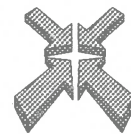




# THE MIX



JOURNAL OF CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 5

JULY 1997

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## Our Say - Good conversation and the getting of wisdom

Central to the mission of Catalyst for Renewal is the desire for good conversation. To that end we have set up a number of forums, including Spirituality in the Pub, Catalyst Dinners and *The Mix*. We believe that, if people are willing to engage in conversation there is reason to hope. When people are unwilling to enter a conversation the future is grim. Yet conversation - particularly *good* conversation - is probably a rare thing. Our experience in Catalyst for Renewal has led us to what we believe are insights in this regard.

There seem to be at least three essential components of good conversation. Firstly, good conversation - as distinct from mere "telling" or "talking" - can only happen when the question is the focus of attention. The question at hand has a life of its own that must be respected. Every genuine human question is evocative of the Truth. In this sense, all genuine questions - and of course questioners - are sacramen-

tal, signs that point beyond themselves and, if we have the right dispositions, lead us toward the great Mystery. All searching and yearning to know is ultimately part of our desire to connect with that Mystery, to be one with Truth and Wisdom Itself.

If the focus shifts from the question to, for example, scoring a point or defending an ideology, good conversation ceases. If, on the other hand, the focus remains the question, and the Truth towards which every genuine question ultimately points, and we energetically and humbly employ our God-given gifts of mind and spirit in this quest, we open ourselves to grace and the transforming power of Wisdom. The Second Vatican Council put it well:

The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be. For wisdom gently attracts the human mind to a quest and a love for what is true and good. Steeped in wisdom, the human person passes through visible realities to those which are unseen (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.15).

The second and third components of good conversation flow naturally from the foregoing. The first is a disposition of detachment; the second is active mutuality.

Good conversation is, in the end, an experience of grace. It is not achieved by conquest but by facilitation and intelligent submission to the call of the Truth. We remain open to the possibility of discovery, ever available to learn. No room here for egotism, for 'win-lose' arguments or self-defensiveness. Detachment is essential.

Finally, active mutuality is required for good conversation. An ability to flow with the to-and-fro of the conversation, to listen and hear, to respond with words and manner that pick up and foster the call of the question. No room here for hidden agendas or pushing ideologies. Good conversation emerges in self-forgetfulness. It is as if the parties to the conversation meet on neutral territory. Such territory spells vulnerability. It also makes possible *good* conversation and the getting of Wisdom. □

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

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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).

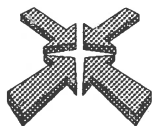
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This journal is published ten times each year, March to December. It is sent to all Friends of Catalyst for Renewal.  
(See coupon on back page for Friends' Application.)

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Registered by Australia Post  
Publication No.255003/02125

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

## The Human Face

**M**Y NAME IS SONIA WAGNER. I was born in Brisbane. My father was Catholic, my mother Anglican. When my mother married, she said if they had children the girls would be Anglican, the boys Catholic. As it turned out, there were no boys, just my older sister and me. We were both baptised Anglicans.

We lived in Camp Hill - an MSC and Good Samaritan Parish. My sister started her education at the local State school and when my turn came my father insisted that I go to the convent school. My sister then joined me there. I used to think it was terribly unfair when the State school children would throw stones at us on the way to the convent school - I felt like telling them that I was actually an Anglican! On Sunday it was the reverse. I used to go off to the Anglican Sunday school and I'd pass the Catholic kids going the other way. In primary school, I remember, while all the others went off to confession, since I was the only non-Catholic, I had to stay alone in the classroom. Each time it was up to me to ask my teacher for work - no one seemed to remember my predicament. At the end of primary school I had strongly bonded with the other girls in my class.

I continued my education at Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane, although my sister went to a State High School. There was a mystique about Lourdes Hill. Past students to this day have a great attachment to the place. I was very happy there over the years 1959-1962.

It was during this time, perhaps influenced by the mystique, perhaps it was simply wanting to belong - who knows - that I took the matter of being a Catholic into my own hands. I did not ask anyone, I just announced at home that I was going to Mass with my father. That caused great difficulties with my mother who took it as a personal rejection. I had already begun to study history at school and knew something of Henry VIII and his break with Rome. But, more than that, more than the mystique of Lourdes, was the deep influence my father had on me. I saw how his faith was obviously so important to him.

I had grown up in two worlds, straddling both and not quite belonging to either. So, at age 14 I became a Catholic. I dearly loved and respected both parents. Neither of them gave up their faith. My sister and my mother's mother - and my parents of course - had a great influence on me. There was also a huge extended family and we always had cousins and others vis-

iting from the country. I had a great group of friends at school and university. I am enormously blessed with many wonderful people in my life.

