



# THE MIX



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## Our Say A Church mud-splashed from history

Cardinal Jean Danielou, French theologian, wrote nearly thirty years ago: I love that Church which plunges into the thickets of human history .... I love that Church because it loves people and therefore goes out to look for them wherever they are. And I love best of all that Church which is mud-splashed from history because it has played its part.

The Church reflects the human story. At times we will find this inspiring, en-dearing, admirable or simply appropriate. At other times we will find it tragic, sad, discouraging or simply inappropriate.

The Second Vatican Council stated it succinctly when it opened its visionary *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* with the following words:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For their's is a community

composed of human beings. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for everyone. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history.

It is not what happens to us that determines the outcome. It is determined more by the way we respond. It is not our sins and failings that will determine the outcome of our lives. That will be determined by our response when we catch ourselves - or are caught - in sin or failure.

The response taught by Jesus and enabled by his Spirit, is one of honesty and compassion, generosity and forgiveness.

St Bernard of Clairvaux knew that we are not likely - indeed not able - to be genuinely compassionate with others when we have not learned to be compassionate with ourselves. How can you weep for your brother, asks Bernard, "when you have not learned to weep for yourself?."

In a time of transition such as ours, many of the signposts of life have either shifted or disappeared. It is a time in which we can expect - in ourselves and others - some uncertainty if not outright confusion, perhaps anxiety, sometimes anger and at least a little grief.

St Bernard's advice is sound. We can minimise the deformative possibilities of projecting our own conflicts onto the world if we pay honest attention to what is going on with us. We can be justifiably suspicious of ourselves when we rail against the sins of the Church without ever having wept for our own sins.

There is much for which we, as Christ's faithful, must seek forgiveness. Too often we have failed as an institution to give witness to the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. We will be better equipped to address these institutional and corporate sins if we as individuals are humbly facing the truths of our own lives.

Humility is a great antidote to projection, where we avoid personal accountability by attacking others. It also disposes us to the grace of healing compassion. □

This journal is one of the works of  
the Sydney based group  
Catalyst for Renewal.

These are the founding members:

Marie Biddle R.S.J., Marie Byrne,  
Marea Donovan, Geraldine Doogue,  
Kate Englebrecht, Michael Kelly S.J.,  
Robyn Lawson, Stephanie Long,  
Chris McGillion, John Menadue  
Tony Neylan, Josephine Scarf,  
Martin Teulan, Ruth van Herk,  
Michael Whelan, S.M.

The following is its mission statement:

We are believers who are attempting  
to establish a forum for conversation  
within the Catholic Church  
of Australia.

Our aim is to prompt  
open exchanges  
among the community of believers,  
mindful of

the diversity of expression  
of faith in contemporary Australia.

This springs explicitly from  
the spirit of Pope John XXIII  
and Vatican II:

"Let there be unity  
in what is necessary,  
freedom in what is unsettled,  
and charity in any case"  
(*Gaudium et Spes*, n.92).

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**The Four Arrows & the Cross** symbolise  
diversity giving rise to communion in and  
through the Paschal Mystery. Those who  
are diverse by nature & culture, in and  
through Christ find lifegiving unity.

## The Human Face

Robert Fitzgerald

**M**Y name is Robert Fitzgerald. My  
family lived in Canterbury until I  
was 8. Family, amongst other things, was  
visits to my grandparents in Redfern in a  
terrace which is still there. They were  
very interesting people, hard bitten in a  
sense, generous, but life was done in the  
raw. I had lots of experiences around  
those people - my grandparents and oth-  
ers - who had done it tough during the  
depression. My grandparents still lived in  
the same house they'd lived in for years  
and years. Like countless others, they  
could never afford to own it, only rent it.

My grandfather was a bootmaker for  
more than fifty years and did not retire  
until he was into his 70's. He lived a  
simple life, went to the pub at night,  
loved the football. He married three  
times, each of his wives dying. He was  
also very attractive to people and able to  
form relationships, but lived a very simple  
and uncomplicated life.

In those early years I knew a common  
bonding of people who shared very poor  
circumstances. Both of my parents came  
from humble backgrounds. I remember  
my aunty who had a son who was intel-  
lectually disabled. He was in his 40's. We  
used to go over there and clean the house.

There always seemed to be a constant  
number of people we were assisting. Not  
in any great way. It was done quietly,  
unassuming, it was just part of the way  
life was - you supported people who were  
not quite as well off as you.

