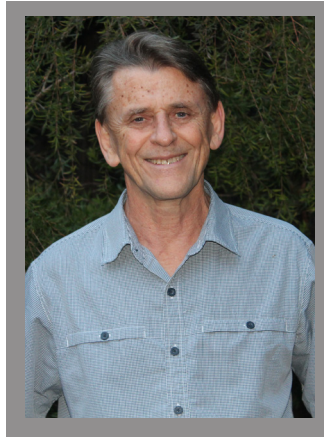


LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A NEW WAY OF BEING

Several years ago I had a client who worked in ticketing for Qantas. He was gay. Some years after I first met him he contracted HIV/AIDS and was dying. I went to visit him in the St Vincent's Hospice in Darlinghurst. His parents were there. They were country people. What we would call the salt of the earth. He offered me his hand to shake. I'm ashamed to say that for the briefest of moments, not even a second, I hesitated. I suppose some sort of completely irrational fear of AIDS at the back of my mind made me hesitate. Or was it prejudice. At a conscious, abstract intellectual level I don't regard myself as being prejudiced against homosexuals. But at the level of a handshake with a man dying of AIDS for just that moment it was different. Perhaps all my underlying fears and insecurities took hold of me at that moment. He was different from me, he was dying, his handshake challenged my comfortable, secure world where for much of the time I am surrounded by those who are like me.



It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God. To be the Body of Christ requires open friendship.

The theme of this issue of the Australian Herald is Celebrating Diversity. We thought of this theme when the Black Lives Matter protests were erupting across the world, when the momentum of the #MeToo movement was intensifying and allegations of sexual harassment by an Australian High Court judge had just been published. We thought of different ways in which an issue could respond to these events.

Much of the time in our culture we surround ourselves with those who are like us. We live in income segregated suburbs. We mix with people with similar interests to us. We talk politics only with those with whom we agree. We try to send our children to schools where they will be among their academic or sporting peers. It makes us feel secure to be among people who are like us, people who we like having around. It is narcissism. We are so insecure about who we are that we try to reaffirm our worth by surrounding ourselves with people who are like us. If we do this then, like Narcissus, we become imprisoned by our own image, fail to see what is around us, and pine away.

One was to try to appreciate the differing perspectives of people both in their life experience, their response to diversity and their way of viewing the world. We see this in the article Robert Thompson edited Celebrating Diversity but also in the artist's perspective offered by Sophie Munns in, Diversity and Depth of Connection and in the appreciation of indigenous people's worldview offered by Marshall Leave in Seeking Spirit in Time before Time.

To be part of the Body of Christ in any particular time and place requires a total rejection of narcissism. It is a new way of being that should liberate us from our insecurities and prejudices. In the Body of Christ there is neither male nor female, rich nor poor, slave nor freeperson, heterosexual nor homosexual as the Apostle Paul recognised in Galatians 3.28 and as has been reinforced in Doctrine and Covenants Section 164.5:

Another way was to focus on how faith can enable you to respond to and assist those who, for one reason or another, cannot always speak for themselves. This is the theme of Andrew Bolton's article, Bearing Testimony; Speaking Truth To Power. In similar vein Malcolm Stephenson's article Understanding The Kingdom of Heaven encourages us to follow the Nazarene example by living lives of sacrificial love and compassionate activity for others.

John Taylor

Editorial Team Member