My first encounter with the question of vocation came when I was baptised. The priest who performed the ceremony: *I suppose you might even be a Good Samaritan.* That was definitely not a suggestion I planned to follow at that stage. However, in my Senior year at Lourdes Hill we had a retreat in which the retreat priest told us this compelling story of finding a pair of sandals on the beach. They belonged to a missionary who had died. The priest asked the question: who will fill those sandals? I felt a strong desire to commit my life to God in the Good Samaritan Congregation. After high school I completed one year of an Arts degree at Queensland University before entering the novitiate with about 60 other young women in 1964.

"The God of Surprises" is the main way I think of God. I have always seen God acting in my life through other people. It's been quite amazing the way that's worked out. The wisdom person has always appeared just at the right time. The main challenge remains the integration and the balance of the journey out, with the journey in. I don't think there was a time I did not believe in God, though there have been times when I've doubted structures, grieved at injustice and disbelieved what people told me about God. I can't remember ever questioning God's love for me.

I see signs of hope all around me. These are times of special grace, even hope, when as Church, we struggle to face our weaknesses. There is hope in the "Common Ground Project" of the late Cardinal Bernadin. When I studied in Chicago I was deeply impressed with Bernadin and his desire to be a bridge-builder, to include rather than exclude. And I suppose that says something about me, my background and personality.



*Sr Sonia Wagner sgs*

# Your Say – Men in the Church

by John Menadue

The following is an edited version - about 40% of the original - of John Menadue's participation at the May Catalyst Dinner. The full text can be obtained on request. Send a stamped, SA long envelope.

As "the son of a preacher", I should give you a text, Jacob's battle with God, which Thomas Merton describes as the prototype of all spiritual struggles:

Jacob stayed behind alone. Then a man came and wrestled with him until just before day break. When the man saw that he was not winning the struggle, he hit Jacob on the hip and it was thrown out of joint. The man said "Let me go, daylight is coming". "I won't unless you bless me" Jacob answered... Then he blessed Jacob. Jacob said "I have seen God face to face and I am still alive (Genesis 32).

Several things in that text resonate with my own experience, struggling with grief and the consequences for about five years thereafter. The first is that the struggle is alone. One has family and friends, priests and religious as wonderful support, but the struggle is alone. It is exquisitely personal.

Secondly, the struggle is not over quickly. In Jacob's case, it was all night. For me it was over years and it continues.

Thirdly, blessings come after the struggle and not before. I was humbled first. All that I had publicly constructed, some success, esteem and security, were unavailing. I learnt that the poor in spirit are blessed. I have been furthest from Truth when I have been most "successful", i.e. least humble.

And lastly, spiritual discovery is grounded in human experience and is not something apart. My experience was intense and very personal, but it is just part of being human. It happens to each of us. As Karl Rahner described it "when we look on the face of the Crucified, we know we are to be spared nothing".

The spiritual struggle to me is about trying to find my true self, not giving myself to others by seeking their esteem or doing what they want or satisfying others, as seductive as that is. It is learning to be content with myself, that I can accept the good with the bad, in short, coming to terms with my being human and accepting that fate. It is being prepared to let go, to admit that participation in life - rather than mastery of life - is sufficient. For the Christian, the spiritual life is to experience forgiveness and homecoming, like the prodigal son, and that despite all the signs to the contrary, life does make sense.

But the journey of spirituality without the community of believers and their support would be impossible for me. I could not conceive of spiritual growth without the Church. The branch withers apart from the vine. I need scripture and tradition for counsel, even though I know from the tradition that the Church's teaching will evolve and change. I need fellow travelers to share experiences. I need stability and continuity so that I am not thrown off course by every passing whim. Most importantly, I need the Eucharist, the double Grace of God's Incarnation and Sacrifice.

In the ALP in the 1960s, when I worked for Gough Whitlam for seven lean years, the Party was run by a few state officials who were not chosen directly by Party members and were only remotely answerable to them. Debate was suppressed. The Party was static and frozen. The atmosphere was quite unreal and problems were denied. Party members and voters were deserting year after year. The Party controllers saw that as vindication of their ideological purity and orthodoxy. The rank and file knew that the party was out of touch, but felt powerless to do anything about it. Change came when the voice of the rank and file could no longer be ignored. Does any of that sound familiar?

## *As people of the Church, we need to be loyal dissenters or the Church and its tradition will atrophy.*

Grounded in the Eucharist, the church is holy. But some of my experiences of the church feel anything but holy. At the local level, I have found the exercise of clerical power quite crippling. The distrust was wounding. I experienced the anger of what a colleague called the "rage of impotence".

