

# THAW

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Of/for Canadian Anglican and Ecumenical Franciscans

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A unique, Christian site, featuring many resources for individuals and for parish study and action. Not without humour! A creation of Canon Jim Irvine, of the Diocese of Fredericton. Cruise the site; it's useful, edifying, fun, original, surprising!

### THIS ISSUE OF THAW –

In this issue we have a review of The St. Michael's Report by Harold, a poem by Tyler Ragan, a meditation by Rolf Pederson and a northern song by Fr. Weir Shivering, (who unfortunately displays a kind of cop-out, snow-bird mentality!) So you see, contributors are coming forward.

## GOD'S EYES

By Tyler Ragan n/TSSF

O Divine Master  
We know we are a judgmental people of yours  
Always looking for something,  
That makes us better than another  
Yet you love us  
You see us  
As your beloved children  
O God  
Grants us your eyes  
To see the world  
Your ears  
To hear the voices  
The cries of our brothers and sisters  
O Lord  
Grant us your heart  
That we may know  
All are blessed  
Regardless of their sort or condition  
For it is in our pride  
It is in our searching  
For the "Great Sin"  
That we lose you  
In our own hearts  
Restore us Lord.  
Dad let us just see  
The world that you loved so much  
To send us your Son  
As you see it  
So we can bring  
Your kingdom here  
On Earth as  
You have it in  
Heaven.  
Alleluia.

## As True As I Can Get It

By Rolf Pederson, TSSF, Chaplain)

I spent a week under quarantine in Guelph General Hospital in early June with a mysterious intestinal illness that has yet to be diagnosed and of which no trace remains.

Most of that hospital time passed while I was in a semi-comatose state. I was barely aware of the passage of clock time (chronos). But I was acutely, fascinatingly and fearfully aware of a slow-moving drama being played out somewhere in that twilight zone between consciousness and unconsciousness. I experienced myself being pulled down and downward into the dark recesses of my own mind and body toward a chorus -- or rather choruses -- of voices. Some were singing and shouting that I was getting what I deserved; others were countering with something to the effect that, no, the sickness or evil was not of my own doing. I, or rather my soul or being, was the victim of a vicious, unprovoked assault. Then the first chorus piped up again, "The glutton got his just deserves. He is ill and will soon die."

This bizarre, ethereal singing was accompanied by a scene of equally ethereal twirling, twisting dancers. Some were the forces of evil or death or chaos (how I know this I have no idea, I just do), others were those of life, good and order. The curious thing was that these dancers or forces were intertwined and their dance went on until I began to sense that the forces of life were beginning to dominate. At the same time, I seemed to be rising toward the light. I was being recalled.

Then it ended -- suddenly. On Thursday afternoon, the sixth day of my hospital stay, a voice -- or rather the experience of a voice -- informed me, "It's over. You're well." And that was it. The dance was over. The fear left me. All systems seemed to return to normal. The searing pain in my abdomen was gone.

What lingered -- what still lingers -- is the vision and the taste of death. It is neither distasteful nor frightening. In a way, death seems very close, like those intertwined dancers. But it has lost its sting. I have no idea how critically near I was to a clinical death, but spiritually the dividing line between life and death seemed almost indistinguishable and I almost seemed impelled to make a choice.

What made me choose life? To this day, I'm not sure whether I did the choosing. I am aware that my wife, Carol, my spiritual director Vince Wall, a sensitive and caring medical staff and a mysterious power -- I can only call it Love -- willed me into returning to this plane of existence.

I have drawn no deep moral lessons from this experience yet. But I now know three things that I did not know before my hospital sojourn. One is that my mission in this messy, often heart-breaking world is not over. The second

is that the importance of being with and open to people in trouble should never be under-estimated. The third is that spiritual adventures, which we humans commonly experience particularly in times of crisis, need to be acknowledged and believed -- never denied or suppressed.

## OUR NORTHERN CORRESPONDENT

From Archdemon Weir Shivering

### CLIMATE CHANGE

(To the tune, "On Top of Old Smoky")

The icebergs are melting  
Im-per-cept-ibly  
What used to be tundra  
*May soon turn to sea*  
The polar bears sunning  
On warm winter ice  
Don't want to go fishing  
The weather's too nice  
The igloos are dwindling  
In warm winter's sun  
Greenland is changing  
"Golf anyone?"  
If God sees the shrinking  
Of earth's arctic cap  
Why not Palm Desert  
On our part of the map?

## THE ST. MICHAEL'S REPORT – A REVIEW

By Harold Macdonald

This report is the product of the Primate's Theological Commission requested by the General Synod of 2004 to determine whether or not the blessing of same sex relationships is a theological matter or something else. With alacrity the Commission gave its answer a year early and it now stands at the Anglican Church of Canada website for all to study.

The report invites comment at four points.

The first concerns the word, "adiaphora". The word is used in both the Windsor Report and the St. Michael's Report. It means, "of no consequence" when compared to "core doctrines" which touch the essentials of the Christian faith.

"We agreed" says the Canadian report, "that the blessing of same sex unions is not a matter of core doctrine in the sense of being credal. The determination of this question will not hinder or impair our common affirmation of the historic creeds". (para 10).