My father was involved in the St Vin-  
cent de Paul Society for a long time. The  
family was inclusive of my father's work  
with Vinnies so I was very much part of  
it. My mother was strong in her support  
of family and relatives. My father's  
mother lived with us until she died.

There was a whole range of experi-  
ences throughout my childhood, all ulti-  
mately connected to assisting people in  
some way or other. It was not obsessive, I  
never felt as though I was being pulled  
into anything, but it was there, it was  
everpresent.

We moved to Killarney Heights from  
Canterbury when I was 8. It was a new  
suburb, upmarket, was different from  
Canterbury. This was a major shift in  
every regard. If you never move out of  
one region of suburban life into another,  
you may never know the differences. Al-  
though the move from Canterbury to  
Killarney Heights was not a dramatic  
one, it did have a significant impact in

terms of showing me the contrast. This  
has been most useful to me in broadening  
my view of people's lives.

I do not precisely know the answer to  
why I care so much about the poor and  
those who for one reason or another can-  
not survive well in society. In fact, the  
older I get, the less confident I am about  
the answer to that.

Apart from childhood experiences,  
however, I can recall a time that did have  
a profound effect on my life and attitude.  
When I was doing commerce and law at  
university, it came to me quite strongly  
that I needed to do something very prac-  
tical - I wanted to do something that put  
my faith into action. At the time there  
was a new group forming in Vinnies  
which was going to help people in the  
inner city. There were two elements that  
attracted me: it was new and it was ex-  
citing. It was also helping people in need  
in an area I was familiar with - Redfern,  
Waterloo. I became president of this  
group. The group used to visit every  
night, nine or ten families in need.  
These families were in devastating cir-  
cumstances. For example, in one, there  
were two women and three or four chil-  
dren, no electricity, virtually no food, a  
candle on the table. Almost Dickensian.  
For me coming from Killarney Heights it  
was almost inconceivable.

There is a passage of Micah that sus-  
tains and guides me: "To act with justice,  
to love with tenderness and to walk with  
humility". I do not think you can keep  
balance in life without these three - jus-  
tice, love and humility. It is important to  
recognise that the gifts, talents and skills  
I have are not of my own creation, not for  
myself alone. They have been given me  
by God for a purpose beyond my own. □  
(*Robert Fitzgerald is a practising solicitor &  
Head of ACOSS. The above is based on an  
interview with Caroline Jones.*)



Robert Fitzgerald

# Your Say

A response to Geoffrey Robinson's essay

by Catherine Hammond

Bishop Robinson's relevant essay led me to three apparently disparate thoughts: to a recent Church social function, a tea lady's story and a farmer's discovery.

I can't count how many Church functions I've been to over my long involvement in 'matters religious'. Only at the last major one I attended did it strike me how similar it was to corporate social functions: the CEO mixes with the office cleaner and everyone is on equal terms. But no one is fooled as to where the power lies! I had been, like everyone else around me, dutifully obsequious to bishops, priests and religious superiors, telling myself that it was because they represented Christ, but suddenly at that Church social event I admitted inwardly that I had simply been recognising power, real power, as real as in any corporate boardroom. And something in me groaned naively, 'But this isn't the way it's supposed to be in Christ's community'.

Which brings me to the tea lady. In a large Sydney concern, there was once a tea lady who had survived 30 years of changes and was dearly loved. She was apparently appreciated, too, and the com-

pany chairman always greeted her on the way to his office. 'What would this company do without you, Millie?' he would say as he strolled by. (As a church woman, I have heard similar commendations from many a priestly authority.) One day Mr. Chairman stopped to tell her he had put her on a team to recommend improvements to the lunchroom 'in recognition of her loyal service'. (Most nuns and volunteers have received that token phrase of appreciation too.)

But what Millie would really have liked to tell Mr. Chairman was that a ramp was needed from the third floor kitchenette to the lunchroom - not only for herself but for others carrying loads. She was listened to very seriously as the board prepared for its weekly meeting, but the following week a memo was sent around to the effect that no changes would be made to the lunchroom area. When Mr. Chairman walked by that afternoon, he didn't seem to notice Millie. (Lay people, particularly women, wonder at times if they have become invisible after trying to play a minor role in decision making.)