I found all this life-draining. I recalled however the counsel of my father, "stop complaining and do something about it" - although I am certain he would not have had the Catholic Church in mind.

Out of those experiences and the similar experiences of other people, Catalyst for Renewal was born. I found it a great help and reassurance that I was not alone. The response has been extraordinary and, to me, life giving. My response to that "rage of impotence" has I hope been constructive:

- I would not accept marginalisation and I would certainly not leave the Church.

- I have found support among Catholics of similar concern, from all parts of the Church, both here and overseas.
- I keep my distance from clerical bureaucracy and go where I can find space and life rather than frustration.
- Having tapped into a wider movement of reform, that has carried with it responsibilities that I had not expected or indeed wanted, I found it wasn't a matter of a few people getting things off their chest. I became conscious that a significant movement was afoot.

As individuals we are in daily need of reform. The same is true of the Church, described so wonderfully in *Lumen Gentium* (n.8) of the Second Vatican Council:

The Church embracing sinners in her bosom is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal.

As people of the Church, we need to be loyal dissenters or the Church and its tradition will atrophy. Tradition is not mere repetition. John XXIII and Martin Luther are heroes of mine. My disappointment with Luther is that he left the Church.

But despite the difficulties that I see as a man in the Church, there are clear signs of hope. The Spirit is alive in the Church.

In the next couple of years, Sydney will have a new Archbishop who will be the head of the Catholic Church in Australia. But how will he be chosen? Who will be consulted? What are the qualities that our new shepherd should have? How can there be proper accountability, even prudence, if the faithful are ignored?

This issue should be discussed in an open and generous manner. The current practice for choosing bishops is recent. As Archbishop Quinn in his Oxford lecture last year noted, until 1829 it was the policy of the Holy See to leave the appointment of bishops to the local Church where possible.

The response to Catalyst for Renewal is encouraging and sobering. We are agents of a wider world movement, rather than a movement itself. Where the spirit will lead, we do not know. We are learning that where people in the Church have room to move, they are responding enthusiastically in building a coalition of renewal.

Spirituality is, in the end, finding a relationship with God and others. A Church grounded in spirituality will constantly reform and be life-giving. It cannot be otherwise. □

# Essay – My life with Christ

by Cardinal Martini

**The Cardinal Archbishop of Milan testifies to the excitement of his personal discovery of Jesus Christ and recounts the stages by which he passed through the test of doubt to a secure faith in him. Cardinal Martini gives thanks for the rationalists and sceptics who forced him to search out the deepest truth.**

At the age of 70, I have been asked to talk about the figure of Jesus Christ. This I looked upon as a challenge, a way of making me think back to what it has meant to me from the beginning, how the adventure of my journey with him has developed, in what stages and in what places, dark or light.

I find it hard to speak of the figure of Jesus in the abstract, with detachment. Anyone who approaches him is involved with him. If I stayed on a purely theoretical level, I would feel I was saying what I did not feel and not expressing what I did feel. The way I met him seems better served if I deal with it in a personal way, describing a definite progress during which I came to know him in certain stages at certain times.

I will do this by writing a kind of autobiography, as if I were describing a journey, using subjective and objective elements, but without muddling them. The objective elements are historical facts about the life of Jesus; the subjective are part of my own often wearisome progress, through which I have come to know and appraise these facts, to clash with them, to make them a part of my own understanding and the choices of my own life.

So I shall speak in the third person and in the first, in the singular or the plural ("I" and "we"). I shall express something of myself that might be a part of anyone, and describe an adventure that might be symbolic. I hope it will make people reflect or help them to respond.

The adventure could be linked to particular stages in life. I will follow the recently published, much-discussed novel - Susanna Tamaro's *Anima Mundi* - which speaks of three periods in human life: Fire, Earth, Wind - the time of growth, the time of choice and the time of arrival; and at the same time I will use freely the revelation to the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb (1 Kgs.19:11-13), where God's presence showed itself mysteriously in fire, wind, earthquake and the murmur of a soft

breeze; and thus I will divide my narrative into five parts.

## Time of fire, or of fascination

My journey started very early, in childhood and early adolescence. It is the story of a boy who knew Jesus - in the family, at school, in his various surroundings - and was greatly drawn to him, in love with him. The boy knew at once that it was impossible to treat such a figure lightly; either you accept all or you reject all. It was a time of increasing, enthusiastic knowledge; the time of fire.

He kept the gospels at hand, astonished by their penetrating words and by the richness of what they said, the strength of the decisions taken, the boldness of the choices made, the coherence of Jesus' witness. Everything seemed original, basic, new, unexpected, clear, demanding, simple, accessible, and altogether rich in future promise.

