedicated to the continuation of the ministry of Jesus in the world today in the name of the coming reign of God. This community of Christian praxis is committed to a critical reflection on its own praxis in the light of the word of God, tradition and the teaching of the church. This understanding of Christianity sees faith embracing a praxis of justice (making things right) and liberation that effects an ongoing process of personal conversion and social transformation. Within the self-understanding of faith, personal experience and the praxis of liberation in the name of the gospel are regarded as sources of theological knowledge and truth. According to this point of view, revelation is understood as the personal reference to the normative character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for understanding revelation today.

These two understandings of Christianity, the one theory based and the other praxis grounded, need to be brought together as mutually complementary and self-correcting. At present there is a serious separation of theory and praxis within the life of the church. The current standoff between a non-historical deductive approach and a historically conscious inductivist methodology in matters of faith and justice is a source of tension in the church today. This divorce between praxis and interpretation is damaging the credibility of the church in a variety of areas which range from social justice to liturgy, from ministry to the exercise of authority, and from Christian identity to the meaning of religious pluralism...

In overcoming the divorce between interpretation and praxis, it must be noted that the historical origins of Christianity go back to the liberating praxis of Jesus and that, therefore, a strong case exists for privileging praxis over interpretation at least as a point of departure. This will require a recognition of praxis as a point of departure that opens up the meaning of Christianity. The meaning of Christianity is not available externally for detached inspection prior to praxis but rather within the praxis of Christian faith. This praxis-point of departure is initiated by impulses coming from those contrast-experiences in life which highlight the difference between what is and what could be. There is a growing volume of indignation at the way the world's resources are so unjustly distributed between the rich and the poor, between the overproduction of the first world and the underproduction of the third world. Likewise there is an increasing awareness that current levels of first-world consumption are no longer sustainable from a justice or an ecological point of view.

Another expression of this turn to praxis can be seen in the newfound sense of social responsibility for the future of the world. This new social responsibility arises from a growing awareness that the way we are is not divinely pre-ordained but rather the outcome of man-made political decisions that can be un-made and re-made. The key to this awareness is the existence of a new way of experiencing the co-presence of God in the world. God is no longer seen as a 'power over' human beings but rather 'a power with' people. God is co-experienced as a gracious presence that empowers people to do what otherwise they would not be able to do. An important theological shift is taking place from experiencing God as One who controls to One who inspires, from One who dominates to One who liberates, from One who intervenes from time to time to One who is already always there ahead of us. It is ultimately this new experience of God, based on the Bible and not metaphysics, which is the source of the Christian praxis of liberation.

Excerpt from *THE STRUGGLE FOR A JUST SOCIETY*

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The Journal welcomes submissions from small faith communities and individuals that share its vision of the Christian Church as one in which all are equal, decisions are made by consensus, healthy relationships are nurtured, justice is done, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

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It is necessary to learn a new art: the art of climbing down. The stream that flows beside me climbs forever downwards; it dashes purposfully to its destination -- to the ocean where all purposes and destinations become one. We always speak of higher purposes; well, the ocean is a lower, deeper purpose. This is a more restful image than higher purposes. Every influence in our world sends us up, praises higher intensity. Those expensive rockets to nowhere are the culmination of modern culture and symbols of the way we think we ought to live. I sit by the stream and try to learn climbing-down to deeper purposes.

What happens to time when we pray like this? Gregory of Nyssa wrote "I believe Bethlehem, Golgatha, the Mount of Olives, and the resurrection to be truly in the heart of one who has found God." Prayer time seems to be quite different from clock time. It is in some sense an inner time: a time in which past and future are in the present, a time that embraces remembrances and hope.

Donagh O'Shea OP

What's Happening In Calgary: Corpus Canada Report

by Dave Pogue, Calgary, AB

Between 10 and 20 of us meet once a month in members' homes, as we have been doing for almost 20 years since we were organized by the late Jack Kerley.

We celebrate the Eucharist, followed by a social hour and pot-luck feast. The host makes arrangements for the liturgy, and, ordained or not, may act as celebrant presider. The homily often gives rise to spirited discussion. Our theme-song is the hymn "Companions on the Journey". The core of the group is the remaining quartet of priests who parted company with the Church clergy to marry and pursue other occupations, while continuing to care and work for a more inclusive priesthood.

We are proud that Monica Kilburn-Smith, a member of our group, was ordained last year as a woman priest. Monica occasionally presides at our liturgy and adds a Celtic dimension to our discussions. She has established the St. Brigid of Kildare Catholic faith community which meets once a month at a United Church in Calgary and holds services during the summer at a quaint little country church. We support and pray for Monica as she bravely pursues this new path.

A December tradition is liturgy and a full festive dinner for members and guests at the Bragg Creek home of Chuck and Mary McLellan. There, in a perfect winter setting, deer come warily to the back door to receive their own Christmas dinner.

In June, we travel to the home of John and Joan Palardy in Olds, AB for the year's wind-up celebration and pot-luck barbecue. This year the Palardy's shared with us their recent experiences in Rwanda where they volunteered to establish a faith-based approach to justice.

During the summer, we pursue another tradition by visiting the Rosebud Dinner Theatre in a tiny hamlet a 1/2 hour drive north-east of Calgary. Rosebud used to be a dying prairie settlement. Today it is a tiny but thriving community with one industry - a famous drama school and a year-round live theatre which attracts patrons from far and wide. Rosebud Theatre is an adjunct to the drama school in Chemainus, BC. This year we were thrilled by the musical production "Oliver".

