Learningguild Letter

2.2015

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

Our only and sufficient basis is the statement that membership is open to everyone who wants to go on learning and help others learn. It follows that we are neither a religious nor an anti-religious body. We are concerned with religion, as with education, ethics, politics, gender and family, health and ill-health, wealth and poverty, exercise and rest, and other aspects of human life.

Our first issue for 2015 was delayed, appearing in December, and this catch-up one, called 2.2015 though it appears in April 2016, complements the first. In that I raised the question how it had come about that the Newman Society at the University of Melbourne, with a Catholic membership and many keen members in the 1950s and early '60s, had disappeared, and that the Australian Student Christian Movement, with a liberal Protestant membership, had shrunk, and I also asked whether those former members of one or the other who had ceased to be members of a Christian church, as I had done, were justified in that cessation.

What does 'justified' mean there? The question may be dismissive, but need not be. It could be replaced by 'in possession of sufficient reasons'. It might be replied "I don't doubt you had reasons, but who is to say whether they were 'sufficient'?" At least, familiar as we are with the remark "That's not a good enough reason", we can consider what serious reasons might typically be given, and see what we think of them.

In my brief treatment (Sec. 3) in the previous issue of how the disappearance and shrinking had come about, I expressed discontent with Vincent Buckley's explanation of his movement in the 1960s away from orthodox Catholicism (which provided much of the theology of the book he edited in the 1950s, *The Incarnation in the University*), and to what he called "an anthropological approach". He says little to illuminate that, claiming that "Something had failed deep in the Christian spirit, not to speak of other less formal spiritual traditions." He admits "most of [my friends] thought me wrong", but barely pursues the matter; he says he thought of himself as "becoming de-institutionalized". (Chapter 13 of *Cutting Green Hay* deserves to be read as a whole: I have quoted from pp. 256 and 258.)

In fact it is possible to be more specific than Buckley in recognizing that widespread movement by particular individuals away from Catholicism or from Christianity occurred at different times through the 1960s and '70s.

Two good places to start are phrases in a paper of 1972, "Theology as a Discipline in a Modern University", by Professor Donald MacKinnon, who was first professionally a philosopher (at Edinburgh, Oxford and Aberdeen) and then, from 1960 and without ordination, a professor of Christian theology at Cambridge. (I am grateful to Professor John McDowell, research coordinator at the new University of Divinity in Melbourne, for giving me a copy of the "Donald MacKinnon Reader" he has edited, called *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty*. To that title, and whether it is justified, I shall return.) On p.3 of the article called by McDowell Chapter 1, MacKinnon writes, in 1972, of "the multitude of beliefs, attitudes, policies of life between which the individual must choose", and on p.4f of "the Churches" as "inevitably preoccupied with the problem of their own survival". (If their own survival was not seen as a problem, then one might say 'preoccupied with their own membership and practices'.)

Put the two phrases together, and the situation of many people, and especially many under forty in English-speaking countries, was that there were ideas about how to live that seemed to offer better guidance than the emphases of their church or even of Christianity. For some, the guide was feminism, or left-leaning political allegiance; for me, influenced by Plato, Cicero, Kant, Mill and Green, it was respect for other human beings and concern for the develop-

ment of their capacities for good. In 1971, while teaching philosophy at the University of Melbourne, I was assisting an Egyptian student, and it struck me that my motivation was Kantian rather than distinctively Christian. I realized that I no longer held to the Christian orthodoxy in which universal sinfulness was emphasized and Jesus Christ was worshipped as Saviour.

I would then have welcomed, as I do now, this statement in MacKinnon's article (on p.4): writing of the necessity, especially in universities in which theology is taught, of "a philosophically critical investigation of a system of belief", he says "this investigation will take account of the most fundamental questionings to which the system in question has been submitted" – including, he says, those provided by people professing other religions. The actual rarity of such investigation is suggested by my comment on p.3 of our last issue on lack of attention to Buber on Jesus and Paul.

Again, however, arises the kind of question I noted in the third paragraph above: what prospect of any approach to impartiality or objectivity or even a claim to reasonableness here? In fact MacKinnon has a remarkable autographical paragraph on p.5, well worth a sympathetic reading as a whole. In about his twelfth year as a professor of theology, with twenty-three before that as a teacher of philosophy, he writes:

> There are many times when I crave the intellectual freedom of the professional philosopher…. It is as if religious belief held one prisoner in a kind of fundamental dishonesty, as if it were a compulsion to intellectual cheating of which one was powerless to cure oneself ….

That resonates for me because in 1959, at the age of 23, I decided to discontinue my candidature for the Methodist ministry, mainly because I did not want to be in a future situation in which my livelihood might depend on maintenance of beliefs that I might not at that future time be continuing to hold.

What then needs to be done? Those "most fundamental questionings" need to be prominent in any honest study of Christianity, or any other religion, and therefore, as Mill insists (*Liberty* Ch. 2 para. 23, beginning with "The intellect"), the student must be able to hear from actual objectors and to "feel the whole force of the difficulty".

The reader of MacKinnon's article, set at the head of a book that has the title it has, might well suppose that in the rest of the book there would be plenty of such engagement with objections from, or accounts by, non-Christians. Regrettably, in the 29 other articles called chapters by McDowell, one finds, of that kind, only a dialogue with Anthony Flew and some significant mentions of George Steiner. In fact, MacKinnon's predominant concerns in these articles are to urge that Christians must not "subordinate Christology to the study of the church's life" (p.252), but recognize the centrality of the anguish of Jesus at Gethsemane and of his crucifixion, and the resurrection, and to exhibit unreasonable attitudes among Christians for what they are.

One of those attitudes is opposition to the ordination of women on the ground that the priest celebrating the sacrament often called the Eucharist must be male, as an "icon" of Christ. Chapter 26 is a clear and concise rebuttal of that. Few others are clear or concise, and therefore I have to say that I expect this collection to have little influence. Quoted on p.83 of the new Gowers (see p.9) is the Fowler brothers' five-fold watchword for good English: "direct, simple, brief, vigorous and lucid". A French diplomat, asked how it was that he was such a good after-dinner speaker, said "I know what to leave out." A better guide than the Fowlers' is "direct and clear, and no longer or more complex than the matter requires". Anyone who doubts the need for such a principle might watch and listen to a lecture given to the British Academy on December 1st 2015 by the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams, himself much influenced by MacKinnon, which was not shaped, formulated and trimmed in accordance with a rewarding discipline of that kind. (Google 'Lord Williams, PBA lecture Theology and the Tragic'.)