## Time of earth, or of doubt

This early happy period does not last long, however. A second one follows, which we may call the stage of questioning and doubts; the stage of earth. Questions arise, at first scarcely noticeable, then more insistent. Can it really be so? How could we know that the evangelists were telling the truth, that things happened in that way? What is the historical basis for what these books tell us about Jesus? Why are these pages credible? May we not be building up a figure on the fantasies of fanatics in the past? What is said about Jesus may be all very fine, but is it soundly based?

The boy then decides to read whatever he can find about the historical basis of the figure of Jesus. He delves into libraries and listens to anyone who seems to know more. Yet there is always a certain dissatisfaction, a certain disappointment. The answers he is given prompt new questions, and he has a feeling that those who answer them do so in a rather glib way, as if to avoid a boy's importunate demands, or else they are trying to defend something that has already been decided, about which they have already made up their minds. The rather hackneyed answers do not entirely satisfy him.

## Time of wind, or of rage

Then comes the time of rage, the time of the wind mentioned in the Book of Kings: "A great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks" (1 Kgs.19:11). In my case it was around the age of 25 when my longing to discover the truth about Jesus coincided - providentially, because both time and place were right - with the chance to study the origins of Christianity scientifically and in depth.

I studied the languages in which the books of the Bible were written (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), I became familiar with papyri and ancient codices, and learnt about archaeology and the cultures in which the events of the gospels occurred. The work seemed endless. I never paused, and it took a strong will, like that of the strong wind in the Book of Kings, not to quail before the sheer quantity of facts. But the effort was worth it, because from what I call the time of rage and the fierce wind, I have obtained many ideas and the ability to ascertain a great many things and find a great many answers. The adventure was not yet over, though.

## Time of earthquake, or of trial

The third period had allowed me to see many ancient texts through which I could consider more carefully and scientifically what could be said about Jesus. My searches continue even though I no longer have time to consider them closely. Today we are better able than people were in the past to recognise the authenticity of the gospels. The time of rage had to be followed by a period of testing and questions.

Jesus' words to Peter came to mind: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat" (Lk.22:31). This sifting is not accidental, it is providential. According to the Book of Kings, still on the subject of Elijah, "after the wind an earthquake" (1 Kgs.19:11). This is the time when faith is shaken and put to the test.

I was sifted and put to the test in the following way: studying ancient sources and evidence of Jesus also involved sifting ancient and modern interpretations of him, above all those from 1700 until today, that is from the beginning of historical criticism, the Enlightenment and historical positivism until our own time. I set about

reading all the books, all the interpretations, devouring them, scrutinising them, weighing them up. I wanted to see who was right.

Such labours often plunge people into a dark night of the soul: will there ever be a light out of this tunnel of critical doubt, out of the systematic questioning of all the facts? All the same I want to express my thanks, my gratitude, to all the most distinguished and demanding supporters of critical rationalism, to all the "masters of suspicion" of the last century and this one, for having put me into direct touch with all the possible objections to the figure of Jesus, even the most extreme: the hypothesis that he may have had no historical existence, the denial of various things in the gospel narratives, the idea that it would be impossible to write a life of Jesus today, the criticism of the supposed reconstruction of his words and actions, doubts on fundamental points of his life, and the rest.

For me, the fact of not avoiding any critical challenge was most fruitful and stimulating: so was allowing myself to be questioned by all the attempts to make Jesus into a mythical or imaginary being, or else to call him the product of subsequent backward-looking ideas.

Systematically, cruelly, and at the same time healthily, I laid myself open to doubt, ceaseless in my search for the truth. It was like seeking continuously to keep one's balance on ground shaken by an earthquake. Apart from the metaphorical, the fundamental question I had to answer was this: were these words, these events and these attitudes in the life of Jesus original, his own, or were they the result of some retrospective elaboration put about by enthusiastic or fanatical admirers or followers, or else the product of the creative efforts of the early Christian communities? And if we must admit, as we cannot fail to, that the early communities had first an oral and then a written tradition in handing on the words and deeds of Jesus, how far is it still possible to know what Jesus really wished, said and did?

Little by little I had a surprising experience: the feeling of uncertainty, puzzlement and unease I was left with when I considered the official defence of the historical reality of Jesus, and the easy answers of so many of its supporters, disappeared when I gradually came to feel sure in the face of the massed opposition of the critics. Trying to weigh up the opposing arguments one by one and comparing them with the texts and with ancient discoveries, I came to see more and more clearly that

we cannot avoid the solid basis for what we can know about Jesus, that we cannot reduce his figure to something faded or inaccessible without contradicting ourselves or the ideas that come out of serious research.

