

SCIENCE AND FAITH 13.11.22

It is so good to be back again after the frustration of cancellations and worse over all those months.

Then, as we dared to set this date and make the necessary arrangements, I thought over and over what this topic meant for me, for the way I have lived my life and continue to do so.

The simple word 'faith' has so many aspects---Is it the doctrines, I believe? Is it the way I interpret them? How do I celebrate significant events? How do those celebrations help me to share them and to live more fully?

I can say that I am a cradle Christian, of the Catholic tradition---all my grandparents were Irish. My parents were committed to their faith which meant prayer at home, regular attendance at Sunday Mass, going to Catholic schools and taking part in parish life. NOW I see that for what it was---the beginning of **my own faith journey**. As I continued that journey as an adolescent, as a young adult, I was uplifted and enthused by a major gathering for the whole church---the renowned Second Vatican Council which answered so many of the questions arising in my mind. My right and even my obligation was to be an active participant in the life of the church and to acknowledge/share the faith of people of other Christian religions and of other faiths.

Meanwhile, I had begun another journey. At year 11, I changed to a larger school---not looking for science subjects, but including them, for the first time, in the options available to me. I often describe that as a BINGO situation—I took to Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Maths which led to studying for a science degree at the then, only, University, Melbourne and graduated three years later with majors in chemistry and biochemistry. The latter can be described as the chemistry of living things and was very appropriate to CSL—then Commonwealth Serum laboratories, where I spent the next 40 years. .. I'm sure I can say that my work there was very significant in making the link between faith and science. After all these years, I'm still uplifted and excited when I get the opportunity to talk about 'blood'. It is made up of many parts--the red cells, unique in their ability to carry the oxygen we breathe into our lungs and transport it to all the other parts of the body. The white cells, essential to 'scavenge' intruders (microorganisms).

The liquid part of blood (the plasma) is rich in many chemicals, called proteins, which also play important roles in maintaining our health.. We know, if we cut ourselves, a clot will form stop the bleeding. This happens by a chain of chemical reactions but if one component of that chain is absent, the clot cannot form, leading to a serious, or even, a fatal, outcome. You might have heard the word 'haemophilic' describing people who lack that special protein (clotting factor) ---Factor 8. It is now possible to isolate factor 8 from the plasma of 'normal' donors for infusion into people at risk. As well as clotting factors, the plasma of normal individuals contains other more valuable proteins. They are the immunoglobulin---the antibodies which our bodies have made as we encountered all kinds of challenges--- especially disease causing organisms. However, some people are lacking the ability to make these antibodies and so are not protected from infection. Again, the antibodies from 'normal plasma' can be made available for those at risk.

What about the scientific discoveries which are very **controversial**? There can be accusations that their use is an attempt to replace God! Some faith communities cannot accept blood transfusions despite their life-saving potential because of the writings in their 'holy writ'. The use of IVF and abortion are even more controversial. For me, I have been guided by listening to views held by others, by doing my best to understand their point of view. If it is the matter of a vote, to accept the decision of the majority. Respectful, always respectful.

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