In a spirit of friendship, we honour special birthdays and anniversaries. The past year has seen 80th birthdays for Adelle Pogue and Adele Ericson, and the fiftieth Anniversary of the Pogues' wedding and Fred Williams' ordination - all good excuses for a special dinner. The previous year was the fiftieth anniversary of Chuck McLellan's ordination.

The Palardy's and Fred Williams keep us informed of Corpus activities, the local Vatican II group, and the chair of Christian Thought at the University of Calgary. Corpus continues to be a source of inspiration, solace and friendship, and a place to talk and meditate about Christ's message to an evolving church.



Why I Believe In Reincarnation

by François Brassard, Ladysmith, BC



In the April-June 2010 issue of *The Journal*, Arthur Menu explained why he does not believe in reincarnation. Given the premises of his position: concepts of traditional Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as the use of the scientific method as applied to classical physics, I could agree with some of his conclusions. However, I don't accept his premises, and in this article, I would like to point out why and

what I propose instead in support of the concept of optional reincarnation.

First of all, just because some traditional Hindu and Buddhist concepts, such as cross-species reincarnation, appear to be misinformed in the light of present-day information, one must be careful to glean the great spiritual wealth these two wisdom systems provide.

The above proviso aside, the main point regarding reincarnation is to explain how a person's lived experience is carried forward from one life to as many others as the same intelligent entity chooses to embrace. In my understanding of things, the unifying principle or source linking all lived experiences of higher intelligent beings is the 'soul' or 'spirit entity.'

It is true, of course, that all incarnations of a spirit entity require a physical manifestation and, for humans that occurs in a body where the transmission of information passes primarily through the brain. Because the brain is a finite biological object, it carries with it many physical limitations, some inherent and others that develop according to the vicissitudes of life. This is important to note because it colours in many ways the information gleaned from spirit entities concerning past lives lived, as well as life between incarnated lives.

Now, Arthur correctly states that "physical manifestations of the spiritual must obey the laws of nature and be subject to scientific observation like other physical phenomena." And he claims that no such manifestations have been detected by science. I disagree with his claim because it is premised on a concept of science that is now outdated. Let me explain. The science to which he refers is "classical physics," a Newtonian mechanistic explanation of nature that works reasonably well at the macro level, but is quite deficient at the micro level. Quantum physics offers a better explanation of what occurs at the micro or quantum level, even though its description of the movement of objects displays odd and unusual behaviour. For example, the quantum 'particle' or 'wave function' cannot be measured with fixed mathematical exactitude; it can only indicate possibilities of eventual destination. It's like trying to determine where a bouncing ball in its downward arc will eventually land. At the quantum level it appears like 10 balls each headed for a slightly different landing site. Thus, at the quantum level, the solidity of an object is illusory in terms of human perception: everything is in motion at any one time and that includes rocks.

An even more bizarre phenomenon of quantum physics, verified by repeated experiments, is the fact that a quanton in motion displays all the characteristics of a wave function, but when it is observed, it displays the more restricted characteristics of a particle. From many other examples of this phenomenon, for example in biology and,

particularly, in the neuro-science of brain functions, it becomes clear that the observer can have a causative effect on the observed. Dr. Masaru Emoto of Japan ("Messages From Water") expressed this with astonishing beauty with his experiments with water crystals. He photographed water crystals from a clear source, and then he photographed the same crystals again after a group of people in a meditative mode together sent feelings of loving gratitude and peace upon the water. The second photographs showed more elaborate structures of exquisite beauty. Thus, what I think affects the world.

Clearly, these discoveries, like all discoveries, come about through an interaction between the observer and the observed. However, strictly speaking, all physicists, whether of the classical or the quantum variety, study only one part of this equation, the object, not the subject. They tell us nothing about the source, direction or purpose of objects in motion. Yet, the observer is far more fundamental in this interaction, because it is the observer that brings the observed to consciousness, and, in doing so with intention, can produce change in the observed. This is a monumentally new and important application of the third law of thermodynamics: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." It is new because it describes an interaction between the non-material (spiritual) and the material (physical).

In the last 20 years many scientists of different stripes have been studying the phenomenon of consciousness. They tell us that in human beings it expresses itself as self-awareness of whatever one chooses to become aware of. Thus, it posits self-awareness and free choice. It operates chiefly through the frontal lobes of the brain, gathering and processing information gained primarily through human five-sensory perception.

In recent times, a vast library of anecdotal evidence from a wide variety of human experience has produced information that surpasses the limited capabilities of five-sensory perception. This information reaches human consciousness directly as intuition, creative imagination or direct revelation stimulated by meditation, various trance states or, at times, by just plain happenstance. In fact, there is an enormous amount of study and experimentation taking place today with the goal of understanding this phenomenon more clearly. Professors of philosophy or of noetic sciences in search of universal answers posit the existence of a Source of Consciousness that is the ground of all being, that which unites and drives all reality, whether it be material or spiritual.

At this point, one might ask what contribution physics might make to this discussion about reincarnation. From what was described above, classical physics can offer no help, because of the limitations of our five-sensory perception with its consequent inability to explain quantum phenomena. And, strictly speaking, quantum physics is unable to prove the existence of telepathically transmitted information, because its non-material source is beyond the scope of its investigations. However, it can and does provide a framework of possibility, maybe even plausibility, for the existence of such information.