Since, then, this book includes very little discussion of major objections to Christianity, I shall specify three areas myself, having already put, on p.6 of the last issue, some objections to belief in an all-good and omnipotent God. There will be considerable overlap with my editorial letter in 2.2013. The three are (1) orthodox Christian beliefs about sin and how to deal with it; (2) orthodox Christian beliefs about Jesus called Christ; and (3) the lack of breadth in Christian ethics.

1. On p.295, after wide reference to great literature displaying them, MacKinnon writes of

> the manifold windings of wilful self-deception, the catastrophic consequences of lust and greed, of jealousy and ambition, the ultimate ambiguities of human life which often leave a man, in the end, a riddle to himself and his neighbours, but which certainly destroy our readiness to accept a comfortable and comforting verdict on our motives, when we suppose them pure, or even lofty.

The next paragraph begins with this sentence (on the same page) and then illustrates it:

> I fasten on self-deception, for here is one of the very deepest sources of the devastation which evil brings into human life.

It is most certainly salutary to ask and pursue such questions as "Am I self-deceiving here, or in some part or aspect of my life?" and to recognize that one might well be self-deceiving in answering them. Readiness to learn and benefit from others' knowledge or even impressions of oneself can be one criterion of honesty here ("to see ourselves as others see us").

No one who reads Plato's *Gorgias*, or Jonathan Glover's *Humanity*, most of it an account of inhuman behaviour in the twentieth century, can doubt how depraved human beings can be, and many have been. But it does not follow, nor is it the case, that "there is no health" in any of us, as the General Confession has required Christians to affirm. We have to consider human beings, men and women, in their actual diversity, some properly described as just or compassionate or people of integrity. Christians do well to heed and discuss Rabbi Epstein's remark in his Pelican book:

> Judaism … denies the existence of original sin, needing a superhuman counterweight, and allows only the free choice to sin, an inevitable concomitant of free will.
>
> (*Judaism*, 1959, p.142)

The Roman Catholic Church, and to varying extents other churches, have put great weight on confessing one's sins and sinfulness, asking God's forgiveness, being authoritatively assured of it, and, in some cases at least weekly, going to what is called Mass, or the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper.

That these practices have often had a purifying and even liberating effect cannot be doubted; but they have often also been linked to a supposition that those who are alone entitled to "celebrate" (preside, and consecrate the elements) on these occasions are a class apart, and that what matters most is the maintenance of this celebration, attendance at it, and the reputation of the church that maintains it. Hence there arises the kind of unwillingness among authorities that has become widely evident in the Catholic Church to be on guard against any tendency whatever to exploit children sexually or by arousing fear in them, and to take firm and prompt disciplinary action against those celebrants (and others) whose deviant behaviour needs to be faced and, on pain of expulsion, brought to an end.

There is also the tendency to think that one has dealt with one's wrongdoings by "going to Confession" and being assured of forgiveness, when there is need of great attention to, and discussion of, the nature and fostering of good character and helpful self-devotion to the needs of others as well as to one's own best pursuits. (See Section 3.)

2. What are we to believe concerning Jesus called Christ or Messiah? Again it is valuable to hear from Epstein, even if one immediately disagrees:

> within a few decades the Christian church under the influence of Paul was altering its conception of Jesus in a way that meant that he was no longer thought of as merely human, and implied that he was in fact a second God – a belief which was a denial of the unity of God as Jews understood the term.
>
> (p.107)

In discussing that view, it is relevant to go to the first chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he says "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ", uses the Greek words so translated, '*kurios Iēsous Christos'*, in one order or another, six times in the first ten verses, in v.24 refers to "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God", and in v.30 says that God has made him "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption". With the possible exception of the letter to Titus traditionally attributed to Paul, the one called the Lord Jesus Christ is never called God; yet the language we have noticed is hardly consistent with regarding him as "merely human". So it is unsurprising that in the second letter to the Corinthians (5.19) there is the famous assertion that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself".

Whatever we make of Paul's meaning, and whatever we make of the later view that prevailed as the orthodox one, that there is "one God in three persons", there is the difficulty that what Jesus most persistently preached was what in Luke's gospel is called "the good news of the kingdom of God"

(4.43). He became aware that his message was producing division, even within families (12.51-53), and looked more and more to Gentiles who would take up what many Jews were rejecting:

> you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God
>
> (13.28f)

He seems to have made some extraordinary apocalyptic predictions ("for [us]", says MacKinnon on p.296, "the imagery of the second advent has become sheerly incredible"), but it seems clear that he remained convinced that the coming of the kingdom of God was near:

> I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.
>
> (22.18)

Some will recall the phrase "the extension of Thy kingdom" used in Protestant churches in the prayer that money offered in the collection would be used in the best ways. The assumption was that "the Church" was, or was an agent in the extension of, that kingdom.

Do we not have to say that Jesus's trustful hope was not fulfilled, and that the set of churches which have all affirmed what is often somewhat ambiguously called the divinity of Christ is no nearer than it ever has been to ushering in what could be called "the kingdom of God"?

MacKinnon would not be without sympathy for that view, given that near the end of that first paper he writes (unduly generalizing with the ambiguous word 'ecclesiastical'?) of

> the historic obscurantism and pettiness of the ecclesiastical temper, its disregard at once for the claims of reason and compassion,

and of

> the kind of elaborate make-believe, encouraged, for instance, by the authorities of the Established Church at the time of the Coronation of Elizabeth II, when it was suggested that its whole elaborate and archaic ritual was a kind of representation of the coming of God's Kingdom ….

3. What ethic are we to seek to live by, and to recommend, especially but not only to young people?

That is surely an urgent question, not least at a time when the percentage of young people from Christian traditions who remain Christian has been falling, and many of them have heard little related to Plato's question "In what way should one live?".

