



THE MIX



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Our Say – What is happening?

The June 24 issue of the London *Tablet* (page 846) carried a report on research recently done by the BBC. The research project was called the Soul of Britain and found that 76% of people in the UK admitted to having had a religious or spiritual experience. In just over a decade, the researchers note, there has been a 59% rise in the positive response rate to questions on this subject. Compared with 25 years ago the rise is greater than 110%.

The authors of *The Tablet* report on this research – researchers themselves from the Centre for the Study of Human Relations at Nottingham University – suggest the findings raise more questions than answers. However, these same authors note:

The figures contrast radically with recent statistics showing how church attendance is declining all the mainstream Christian denominations. Regular church attendance fell from 4.74 million in 1989 to 3.71 million in 1998. This is more than a 20% drop in ten years. These gloomy figures have been used by some to predict the total disappearance of Christianity in

Britain in the near future. But if one looks instead at the figures on spiritual experience, they might suggest that, on the contrary, we are in the midst of an explosive spiritual upsurge.

At the very least these research findings should make us take a closer look at what is happening with regard to religion and spirituality in Australia at this time. Something similar seems to be happening here. It would be facile for those of us who treasure the authentic Catholic tradition to turn a blind eye and simply wait for those who have left the Church “to come back”. It would be just as facile to predict the demise of the authentic Catholic tradition.

While we must resist the temptation to come up with easy answers, we must also resist the temptation to refuse the questions. There are two obvious questions that come to mind: What might the relationship be – if any – between the rise of interest in “spirituality” during the last generation and the decline of practice in institutionalised Christianity in the same generation? Is it possible

that the Spirit of God is working in some mysterious and powerful way in and through those who do not – cannot? – find a place within institutionalised Christianity as it is presented today?

We might also wonder what this is saying about the contemporary culture, about the current forms of institutionalised Christianity and about the religious, social and cultural implications of it all for the coming generations.

The authentic Catholic tradition has an immensely rich spiritual heritage – at least as rich as the spiritual heritage found in any of the great religious traditions of the world. The conversation about what is happening at this time must include an effective conversation with that rich tradition.

If the current movement towards increasing interest in “spirituality” – whatever that means precisely – does nothing more than force us to recover our own rich heritage, it will have done a marvellous thing for both the Church and the world. □

This journal is one of the works of
the Sydney-based group
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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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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 life-giving unity.

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The Human Face

My name is Margaret Frawley. I live in the town of Kingaroy, one of three main rural communities that comprise the South Burnett in Queensland. Much of my story is universal to women born in country towns in Australia after the Second World War. Many of the events of my life have been shaped by the times and places in which I have lived and the values my family and my church provided.

I was the oldest of five children born to Bernice and Bill Todd. Toowoomba has been home at some stage or other to six generations of our family. I was educated at St. Ursula's College, worked locally for a while as secretary at St. Mary's Christian Brothers College, until I married my husband, Terry. I threw myself wholeheartedly into the roles of wife and mother, and together we have raised six children. Now we have three grandchildren as well.

Terry's career as a teacher and school principal, both with the State and Catholic systems, has always acted as a catalyst in my life, impacting on such areas as the variety of places where we have lived, the friends we have made, and on my own personal quests — my own struggle and search for authenticity, for a sense of integration and for self-awareness.

Ten years ago, the parish priest of Kingaroy, Fr. Kevin Ryan, asked me to work with marginalised women in the community. I accepted the role of Parish Worker, and began another journey of self-discovery. What began as weekly visits to one elderly blind person and two or three sole parents became, in time, St. Mary's/Centacare South Burnett: a complicated network of government- and non-government-funded projects and programs under the sponsorship of Centacare and with the generous support of the parish and wider community.

Our services are offered to all, with a non-judgmental, non-sectarian approach, irrespective of the client's ability to contribute financially. There is the counselling work, the Bread Run (volunteer workers delivering foodstuffs and meeting emotional as well as material needs), Court Support (available to both victims and offenders), the Filipino-Australia Caring Group, HIV support, the Women's Service, Multicultural support, and Telelink (linking up the elderly, sick and isolated through the phone).

The Women's Service currently has 260 clients and 5 part-time workers. The program addresses issues of sexual assault or sexual abuse, past or present, as an adult or as a child.

My role evolved into a complicated mix of Pastoral Associate and Coordinator-

Counsellor. It sent me in pursuit of a degree in social welfare. I began studying with my second son and may just finish before my youngest!