It is here that one can profitably return to the wisdom traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaeo/Christianity. Two mystical truths common to all these traditions is that all reality is interconnected

Why I Believe In Reincarnation Continued...

and that there is no real separateness from the Source. Common sense perception sees reality as separate, but extra-sensory perception of information sees reality as "entangled," meaning interconnected and beyond the confines of time.

We also know today that when humans achieve 'higher' levels of consciousness through meditation or hypnosis, the less filtered is the telepathic information received, meaning the more attuned it is to the higher frequencies of the spirit dimension. However, the transmission of this information among humans through language (so far we don't know how to communicate telepathically) is affected by the limitations of the human brain and the changing circumstances of any particular 'psychic's' historical and socio-cultural experiences. Nevertheless, from the flood of information pouring in from mystics, psychics and channelers on the one hand and neuro-scientists, psychologists and hypno-therapists/regressionists on the other hand, we are getting a clearer picture about life in the spirit dimension and its interface with incarnated realities.

Following is my own very basic sketch of spirit life based on what I have read, studied and experienced, and embedded in it is an explanation of why I believe in reincarnation.

No one knows for sure what the Source of Consciousness is really like. We only get expressions of what it feels like, for instance, an ambient atmosphere of Beauty, Peace, Compassion, Joy, Empowerment, etc. That point aside, we do know that the spirit dimension is populated with spirit entities (angels?) that are created by the Source as packets of pure energy. They start off as young and immature, and they are drawn to grow in wisdom and eventually to become one with the Source. They are born immortal outside of time and space as we humans know it. Frankly, I don't understand how a spirit can grow in maturity outside of time, but, apparently, it can.

These spirits grow in maturity through their interactions with other spirit entities, their friends, companions and study group colleagues. They also grow through their interactions with other created realities, like the beauty they observe on other planets where life exists. For example, in one case study a spirit explained how he (sic) and some of his companions were able to focus their energy at the molecular level in order to create a genetic variation of a plant that would act as a predator to hold in check a plant that was overtaking all the vegetation on a small planet where there was no animal life, intelligent or otherwise.

Spirit entities also grow by choosing to incarnate in intelligent life forms that exist on various planets, such as Earth. They do so, because the lived experience provides a major challenge for the exercise of their personal gifts. Their hope is to harmonize with the body they enter and to influence the free will choices of the person in a way that directs them to practice non-violent, non-judgmental, compassionate behaviours that draw them closer to the Source of all reality. This is not easy for the spirit to do, particularly here on Earth where the vibrations are quite dense, causing communication problems. Also, relatively young souls don't always have the necessary skill to move the person away from harmful, if not evil behaviour. Sometimes, in extreme cases, souls can be damaged and may require cocooning and purging when returning to the spirit dimension after the death of the human vessel. On the other hand, for every relative success story, the soul enjoys the added benefit of

having contributed in whatever small way toward the evolutionary destiny of the planet which, on Earth, is to shift the tide of human behaviour away from the violence of a survivalist mode embedded in the simian brain to a peaceful, non-judgmental, compassionate mode characteristic of the Source.

Why do souls choose to reincarnate? There are various reasons given for this. Some souls want to return in order to grow by correcting mistakes made in a previous life (lives). Some see it as an opportunity for fast tracking personal growth by intentionally choosing a difficult assignment. One such soul described his previous incarnation as a successful businessman as flawed, because the human person was a control freak who was very hard on his employees. In his next life, he chose to incarnate in the body of a person who suffered from cerebral palsy in a family of parents of meagre means and of four siblings. He had very little control of his body and was totally dependent on everyone for all his needs. It was a fairly short but very productive life. He practiced great patience, always had a smile on his face, was constantly encouraging his siblings and elicited much joy and generosity from them all. When he returned to his spirit study group after the death of the human person, he received a "standing" ovation for a well-accomplished mission. Not long after (sic), the colour of his aura changed from white to white with yellow tinges, a sign of his spiritual advancement.

Some souls choose never to incarnate for very personal reasons, but in such cases they choose to take on other very responsible tasks, such as being a "spirit guide" (guardian angel?) for another frequently incarnating soul. By the way, all souls have spirit guides and sometimes more than one. Also, when souls reach a very high level of wisdom (indigo coloured aura), there is no further reason to reincarnate and they move on to more important functions according to their gifts and desires.

Obviously, much more could be said on this topic. Hopefully, this is enough to whet your appetite. For more, very clear information about life between lives, read the works of Dr. Michael Newton, a Master Hypno-regressionist who bases his documentation on more than 6000 case studies of clients he has worked with therapeutically.

Over the last few years, Connie and I have had endless discussions on the topic of life between lives. It is always a very exciting process. It inspires us to make our own lives as productive as we can. Though we remain Christian in background, our current understandings have allowed us to bypass traditional institutional religion with its outdated concepts. It has led us to participate in a more inclusive, universal spirituality, one that feels totally in synchronicity with what Jesus was teaching about life in the Spirit.

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Theological Soapbox: Reincarnation? A Response

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC



I am glad that the ongoing discussion between François Brassard and me about reincarnation has made it to the pages of The Journal. The topic is one of interest to many people, and it is my hope that readers will

participate in the discussion by writing letters to The Journal's editor, some of which may find their way on to these pages.