This leads me to my final thought: about the hard-up farmer. For years he

had tried to make a go of a pretty poor piece of land, but to no avail. Just when he was about to give up, the unbelievable happened. It was discovered that he was literally sitting on a gold mine! His miserable twenty acres were now worth millions. Well, I am firmly convinced that, despite the rather barren-looking Church scene of today, we are sitting on a veritable gold mine: the wonderful, exuberant gifts of gold in the hearts of baptised women and men - just waiting to be hauled up to the dry surface.

I used to think that it didn't matter if I could not be a real part of the structures of the Church, or take a genuine role in decision making in the Church I love - I would concentrate on striving to transform my inner self into Christ, and in that way I would perhaps be a small spiritual powerhouse in the boiler room of the Church.

Though noble, that attitude now feels like a cop-out. I've decided to try to help haul the gold up to the surface.

*Catherine Hammond is an Editor, Publisher & Lecturer in Sydney.*

## Letters

*The Mix* is a breath of fresh air. Sometimes at the coal face of Centacare and the chalk face of Australian Catholic University the weight of institution and the concerns of the moment squeeze out space for the Spirit. Like so many others we welcome *The Mix* as an Australian journal in the tradition of *The Tablet*, as a provider of space for the Spirit. May Catalyst for Renewal grow from strength to strength and may *The Mix* continue to present relevant, challenging and diverse viewpoints.

*John Francis Collins & Sandra Carroll, Dulwich Hill, NSW*

Congratulations on Catalyst for Renewal. It is a great move and I love reading *The Mix*.

*Anne Derwin RSJ, Provincial, NSW, Sisters of St Joseph*

Just a word of appreciation to all of you who are involved with Catalyst for Renewal and *The Mix*. The first stone has been dropped into the pond! There seem to be so many people who are hungering for their equivalent of the Emmaus jour-

ney to begin. So many are hurt, tired of what is not said and what is not addressed by the institution of the church and yet they are reluctant to leave. I wish you all well in offering a halting place (in the tradition of *The Travellers*) where we can share stories and compare notes about where the Lord wants us to celebrate Passover with him at this time in our journey.

*Kevin Dance, cp, Passionist Provincial*

I regret that I am not close enough to you to join the SIP group in the Pymble pub - a pub of which I have fond memories. I like your magazine - it is short enough to be inviting and filled with quality reading.

*Fred Nixon, Stirling, SA*

I look forward to the opportunity of corresponding on the many questions I have about my faith & also the deep disappointment I now find in this great faith.

*Mike Purtell, Springwood, NSW*

Keep up the great work!

*Martin Maunsell, Revesby*

I enjoyed Volume 1, Number 1. Keep up the good work!

*Brendan Quirk, Concord, NSW*

Congratulations to you all on this venture. I am looking forward to the coming issues of *The Mix*. I expect to be moving from Burnie at the end of the year so have taken out another subscription for the Adult Education Group in the Parish. It seems to me to be of great value to them.

*Bernie McFadyen SM, Star of the Sea Parish, Burnie, TAS*

Congratulations on these various initiatives - *The Mix* etc. Best regards!

*Sophie McGrath RSM, Epping*

Good on you on this initiative! Excellent reading in first edition of *The Mix*.

*Molly Ariotti, Toowoomba, QLD*

**WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR  
VOICE IN THE CONVERSATION  
WRITE TO US ABOUT YOUR  
IDEAS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS**

# Essay - 'Tis death that makes life live

by Michael Whelan

Living and dying are interdependent. There is an inevitable rhythm to them that is written like a genetic code into all that is. Day gives way to night, summer to autumn and winter which in turn give way to spring. We leave the womb, the utterly dependent infant becomes the protective parent who in turn becomes the utterly dependent frail aged. And so it goes. Robert Browning put it this way: "You never know what life means till you die;/ Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live;/ Gives it whatever the significance" (*The Ring and the Book*). Our faith allows us to see this as a paschal rhythm, the ongoing exodus towards ultimate freedom. By choosing to submit graciously to this process we discover we are one with the liberating Christ who is our life.

For brute animals and other forms of pre-human life, the dying and rising rhythm of existence is not problematic. They do not ask questions of meaning. They are not free to choose.

Human beings, however, do not have "the pig's advantage" as Samuel Beckett observed. For us the dying and rising rhythm of life is problematic. In our hunger for living we must negotiate the paradox that we cannot have life without death. Daily living implies daily dying. We rebel at the prospect. And if our rebellion is successful we miss our lives.

In Walker Percy's novel *The Second Coming*, the millionaire widower Will Barrett muses:

Is it possible for people to miss their lives in the same way one misses a plane? And how is it that death, the nearness of death, can restore a missed life? ... Why is it that without death one misses his life?