I could draw upon any of the five authors I named at the foot of p.1, but shall concentrate here on the first ten paragraphs of the third chapter of Mill's *Liberty*. He makes **too** much of the important matter of individual differences; but in fact he writes in the third and fourth paragraphs about "powers" and "faculties" that are very widely shared among human beings, though often neglected.

Like the quotations above from Epstein, there are unfavourable comments from Mill (in paragraphs 7 and 8) that merit the attention of Christians and of any who would call themselves enquirers. The charge is basically that a requirement of **obedience** is too prominent a note in Calvinist teaching, and that therefore little or no attention is given to the increasing of human beings' supposedly God-given "capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment".

That serious charge is justly made against many parents, teachers and other authorities in distant and recent years in various Christian traditions. Now, I think, it is apter to say that there is commonly in Christian ethical teaching a lack of breadth, and of emphasis on the wonder of those capabilities. For students as for teachers, there is a great need to go on exploring biographical books, booklets, articles and programs, so as to learn more about human possibilities (and practicalities) for individual and social good. In so doing we should consider, as Kant would insist we do, what principles we should adopt as our own, what priorities to recognize among them, and how to relate them to our own often modifiable circumstances. Christian preachers and educators should not be as content as they often now are to talk about costly love of one's neighbour and self-sacrifice. What various kinds of goods are they whose vivid apprehension is a strong defence against any tendency to weaken or destroy one's faculties through drunkenness, drug-addiction or despair?

The University of Divinity is not a "denominational seminary". Yet MacKinnon's pages 6-9 in that first article imply that he would have serious questions about it. One test will be its attitude to non-Christians.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

Why I have joined Inclusive Catholics

FRANKLIN ROSENFELDT *is a Professor of Surgery at Monash University who has engaged in research in cardiac surgery at the Alfred Hospital for thirty years. An earlier article of his appeared in* Lg L *2.2006, entitled "Complementary medicine and scientific testing".*

I had most of my school education at St Ignatius Jesuit College in Adelaide, where I received an orthodox Catholic religious education with the exception that we were encouraged to think for ourselves – or at least we thought we did. But we still seemed to believe such nonsense as that missing Mass on Sunday was a mortal sin which could condemn you to hell for all eternity. Through my 20s and 30s in Australia and overseas, I went faithfully to Mass but on occasion did enjoy non-Catholic services. My big step across the denominational divide occurred when I married Anne, a member of the Baptist Church.

Anne and I were both living in the USA at the time and we were to return to her home in Southampton, England, for the wedding. Our parish priest in the USA surprised us by saying that as I didn't have a church in Southampton and Anne did, we could be married in Anne's Baptist Church. I said this was OK with me provided we could have a Nuptial Mass.

In the end we had such a Mass in the Catholic Church with one of Anne's Baptist minister friends reading the lesson. Then we and all the guests drove to the local Baptist church, where the wedding ceremony was conducted by the Baptist minister and the Catholic priest gave the sermon. The guests remarked that this was a unique and wonderful ecumenical occasion. It set the tone for our religious life together ever since.

After we returned to Australia, we attended St Bede's Catholic church in North Balwyn and the children were brought up as Catholics. After they grew up Anne gravitated to the North Balwyn Baptist Church. I now attend that church every few Sundays and play guitar in one of their music groups. I have learned a lot from the Baptists and have seen how well a non-hierarchical democratic church can function. I gained more knowledge of the workings of Protestant churches during a term as chairman of the North Balwyn Inter-church Council.

By contrast, in the Catholic Church I have had several instances where a parish priest has told me in no uncertain terms what to do and what not to do. I have served on parish councils but became frustrated in that I felt I had more to give but was prevented from doing so by the laws and regulations and by the culture of clericalism, i.e. the "Father is always right" mentality.

In recent years I have become increasingly disillusioned with the Catholic Church as I saw the necessary reforms of Vatican II being wound back by the last two Popes. I have seen good men and true like Fr Paul Collins in Sydney, Bishop Bill Morris in Toowoomba and Fr Peter Kennedy in South Brisbane sidelined by the church authorities for the unforgivable sin of speaking their minds and following their conscience.

Some three years ago I heard of Fr Greg Reynolds and of his proposal to form a group of Christians, mainly Catholics, that would welcome those disillusioned with their churches but still wanting to follow the teaching of Jesus.

In 2012 Greg, a priest of the Melbourne Archdiocese for 31 years and stationed at Westernport parish, resigned from the Melbourne Archdiocese to form a group to be known as Inclusive Catholics. His desire was to reach out and minister to that large group of members of the Catholic Church who had become disenfranchised and disillusioned with the current direction and ethos of the Church and had walked away. Greg also believed strongly in the necessity of accepting married priests into the church and ordaining women as priests. He also wished to reach out to all those who had felt unwelcome in the church, especially divorcees, members of the gay and lesbian community, and all those wounded by clerical paedophilia.

This idea appealed to me immensely, so I decided to join Greg and his supporters in Inclusive Catholics, a group of Christians who meet together for worship, fellowship and discussion. The group holds Eucharistic celebrations available to all Christian believers at 5 pm on the first and third Sundays of the month in the Glen Iris Uniting Church at 200 Glen Iris Road, Glen Iris, just off High Street. These Eu-

charistic celebrations are preceded by a quiet meditation session at 4.15 pm. www.inclusive-catholics.com is the address of the website. There is an email list for communication with all members. Over the last three years I have found it a most liberating experience to be a member of this group. I have had the opportunity to give homilies at our Eucharistic celebrations. I have enjoyed our retreats and our book club. Anyone interested is invited to contact Greg Reynolds at greg.reynolds3@gmail.com, or indeed to write to me at rosenfeldt@bigpond.com.

