

# CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #7

## CHANGE AND GROWTH

### CHANGE WILL HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY, GROWTH IS THE RESULT OF HARD WORK

The world - our lives included - is dynamic; change is part of the nature of things; as Frank McCourt says in Chapter 1 of *Angela's Ashes*: "... 'Tis"; Whether or not change is also good, will depend on us; life is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us; we do not have the pig's advantage - we must think and choose, and the shape of our lives ultimately depends on that thinking and choosing; John Henry Newman's observation must be understood in the light of the foregoing: "To grow is to change. To grow much is to have changed much;" Human beings need a sense of continuity and purpose amidst the change; constant change can be very destructive if people do not have some sense of being grounded beyond the change and some sense of meaning in the change.

### CHANGE TODAY IS MASSIVE, PROFOUND AND RAPID

Our time is probably unique in the history of humankind; we do not know how long this era will last; perhaps we are just in the beginnings of the end of an era, a period of deconstruction rather than reconstruction; probably we will not live to see the reinstatement of a stable and predictable world such as the one we knew in the **fifties**; that is neither good nor bad - "'Tis"; how we respond is the critical issue; Change is happening throughout the human family; we may find it useful to think of concentric circles of change with ourselves at the centre of those concentric circles: the outer circle of change **might** be the whole human family, the next circle Western culture, the next circle the Church, the next circle Australian society, the next circle the Church in Australia, the next circle our neighbourhood, the next circle our workplace, the next circle our family and so on; within each of those circles we can name specific processes of change - eg consider:

- the human family took tens of thousands of years to reach 1 billion people on earth in 1805, 155 years to treble that to 3 billion in 1960, and less than 40 years to double that to almost 6 billion in 1998;
  - the advent of huge advances in communications and travel;
  - development of multi-national corporations, economic rationalism and their effects on the availability of work, types of work, work practices, career expectations and so on;
  - advances in medical technology, genetic engineering and the like;
  - the advent of highly sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, from assault rifles to nuclear bombs;
  - changes in the ways people think of themselves and the world, their sense of right and wrong, good and evil, their attitudes, felt needs and expectations, and the effects these have on the family, education, health care and relationships generally within the community;
  - the emergence of a strong sense of the rights of the individual, minority groups, cultural and national identities;
  - the damage we have already done to the environment and the connection between high material standards of living, such as we experience generally in the Western world, and pollution;
- Reflecting of these concentric circles and the dynamics of change within each circle, may help us gain perspective, keeping an eye to the big picture, relating what happens in the smaller circle of our lives to what is happening in the wider circles of the world in which we find ourselves; it will help us gain and maintain a sense for what does and does not matter in the end.

### HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Our responses must be communal and multi-layered; not everyone will bring the same gifts and insights - we need each other and need to work together; our communal responses must be global and local, practical and theoretical, short term and long term, but above all person-centred; we must think deliberately about what it is to be human.

The following are some suggestions from the field of spirituality as to how we might respond:

- Firstly, our response to what is happening, will be governed pretty much by our inner worlds; we have an extremely rich tradition of spirituality within the Church upon which we can draw to deepen this inner world;
- Expect change to take something out of you, demand something from you; it entails a sort of dying;
- Foster a transcendent self-presence: always think of yourself and life in the context of the Transcendent, always within the ambience of the Loving One who has promised "I am with you!"; always think of yourself as connected!; this will give you perspective and a deepening sense of what does and does not matter in the end;
- As a complement to transcendent self-presence, foster opportunity thinking: regard your circumstances as promise not threat, consider your limits as opportunities to grow; be alert, hear and heed what life is saying;
- Remember those worse off than you, reach out to them; by all means look after yourself but never forget that part of being yourself is a certain self-forge-ness and generosity to others; this is part of being connected!;

- Remember, we are a pilgrim people; we have not here a lasting city; our consciousness is defined by the Kingdom of God; we turn to the great metaphor of the Exodus for understanding and light in the movement of our lives; we see ourselves and our worlds in the context of the God of the Covenant;
- Deliberately work to build a life centred on God, the Still Point, that Source of all Reality, the Loving Creator of this changing and finite world - through involvement in community worship, parish life, personal prayer;
- An exercise: do reflectively something you would normally do pre-reflectively;
- A book: get and study Eugene Gmdlin's *Focusing*, Bantam Books, 1983;
- A project: join up with like-niinded people and have conversations about things that matter; eg use these Suggestion Sheets.

