



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET

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The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance –

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: *"...Professors of theology (the experts) both clerical and lay, are generally the people who least understand religion. Why is this? Because religion, like literature is a complete world view. It cannot be studied in a compartmentalised way. One cannot approach the religious experience with only the analytical burner turned on in one's brain. One must approach it with one's whole heart, mind and soul. (Who once said something about loving with one's with one's whole heart, mind and soul?)... we desperately need to see the Faith whole and unperverted."*

– *"The Peasant's Faith"* by Daniel Neyer

A BLAST FROM THE BISHOP! continued...

You will remember it ended last week with... "The world now needs a U.N. army in the way that Britain 200 years ago needed to turn its bands of militia in each town into a national police force...."

Strange distortion by George Bush's coterie of religious conservatives: The religious conservatives who surround George Bush, he says, espouse "a very strange distortion of Christianity" and the fact that "some of them stand to benefit financially from the reconstruction of Iraq" has made the whole enterprise even more suspect.

Of Israel, he says: "I agree with the millions of Jews around the world, and tens of thousands in Israel – some of whom I know from teaching at the Hebrew University – who grieve at what some Jews in Israel led by Ariel Sharon are doing. I'm not anti-Israel but when I see what's been done to the Palestinians over the past 50 years, I say, 'Well I'm sorry, but if you put people behind barbed wire, keep them caged, take their land despite international resolutions, and bulldoze their homes, you are asking for trouble'.

"This is not in any way to excuse or exonerate the horror and enormity of suicide bombing. It is just to say that if you squeeze people that tight sooner or later they'll do drastic things. There must be better ways to achieve peace than the road taken by the government of Ariel Sharon."

He gives the present cultural imperialists a serve: Interestingly, he draws a parallel between America's unilateralism in the Middle East and in the gay bishops' debate, seeing the same arrogant cultural imperialism behind both. The holding agreement of the crisis meeting of primates at Lambeth

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to set up a commission instead of splitting the Anglican Communion immediately was "scuppered within days with Frank Griswold [the US primate] making it clear at once he didn't agree with the consensus".

Dr. Wright clearly does not accept the way the battle-lines on homosexuality have been sketched by the media. "I get irritated when people suggest the debate is between literalists and those who think scripture has to be interpreted or put into context. Some of us have spent our professional lives putting scripture in its historical context and in their contexts the relevant New Testament passages basically meant something deeply counter-cultural, then as now. If people's instinct leads them towards persons of the same sex then that is, like many other things in life, something with which a Christian has to wrestle rather than just saying, 'Well, if you feel that strongly, that's the way it should be'.

"This debate is really about the role of reason. We don't do reasoned moral discourse any more. We do, 'I feel strongly about this', 'I feel wounded about that', and 'Let me tell you about my pain'. Victimhood is the new moral high ground. We've slid into a post-modern morass which sounds like reasoned discourse but which is really just an exchange of strong emotions. Feelings matter hugely, of course, but we mustn't mistake them for moral discourse. The debate has become so shrill precisely because we're trying to cover up for the fact that we no longer have any deep moral roots or thought-through moral principles."

No mechanism in our culture for dealing with problem of evil: Which takes us to what Dr. Wright sees as the heart of the matter. Homosexuality can't be isolated from wider cultural debate. "There is an implicit pantheism in our culture most obvious in New Age spirituality and it leaves us with no mechanism for dealing with the problem of evil."

We think that we have so many rules and regulations we can stop things from going wrong. We are lulled into a false sense of security. "But then, whether with the two little girls in Soham or the two giant towers in New York, evil is suddenly back and as a culture we don't have the coping mechanisms. But evil is powerful and it matters."

The Bishop has something to say on sex too: "In Christianity we have a God who takes the pain of the world upon himself. And thereby provides healing and new life which is a way out of it."

Sex is one touchstone in all this. "Our culture screams that sex is for enjoyment, for recreation. But sex is like fire. It brings warmth and life to a relationship. Yet we light our fire only in the fireplace; if we lit it wherever the room was chilly we'd burn the house down. If we don't keep sex in its proper place perhaps we shouldn't be surprised when it backfires on us.

I don't know what sort of a mindset Ian Huntley had but I do know that he grew up in a world so soaked in a free-and-easy sex culture, a pornography culture which says 'sex is there for the taking, everyone wants it really', without any sense of human dignity or of the preciousness of sex.

"In a society which has seen a sexual revolution within a generation it is fair to ask, historically, 'Which generation in which culture would you trust to tell the truth about sex? Would you choose one like ours, which has produced so many bruised, wounded broken families, domestic chaos, and teenage pregnancies?'"

If this ignores the fact that many other eras have been characterised by sexual licence it reveals

something of Dr. Wright's personal history: "As someone who's been a pastor of students for many years I have picked up the pieces, time after time, of those kinds of relationships. As a society we need to take several steps back and ask whether we like where we've got to."