François' response to my article (my Theological Soapbox column in the previous issue of The Journal) appears elsewhere in this issue. In response I wish to make three points: (1) quantum physics does not lend support to François' version of reincarnation; (2) there is no indisputable scientific evidence for the psychic phenomena that François offers in support of reincarnation; (3) faith in reincarnation is not compatible with the Christian faith.

Quantum Physics

François cites experiments in which observation of a subatomic entity causes the entity to change from behaving like a wave to behaving like a particle. He offers this as evidence that “the observer can have a causative effect on the observed”. By this he means that a person who brings the observed entity into consciousness with the intention of changing its behaviour can, in fact, change its behaviour. The classic experiment that exemplifies the effect of observation is the double-slit experimentation.

In this experiment packets of light energy called photons are directed, one photon at a time, towards a plate that has two small openings in the form of side-by-side vertical slits. On the other side of the plate is a screen. As photons are beamed toward the plate, light emerges from the slits and forms a pattern on the screen. The pattern of bright and dark bars that is produced on the screen is just the pattern that would be produced if the light going through the slits were a wave. Now if an instrument that can detect photons is placed in the slits, in order to detect which of the two slits a photon goes through, the pattern of bright and dark bars on the screen changes to the pattern that would be produced if the light going through the slits did so in the form of particles rather than waves. In the parlance of physics, the detection of the photon going through a slit is called an “observation”.

What is essential to note is that the “observation” is performed by a physical device which is not itself conscious. The human experimenter could set up the experiment to start automatically and leave the room. In his or her absence the change in pattern on the screen would still happen. The experimenter could set up a video camera that would make a time-and-date stamped recording of the

experiment to verify that the quantum event did indeed happen in his or her absence. Human consciousness does not cause the change on the quantum level because no human being actually observes the quantum event, that is, the detection of the photon by the detecting device. The best the experimenter can do is observe the consequence of the quantum event, that is, the change in the pattern of light on the screen.

And it is true of all experiments with subatomic entities that no human directly observes the quantum event. The experimenters infer the nature of the quantum event by analyzing the data provided by detecting and measuring devices. This human “observation”, which in reality is an inference, takes place after the quantum event, and therefore cannot cause it. So in no case does quantum physics provide evidence of consciousness causing a change in the physical world. François cites the work of Masaru Emoto with water. I recommend that readers read the article on Mr. Emoto in the online Wikipedia encyclopedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masaru_Emoto> . I quote from the article: “Commentators have criticized Emoto for insufficient experimental controls, and for not sharing enough details of his approach with the scientific community. In addition, Emoto has been criticized for designing his experiments in ways that leave them open to human error influencing his findings. In the day-to-day work of his group, the creativity of the photographers rather than the rigor of the experiment is an explicit policy of Emoto. Emoto freely acknowledges that he is not a scientist, and that photographers are instructed to select the most pleasing photographs.” Citations are provided in the article. The article goes on to note that his claimed results have not been verified by rigorous scientific experimentation.

Psychic Phenomena

I recommend that readers read the following articles in Wikipedia: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychic>> and <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parapsychology>> . I quote from the former article: “In 1988 the U.S. National Academy of Sciences gave a report on the subject that concluded there is 'no scientific justification from research conducted over a period of 130 years for the existence of parapsychological phenomena.' In a 1990 survey of members of that organization, only 2% of respondents thought that extrasensory perception had been scientifically demonstrated, with another 2% thinking that the phenomena happened sometimes.” The consensus of the scientific community is that the psychic phenomena that François offers as evidence for reincarnation have not been scientifically verified. Again I quote the article: “Physicist Robert Park states that parapsychology's reported positive results are problematic because most such findings are invariably at the margin of statistical significance and that might be explained by a number of confounding effects.” Citations are provided in the article.

Reincarnation and Christian Faith

François cites the reports of psychics, who claim to provide information about a realm of spirit beings who from time to time incarnate themselves either in or as human beings. I say “either in or as” since it is not clear to me from what François says whether these spirits coexist with the soul of the person whose body they inhabit or whether they are the one and only soul of that person. In any case,

Soapbox Continued...

the whole scheme depends on whether the psychics' reports are true.

It is well known that the world of psychics has been congenial for frauds over the years. But let us suppose that there are some psychics who honestly report what they have experienced. I can think of at least three alternative explanations for those experiences that do not imply the existence of the spirit realm that François has described. One explanation is that the psychics have entered a dreamlike state, in which they are both conscious and dreaming. I can remember times when moving from sleep to being wide awake, I continue to dream, giving the dream an aura of reality, and during which I have been able in some way to control the progress of the dream. Another possible explanation is that the psychic enters a trance-like or hallucinatory state in which the contents of his or her unconscious emerge into awareness in the form of visions or verbal narratives or a combination of the two. A third possibility is that the psychic experiences a temporary psychosis in which he or she takes on a variety of personalities such as we see in cases of schizophrenia or split personality. Any of these three possible explanations strike me as more plausible than postulating the existence of the realm of spirits we have been discussing.

Lacking evidence to give the existence of such a realm a scientific basis, to hold that the realm exists is an act of faith. The question then becomes, is faith in this spirit realm compatible with the Christian faith?

Christianity does believe in spiritual beings called angels or demons. But they do not incarnate themselves in or as human beings. They may appear to human beings in human form but they do not have physical bodies.