Living as a Christian and a Catholic

TONY COADY, *Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne and still especially active in practical ethics, has written an article to appear this year in an OUP book entitled* Philosophers Take on the World. *These are his last two paragraphs.*

Is there nothing that can be said to be crucial to Catholic identity? It all depends. In one sense the vital contemporary question is not whether you identify as a Catholic, or Protestant or Orthodox, but whether you are a Christian and so shape your life around the central Christian mysteries, such as the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection, and the urgent moral and spiritual messages of the Gospel. This should give rise to a Christian ethic that is informed by such values as the central importance of neighbourly love (where 'neighbour' is understood broadly as in Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan); the equality of all people as children of God and an associated concept of justice as more than a requirement of local institutions; the crucial importance of the poor and downtrodden as harbingers of God; the pre-eminent demands of peace; and the often mysterious significance of endured suffering. Much of this is perhaps more the province of ethos than codified ethic, but in conjunction with the efforts of natural reason it issues in distinctive injunctions to behaviour, including those involving the morality of homosexuality, divorce, abortion and euthanasia, as well as broader issues such as capital punishment, racism, and immigration. These injunctions will sometimes overlap with non-Christian or non-religious moral conclusions, sometimes not. None of this should be surprising because we share a common reasoning and emotional nature, and in addition Christian (and Jewish) insights and values have shaped a great deal of Western and Eastern civilisation, just as non-Christian thought has influenced Christian interpretation of its heritage.

As a Catholic, I try, in community with many others, to live in a complex, interpretive relation to those insights, values and mysteries and to the diverse strands that make up multi-coloured Catholic tradition. That tradition, already complex, is still in process of development – after all, the first 2000 years of Christianity may well prove to be its infancy, and the present turbulence within Catholicism a necessary stage of early healthy growth.

I wrote to Tony about the Inclusive Catholics Franklin Rosenfeldt had joined and he replied "As for joining a Liberal Catholic sect, I can't envisage that. I have too many personal and historical connections to the mainstream Catholic community and some of its outstanding, inspirational people, to think of such a move. But, of course, I wish them well (given what little I know of the group)." *Later, I sent him Franklin's article, and he has responded:* "[It] was very interesting. After reading it, I think I was mistaken to characterise them as a sect. They don't seem to me to be aiming at setting up a different form of 'church' or distinctive religion, but rather to be forming a group (as Rosenfeldt called it himself) of like-minded and like-hearted Christians, many of them Catholics, who seem to share many of the views that I and other Catholics have. I belong to several such groups, including the Parkville parish, and have no need to join another, but of course I wish them well."

In a discussion, Val Noone (see Lg L *1.2015, p.1) has suggested that Tony Coady's words "*the central Christian mysteries, such as the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection*" could be understood "*metaphorically*". Donald MacKinnon (see my editorial letter) would certainly have disagreed with that. Comments welcome!*

JH

Mary Gregory

19th October 1927 – 18th October 2015

This tribute is from Ruth Wardlaw, *a close friend and former colleague of Mary.*

Learningguild's ethos includes an emphasis on developing one's powers of expression, so its magazine seems a particularly appropriate place to celebrate such a memorable life as Mary's. For her it was a matter of discovering a form of artistic expression rather different from the communication skills which had been so much a part of her professional life.

At John and Margaret Howes's home in Fallon Street, you may have seen Mary's beautiful painting of a *Just Joey* rose in the hallway, but not known that the artist had taken up botanical illustration only after retiring at the age of sixty from a long and impressive career in social work.

A meeting with Celia Rosser and admiration for her wonderful banksia paintings inspired Mary to discover her own talent for botanical illustration. She had dabbled in life drawing, but now she commenced classes with artists like Anita Barley and mixed with others in the Botanical Illustrators' Group of the Friends of the Royal Botanical Gardens. Very soon she was exhibiting her work and her talent was increasingly recognised. The first of the biennial exhibitions of Botanical Art held by the Friends was in 1992 and at each of the exhibitions held in 1996 and 1998 one of her paintings was acquired for the State collection. These are housed in the library of the National Herbarium of Victoria.

Mary began to work with a friend as a volunteer at the Herbarium in 1992, mounting vascular plants. After some time doing that, they were asked, together with another botanical illustrator friend, if they would move upstairs and work exclusively on curating lichens. They became known in the Herbarium as "the Lichen Ladies". For over 20 years they spent Monday mornings volunteering there. On Tuesdays they painted with an informal gathering of botanical illustrators in the garden's Whirling Room Studio. These artists gained the name "the Whirly Birds". That group, which Mary found sustained her in the development of her work, has gone from strength to strength.

In 1993 the Australian artist Jenny Phillips exhibited at the London Royal Horticultural Society's exhibition of botanic art. Returning home with a gold medal, she encouraged other botanic artists to submit their work. In 1997 Mary responded to the challenge and received not a gold but the next highest honour, a silver gilt medal, which, she thought, was "just about right". Her skill as an artist was recognised again when she was asked by Adelaide University's Barr Smith Library to paint a series of striking *Bromeliads* to display there in honour of a *Bromeliad* enthusiast who was about to retire from the staff. Subsequently the Bromeliad Society acknowledged her work by naming a new plant, the *Janet Gregory*, after her eldest daughter.

The essence of botanical illustration, as Mary once explained to me, is to be able to represent together all the different forms of a plant: not just the flower, but its seed, roots, configuration on the stem, and so on. Yet Mary did not confine herself to working in this way. To take some instances, her intricate paintings of pieces of bark, a single onion, a dry leaf, and at the end of her life a friend's shell, marvellously drawn, are complete in themselves, and have an almost tactile quality.

Mary's commitment to social work remained strong. Throughout her retirement she was a fierce advocate for the profession in the face of external criticism. She sometimes had niggling doubts about whether she should be spending more time on social issues rather than becoming so absorbed in the world of botanical art. Typically self-effacing, and declining to take up any senior positions that would require her to speak in public, she was probably unaware that her influence on colleagues with whom she had worked would be ongoing.

When Mary retired in 1987 she had been working for the previous thirteen years at the Box Hill Hospital. Her colleagues, of whom I was one, compiled a book of tributes to her in which our admiration and affection for her as a friend and a colleague are clear. We drew attention to the clarity of her verbal and written communication with those with whom she worked, her calm and capable handling of crises and difficult cases, her ability to disagree without undermining, and her readiness to be innovative.

Above all, it was her gentle wisdom and constant support that made her such a valued friend.