In other words, I was feeling that an approach to the ancient sources of knowledge about Jesus could not, without contradicting its scientific ideas, fail to admit that there were significant and decisive sayings and events in his life which could not be eliminated by any criticism, however corrosive it was, or be attributed to the inventiveness of later communities.

Either one had to give up, explain the data as they were and stop looking, or else admit that from them the basis of an important number of facts, words and actions of Jesus emerges which is more than enough to move us to the depths of our being. To me, discovering all this in my daily work, and in my efforts to take every possible objection seriously, was of the greatest possible help.

#### Time of the soft breeze, or the struggle

There was a time of loving, a time of doubt and questioning, a time of rage and a time of testing; to these we must add the time when we struggle with Jesus, a struggle which is never-ending. It is rather like the struggle of Jacob by the ford of the Jabbok at night, when "a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day" (Gen.32:24). It is a struggle against someone who is stronger, who never gives up the fight, and the dawn of full, unveiled knowledge has not yet come.

In spite of being sure that we are grasping a solid reality - because we are both held by it, and holding it - it is still night-time. It is rather like the experience of Elijah, who after the wind, the earthquake and the fire, heard what seemed like a faint whisper, a small murmur, and covered his face with his cloak: "And after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kgs.19:12).

Going beyond metaphor, I mean to say that the historical knowledge of Jesus is not confined to itself, but ends in a question: Are you prepared to believe in what I say as words that come from God? Are you ready to recognise my mission as a mission that comes from the Father in Heaven? Are you ready to believe entirely and deeply in me, like Peter when he says:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt.16:16)?

This is the fifth stage, the one in which we can just hear the murmur of a light breeze, the stage when we have knowledge of faith. This involves a leap which no historical research can make us take, a step which all of us must answer within ourselves, to our own conscience; a step which sets us not before the figure of Jesus, but before the mystery of Jesus, his unique relationship with the Father, his transcendence, his meaning for the history of everyone and of the whole of humanity and his capacity to reveal the face of God. Many new, even harder, questions then arise: why did someone whom we think so near to God, beloved by God, suffer such a cruel fate in his own life? Why did he seem, humanly speaking, defeated? Why did he appear so weak and helpless?

There is, then, a final step in our understanding of Jesus for which the name of Jesus alone is not enough. That is the time of the understanding of faith, which means further questions and an unending search to link the human defeat of Jesus of Nazareth with his intimate closeness to God; the Cross and his death with his divinity.

The scope of these questions widens to include all human experience of pain and death, the meaning of what seems to have no meaning, why God revealed himself not in power and glory but, as Luther incisively put it, *sub contraria specie*, in the very opposite of what one might think of as God.

And there is yet another new fact, another surprise. When we consider the mystery of God crucified and God's weakness, seeing these in Jesus crucified and risen, then the words and actions of Jesus, the parables, the beatitudes, the miracles and cures, the teaching of forgiveness, and his being tortured to death take on a new meaning. Reading the gospels again, one finds in them (and between them and the rest of Scripture) a profound coherence, an unexpected richness of meaning. Everything is linked again in a new understanding of Jesus, which makes it enter the pith of our living experience as weak creatures seeking a hope that will not disappoint us.

It is this mysterious, enticing journey which I should wish for everyone. □

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This article first appeared in the London *Tablet* (March 22, 1997) and was translated from the Italian by Isabel Quigly. Reprinted with permission.

## Words for a Pilgrim People

Then Moses summoned Joshua and in the presence of all Israel he said to him, 'Be strong, stand firm; you are going with this people into the land Yahweh swore to their fathers he would give them; you are to give it into their possession. Yahweh himself will lead you; he will be with you; he will not fail you or desert you. Have no fear, do not be disheartened by anything. (Deut 31:7-8)

By the sacrament of baptism ... a person becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life, as the apostle says: 'For you were buried together with him in baptism, and in him also rose again through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead' (Col 2:12; cf Rom 6:4). Baptism therefore constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 22)

All the ends of the earth, all the kingdoms of the world would be of no profit to me; so far as I am concerned, to die in Jesus Christ is better than to be monarch of earth's widest bounds. He who died for us is all that I seek; he who rose again for us is my whole desire. The pangs of birth are upon me; have patience with me, my brothers, and do not shut me out from life, do not wish me to be stillborn. Here is one who only longs to be God's; do not make a present of him to the world again, or delude him with the things of earth. Suffer me to attain to light, light pure and undefiled; for only when I am come thither shall I be truly a man. Leave me to imitate the passion of my God. If any of you has God within himself, let that man understand my longings, and feel for me, because he will know the forces by which I am constrained (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans, vi).