In what follows I will speak of two ways in which our self can express itself. For brevity's sake I will speak of "two selves", but the reader is to understand that I mean two expressions of our one self.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of grace. God invites every human being to union with God. In the words of Jesus, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22). This union is a gift that is

bestowed on every human being who does not freely reject it. It is not earned, it is not merited. No human being is more deserving of receiving the gift than any other human being. Mother Teresa is no more deserving of the gift than Adolf Hitler.

We rejoice that Mother Teresa led a life that inclined her to accept the gift. We regret that Hitler led a life that inclined him to reject it. We trust that Mother Teresa accepted the gift and we hope that Hitler in his last extremity repented of his ways and accepted the gift. When the gift is accepted at the moment of death, the self that all along has been hidden with Christ is raised in bodily form in the resurrection of the dead. (See Colossians 3:3-4, and yes, even Hitler had a self that during his life on earth was hidden in Christ). Those who reject the gift in the moment of death separate themselves definitively from the self which had been hidden in Christ in preference for a self that chooses not to be in union with God. This self also is raised from the dead in bodily form.

These are definitive choices. They are definitive because we want them to be definitive. There is some satisfaction in rejecting union with God in order to be god for oneself, and there is bliss in accepting union with God, but to be neither one nor the other, the prospect of living in perpetual ambiguity about who one is, in the end becomes unendurable.

Whether we realize it or not, it is tremendously stressful to be in two minds, to be the battlefield for two selves at war with each other. If we have lived long enough to develop a strong self that stands in opposition to our other self that is hidden in Christ, then at the moment of death, a question is addressed to us. That question is: Who are you? The two selves thrust themselves forward, each demanding to be our one and only self, and the resulting tension cannot be borne. We want the tension to end and the only way it will end is if the question, Who are you?, never has to be asked again. That means making a choice that defines forever who we are.

This is what death is. We only die once. There is no second, or third or any other number of go-arounds. This is it. Be prepared.

Christian faith seeks to keep alive the memory of the praxis of Jesus in society in the name of the coming reign of God. The historical praxis of Jesus had a direct bearing on the political and religious situation of his day: good news to the poor, relief to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. One way in which the historical Jesus sought to embody this vision of the reign of God was through the creation of a new table fellowship among those who were socially excluded, politically marginalized, and religiously outcast. The meal-ministry of Jesus prominent in the gospels, provoked a negative reaction from the Pharisees who accused him of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Mt 11:19). This new praxis of table fellowship initiated by Jesus in his ministry was formalised at the Last Supper and prophetically re-enacted by the washing of the feet and followed by the command "Do this in memory of me." The praxis of the celebration of the Eucharist in the church today has lost its organic connection with the meal-ministry of Jesus and the washing of the feet. With the help of a new imagination ... the way we celebrate the Eucharist could be transformed to recover its connection with the work of justice.

... The work of justice without the celebration of the Eucharist is in danger of running out of hope, while the celebration of the Eucharist without justice runs the risk of becoming an empty ritual. Neglect of this close connection between the work of justice and the celebration of the Eucharist accounts in part for the presence of so much apathy and the absence of hope within liturgical assemblies.

By Dermot A. Lane

Spirituality, Evolution And Religion

by Emil Kutarna, Regina, SK



Here is grandpa Emil duked out on his 80th birthday with granddaughter Maiella.

The way I see it, whether one realizes it or not everyone has a viewpoint about the meaning of life. Because “viewpoint” and “meaning” are not material things. How one lives out this viewpoint is, you might say, their “spirituality”. Furthermore, if one now practices certain rituals to express this spirituality, I would call this “religion”.

Lately I have become comfortable with the viewpoint that evolution is a key to understanding the meaning of life, and a key to understanding good and evil. Evolution seems to be a good explanation for the great upheaval in religion during these modern times. Applying evolutionary principles leads me in a certain direction for my spirituality that differs from what I had been following for most of my life.

The meaning of Life

I think that the Book of Genesis was an attempt at explaining why life is as it is based upon the knowledge the Hebrews had at that time in history. It is in our nature to wonder “why?” So why is there suffering and death? Because the legends the bible writers had, told them that our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, had displeased their Creator, and so the punishment of suffering and death had to follow.

Naturally a whole set of religious behaviours evolved in order to placate the Creator, and so the Hebrew religion came into being. Unfortunately there emerged self-interested leaders for whom legalism was more important than spirituality. (I can't resist to comment: how history repeats itself in our own day!).

Jesus of Nazareth

Then came this amazing genius who could see through it all. It compelled him to speak out, and his words resonated with the people, but what he said also drew the anger of the religious leaders. After John

the Baptist was killed, Jesus probably knew that he would be the next target. He was so different that history could not forget him, and thus we have “The New Testament”.

Religion in the second millennium

Huge scandals have rocked the Catholic Church. Priests abused children and Bishops protected the priests. The authority of the clergy went down the tube. By their thousands people stopped going to church, not because they didn't believe in God, but because they didn't believe in the church anymore.

Spirituality

Some people say that they can be spiritual without going to church or being religious. My understanding is that religion is about people getting together for mutual support, and this means some kind of organization. And organization means guidelines and rules. It follows that some kind of ritual needs to be practiced to give expression to the spirituality of the group. On the other hand, if you want to be a hermit and make your way through the spiritual labyrinth alone, then I guess you can be spiritual without being religious.

To whom shall we go?