Mary met her beloved husband Jack in England. She was employed in social work and he was researching towards his doctorate in history. He says that the only love letter he ever wrote to her was during their courtship when, sitting in a bus across the aisle from her, he was suddenly overwhelmed with a clear vision of her qualities. He credits her with opening his eyes not only to her as a person but to a world of which, as a young man preoccupied with his own studies, he had been quite unaware.

People in the caring professions can be notorious for their failure to deal effectively with issues arising in their personal lives. Mary was very different. Her day-to-day life was entirely consistent with her practice as a social worker: loving and supportive. When she and Jack returned to Melbourne, they established a rich family life together and Mary had a temporary break from social work during her four children's early years. Jack has acknowledged the enormous support which she gave him when he was suffering from serious, near-suicidal, depression. He mentions too her foresight in persuading him that, with a young family, they needed to move closer to public transport; and her determination, when they found their precious daughter Prue somewhat delayed in her development, to do anything she possibly could to help her build an independent life.

In her early seventies Mary found that she had bowel cancer. She handled the diagnosis and treatment with characteristic elegance and grace. Finally given the "all clear", she was able to resume her activities with confidence, and it was a very productive time for her. However, a few months before her death she was found to have pervasive metastatic cancer from an unknown primary source. Resourceful as ever, when she found that ongoing treatment was difficult and becoming less effective, she turned to palliative care and with the loving and constant support of her family was able to die at home in their company. The way in which they and she lived in those months has been an inspiration to her friends.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! It is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height
be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

Shakespeare, Sonnet CXVI

Questions and principles for sentence-construction

Plain Words, *Rebecca Gowers's revision of the original version of the classic book by her great-grandfather Sir Ernest Gowers,* The Complete Plain Words, *is Penguin's replacement (2015) of the latter, whose first publication, by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in London and with an eye to the improvement of civil servants' English, was in 1954. I have therefore revised the article of mine that was published in* Lg L *1.2013, was specifically related to the third edition of* The Complete Plain Words, *and had the title repeated above. I have made some changes and additions as well as giving chapter- and page-references to the new book.*

John Howes

The path to discovery, and to getting things right or doing things well, often begins with the asking of appropriate questions. One such question is often "Have I reached a point where it's easy to go wrong, and, if so, what principle should I follow?".

In the past five decades, widespread failure in English-speaking countries to explain the construction of many kinds of good sentences, and therefore to teach English grammar in systematic ways and require plenty of sentence-correction, has led to ignorance of specific questions worth asking and principles to be applied. Hence many mistakes. In this article I go from question to question, propose a principle or principles, and offer for correction examples of errors that the principles rule out.

Numerous principles are to be found in a book that deserves sustained study in every English-speaking country by every senior secondary teacher and student, undergraduate, postgraduate, university teacher, journalist and report-writer, and by all others who value good writing. Yet the third edition of ***The Complete Plain Words***, published by Penguin in 1987 with further revision of Sir Ernest Gowers's book, has been little known, especially outside Britain, in the years since then. The original, by a very distinguished civil servant, had been widely regarded as an indispensable guide to clear and concise writing in what Australians call the public service. Now Rebecca Gowers has gone back to and revised her great-grandfather's original text, and produced the new and very good book ***Plain Words***, which includes as a preface a fascinating account of him.

How ridiculous it is that in secondary and tertiary education there is seldom the critical conservationism that would lead to the recognition that Gowers is a classic which could and should be studied over many years. How many mistakes (and how much correction by those who still can and do correct others' letters or reports), how much wordy or imprecise writing, could thus be averted, and how much clear and satisfying communication fostered!

One function of my own book *Making up Sentences* (*MS*), of which I still have to complete the third edition, is to prepare the way for effective use of Gowers in self-education by explaining many grammatical terms used there. (Individual chapters are available from Learningguild.)

My indented examples of going wrong are all from the book I reviewed in *Lg L* 1.2013, *Life Surfing Life Dancing*. Like Gowers, in all these cases I give sets of words without names of authors or page-references. I invite the reader to correct the errors (sometimes more than one). Each set of words can be referred to by giving its section number and then its own within that section, as in '2.2'. Sets of words not presented as sentences should not be turned into sentences.

1. Would this sentence be better if it were shorter, or turned into two or more sentences?

Gowers has an excellent chapter (VI) on the avoidance of verbosity, and a short section on sentences (pp. 265-7), where she gives and illustrates a basic principle, and yet leaves an error uncorrected. I invite the reader to spot it, and to correct it, as I shall, in each of two ways. "The two main things to be remembered about sentences if you want to make your meaning plain is that they should be short and should have unity of thought."

1. I have briefly referred to aspects of health and wellbeing within this chapter, but I want to formally acknowledge that I do

not believe I have come anywhere near close enough to adequately doing this range of topics justice.

2. While we are all aware of the fairly rapid relief one can obtain from taking a pain-killer to alleviate a headache, there are very few circumstances of a consumer actually feeling better/stronger/healthier within a reasonable time scale (hours/days or longer) after swallowing a dietary/nutrient supplement.

A long subject-locution (for that term, see the following section), from 'The two' to 'plain', led Sir Ernest Gowers to forget the plurality with which he had begun, and none of his revisers (not even Rebecca, who altered the set of words 'by those who want to make their meaning plain') has noticed that! We can correct the error by changing 'The two main things' to 'The main principle', or by changing 'is' to 'are' and inserting a second 'that they'. I prefer the first for its brevity, enhanced if we drop the second 'should'. We can even halve the number of words with the more moderate and better advice "Don't obscure what you have to say by unnecessary length or complexity in any sentence."

2. Is this personed verb part of a matching pair?

Those two terms are my own (*MS* 1:7). Rebecca Gowers discusses the matter with good examples on pp. 189-196. 'Personed verb' has the same meaning as the old 'finite verb', i.e., a verb describable, in its particular context, as a 1st-person, or as a 2nd-person, or as a 3rd-person form. Students can be asked to give its **label** from the table-of-six that runs in two columns from '1S' ('1st person singular') to '3P' ('3rd person plural'), and applies in the first instance to personal pronouns (the two sets of six beginning with 'I' and with 'me', in which the 3S forms are 'he/she/it' and 'him/her/it').