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 am, 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, *The Transcendent Self*, Dimension Books, 1979, 167-8).

## The Bible - Obedience in the bible

Our English word *obedience* comes from the Latin root words *ob* meaning *towards* and *audire* meaning *to hear*. The connection between *hearing* and *obeying* is also very strong in the bible - so strong, in fact, that it can present some problems for the translator.

The Hebrew word *shema* is variously rendered in English as *hear* or *obey*, depending on the context. Perhaps the best place to see this is in Deut 6:4 (cf *The Mix*, 2:4, p.6). The Hebrew word found there - the word which gives the name to the great Jewish prayer, *The Shema* - is generally translated as *hear*. Clearly it is a very particular call to hear. It also implies *be attentive and take this to heart, let this word find a home in you, let it transform and guide you in all your ways*. In other words: *Obey!*

In the Septuagint (cf *The Mix*, 1:5, p.6), the Hebrew word *shema* is consistently translated by the Greek verb *akouo* - meaning *hear, listen, attend, perceive by hearing* - or the noun *akoe* - meaning *hearing, the ear, a thing heard*. In the world of the bible, *hearing* has much more significance than it does for the Greek world. God meets the People in and through the Word that proclaims the active presence of God and that demands a willingness to, as it were, enter that Word and let that Word enter one's being. Hence the importance in our tradition of *lectio divina* - that process whereby we chew on the word, savour it, let it get into our bloodstream and transform us from head to toe. This process of assimilation of the Word lies at the heart of becoming obedient in the biblical sense of that word.

The NT use of *akouo* and *akoe* follows essentially that found in the Septuagint. However the content of the message is now Jesus Christ in whom the Covenant forged in the Exodus Event (cf *The Mix*, 1:2, p.6) is fulfilled. The *hearing* and *obeying* take on special significance. The truly *obedient* - ie those who genuinely *hear* - are those who live in intimacy with Him. "Blessed those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28). "Make your home in my word, you will learn the truth and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32).

Obedience in the NT can only be understood in the light of an intimate relationship with God in Christ. It is not essentially about conforming to a system or simply doing as one is told - though it may in fact give rise to that at times. Just it may give rise to the opposite of that - refusing to conform or do as one is told. The behaviour of genuinely obedient people - in this biblical sense - will be marked by those two great signs of good spirituality: freedom and graciousness. They know that their lives have been overtaken (cf Phil 3:12), that they have found the treasure (cf Mt 13:44) and the rest follows from that and lead back to it.

Examples could include Mary MacKillop, who graciously accepted a absurd excommunication; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who resisted both the Nazi war machine and the opportunity to escape; and Martin Luther King, who engaged in calculated "civil disobedience".

## Tradition - Catherine of Siena (347-380)

In the town of Siena 650 years ago Catherine Benincasa was born. The youngest of a reported 25 children, she is better known as St Catherine of Siena. From a very early age she seems to have received extraordinary mystical experiences. Catherine resisted her parents' efforts to marry her off and became a Dominican Tertiary when she was about 17. For the next three years she lived more or less as a recluse in one of the rooms of the family house. During this time the mystical experiences intensified.

Even though she remained confined to the house during these years, a small band of followers began to gather around her. These became her travelling companions when she started to become involved in public affairs. After this period she commenced a time of service within her own household and to the needy and sick of the city.

Philip the Fair of France had kidnapped Pope Boniface VIII at the beginning of the century and constrained his successor to remain at Avignon in 1305. Thus began the 73 years of the so-called Avignon Captivity. Catherine and her band went to Avignon in 1375 to insist that Pope Gregory XI return to Rome. Her influence was crucial in bringing about that return in 1378. However, when Gregory died soon after returning to Rome, the new Pope - Urban VI - was challenged by "Pope Clement VII" a Frenchman elected by his countrymen who did not like the way Urban was behaving. The last years of Catherine's life were spent in fruitless attempts to rally support for the weak and often unworthy Urban.

Catherine's life is "defined by her prayer" (Suzanne Noffke OP, ed, *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, Paulist Press, 1983, p.1). Her "obedience was a radical, world-ignoring attachment to Jesus and God's will for her. Our of that obedience was forged a reformer of unshakeable purpose" (Eleanor McLaughlin, "Women, Power and the Pursuit of Holiness in Medieval Christianity" in Ann Loades, ed, *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, SPCK, 1990, pp.99-123 (p.113)).