When a number of followers left Jesus, he asked the Twelve if they too would leave. Peter answered, “To whom shall we go?” (John 6,69).

I am asking that question now, and I think I am not alone. Unfortunately I cannot say that I shall go to the Catholic Church for spiritual guidance.

Maybe it is irreverent, but let me say it: There is no genius to lead us today as Jesus did in his day. I think today the leader is not a charismatic individual. It is the WWW, the world wide web, the Internet. This is where I get much of my spiritual inspiration, compared to the very little from the Sunday sermon. An interesting study shows that more women than men are beginning to use the internet. I am not surprised that it is women who are leading in the changes, not only in the Catholic Church but in other churches and in world events as well.

So what have I learned?

It would take many pages to explain where my head is at now. But let me summarize the main points only. Some of the ideas may be shocking.

1. The science behind Evolution is more convincing than Genesis. So St. Augustine was wrong, Original Sin does not exist in the way most Catholics see it, nor is there the need for Baptism to wash it away in order to be saved. Along with Baptism, all the other sacraments take on a new meaning.
2. Every now and then conditions are right for a leap in evolutionary development. Jesus could be a wonderful example of just that. He was a rare genius, wonderfully wise, compassionate and brave. His words and deeds are a huge inspiration, a great example to follow. And if Original Sin does not exist, it is not necessary for Jesus to be divine, or to die on the cross to “open the gates of heaven”, to atone for our sins.

3. God is present to all creation; therefore, all creation is sacred. So how can there be any separation between sacred and secular? It is not only religious practices like prayer, fasting and going to church that are holy actions pleasing to God. Every breath we take is a holy action. Everything we do is either helping or hindering God's work of creational development. This thought needs a lot of meditation

4. How can a loving God allow evil in the world? I suggest that what we think is evil may be the way evolution proceeds. If everyone was perfect like Jesus, would there be any murder? Maybe, just maybe, murder happens because some brains are so undeveloped that they are capable of crime. Perhaps in evolutionary time, the Kingdom of God may come when all humans are like Jesus, perfect and loving and compassionate. In the meantime we just have to do our best to protect ourselves from the murderers just as we protect ourselves from earthquakes and tornados. Sadly we are not always successful. But yes, it is still a mystery.

5. For practical purposes, what do I do now? Well, I'm still a Catholic and belong to my parish, imperfect as we both are. Sunday Mass leaves a lot to be desired, but I make allowances and I make little changes. I don't begin Mass by thinking of my sins and feeling miserable. Instead I think of how wonderful it is just to have made it this far – I'm 80 years old! Then I happily recount the many ways I have enjoyed God's blessings these last few days, such as being a new grandpa!

Other little changes: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth."

I have some difficulties to work out about the Creed, but give me time.

At the Offertory, my response is: "May God accept this offering from *our hands*, (we all together offer the gifts, not only the priest) for the praise and glory of God's name, for our good and for the good of all God's *people* (I think we should include more than just us Catholics)."

I also have difficulty with the "Lamb of God" and its implication of redemptionist theology.

So I need to do something with that.

At communion, I again don't like this idea of always declaring "Lord, I am not worthy", how not good enough I am. I know I'm not perfect, but it isn't entirely my fault that I happen to inhabit this planet at this time of its development and human development. It smacks a bit of an insult to God suggesting that God isn't doing a very good job of it all. So quietly I say to myself, "God, it's great to be here with my extended family".

So what does communion mean? That Jesus is with me as long as the elements of bread and wine exist, around fifteen or twenty minutes, according to the good Sisters who taught me Catechism? I gave that up a long time ago. Here and Now I like Teilhard de Chardin's idea of the Cosmic Christ. When the communion minister presents the host and says "The Body of Christ" for me it means that the new creation is another tiny step slowly coming into being, and I can enthusiastically say "Amen" to that.

John The Baptist

by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC



Two powerful prophetic preachers who lived in Palestine in the first third of the first century AD are known as John the Baptist (JnB) and Jesus of Nazareth. They preached the 'gospel' of the coming Kingdom of God in words that were alarming to the authorities, and they were

both executed. In the main it is not possible to say exactly what they said and did because those who were inspired to collect and present the accounts were not simply recording straightforward biographical or historical data. However, because of the rigorous studies by biblical historians, anthropologists, linguists, and exegetes, it is possible to obtain a reliable picture. The following is part of what I have gleaned from reading their works.

The canonical accounts of the ministry of Jesus begin with JnB though their accounts of him differ according to each evangelist's purpose. It is useful to read the texts together: for example Mk 1:3f; Mt 3; Lk 3:2f; Jn 1:6,7,19f. The text from Isaiah 40:3 was originally a comforting cry to the Israelites in the 6th century BC Babylonian Exile to get ready to return to God's house in a new Jerusalem: "A voice cries out in the wilderness 'Prepare the way of the Lord! Make the road level for our God'." The Gospel of Mark (1:2f) blends this text with Exodus 23:20 and Mal 3:1f "I am sending a messenger before you to prepare the way before me".

JnB is "apostled by God" (Jn 1:6). He is a dramatic sight. He addresses the Israelites whom he sees living in a situation of 'unrightness' and apostasy by their leaders. He preaches that God is about to restore his Kingdom and that they should return to God's covenant by a changed way of life. The sign of this

John The Baptist Continued...

changed way of life is his washing them (baptizing) in the River Jordan. JnB does not preach the orthodox creed and observances of the Temple. On the contrary the New Testament (NT) proclaims that *he* is the herald, the “voice in the wilderness” where the word of God came to him. Eating the food of the poor and dressing like a prophet, *he* is announcing the imminence of God’s coming Kingdom.