How we choose will determine how we live and how deeply we live. This fact lies behind the option put to the people of old: "See today I put before you life and prosperity, death and disaster" (Deut. 30:15).

We come face to face with the dying in a thousand ways daily. Essentially it is found in all those moments when something of importance or significance ceases to be. We willingly or unwillingly lose something that helped us make sense of life. It might be a relationship, a job, expectations, health or financial security. Or it might be the more subtle cessations that touch the spirit - cessa-

tion of control, of "being someone", of the good reputation or some form of hidden selfishness or egocentricity.

Such cessations may evoke - more or less - the full range of human thoughts and feelings, from anxiety and fear to relief and peace, from sadness and pain to hope and joy.

The final act of surrender, where literal, biological death occurs, is simply the climax to a process that begins at birth - a process the healthy human being chooses and lives daily.

This was brought home to me powerfully when I watched a friend - who was also a priest - die of AIDS. He died many times before his body finally yielded to pneumonia. I believe he was more the priest in this tragic experience than he had been prior to that. His wonderful parents, family and friends lived the dying too, each in his or her own unique way.

Parents frequently make heroic sacrifices, laying down their lives for their children, because they want their children to have life. Spouses transcend their own egotistical wishes in order to meet each other in a generous effort to make their marriage work. Families reach out with a poignant mixture of care and impotence to one of their members afflicted with Alzheimer's disease or mental illness.

*We the Christian faithful  
are being called to enter  
- individually and  
corporately -  
an experience of death.  
There is a cessation of  
something that has been  
deeply important to us,  
something that has for  
generations provided an  
intricate web of life that  
we have called  
"Christian"*

Individuals face loneliness, depression, anxiety and the sheer tedium of ordinary living. Some turn up daily to un-

rewarding work while others have no work to go to.

These - and many other experiences like them - are the brothers of death, intimators of mortality, mementos of our indigence. They are also - potentially at least - the gatekeepers of life, the midwives to the many births we must live through on the way to our final act of surrender. Courage, commitment and generous submission to what must be seen the gate open and the birth happen - often in the most unexpected and even wonderful ways. Life conquers death in us and through us when we live the dying. This is a profound human paradox.

Perhaps the most stark manifestation of the unwillingness of contemporary cultures to negotiate this paradox well is found in the attempts to legalise euthanasia. Euthanasia is a most blatant form of death denial. It represents a refusal to enter the dying that life demands - the dying of pain, burden, sacrifice, humiliation, helplessness and so on. Euthanasia is a triumph of death, not life, because of the refusal to enter the paradox.

There is a dying each time we choose to move from selfishness toward generosity, from hatred toward love, from wilful control towards willing participation, from judgment towards compassion, from dishonesty towards honesty, from bigotry towards acceptance, from pusillanimity towards big heartedness, from infatuation towards genuine love.

There is also dying in depression and anxiety, in shame and guilt, in boredom and disappointment, in waiting and questioning, in getting out of bed in the morning and going to sleep at night.

When we enter the dying and submit to the natural rhythm of life, we live. We are purified. We grow in love. Our capacity to understand increases. Our desire to encourage and support others is strengthened. Our sensitivity and wisdom are enhanced. We become less egotistical and more identified with who we actually are as distinct from who we pretend to be or might wish to be.

The centre of our lives shifts more and more to the Centre of all things when we enter this rhythm. That Centre of all things is then manifest increasingly in the hellos and goodbyes of everyday. We know the joy and freedom of a life lived in the light of Life itself, in the spaciousness



of the Eternal Mystery. We stop carrying around our personal knapsacks of unlived dying, infecting those we live with.

There is nothing morbid, pessimistic or masochistic about this. On the contrary such outcomes are the result of death denial. The morbid are those who will not let go of death because they find some security by clinging to it, the pessimists those who do not trust the natural rhythm and therefore refuse to enter the dying, the masochists those who find a perverted pleasure in the feelings of domination and control death gives them. All three fear life and the freedom and accountability of life. All three are modes of death denial.

Show me a person of depth, sensitivity, compassion and sincerity and I will show you someone who has entered the paradox and lived the dying and rising rhythm of life with more or less generosity and courage. Show me someone who is more or less egotistical, mean, insincere or lacking in compassion and I will show you someone who is refusing to enter the paradox, avoiding the dying that life asks or at least has not yet entered the paradox and lived through that dying. Not having lived it they carry it.