Unlike other grammarians, I consider it essential to have a terminology that enables one consistently to distinguish clearly between what I call a subject-locution (Sub-L) and what I call a subject. In 'Ann was praised', 'Ann', the **word**, used to refer to the particular woman of that name, is entirely different from the **woman** Ann herself, whom I call, appropriately, the subject of the sentence. Sir Ernest was mostly consistent in using the word 'subject' to refer to the linguistic item, but he nevertheless wrote of someone who "must have started with the intention of making the Tate Gallery (about which he was writing) the subject of his sentence", and Rebecca keeps that on p.224, except to alter the parenthesis to "(the true topic here)". Speakers or writers may indeed call the Tate Gallery their subject, but they refer to it with a subject-locution, one or more items of **language**: 'the Tate Gallery' or 'it' or some other. (See *MS* 1:7.1 and 3:2.6.)

Rebecca retains the words "The rule that a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject a plural verb" (p.189), but omits a valuable example of error given but not explained by Sir Ernest: "his refusal to submit to sustained pressures on mind and spirit were worthy of the highest traditions of journalism". It can certainly be brought under the heading of 'Attraction' (see p.192f), but we need such a phrase as 'the **main constituent** of the Sub-L' (main, that is, grammatically), in that example of error the long Sub-L from 'his' to 'spirit', where it is the singular noun 'refusal'.

So let us make this our fundamental rule: unless it is imperative, every personed verb in a normal sentence must have its Sub-L, or the main constituent of that Sub-L, **in a matching pair**, i.e., one that has for each the same person and number (and so the same label). Mistakes often occur as a result of failure, as in the Gowers sentence quoted in our first section, to note and focus on that main constituent, there the locution 'two main things'.

1. other types of studies where the health of people have been followed for years
2. The mysteries of passion, love, and how to best live day to day in a couple relationship is one of the most constant subject of conversations.
3. each [of the two partners] were keeping a tally of all the dishes that were not put in the dishwasher

3. Am I presenting a direct question or an embedded one?

We say 'How old is he?' but 'I want to know how old he is.' and 'Do you know how old he is?'. The first and third have question marks because they are direct questions; the second is a statement and so has no question mark; both the second and the third "embed" a question, whose verb therefore has the position it would have in a statement, e.g., 'He is 34.' The phrase 'embedded question' is a vivid one, but Gowers has the commoner 'indirect question'. On p.263 of the chapter on punctuation (all of it deserving detailed study), such questions are distinguished from direct ones, with examples.

1. the next question is why would one want to be happy?
2. We ask them … to think about what sort of person do they want to be?

4. Should I use a pronoun here?

Gowers's excellent principle (p.204) is "Do not be shy of pronouns." They enable a speaker or writer to avoid cumbersome repetition of nouns or noun phrases. Often the pronoun will be in one or both of the two groups called personal (see the first paragraph of Sec. 2 above). It is often useful to employ *that* or *those* as a demonstrative pronoun, especially in comparisons, so as to compare comparables precisely and neatly, as in 'Bob's success was more surprising than that/those of Meg and Jo.' The importance of **parsing** becomes clear when we realize that *that* may be "a conjunction, a relative pronoun [or] a demonstrative pronoun" (p.216) – or, as Sir Ernest saw at this point, an adjective, as in 'that box'. *One* and *ones* are often useful as pronouns.

1. Your goals should be achievable and realistic and you may like to gradually work your way up to meeting your goals.
2. considerable efforts are being made by foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
3. each couple has its own unique emotional ecology, which is different to every other couple
4. when there is a loss of attunement in their closest relationships, such as their mother, father or partner
5. The battle is with the excess of foods with completely different nutrient compositions to unprocessed foods; often these new processed foods are rich in energy, [etc.]

5. Should I use or avoid a participle here?

The relevant area runs from p.222 to p.226, as usual with valuable examples. Because I think that present and past participles are best considered together, and that Rebecca Gowers is mistaken in counting as participles 'concerning' used as a preposition and 'supposing' used as a conjunction, and in saying that the participle 'working' is the verb in 'was working' (it is the main part of the two-word verb 'was working'), I shall give my own explanations here, and refer to *MS* 3:5. In verbs called regular, the present participle is made by adding *ing* and the past participle by adding *ed* or something ending in *ed*: *lifting*, *lifted*; *carrying*, *carried*; [for *hop*] *hopping*, *hopped*. In those called irregular, too, the present participle is made by adding *ing*, but the past participle has to be learnt in each case: examples are *gone*, *driven*, *bought*. Often a participle is used after one or more little words called auxiliaries to make **one** personed verb (see Section 2 above), as in *was working* or *has been bought*. Error arises less in that use than in the adjectival one, as in 'Jumping on the bus, her purse fell', where the participle 'Jumping' is **unconnected** ('unattached' is the word in Gowers): it is not tied to any noun, pronoun or phrase, and 'she dropped her purse' is needed.

The gerund is a **noun** derived from a verb, as in 'It was his interrupting [of] her that led to that remark of Susan's', where the possessive form *his* is clearly preferable to *he* or *him* followed by *interrupting* as a participle. At least for living beings, and where the focus is on an action or similar feature rather than on the being concerned, it is better to have a possessive form followed by a gerund than the bare noun or pronoun followed by a participle. Gerunds too can be wrongly unconnected. Sometimes it is better to reconstruct one's sentence to avoid using either a participle or a gerund. (See Gowers for these points and examples.)

Recently it has become common, especially among journalists, to use in a second part of a sentence the cumbersome 'with … -ing', as in 'There is disagreement over this new tax, with some arguing that …', instead of using, after a colon, a personed verb, as in the preferable 'some argue'. (Sometimes one could start a new sentence.)