JnB preaches from his own deep faith; he quotes no scripture nor any other authority. He takes it as a given that his hearers know what he is talking about in this time of apostasy by the Judean leaders. He does not claim to forgive sin because that is God’s prerogative; God’s work is to make things right. JnB does not claim to be Elijah, nor any other ‘strong one’, such as the fiery judge of Malachi, nor the Archangel Michael, nor the son of Man. All Israel can be saved as God’s promise is forever no matter what.

For JnB, the imminent judgment by the “Coming One” is unimaginable ‘good news’: It will be God’s cleansing spirit/wind for those Israelites who have changed their ways. But it is equally unimaginable purifying pain (fire) for those who have neglected to do so. He urges the Israelites to share - clothes and food - and to do other right-making God-like works. The “Coming One” (whose identity he is vague about because he does not know it) is stronger than he who is not fit to untie his sandal. JnB does not look for a messiah nor a Davidic rescuer. In his view, there is only the unknown Coming One between himself (the messenger foretold in Malachi) and God’s Kingdom. It is urgent that the Israelites “think about it again.” The time is almost up.

But JnB was mistaken. The future did not happen as he predicted. His Coming One did not come, and JnB was executed. His followers either gave up or joined the Jesus movement, or they modified their expectations. Josephus gives their views and what they developed into. The NT stories echo things that JnB said and did as remembered and passed on by his own or Jesus’ followers. The question being asked “Was John’s baptism from God or from John?” Mk (11:30) puts it on the lips of Jesus in answer to the pharisees’ question to Jesus “Who gave you authority...?”

In 93 AD, Josephus, who in the context of his history had no need to dwell on JnB, gives a picture of JnB different from that in the NT in that he is not the “voice in the wilderness making level the way” for God. Josephus reports what he learned from JnB’s later disciples. Herod Antipas had JnB “put to death though he was a good man and exhorted the Judeans to lead righteous lives, to practice justice (i.e. to make things right) towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in ritual cleansing/baptism...if they used it to cleanse their bodies and not for pardon of sins because their souls had already been purified by justice. When others joined the crowds about him and were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed and decided to strike first. John was brought to Machaerus and there put to death. The Judeans believed that Herod’s army was destroyed (by his father-in-law, King Aretas) because God wished to avenge John and punish Herod.” Josephus omits the coming of God’s Kingdom probably because in Rome such a notion was too politically dangerous. The repeated ritual washing of the body was a symbol, a sign that one had already begun to live God’s way and JnB’s disciples repeated it in his memory. Such ideas were probably different from the teaching of JnB himself and the practice

of his first disciples. They show, however, that JnB’s ‘voice’ was still strong in Josephus’ time.

Early groups of Jesus followers thought well of JnB but they interpreted him in terms of what they believed God had done for Israel in Jesus. Many of JnB’s words and deeds were related by his own followers and modified by the Jesus’ groups. They searched the scriptures for texts that might explain these two prophetic preachers:

“They who wait for Yahweh shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.... All who thirst come to the waters; he who has no money come, buy wine and milk without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and labour for that which does not satisfy?” (Is 40:31; & 55:1f)

JnB’s conception was patterned after Isaac and Samuel. The names of his parents and their priestly and Davidic ancestry; the barren woman, Elizabeth, getting pregnant recalled old-aged Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel; the text from Malachi already referred to; the canticle of Zachary in Lk 1:68f may have been composed by JnB’s disciples; these and more were taken over by Jesus groups.

Elijah has an important role in the JnB story though he himself has no place for Elijah. In the 1st century, expectation was high among the Israelites that Elijah was about to come - but not as the forerunner of the messiah. The last words of the Malachi Appendix that closes the christian Old Testament are “I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before my day comes.” Mt’s Jesus says “He (JnB) is the Elijah who is expected to come.” (11:14) and in chapter 17 “Elijah comes first and restores all things... and the disciples understood that he (Jesus) spoke about JnB.” Justin Martyr (d. 160 AD) depicts JnB in Elijah’s role as the last herald of God’s imminent coming and the one who precedes the messiah. In the 3rd century Pseudo-Clementine’s *Recognitions*, JnB’s disciples still claim him as the messiah.

Rumours and stories about JnB were plentiful in the first century AD. It is clear, however, that, prophet-like, he witnessed to his faith, lived his understanding of the true Israelite, and preached God’s gospel to “the people of the land” who had little use for man-made codes but who would listen to him. He ignored the Jerusalem authorities believing that because they were misusing their power and not likely to change their ways, they were destined to be sifted like chaff by God’s cleansing wind and then burned in a pile.

Jesus, like many others, went out to him to be baptized. After a time Jesus left him and took God’s good news to the people in their homes, hamlets, villages, towns and even into Jerusalem. Jesus had more success with the people than JnB had, but as we know, he too was executed by the authorities.

The full text of Gregory Baum’s talk *Vatican II - A Look To The Future* is printed in the August/September 2010 issue of the *Island Catholic News* (icn@telus.net)

Two Recent Letters

Most Reverend Dr. Guiseppe Leanza

22 July 2010

Excellency,

I write in relation to the press release following publication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on “Norms concerning the most serious crimes” issued on 15 July.