It goes on: "On the contrary, the Commission does not believe that this should be a Communion-breaking issue".

In other words blessing same sex unions, while meriting consideration as a theological issue, is not of significance and can be termed among the "adiaphora" of Christian belief.

The Windsor Report, on the other hand, comes to a very different conclusion. It says, (to paraphrase) that the matter might be "adiaphorous" if it met two criteria.

"First, is this in fact, the kind of matter which can count as "inessential" or does it touch something vital? Second, if it is indeed, 'adiaphora', is it something that nevertheless, a sufficient number of other Christians will find scandalous and offensive, either in the sense that they will be led into acting against their own conscience or that they will be forced, for conscience's sake to break fellowship with those who go ahead." (para 93).

The Canadian report sets aside these two concerns with the rather summary declaration that the issue "should (not) be a Communion breaking issue".

So much for the agony among the Anglican Churches of the Communion and for the anger, denunciations, defenses, de facto schisms, vacillations, archiepiscopal statements and reports, of the past two years.

The second word which demands attention is "complementarity". It is used in the paragraphs on "Human Relationships and Sanctification" starting with paragraph 30.

"Historically, many have understood this (marriage), to be a relationship of complementarity, in which men and women in being created by God, were created male and female precisely for one another, (Gen 2:18-24".

Now here we have an unusual problem. There is no such word as "complementarity". Well, Neils Bohr coined such a word to describe the relationship between wave theories of matter and particle theories. The conundrum of the wave-particle "duality" is that the same physical phenomenon can be described mathematically as either wave or as particle. But when the wave formulae are used the particle formulae are entirely cancelled out and vice versa. This dichotomy Bohr called "complementarity". The one cancelled out the other completely.

Now I know of marriages in which this is what actually happens; the male has so dominated the female that she is nothing but a cipher; or the female so dominates the male that he is nothing more than a stooge!

Apart from Bohr's word, there is no other meaning to "complementarity" in my Oxford Dictionary.

What the Commission means is "complementary". Inside the female there is a male-shaped vacuum which must be filled in marriage before the woman can become whole. Her "heart is restless until it find it's rest in (him)". Likewise there is a woman-

shaped vacancy in every man which calls out for a female life-time tenant without whom he is an empty landlord.

Now many marriage partners fail to find the complimentary promise of the relationship. The heterosexual union of man and woman does not always demonstrate this complimentary character. When the sexes mix in marriage, it is more like oil and vinegar, which require constant stirring.

Although Genesis affirms the complimentary purpose of human sexuality, and Jesus repeats it, the Commission does not make the case for this kind of sexual, or even ontological, need in the male and female for one another. Instead the report gives a stout defense of single life – chastity. How the need of one for the other can be affirmed in the same breath as espousing the virtues of celibacy is not explained. Is this important? Yes: because in the discussion of same-sex unions the Commission will ask about “complementarity” in same-sex unions.

“The question that remains is whether the lack of complementarity of gender in same-sex unions can prevent such a couple from being a means of grace, experiencing spiritual growth, and participating in the life of God”. (para 31).

The answer to the question is, of course, “Ask a gay or lesbian Christian in a sexual relationship!”. And one is forcefully reminded of a narrow view; that the Commission does not witness to any conversation with gay and lesbian Christians. Perhaps it tells us something that the Commission is composed of Anglican heteros, is chaired by a spinster and the Report is dedicated to a convent.

Scandalously, the voice of the homosexual person is silenced in this consideration of his or her capacity to love. Is this not a grievous omission?

The third feature of the S. Michael’s Report which invites comment is the difficulty which its members experienced in defining what is and what is not “doctrine”. They settled for the concept of “core” doctrines, or credal statements. Like the doctrine of the person of Christ in Chalcedon, (421 Modern Era).

But the concept of “core” doctrines is but a metaphor. Think of the core of an apple. It is filled with seeds, granted: but it is also inedible.

George Pattison, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, in his recent little book “A Short Course in Christian Doctrine” reminds us that doctrines are about faith, and faith has both an objective side, (the faith as in Chalcedon) and my faith or yours; the subjective side. He likens doctrine to teaching; teaching the faith to a person. The transmission of doctrine, (traditioning) occurs in a two-way relationship between teacher and learner, the teacher having a kind of midwifery role in bringing forth the learning of personal salvation in the student.

If the Commission had considered both the objective side and the subjective side of faith and seen that doctrine is traditioned by dialogue into every time and culture it might have had a firmer grasp on the issue of “complementarity” between loving same-sex persons. It would have learned how in same sex love, the one may indeed compliment the other.

Finally there is love; love for which there is no accounting. The Report is blind to the

essential lunacy of love itself. Heterosexual or homosexual. The unwritten assumption of the Report is that one can discuss love as if it were rational, linear and not given to the wild impulses which both frighten and enliven. For love alone gives life and can deflate even theology in an instant. Here is Nicholas Cage talking to Cher in the movie "Moonstruck".

"Come. Get into my bed. I don't care if I burn in hell. I don't care if you burn in hell. I understand now: there is no future and no past. There is only you and me. I love you. I want you in my bed. Now."

How Jesus would have loved him! He has found the pearl of great price.