# News in Brief

• **Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver has written a strongly worded letter to his archdiocese concerning the death penalty.** (This letter was published on June 6 and is written in view of the Timothy McVeigh Trial that has just concluded in Denver.) Chaput noted "on the heels of the Timothy McVeigh verdict, a local radio station set up a kind of drive-by jury a few miles from Denver's federal court house. The idea, literally, was to honk if you wanted to execute (or "fry") the killer. By the end of Wednesday, June 4, more than 24,000 Coloradans had done so. Let's overlook, for a moment, the circus-like indignity this brought to a moment of almost unbearable remembering for those who lost family and friends in the Oklahoma City bombing. Instead, let's acknowledge a fact: A large majority of Americans support the death penalty. And so do most Catholics. ... As a brother, I ask the people of this archdiocese and all people of good will to turn away from the death penalty, not only for the sake of the convicted person, but to protect our own God-given human dignity. Let me tell you why. ... let's assume that a person is guilty of premeditated murder; that he or she gets legal counsel, with correct legal pro-

cess, and is convicted by a fair jury after careful and intelligent deliberation. Killing the guilty is still wrong. It does not honor the dead. It does not ennoble the living. And while it may satisfy society's anger for awhile, it cannot even release the murder victim's loved ones from their sorrow, because only forgiveness can do that. What the death penalty does accomplish is closure through blood-letting, violence against violence -- which is not really closure at all, because murder will continue as long as humans sin, and capital punishment can never, by its nature, strike at murder's root. Only love can do that".

• **Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee has contested Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's opinion that Pope Paul VI caused "extremely serious damage" by his reform of the liturgy.** The real damage was done, the archbishop maintains, by the decision of Pope John Paul II to allow use of the Tridentine rite, not by Pope Paul VI's decision to suppress it. Archbishop Weakland argued, in an article in the 7 June issue of *America*, a New York weekly published by the Jesuits, that Pope John Paul's decision in 1984 to permit use of the Tridentine liturgy in certain,

limited circumstances, and, in 1988, to relax the rules on it, "totally derailed the liturgical renewal", and contributed to "devastating" disunity and division in the Church. "Not only was the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council called into question; the impression was created that with sufficient protest the whole of Vatican II could be reversed", he wrote. Cardinal Ratzinger had said that Pope Paul VI's suppression of the Tridentine liturgy was "a break in the history of the liturgy, the consequences of which could only be tragic". In his article Archbishop Weakland recalled that when he was living in Rome in 1968, as Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Federation, he was one of a small group who took part with Pope Paul VI in Masses using the new rite. "The Pope", he said, "was not taking the decision to publish the new rite lightly". He went on to say that what "totally derailed the liturgical renewal was the decision of Pope John Paul II -- made, I am sure, with great anguish -- to grant in 1984 the indult that allowed the Tridentine usage to flourish again", even though his consultation of the world's bishops revealed that they were almost unanimous in backing Pope Paul VI's policy.

## Bulletin Board

### Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

**July 9:** Visiting Maryknoll priest Larry Lewis begins his program in Perth (Info: Wendy on 09 367 5271);

**July 16:** Pymble SIP - "Authenticity" with Jim McKeon and Marilyn Correy (Info: Marie on 02 9869 8101 or Robyn on 02 9876 6139);

**July 22:** Visiting Maryknoll priest Bill Frazier will give the first of two evenings of reflection in the parish hall at Hunters Hill, 7.30-9.30, entry by donation (Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262);

**July 24:** Bill Frazier will be at Kincumber (Info: Patricia on 043 68 2805);

**July 25:** Bill Frazier will give a morning of reflection in the parish hall at Hunters Hill (Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262);

For further information on sessions to be given by Bill Frazier and Larry Lewis contact Pauline on 02 9816 4262.

**August 1:** Catalyst Dinner - "Parents in the Church" with speakers Deirdre Grusovin and Richard Mulhearn;

**August 6:** Paddington SIP - "Obedience" with visiting lecturers from Maryknoll,

New York, Bill Frazier and Larry Lewis;

**August 7:** Catalyst Symposium, "Collegiality and Subsidiarity - Implications for the Selection of Bishops", with Geoff King SJ and Deirdre Rofe IBVM, at McKillop Campus of ACU Edward St North Sydney, 7.30pm, entry \$5 or donation (Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262);

**August 20:** Pymble SIP - "Courage" with John Menadue and David Purnell;

**August 23:** Reflection Morning with Marie Byrne - Sydney folk should look for details in their parish bulletins nearer the time or contact Marie on 02 9869 8101;

**August 26:** SIP begins at Rouse Hill - "The Good Life: What is it?" with Geraldine Doogue and Michael Whelan (Info: Marie on 02 9745 3444);

**September 3:** Paddington SIP - "Chastity" with Marie Byrne and Michael Whelan;

SIP may also be found in Melbourne (Info: Simon on 03 9497 1631), Brisbane (Info: Gary on 07 38412284) and Geelong (Info: Denis on 03 5275 4120). Canberra and Bowral are also making preparations.