Liberals would respond that this does not make sufficient distinction between casual homosexual sex and faithful gay relationships but Dr. Wright is adamant that the Church has to hang on to the truth that it is called to be different and not ape the world in its sexual, cultural, social, economic, military or other agendas.

The New Testament does not recognise any sex/religion/politics divide, he insists. Part of what the media rarely report about the Church is the work of unsung heroes and heroines across the country. "I was in a redundant bank in South Shields the other day where a credit union has been set up by the Church, doing what's needed where every other agency has abandoned ship," he adds.

The Archbishop of Canterbury understands all this, Dr. Wright says. "Rowan is brilliant in several interlocking ways. There's nobody else who could do what he already has done. The primates' meeting showed his extraordinary gift of being able to draw people together. He's a man of such transparent Christian spirituality that it takes somebody peculiarly hard-nosed to resist. He has been called and equipped for a very difficult moment in church history and he's come across as a man of enormous integrity and courage."

This is not how many former supporters in the liberal establishment see him. They feel he crumbled under pressure, abandoning his tolerant inclusivity of homosexuals. "No, they built him up as a great liberal hero then screamed blue murder when he turned out to be more complicated. The idea that he capitulated to a bunch of evangelicals using their financial clout to threaten the rest of the Church is a smear."

"The press tends not to see much more than a quarter of the issue. Rowan has shown that he's not going to be pushed around by any section of the Church but is going to listen extremely carefully to everyone."

Dr. Wright knows many in the secular world will disagree. But the Church today, he says, is playing on a steeply sloping pitch. If the establishment view says something different from entire church tradition, on sexuality, on war, or whatever, and is criticised for that then the Church is "big enough to take that".

And Tom Wright, we are invited to infer, is big enough too.

FREEDOM IS THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE OR REFUSE, ONE THING AT A TIME: How many readers remember the battles fought over the fluoridation of public water supplies twenty-three years ago? Those battles were fought on very narrow fronts, against the big battalions of vested interests, by small numbers of freedom-loving people who had grasped the truth that as free people, the real issue was their right to choose or refuse medication whether it came through their water pipes or not!

They grasped the truth that compulsory fluoridation of public water supplies amounted to mass medication, and they were opposed to compulsory medication on principle. That sort of thing happened in Nazi and communist regimes – not in the land of the free – Australia.

Whilst in Brisbane, Queensland last year I was amused to hear over radio the arguments put forward

for fluoridation of the public water supplies by the government authorities. Adelaide, South Australia was used as a shining example of its great success. What they didn't 'bring to the light' was the fact there are any number of businesses in Adelaide flourishing and profiting by supplying households with 'spring water' for human consumption, for drinking.

Great numbers of people in Adelaide do not drink from the public water supplies – because of the fluoridated water! Even though it costs them they have exercised their right to choose not to drink it!

How the authorities have managed to come up with reliable research into the pros and cons of the benefits or otherwise of fluoride in Adelaide's water supplies is anyone's guess!

U.S. JUDGE RULES TROOPS WERE GUINEA PIGS FOR ANTHRAX JABS: The following news item was released just before the Christmas break; too late for the last 2003 edition of *On Target*. But because it is inextricably linked to our fundamental right to choose or refuse one thing at a time, in this case compulsory vaccinations, it is still worth reporting.

"The Pentagon has suspended compulsory vaccination of U.S. troops against anthrax after a federal court judge ordered the military to stop treating its personnel like "guinea pigs".

U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan ruled that the mandatory inoculations, administered to more than 900,000 troops, violated a law passed in 1998 prohibiting the use of experimental drugs on troops.

A spokesman for the Justice Department, which represented the military in the case, said the Pentagon would instruct medical personnel at U.S. military facilities around the world to temporarily halt the vaccinations while it reviews the ruling.

Australian troops had already refused the vaccine: Earlier in 2003, 52 Australian troops were flown home from the Persian Gulf after they refused to have the vaccine because they were concerned about possible side effects. This was despite the vaccination being voluntary for Australian forces.

Lawyers representing U.S. soldiers say the shots have sickened hundreds and caused a handful of deaths. In his 33-page judgement, Judge Sullivan ruled that the anthrax vaccinations violated a law passed by Congress in the wake of concern that similar inoculations may have led to illness among veterans of the 1991 Gulf War.

What has Defence Minister Robert Hill got to say about the matter now? Australia's Opposition defence spokesman, Chris Evans, said yesterday the Defence Force should review its policy in light of the US judgement. Defence Minister Robert Hill and the Defence Department would not comment.

Australian Defence Association executive director Neil James said the vaccine was "a reasonably dangerous injection". But he said the issue was almost irrelevant with Saddam Hussein's capture, "The most likely user of anthrax... was the regime of Saddam Hussein."

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