CATALYST SUWESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporate@ PO Box 139, Gladesville, NSW 1675 - TeYFax: 02 9816 4262

## TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

1. "Teaching the need to be free and unfettered, (Chuang Tzu) realised that the only freedom worth having is the freedom which results from perfect harmony with that power or principle which lies at the heart of all that is and which he called TAO." (D. Howard Smith, *Wisdom of the Taoists*, New Directions, 1980, 9)
2. "What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, fiffiffiermore, we had to teach the despairing men that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life - daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Lif@ ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual." (Vikior Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, Touchstone Book, 1962, 76)
3. "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." (Fredeiiic F. Flach, *Choices: Coping Creatively With Personal Change*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977, 47)
4. "Because our lives and memories are so short we think that what has been going on for the past ten to fifteen years is the way it has got to be." (David Suzuki cited in Phil Noyce, "Lessons From A Japanese Canadian", *In the Future*, 4 (Feb/Mar, 1989), 9)
5. "Whether I am a child or an adult, a simple person or a hero, a prisoner or a free citizen, I am always a potentiality for transcendence in many ways. If I were to 'freeze myself into one mold by repression of the aspiration to transcend what I currently an4 I would die to authentic living. The most sordid crime against our humanity is to destroy what we basically are: transcendent selves." (Adrian van Kaam, *Transcendent Self* Dimension Books, 1979, 167f.)
6. "God and humanity are like ~ lovers who have rffissed their rendezvous. Each is there before the time, but each at a different place, and they wait, and wait, and wait. He stands motionless, nailed to the spot for the whole of time. She is distraught and impatient. But alas for her if she gets tired and goes away. .... Ale eueffixion of Christ is the image of the fixity of God. God is attention without distraction. One must iniitate the patience and humility of God." (Simone Weil, "Me Things of the World" in G. A. Panichas (ed.) *The Simone Weil Reader*, David McKay Company Inc., 1977, 424f.)
7. "In 1961, and certainly all through the 1950's there was, to be sure, a certain malaise in American Protestantism. It was limited to relatively small circles within the churches. .... The situation could not be more different today. Mainhne Protestantism is marked by a widespread demoralisation that has been called a general failure of nerve. Its expressions range from masochistic self-laceration to hysterical defensiveness. .... ne Catholics, who back in 1961, still seemed to be sitting pretty on the rock of Peter, are now looking for plausible lifeboats with the rest of us. .... Christians, like other men are creatures of habit. .... I~ that many in our churches today can be described as being in search of a culture with which to identify." (Peter Berger, *Facing Up To Modernity*, Penguin, 1979, 227f.)
8. "The fact that the Church exists and lives within a true history also means that she cannot free herself from **time**, from its burdens and its dullness, and from the delays that it imposes. It is not in spite of time and its unfolding, but in them that the Church carries the gifts of God and puts them into practice. History and the action of people in time, and through the means usually employed by them, are not, for the work that God pursues in and through the Church, an extrinsic element, or even a hostile one, which should be reduced as much as possible, forgotten or oven eliminated; nor is it an external framework within which a non-terrestrial scenario wdl develop. It is rather that in which and through which a divine enterprise is realised." (Yves Congar, *nis Church that I Love*, Dimension Books, 1969, 89-90)
9. "Yes, but where is God in the silence and darkness, in the laboured beatings of the heart? Where is the idea of God in this uttennost emptiness? Perhaps after all the ultimate truth is not light and goodness but darkness and horror? Surely this terrible happening, this extreme anguish of the poor naked hiunan spirit is proof that there is no God at all or that if there is he is without care of me? 'All thy billows and thy waves have passed over me .... The water compassed me about even to the soul ... the bars of the earth have shut me up for *evee*. So spoke Jonas, and Job too under the silent heavens. It is indeed a note that is struck again and again in the Old Testament. But always the Lord comes to save, and is as it were thus, by this extremity, defused in the fullness of his saviourhood. Jesus comes as the one who saves, the God who saves. Yet he is also Jonas and he enters into the darkness of Gethsemane and the darkness of the tomb." (Noel Demiot O'Donoghue, *Heaven in Ordinarie*, Templegate, 1979, 74)

10. "Ciod, ... who abides forever, for whose presence no one has to wait, whose absence no one has to fear, for the very reason that God truly *is*, is ever present." (St Augustine, *On Order*, 11, ii, 6)

11. "We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit. " (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), n.75).

12. "BestillandknowthatlamGod..."(Ps.46:10)

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What has been your personal experience of change in recent times?
2. Describe what you see as one of the most significant changes in the *world* in your life time. How has it affected you?
3. Describe what you see as one of the most significant changes in the *Church* in your life time. How has it affected you?
4. How do you find stability and peace in your life?
5. Do you ever feel tempted to withdraw? What is that like?
6. What gives you hope?
7. What do you think Pope Paul VI meant when he said "we live in a privileged moment of the Spirit"? (cf #10 above)
8. What does a time of transition ask of us that a time of greater stability may not?
9. What do you think O'Donoghue means when he asks: "Where is God in the silence and the darkness"? (cf #8 above)
10. What is Congar saying about "time" and "the Church"? (cf #7 above - especially the last line)

CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated, PO Box 139, Gladesville, NSW 1675 - TeYFax: 02 9816 4262