The serious crimes to which the regulations refer concern the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance but also of sexual abuse committed by a priest against a minor under the age of eighteen. In relation to the latter, the acceleration of procedures, the possibility of including laity as members of tribunal staff, lawyers or prosecutors, and the introduction of a new category: paedophile pornography, together with reference to the explanatory “Guide to understanding basic CDF Procedures concerning Sexual Abuse Allegations” published on the Holy See website which advises compliance with civil law at all times, are all welcome as indicators of the current and anticipated further commitment of the Church to best practice in child safeguarding across the globe.

However the communication also referred to “crimes of a different nature” and included in its listing the ordination of women. This led to a very great number of media, certainly across the English speaking world, suggesting an equation by the Vatican of child abuse and female ordination. For those faithful, both men and women, who love and serve their Church, this was humiliating.

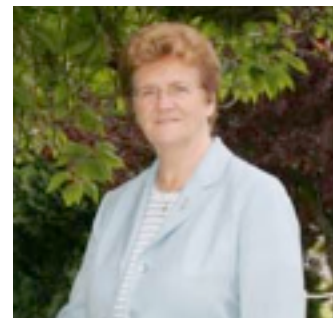
This letter is not about the ordination of women, although that is increasingly becoming an issue in need of serious attention and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is about communication, that however unintentional, appears to betray and demonstrate an apparent lack of respect for all women on the part of leaders in the Church. In this climate it is becoming increasingly difficult, for example, to raise issues of injustice, a Gospel imperative, when the Church one represents continues to send negative messages about half of its members.

In appreciation of your kind interest at all times,

Yours sincerely,

Marianne O'Connor osu

Leader Of The Irish Ursuline Union



To My Maryknoll Brothers,

You have been my community, my family, for 44 years. Because of my love and respect for you and for Maryknoll, I want to explain, as best I can, why I believe women should be ordained in our Church.

As a young man in the military, I felt God was calling me to be a priest. After much discernment, I entered Maryknoll and was ordained in 1972. I am grateful to have found the hope, meaning, and joy I was seeking in life.

In my ministry over the years, I have met many devout women in our Church who feel called by God to the priesthood, just as we do as men. And why shouldn't they be called? As Catholics, we profess that our all-loving God created men and women of equal worth and dignity. As priests, we all say that the call to the priesthood is a gift and comes from God.

My brothers, who are we to reject God's call of women to the priesthood? Who are we, as men, to say that our call from God is valid, but their call, as women, is not? I believe that our all-powerful God, Creator of the universe, is certainly capable of calling women to be priests.

Our Church leaders tell us that women cannot be priests because Jesus chose only male apostles. With all due respect, this is not accurate. As Christians, we know the importance of the resurrection. It is at the core of our faith. Jesus chose a woman, Mary Magdalene, to be the first witness to His resurrection. She was also chosen to bring “the good news” to the male apostles and became known as “the apostle to the apostles.” Galatians 3:28 is very clear: “There is neither male nor female. I Christ Jesus you are one.” Furthermore, a 1976 report by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Vatican's top scripture scholars, concluded that there is no justification in the New Testament for excluding women from the priesthood.

Reflection on the scripture, the love of God, and the many stories I have heard from women over the years about their being called by God, I believe that excluding women from ordination is rooted in sexism. Sexism, like racism, is a sin. And no matter how hard we may try to justify discrimination, in the end, it is always wrong.

For the past 20 years I have been speaking out against the injustice of the School of the Americas and U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. In conscience, I cannot be silent about an injustice I see much closer to home - an injustice in my Church. The exclusion of women from the priesthood is a grave injustice against women, against our Church, and against our God who is calling women to serve our Church as priests.

Fundamentally, the ordination of women is a matter of justice. At the same time, there are practical benefits to having women priests. As we know, our Church is in a serious crisis. Hundreds of churches are closing because of a shortage of priests. When I entered Maryknoll we had over 300 seminarians preparing for the priesthood. Today we have eight. If we are to have a vibrant and healthy Church rooted in the teachings of Jesus, we need the wisdom, compassion, courage, and gifts of women in the priesthood.

Like the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, and the right of women to vote, the ordination of women is inevitable because it is just. Let us be on the right side of history.

Our Maryknoll community is well known and respected for its work for justice and the oppressed. My brothers, I respectfully ask that you break your silence and stand in solidarity with the many women in our Church who, like you and me, are called by God to the priesthood.

Your brother in Christ,

Roy Bourgeois, M.M.



Corpus Canada

Who Are We?

We are a faith community of men and women empowered by our baptism in Jesus' Spirit to reach out to others in their need as Jesus did. We also provide support for married Roman Catholic priests, their family and friends.

Where Are We Going?

This faith community is dedicated to

- Renewal of ministries in the Church, including an ordained ministry open to men and women, married and unmarried;
- A vision of Church that includes all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ;
- Development of leadership among all the baptised in the Church;
- Promotion of a wholesome view of sexuality;
- Justice for all based on Gospel values.

Our message is a healing one and is directed to everyone, especially the marginalized in the Church. It is our hope to reach people through many ministries, and in a special way through the creation of small faith communities.

How Do We Get There?

Through a collegial approach based on consensus reached through communal discernment in the Spirit, we share our gifts that all creation might be transformed according to God's loving plan.

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