Whilst the dying and rising rhythm runs like a genetic code through every moment and every part of existence, there are times and situations where it is writ large. We call these moments crises.

The English word for crisis comes from the Greek word *Krisis* which means *decision*, and *Krino* which means *decide*. Both these words have their roots in *Krineo* meaning *parting of the ways*.

The Chinese character for crisis has a man on the edge of a cliff. From that point he can see very clearly. He may also fall to his death. Thus the Chinese character portrays crisis as a moment of opportunity and danger, promise and threat.

Both etymologies help us to draw out the meaning that remains largely implicit in our own understanding of crisis. In a moment of crisis there is always a danger that we will be unwilling or unable to enter the journey that life is asking of us. The humiliation, pain, anxiety, loss of reputation, insecurity, diminution of power and control may seem too threatening. The courage and generosity required to meet these experiences of dying to live, might be or seem to be too much.

Individuals and groups, in the face of a crisis, can behave in self-destructive ways. The psychiatrist Frederick Flach describes this reaction well and situates it within the context of the paradox about which we have spoken:

"Rather than being some kind of propulsion toward the grave, the so-called death instinct may actually be that part of the human personality which is required for the disintegrative or falling-apart phase of the normal response to stress. The greater the stress and the more profound its impact, and the greater the demand for recovery to a higher level, the more disruptive the shock will be to the individual. There is plenty of evidence in the collective history of mankind to support such a concept. In Christian theology, the admonition to 'die in order to be born again' has been taken to mean a promise of life after death. But it can also be interpreted within the framework of each person's own evolution throughout life, so that the process of adaptation to stress, especially at life's turning points, becomes a series of deaths and rebirths on a psychological rather than a physical plane. And it is precisely when people cannot fall apart and recover, that they enter a condition in which most of their energy is spent holding themselves together in one piece, while a crippling spiritual and emotional corrosion goes on underneath" (Frederic F. Flach, *Choices: Coping Creatively With Personal Change*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977, p.47).

On the other hand, individuals and groups might respond to a moment of crisis with more or less courage and generosity, live the dying and thereby come through to a whole new depth of living.

***Bishop Robinson  
was an example to us all.  
His courage and honesty  
under enormous pressure  
was inspiring.  
He died for us that night  
and it was a lifegiving  
moment many had  
waited for.***

The Church at this time - like the many cultures and societies in which it is situated - is in crisis. We the Christian faithful are being called to enter - individually and corporately - an experience of death.

There is a cessation of something that has been deeply important to us, something that has for generations provided an intricate web of life that we have called "Christian". Rituals, symbols, customs, ways of thinking, speaking and behaving, accepted questions and well worn an-

swers, roles and relationships, social status and political leverage have all contributed to this taken for granted world.

The German social philosopher Alfred Schutz has warned: "The taken for granted world always carries the rider 'Until further notice'". We have been given notice.

The Church, as we have known it, is dying. Our faith allows us to situate this dying within the general paschal rhythm of life. The Church, like any other individual or group of individuals, must constantly be about the courageous and generous business of dying in order to live.

At the end of April many of us saw Bishop Geoffrey Robinson appear on *The 7.30 Report* with Kerry O'Brien. He was representing the Church on matters relating to accusations of pedophilia within the Church.

Bishop Robinson was an example to us all. His courage and honesty under enormous pressure was inspiring. He died for us that night and it was a lifegiving moment many had waited for.

He has shown a willingness to bravely broach the unbroachable, compassionately name the unnameable and humbly stand his ground. He admitted that we, Christ's faithful, have been unfaithful and we need forgiveness and a change of heart and mind. Bishop Robinson has given good pastoral leadership pointing the way to genuine renewal within the Church.

There can be no renewal - no rebirth - in the Church without such willingness to enter the paschal rhythm. Avoidance and evasion of either personal or institutional sins can, at best, lead to a situation "in which most of (the) energy is spent holding (ourselves) together in one piece, while a crippling spiritual and emotional corrosion goes on underneath". At worst it leads to all sorts of destructive and death dealing strategies to avoid joining our Paschal Lord on the Way.

Ours is a time in special need of honesty and generosity of spirit, of forgiveness and compassion. Each of us is in deep need of all these graces.

