

From death wish, depression to being an amputee ambassador

Some years ago I was working in a campaign against landmines together with Tun Channareth. Tun is Cambodian and was only about 22 when he stepped on a landmine.

We took part in many

Beate Matthies

events where Tun was talking about his experiences and where he was

asked how he felt when he lost both legs as a young man. He answered that he wanted to kill himself because he didn't think he could be of use anymore. His friend saved his life.

■ Nobel Prize

Today, Tun Channareth is the amputee ambassador who doesn't just promote a world without landmines, but has given hope to many thousands of Cambodians who have to find a new way of life after an accident with landmines. He is a man full of enthusiasm and energy. In 1997 Tun was chosen to receive the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

An unexpected new life. Useless because of a handicap?

I don't know what the practice in Greece was before the Hippocratic Oath was introduced, but there might have been good reasons for obliging doctors

not to harm the patient.

Euthanasia has had many faces in history. The word "euthanasia" means literally "good/beautiful natural death". However, dictators have used euthanasia to get rid of persons who were considered a burden to society.

■ 'Unworthy' lives

Hitler talked about "unworthy" lives, killing thousands of innocent victims who were handicapped or had mental health problems. Cardinal von Galen, a courageous German cardinal who was later beatified asked in his famous homily of August 3, 1941: "Do you, do I, have the right to live only as long as I am productive, as long as others think that I am productive?"

There are reports from Romania that during Ceausescu's dictatorship (ended 1989), handicapped or mentally ill patients, as well as people older than 65, would not get medical help — they were considered useless for society.

In countries like the

Netherlands, active euthanasia is possible. In the neighbouring country, Germany, it is considered a crime. Some German cities at the Dutch border have had an influx of Dutch senior citizens — they don't trust their doctors any more.

A study at the University of Goettingen, Germany, from 2012 shows that in the Netherlands there are more than 4000 euthanasia deaths every year. In 41 per cent of the cases it was the family who decided on the death. Only 14 per cent of those killed were able to express their wish. Eleven per cent of those killed would have been able to express what they wanted, but were not asked.

The reasons doctors gave for terminating those lives were "no chance of improvement" (60%) and that the families couldn't cope with the situation anymore (32%). A survey among doctors in the Netherlands shows that 38 per cent of euthanasia cases are not registered as such.

For more than 20 years the Catholic and Lutheran Churches in Germany have organised an annual "Week for Life". This year's campaign, which ended on April 25, was called "Dying in Dignity".

■ Not the death cup

Cardinal Marx, the president of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference, wrote in the preface to the campaign's booklet: "It is a shame for a society if the option for suicide is just another option among many others: care home, hospital, suicide. The level of humanity within a society depends on how this society deals with old, sick, weak or terminally ill persons. Those persons need our care, not the death cup."

Cardinal Marx promotes the development of a "Culture of Death" without fear, but with love.

If euthanasia becomes an option for people who have the strong desire to die, it might easily become an option for people who feel lonely or depressed. Would this really be "merciful killing", even though merciful care might be able to change that desire? Tun Channareth is a beautiful example.

Sr Elizabeth Davis, a Canadian Sister of Mercy, reminded us recently during an interview that we are all "Missionary Disciples", from the unborn baby to the dying person — by creating love around us!

Beate Matthies is the coordinator for the Mercy Spirituality Centre in Auckland.

Letters

English missal 'failings'

United States Bishop Donald Trautman's list of words "illustrating the failure of the English Missal to communicate in the living language of the worshiping assembly" (NZ Catholic, April 19) has notable omissions.

If he regards "consubstantial, incarnate, oblation, conciliation, ineffable, unfeigned" as solecisms, then logically he should also deplore "annunciation, visitation, nativity, transfiguration and ascension". As human attempts to describe divine mysteries, these words all convey something of that mystery by the very fact of not being quotidian (or perhaps, I should say, everyday).

We understand the rosary's "clunky" terms because previous generations

of priests taught us their meaning. The Missal now presents our pastors with an opportunity to explain the Mass as the fountain of life, to give the laity a clearer understanding of the Holy Sacrifice and incentive to attend.

Given today's reduced attention span, sentences could be shortened, but dumbing-down the language connotes possibly dragging down the faithful from mystical contemplation to the level of the news at six.

The Mass is literally out of this world. To penetrate this mystery our hearts must be dilated and our minds raised up "into intimate contact with the High Priest" (*Mediator Dei*).

Julia du Fresnoe,
Waipukurau.

Missal critics miss the mark

Those criticising the new Missal translation (NZ Catholic, April 5 & 19) provide the reasons why a more authentic approach to translations must be adhered to.

The example of "my soul shall be healed" to "I shall be healed" shows how the change of only a few words in English changes the meaning from what the Church wants to be conveyed. We see this also in the novel responses to psalms in the lectionary when compared with the psalms they are taken from.

I do not have a problem with the new translation, especially when one investigates the Church's teaching, available to us all in the catechism.

Rather than seeing this language as clumsy, I consider we are at least speaking with one heart and mind with the whole world. A great sense of unity flows from this appreciation and I would rather pray with the Church than use different poetic language that can so easily take me to a different place that some may find homely, but is not where Jesus Christ wants

us to be. When confronted with those who didn't like what they heard, Jesus was clear that truth prevailed (John 6:66).

Similarly, Cardinal John Dew responds to Pope Francis's call to "reach out to the peripheries to the vulnerable and struggling looking for something to hope for" by "adapting Masses to meet multicultural needs" (April 10). I suggest that confusing them with mixed messages is what the vulnerable and struggling don't need and the poor theology and liturgy we can expect will not attract them either. We have failed in this approach and a more authentic approach is needed.

I think it is time to put aside personal revelation and speak clearly with the mind of the authentic Church, not some outdated failed antipodean version of it.

Alan Light,
Devonport, Auckland.

■ The writer refers to speaking "with the whole world", although English is a lesser-ranked language with respect to its number of native-born speakers. — Editor.

Reaching out to everyone

There is an old story: A couple walking home from the country pub came across a drunk asleep in a ditch lying next to a pig. One said to the other, "You can always tell a person by the company they keep". The pig got up and walked away.

Jesus of Nazareth kept some strange company during his time on Earth. He even accepted invitations to dine with tax collectors, publicans and prostitutes, no doubt with attendant pimps. When questioned by the Scribes and Pharisees he told them: "Those who are well do not need a physician" and, another time, "I have not come to call the righteous". Our Blessed Lord did

not believe that his hosts had made the best life choices, but they were still children of God.

Bishop Charles Drennan knew that a sizeable majority of the 500 protesters he marched with in Palmerston North were fully paid-up members of the so-called "Culture of Death". Pro-abortionists, supporters of euthanasia, same-sex "marriage" and, in some cases, totally opposed to the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

We can expect that our bishop emulated his Master's example by gently inviting his marching companions to, "Come follow Me".

John Gilbertson,
Waiohiki, Napier.



Tun Channareth overcame depression after losing his legs to landmines and is now giving hope to others throughout Cambodia.



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