Rosemary Breen recently organized a SIP-like event in Inverell (Info: Rosemary on 067 22 1537). Keep your ears to the

ground - we believe things are happening like this all around the country. If they are not happening where you are, ask 'Why not?'. Or else contact Catalyst for Renewal's Convenor of SIP, Sr Marie Biddle RSJ on 02 9745 3444.

• **Inspiring Mission: Promoting Mission Towards 2000.** Conference organized by Catholic Mission (Work of the Pontifical Mission Societies) the MacKillop Campus of Australian Catholic University (Sydney), September 12-14. Keynote speaker is Irish Columban missionary Niall O'Brien. Cost \$120 per person. The conference is for educators, pastoral planners, youth workers, those in parish ministry, cross-cultural missionaries and anyone committed to mission. (Info: Peter on 1800 257 296).

• **The Way of Prayer - a workshop with Alex Nelson** on July 26, at St Alban's Anglican Church, Pembroke St Epping, 9.30am-4pm. Cost \$25 (concessions available). (Info: Jillian on 02 9489 7480).

• **Fr Edward Doran OSB on Christian Meditation** at St Benedict's Monastery Arcadia (NSW), August 17, 10.30-3.0, no charge, BYO lunch.

# Recommended Reading

- William J. Bausch, *The Parish of the Next Millenium*, Twenty Third Publications, 1997, 288 pages, pb, ISBN 0-89622-719-7, \$29.95.

This is a book of provocative statements and many questions by a tried and true author (*Pilgrim Church, Storytelling the Word, The Total Parish Manual and While You Were Gone etc.*) Every attempt is made to help the reader face the tough issues that parishes - in the Western world at least - must deal with. The first 65 pages are heavy going as they detail "the bad news" of our situation. Bausch is no doom sayer but this material - although factual and necessary to the project - is a cold shower. He goes on to look at "glad tidings" before he then gets to the meat of the book: "The Laity", "Charisms and Relationships", "Spirituality", "The Catholic Imagination" and "On the Road to Partnership". Each chapter begins with some focus questions and ends with further questions for discussion and planning. There is depth and breadth in this book. It is readable and very balanced, likely to provide the basis for good conversation for a large cross section of most parishes. This would be a wonderful book for a parish group - say a parish council - to use for study and discussion as part of an overall effort for renewal. Highly recommended.

- Bernard Bro, *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, Darton Longman and Todd, 1979/97, 116 pages, pb, ISBN 0-232-52230-8, \$20.

Bravo DLT! This modern classic, out of print for many years, has now be re-printed to celebrate the centenary of Thérèse's death. Bro writes of Thérèse's spirituality with unrivalled insight. He presents this book as "an introduction to life with Thérèse". He says the saint does not evade those issues that the post-modern mind knows but flees: "why death? How are we to hope to the last? Can we experience religious doubts, be shaken by them and still stay faithful? Why do we have to suffer?". Thérèse's focus on God's mercy and love is liberating. She says: "We must weakly carry our cross". Bro interprets: "Yes, if we love mercy, we must consent to leading our lives and carrying our cross deplorably badly. Only then do we know that we haven't been cheating, we know that we've reached the light at the last. Yes, says God, this is all I ask of you, and you will be my disciple". This book is not for the faint of heart. It is very demanding and must be read slowly, waiting upon the text so the full impact may be had. Do you want to meet a post-modern saint? Read this book. It is one of the best introductions to a spirituality for our time.

- Bernard Cooke, *The Future of Eucharist: How a new self-awareness among Catholics is changing the way they believe and worship*, Paulist Press, 1997, 61 pages, ISBN 0-8091-3697-X, \$11.95.

The liturgical movement that had already begun last century in Europe, found its first formal expression in Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947). However, it was not until the Second Vatican Council - and its first major decree, *Sacrosanctum Concilium, (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)* promulgated on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1963 - that substantial moves for a renewal of the Eucharistic liturgy were made. Unfortunately there was far too little popular understanding of why the changes were being made. Cooke addresses that very well in this little book. It is a good example of foundational thinking. He avoids polemics and concentrates on the principles underlying the changes. Chapters include: "The Roots of Change", "New Understandings of Sin", "The Real Jesus", "The Risen Christ" and "An Evolving Church". Cooke manages to introduce some profound theological insights without becoming academic. This is a book for a popular readership, although those who do read it have to apply themselves. It would be difficult to find a better introduction to the Eucharistic liturgy today.

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