"We know that by turning everything to their good God co-operates with all those who love him" (Rom. 8:28 - JB). The danger is that, in the midst of the crisis we will forget God and the mystery of forgiveness and mercy, of life emerging from death. It is God's Church. We are God's people. □

*Michael Whelan SM is Secretary to Catalyst for Renewal and Director of Theology Programs for Australian Catholics Network.*

## Words for a Pilgrim People

*'Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit' (Jn. 12:24).*

*The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love; and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. (Apostolic Exhortation 'On Evangelization in the Modern World' ('Evangelii Nuntiandi'), n.15)*

*Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. ('Evangelii Nuntiandi', n.41)*

*The Lord will never ask how successful we were in overcoming a particular vice, sine or imperfection. He will ask us, 'Did you humbly and patiently accept this mystery of iniquity in your life? How did you deal with it? Did you learn from it to be patient and humble? Did it teach you to trust not your own ability but My love? Did it enable you to understand better the mystery of iniquity in the lives of others? Did it give you the most typically characteristic of the truly religious person - that he/she never judges and condemns the sin and imperfection of others?' The religious person knows from his/her own life that the demon of evil can be stronger than human beings even in spite of our best attempts; the religious person knows that it is the patience, humility, and charity learned from this experience that count. Success and failure are accidental. The joy of the Christian is never based on his/her personal success but on the knowledge that our Redeemer lives. The Christian is the one who is constantly aware of his/her need of salvation. Acceptance of the mystery of iniquity in our project of existence is a school of mildness, mercy, forgiveness, and loving understanding of our neighbour (Adrian van Kaam, **Religion and Personality**, Image Books, 1964, p.26).*

## The Bible

The bible exposes, it does not impose. The Person and teaching of Jesus expose, they do not impose. Divine revelation lays bare, points, shows, makes us aware of what is. The Word of God is a liberating Word because it invites us into the Truth. It is all beautifully summed up in John's Gospel: 'If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free' (8:32).

Subtly, insidiously, this foundational truth gets turned on its head time and again. The bible is dredged for quotations and rules to which human behaviour is then required to submit. It is assumed, according to this misrepresentation, that the bible is a sort of abstract technical manual that asks us to leave behind our humanity and force fit ourselves into an idealised image called "Christian". Such an approach presumes that the bible precedes human experience. It does not. The bible grows out of human experience and helps us understand that experience. It also tells the wonderful story of God entering human experience, embracing and transforming it. When we fall prey to this distortion, religion becomes something alien to human experience and eventually the enemy of human experience. This is the way to oppression and bondage - the very opposite of what true religion is about. Karl Marx was not entirely wrong: Religion can be the opiate of the people.

A necessary pre-requisite to a fruitful reading of the bible is an honest reading of one's own life. As we read the bible it can be helpful, from time to time, to come back to such questions as: What is happening in me as I read this word? What does it awaken in me? What do I feel? These questions ought to be asked as open questions - ask them with your head and wait for the answer in your tummy! The finer points of exegesis and hermeneutics will not count for anything if you have not let the Word awaken you to your experience and what testimony your spirit and the Holy Spirit are bearing at this time (cf. Rom: 8:16). □

**Suggested Reading:** M. Casey, "Pondering the Word" in the author's *Towards God: The Western Tradition of Contemplation*, Dove 1995 - practical presentation of the tradition of *lectio divina*; E. Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam Paperbacks, 1986 - excellent practical guide to listening (c. \$10); A. van Kaam, "Introspection and Transcendent Self-Presence", ch. 7 of the author's *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Dimension Books, 1975 - good complement to Gendlin, situating self-reflection in transcendent context which will minimise self-absorption; Adrian van Kaam, "Epilogue", the author's *The Woman at the Well*, Dimension Books, 1976 - practical guide to *lectio divina*.

## The Tradition

One of the great ascetics of the desert warned: "It is better to eat meat and drink wine than by detraction to devour the flesh of your brother". The Desert Fathers were only too aware that we all possess at least one great genius: the ability to deceive ourselves. This was a prime motivation for the sometimes severe ascetical practices they pursued. They wanted to get beyond the illusions, pretenses, rationalisations and masks and live the truth of their lives as simply and generously as they possibly could. They knew the devil to be "the father of lies" (cf. Jn. 8:42-44) and Jesus to be "the Way, the Truth & the Life" (cf. Jn. 14:6).