1. vitamin A toxicity occurred in some polar expeditions as a result of the intrepid travellers consuming the livers of their dogs, which were loaded with vitamin A following the dogs being fed on seals
2. This research has been repeated with similar results elsewhere, with a trial being considered in Australia in the near future.
3. this has led to more people being able to afford eating away from home
4. White Australia was settled with our first soldiers, the Rum Corps, being paid in alcohol.
5. trauma and emotional pain that result in us not feeling safe
6. despite most Australians disapproving of extramarital encounters
7. Taking us back to Tilda and chocolate, she [Tilda] had made the logical connection between palm oil and chocolate
8. without developing these feelings, they will fade when confronted with the demands, stresses and traumas of life

6. Do I have an appropriate structure?

That is an important question to ask about one's essay, paper, talk, thesis or book. (See my page headed "Seven features of a good talk or paper" on our web-

site.) But it arises also within sentences, especially where familiar **pairs** occur such as the combination of *both* and *and*, each of which needs to introduce a word or set of words that is **parallel** in form to the other and fits preceding words. (The same applies to sets in bullet-point form.)

Gowers deals well with 'both … and' in Chapter IX, on p.178, and that whole chapter, especially its early section headed "TROUBLES IN ARRANGEMENT", deserves close attention. "Danger Ditches", to use the title of a handwritten book a Welsh teacher of French required us pupils at a London school in 1947-8 to maintain, include *however* (**not** equivalent to the conjunction *but*!), *including*, *because*, *as* and *as to*. It should often be asked whether a particular verb is used, like *raise*, transitively, i.e. with an object-locution, and so can be put into the passive, or, like *rise*, intransitively, or in both ways, like *break*. (*MS* 3:3.)

Is my first example of error satisfactorily corrected on the book's back cover by the addition of *from* after *also*?

1. [The writers] discuss their views on well-being, based not only on their clinical and research roles, but also their life experiences.
2. good habits of interaction and conversation make the issues either feel manageable or resolvable
3. the Internet is a medium by which a person with depression who values self-reliance and believes that they should help themselves can do just that.
4. just because you might, at times, feel stupid doesn't mean you are!
5. The tension we experience is because we latch on to and pull against what is taking place.
6. [if their emotions are not concealed] as a couple it is more obvious how each other feels.
7. You are free to give as much or as little information as you feel comfortable.
8. experience success in all areas of life including in the workplace
9. It is worth discussing with your partner as to whether people … honour and respect your partner and your relationship.
10. Herpes is most likely to be transmitted during an active phase, however it is possible to transmit the virus at any time.
11. These issues … do not resolve with substance use.
12. [Concerning "substances".] try to ensure you fall into the group of people who can enjoy, in a balanced fashion.
13. This book explains about the importance of finding a good general practitioner

7. Is this a comparison in which *like* or *unlike* is the right word?

Gowers's sound principle for written English is on p.181: "in formal English prose … *like* must not be treated as a conjunction." When it is correctly followed by a noun or pronoun with no accompanying verb, but often with a comma, as in 'like Bill,' or 'like him,' it is a preposition. In Gowers's example of error 'like success does', it is used as a conjunction introducing a subordinate clause (i.e., a set of words which, though including a Sub-L and a personed verb [see Section 2], could not be a normal sentence), and should be replaced by *as*. Sometimes *like* itself is acceptable, but as a preposition followed by *that* or *those* as a pronoun along with another preposition such as *of*, to ensure that comparable entities are compared. (See Section 4.) *Unlike* too is often wrongly used: try the same remedy.

1. the man proceeded to consume [most] of the food in a manner like a dog guards its dinner plate
2. just like focusing on our own strengths enables us to be at our best
3. like elsewhere on the body, irritation can occur as a result
4 like trying to describe an elephant, the description [of mindfulness] will vary depending on which part of the elephant we focus on.
5. unlike some countries around the world, GPs in Australia undergo extensive professional training to be recognised as GPs.

8. At this point, is this the best word or phrase to employ?

The seventh chapter of Gowers recommends the choice of the familiar word, and the eighth that of the precise one. Both are full of humour and of apt examples of ineptitude, as in the discussion of "clichés and overworked metaphors" (pp. 149-163). In Chapter IV there is a valuable list of "words and phrases often used incorrectly", such as *reticent* (where r*eluctant* would be correct) and *mitigate* (*militate*).

One of our authors has this to say about "one of the founding fathers of positive psychology", Christopher Pearson: "When once asked … to sum up this exciting new science of happiness, Chris responded with these three simple and profound words: 'other

people matter'." How valuable it is to consider whether *study* is better than *science* there, and *revealing* than *profound*, and even to ask oneself whether the phrase 'these three simple and profound words' should be omitted.

A word may itself be usable in a given context but need a different construction.

1. They had three children, substantive careers, a mortgage, a dog and two cats.
2. Tom had been very impacted by the pressures of work [etc.]
3. In the highly dangerous world of our stone-aged ancestors
4. Not every lump is a STI.
5. There are, of course, multitude ways we can lose our equilibrium.
6. Before we look at how to practically do this
7. A standard drink is 10 gm of alcohol.
8. Although sex seems to be ever more prescient in our modern day lives
9. thinking about how to engage the population through emotional registers
10. If you are unsure, discuss products with your doctor prior to use.
11. Perhaps it is because we have approached the problem from the point of view of facts and rational argument rather than from the point of view of story and embodied rationality.
12. but as I will refer to throughout this chapter, there are many myths and misconceptions about happiness
13. Life is simply not rewarding me as I think I should be rewarded ─ by virtue of salary, or status, or recognition and acknowledgement, or maybe just simple attention.

9. Do I need to use this nounal adjective, especially if it is one of two or more?

We read in Gowers (p.143) "Serious harm is … being done to the language by excessive use of nouns as adjectives." One following illustration is 'Our whole sugar import requirements', to be replaced by 'All the sugar we need to import'. Sometimes a nounal adjective should be followed by a hyphen.

1. when your natural relationship building and repair processes get stuck
2. there are other health benefits of smoking cessation
3. This section discusses the role of flexibility in our lives and time management including how to manage the great time wasters.