Thomas Merton represents the tradition well when he writes: "Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false and private self is the one that wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love - outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion. We are not very good at recognising illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves - the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin." (*New Seeds of Contemplation*)

The following story from the Desert Fathers reflects the wisdom of a true ascetic, one who has been set free from much of the bondage of the illusory self: "To one of the brethren appeared a devil, transformed into an angel of light, who said to him: I am the Angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to thee. But the brother said: Think again - you must have been sent to somebody else. I haven't done anything to deserve an angel. Immediately the devil ceased to appear." □

**Suggested Reading:** T. Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, Anthony Clarke, 1972 (esp. Ch. 5); T. Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, New Directions, 1960; J. Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*, Ave Maria Press, 1978; A. Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, Christian Classics, 1993 (esp. Chs. 1-4); A. van Kaam, *Living Creatively*, Dimension Books, 1976 (Initially published as *Envy & Originality*, now out of print; a modern classic and worth hunting down!)

## News in Brief

• **Cardinal Josef Suenens died in Brussels on May 6th, 1996. He was 91 and had been Archbishop of Malines-Brussels from 1961-1979.** Pope John XXIII made him a Cardinal in 1961. With the support of John XXIII and Cardinal Montini (later Paul VI), Suenens made a decisive address to the First Session of the Council on December 4th, 1962. John XXIII, just weeks before he died sent Suenens to New York to present the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to a packed United Nations assembly in May 1963. After the Council he committed himself to promoting its spirit throughout the world. He published *Co-responsibility in the Church* which was translated into a number of different languages. He was disappointed by the unwillingness of the Roman Curia to participate in the renewal program of the Council and in May 1969 gave a 15 page interview to a French Catholic fortnightly journal that was noteworthy for the strength of its criticism of the Curia. Ten years later he looked back and said: "There are times when loyalty demands demands more than keeping in step with an old piece of music. As far as I am concerned loyalty is a different kind of love. And this demands that we accept responsibility for the whole and serve the Church with as much courage and candour as possible". Cardinal Suenens also devoted a lot of time to the Charismatic Movement. He wrote extensively on this topic: *A New Pentecost* (1974); (in co-operation with Helder Camara and inspired by the motto of Taize) *Conflict & Repentance: Charismatic Renewal & Social Concern* (1981); *God's Unexpected Ways* (1993). In March this year he published a little book called *Life after Life*. He recently told a journalist friend: "I am glad and fortunate that I am soon going to my Father", and added, "I haven't lacked anything in this life. The saying 'If you believe you will see the glory of God' has been a reality as far as I am concerned". Vatican Information Service

reported that Pope John Paul II sent a special message to Cardinal Godfried Daneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels which read in part: "I entrust to the Lord the soul of the deceased, who dedicated himself with intense apostolic ardor to the service of his archdiocese and of the Church in Belgium. I recall with emotion the place that he held in theological and pastoral reflection in the course of the sessions of Vatican Council II, as well as his aptitude in conducting the debates, with great availability to the work of the Holy Spirit and attentive listening to the Council Fathers".

**On April 27th of this year the Argentinean Bishops' Conference published a formal apology for the role played by members of the Church both during and in the aftermath of the war waged during the 1970's between the military and the left wing guerillas.** The bishops expressed "profound regret" for the failure to mitigate "the pain produced by such a great tragedy". It sought forgiveness for those who "deviating from the teachings of Jesus Christ," instigated violence by the guerillas or the "immoral repression". In particular the bishops' statement is unambiguous in its condemnation of the repression carried out by the armed forces and the responsibility the Church had in this through omission or outright collaboration.

**Cardinal Basil Hume, addressing a recent gathering of the Catholic Housing Aid Society (CHAS), said homelessness is a scandal which should no longer be tolerated.** He asked: "Would it not make a fitting and inspiring millenium project for national and local authorities to take decisive action to eradicate preventable homelessness by the year 2000?" He went on to say: "I am still surprised that there are those who seem to think that our Christian response is to be confined to personal and

private devotion, and to be concerned only with the next world. It is not so. Social action is a necessary part of true Christian discipleship".

**Pope John Paul II received the Dalai Lama at the Vatican in mid-May.** The Dalai Lama placed a long white silk scarf around the neck of his "great friend" the Pope. The usual announcements of such a visit in the Vatican newspaper and press releases were not made out of sensitivity for the Chinese.

• **The Christian Brothers opened their Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education in Balmain at the beginning of June.** The Centre has four objectives: to conduct and encourage research into the causes of poverty and inequity in society, especially with regard to youth; to promote teaching that supports awareness, understanding and action in the areas of justice and community concerns; to promote experiential learning activities through organised and reflective immersion programs in Australia and the region; to encourage the development of skills in advocacy and social action; to facilitate liaison and network opportunities amongst agencies involved in social justice and community education activities. In all aspects of its work, the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education maintains close links with a number of marginalised groups in the community. The Centre provides services for these groups and those who work with them: consultancies and networking, advocacy and mediation, conferences and scholarships, liaison with local, national and international social justice networks. In all areas of operation, the Centre makes the link between poverty and social inequity, and the promotion of values in society that marginalise and exclude people. (Contact: Phil Glendenning - 02 810 3922)

## Bulletin Board

• **Spirituality in the Pub continues.** Paddington on the first Wednesdays of the month at 7.30pm (Info: Michael 02 816 3614) and Pymble on the last Wednesdays of the month (Info: Marie 02 869 8101).

• **Maria Tal Cottages** houses of hospitality, places of creative refreshment, Wentworth Falls, Blue Mountains. These houses are in the care of the Sisters of the

Good Samaritan. (Info: Jacinta 047 57 2290)

• **Kuri-ngai Partners invite you to a reflection day with Maria Stevens** Wednesday June 19<sup>th</sup>, 10am-3pm at OLMC Victoria Rd Parramatta. Cost \$10 (concessions available). Prking available. BYO lunch. Tea/coffee provided. (Maria is from the Iwaja language group, Murung, Arnhem

Land and comes with the recommendation of Miriam Rose Ungunmurr- Bauman. She is the Co-ordinator for Aboriginal Education with the Catholic Education Office in Darwin.) (Info: Rosemary - 02 832 0584)

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## Recommended Reading

• M. Casey, *Towards God: The Western Tradition of Contemplation*, revised edition, 1995.

Australian Cistercian, Michael Casey first published this work in 1989. It was reprinted in 1990. This is a new and revised version. That it should be in such demand is a testimony to both the riches of the tradition it makes available and the manner of the writing. Casey shares his personal journey in faith, frequently making useful reference to the tradition. He emphasises the human basis of prayer, the discontent that is a normal part of the journey, that prayer is a natural expression of human nature made in the image & likeness of God, that it is, in the end not an act of the mind but an act of love. Highly recommended for those serious about prayer.

• J. J. Hughes, *Pontiffs Who Shaped History*, Our Sunday Visitor, 1994, index, pb, 320pp., c. \$30.

A noted historian takes us behind the scenes in the lives and times of 11 popes. This book is at once informative, entertaining, sad, challenging and eminently readable. History gives us a sense of perspective. This book helps to give a perspective on our struggles today.

• A. Miller, "Casualties of the Sexual Revolution" (Part I), *The Tablet*, 18 May 1996, 636 & 638; "More Psychology, Less Biology" (Part II), *The Tablet*, 25 May 1996, 680-682.

Concern is expressed that the "sexual revolution" has not brought the rewards it promised. The author draws on the comments of young people. Issues arising include importance of relationships & good communication, need to get beyond "using" each other & treating the other as "disposable", the anxiety a "no rules" environment engenders making it difficult to find common ground for communicating and building relationship, need to recover Gospel values of love, care respect & trust.

• L. Orsy, "Lay Persons in Church Governance? A Disputed Question", *America*, April 6 1996, 10-13.

The Visiting Professor of the Philosophy of Law & Canon Law at Georgetown University Law Center, contributes to an ongoing conversation in this journal re the participation of lay people in the governance of the Church. Orsy finds evidence in the tradition - both theory and practice - for the sharing of governance. He offers some practical ways this can be done. "The unique character of the episcopal power

ought to be respected, but the power given through baptism must not be frustrated".

• Philip Hughes et al, *Believe it or Not: Australian Spirituality and the Churches in the 90s*, Christian Research Association, 1995. (Distributed by Rainbow Book Agencies, 303 Arthur St, Fairfield, 3078)

Presentation of data and reflections based largely on 1993/94 National Social Science Surveys of religious attitudes and practices in Australia. This is a useful resource book. It presents evidence that "belief in God" is still the norm, and this is reflected in continuing interest in "spirituality". But this goes hand in hand with diminishing involvement in traditional forms of institutionalised religion, and growing interest in "New Age" movements. Offers some good food for thought and some basis for planning possible responses.

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**But we have this treasure  
in earthen vessels,  
to show that  
the transcendent power  
belongs to God and not to us.**

2 Corinthians 4:7 (RSV)

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