10. Should I split this *to*-infinitive?

We have a *to*-infinitive at 'to explain' in 'I am able to explain that', and a bare infinitive at 'explain' in 'I can explain that'. The word 'infinitive' has been used in contrast to 'finite', the traditional adjective for what in Section 2 I have called personed verbs. This *to* is not a preposition (**no** preposition can be used directly before an infinitive): it can be called a particle or an infinitive marker (see the two-part entry for *to* in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). Gowers discusses the contentious subject of split infinitives on pp. 232-6, allows some, and includes an example of a series of *to*-infinitives in which there is ridiculous splitting. Examples could also have been given of short but still awkward groups of words in which the *to*-infinitive is unnecessarily split, as in the examples I give here. Often a *to*-infinitive that is not split communicates our meaning more crisply.

1. how to more effectively communicate food-related health risks via the media
2. We all need to continually learn about what draws us together
3. and to not have more than four standard drinks on a special occasion
4. With the advent of the Internet, it is now possible to quickly connect with other people who are 'in the same boat'.
5. it is better to not answer than to give misleading information

11. Is a hyphen needed here?

Gowers covers the ground well on pp. 255-7. An adjective made up from two or more words needs a hyphen to make its nature as an adjective immediately plain. An example given is one that produces a "false scent": 'When government financed projects in the development area have been grouped'.

1. this won't lead to laugh out loud happiness
2. these strengths are trait like
3. In a recapitulation of the lotus eaters story

12. Has an apostrophe been wrongly omitted or wrongly used?

On p.238f there is useful discussion, though the words after the first bracketed numeral need 'some' twice, and instead of the two following paragraphs we could have had the much shorter and internally consistent sentence "An apostrophe is used to form the possessive of short names ending in *s*, and of pronouns other than personal ones (thus *Jones's* and *somebody's*, but *its* and *theirs*)." The *s* is not added after the apostrophe for Greek names such as *Socrates*, but may be added after *Jesus'* and should, I suggest, be added after *Gowers',* lest someone hearing a

reference to "Gowers' book" should suppose that the surname is *Gower*.

1. because its good for us
2. accept each others shortomings
3. that others opinions are not important
4. people change their own and other peoples' behaviour

13. What is the reason why I should or should not put a comma here?

There are many misuses of commas in the collection of essays. I suspect that some writers were influenced by the bad advice from a teacher "Put a comma where you think you should pause." Rightly Gowers distinguishes the numerous **grammatical** reasons for putting or not putting a comma and the **rhetorical** ones (grammatically permissible), where emphasis is given to a previous word or phrase by a punctuation mark that requires a short pause if one is reading aloud, though such pauses may be justified in other places where a comma would not be grammatical.

I think the adjective 'identifying' clearer than 'defining' (in contrast with 'commenting') for the relative clause in "Pilots whose minds are dull do not usually live long" (contrast the original sentence given on p.245).

I doubt if any of the Gowers family has ever understood a sentence to be "such a portion of a composition or utterance as extends from one full stop to another" (p.265). (Why was Rebecca wrong to change Sir Ernest's version of that by inserting the second 'a'?) Say rather that a written sentence is a set of words separated from any actual or imaginable following set by having at its end a full stop, a question mark, or an exclamation mark. What does a **normal** sentence, other than an imperative one, require in addition? A matching pair of subject-locution and personed verb (see Section 2 above), and an overall structure other than one of those used to make a subordinate clause (*MS* 4.4). The sentence preceding this one is, allowably, not a normal sentence, because it is an answer to a question and, straight after the question, does not need to begin with 'A normal sentence … requires'.

It is better, even on Gowers's own account of a sentence, to talk of two or more sets of words (not short and parallel) that **could** each be a sentence, and are defectively separated by what we may call an **inadequate comma**, than to call those sets of words sentences (p.242). Another useful term is '**interrupting comma**', for any one that is used alone between the subject-locution and its verb (p.247).

I invite the reader to study the whole of Gowers's section on commas, and indeed the whole chapter on punctuation. One great benefit of such a study, apart from learning to punctuate well oneself, is that one can thereby be stimulated to think, speak and write in ways that were previously beyond one's ken. It is extremely educative to read prose, and poetry, that has been accurately and sensitively punctuated, and to read aloud (sometimes to children) in appreciative accordance with the punctuation. One example, familiar to me from childhood, is A.A.Milne's "Teddy Bear" (in *When we were very young*, 1924), beginning

> A bear, however hard he tries,
> Grows tubby without exercise.

Another is Sir Isaiah Berlin's account of Mill's education, in Section 1 of his lecture of 1959 "John Stuart Mill and the ends of life", included in the collection of papers by Berlin that is entitled *Liberty* (2002).

I have arranged the first eight erroneous examples in the same order as Gowers's first, second, third and sixth categories of errors. She does not warn us concerning what might be called casual commas with casual sentence-openings.

1. It is a well-known fact, condoms are protective against STIs.
2. Not all of us have the privilege, or the opportunity to be able to choose slow food.
3. he had emotionally settled to some degree by thinking about, and facing the worst possibility
4. Homeric narratives, such as that of the lotus eaters also bring us into contact
5. they needed to have the conversations, which they had not known how to have
6. many women report that the father's devotion and quality of nurturing of a sick or crying child, increased his attractiveness as a man and partner
7. They did not understand why their attempts to 'make things better' and to bring more joy in their life, so quickly faded into emotional insignificance.
8. The transformation of the lifeworld when encountering chronic disease, connects us to the world around us in a profound way.
9. We do not communicate well or deeply, we waste our time and, we do not enjoy our life.
10. And, that brings me to a question.
11. But, it is not all bad news.
12. So, to bring this rambling reflection together.

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Plentiful resources are readily available, especially for the study of reasoning and English expression, and we go on adding to them, as on the preceding six pages. Many, requiring no payment, can be found at learningguild.org.au: go to the Home page, to 'Certificate', and, especially for Chinese learners of English, ***Learningguild Letter*** 1 & 2.2012.

At 'Certificate' are five recent pairs of an examination paper for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression and a detailed report on that examination, full of advice and references. Valuable background is the editorial letter in ***Learningguild Letter*** 1.2008 on the tradition of the *trivium*, the set of the *tres viae*, three paths, grammar, logic and rhetoric, which were long regarded, rightly, as indispensable in secondary education but have been neglected in recent years. Earlier pairs of papers and reports may be obtained from Mrs Margaret Howes, for $5 each ($4 if you are a member of Learningguild: see below).

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