I love what I do and have learned so much from the people with whom I come in contact. We all carry a sacred story, and I am constantly aware of the privilege of being allowed into the depths of other lives. I have learned of courage in the face of abuse, of trust reawakened through kindness, and of dignity and hope born out of having been believed.

The most rewarding and challenging experience of church for me is seeing those who have been marginalised by circumstance (or by church regulation) seeking and finding acceptance and a place to belong. This is what motivates and energises me.

My faith has always been of great importance to me — though often confused with the constraints of religious practice — and inseparable from my daily life. Answers to questions seem to me to pose more questions. Certainties are few. This no longer frightens me. In fact, it serves to liberate my belief in my God, my hope for the future of our world, and for the gift of compassion I specifically asked for.

I don't have any clear answers on how the church will survive in the future. Many people tell me they have walked away because it is no longer speaking to their lives. For me, church is my family and within my own family, I don't always agree with the way things are done, or the way everyone behaves (myself included), but I can't walk away.

I am in for the long haul. I can't help believing the possibilities are endless, if we could just embrace the fact that living is constantly changing and address our issues by 'thinking outside the square'.



Margaret Frawley

Your Say: Letters

Dear Editor,

I write from the perspective of having been the manager of two Australian representative sporting teams for blind and vision-impaired athletes, and athletic coach of another such team. Also, I worked for a time as driver of a bus equipped to transport wheelchair-using clients. And my late wife needed to use a wheelchair towards the end of her life.

I have been aware for a long time of the difficulties experienced by disabled people in taking part in the community life of the Catholic Church and have tried to ease those difficulties in small ways. However, I see the need for a major attitude change in the church at large if we, as followers of Christ, are to fulfil our obligations towards disabled people. Indeed, I believe we urgently need a conference on the Status and Participation in the Church of People With a Disability.

It is assumed that because clergy, lay workers, teachers and churchgoers in general are people of good will, they need no special education in their attitudes towards and communication with people with a disability. Of course this is not the case.

I often accompany disabled people to Mass, and I was once almost on the point of walking out on the sermon when the priest made some particularly insensitive remarks which must have made some of the congregation cringe with embarrassment.

Of course, there are lessons to be learned from a discussion of a particular miraculous cure, but attitudes to sickness and disability which were current in biblical times are not necessarily appropriate today, and it is the responsibility of the priest to address the issues in an enlightened (and indeed Christlike) way, rather than reinforce primitive negative feelings.

It is assumed that because clergy, lay workers, teachers and churchgoers in general are people of good will, they need no special education in their attitudes towards and communication with people with a disability. Of course this is not the case.

We, as Catholics, need to have a defined policy towards such issues as accessibility of church facilities and our attitude towards the participation of people with a disability in the liturgy. How can a person in a

wheelchair be a reader or minister of the Eucharist if there is no way for him/her to approach the altar or lectern?

How can a person with a disability believe that he/she is a valued and respected member of the Catholic community if we make it difficult for him/her to even get into the local church?

How many churches have one or more marked disabled parking spots? How many churches have a designated drop-off zone which is reserved for the set-down of elderly and disabled passengers only? If there is such a zone, marked or otherwise, how many churchgoers abuse it by setting down perfectly fit adults or children who can't be bothered walking a few extra metres?

If there are any toilets, how many are wheelchair accessible?

Once inside the church, is there anywhere you can sit in a wheelchair and obtain a view of what is happening on the altar, particularly when the rest of the congregation stands up?

And do you have to leave before the end of Mass to avoid being trampled in the rush? So much for any social interaction or chat afterwards!

One of the responses I receive when I approach people in authority with these concerns is that if approached by a disabled person, they will respond appropriately. The problem with this attitude is that confronted with the barriers outlined above, people with a disability are much more likely to go away quietly, disappointed, than to have their friends cut a hole in the ceiling and lower them through it, like the man in the biblical story.

Or, to put it another way, consider the proverb, "Where there's a will, there's a way". When a person with a disability is confronted with a literal minefield of barriers against his/her participation in the liturgy, he/she is likely to conclude that the apparent absence of a way indicates the absence of will on the part of clerical authorities and fellow Catholics.

I firmly believe that when the standards regarding access to churches and disability-awareness training of church officers are lower than those required of government buildings and officials, then we are not acting in a way worthy of followers of Christ.

For example, take the quote from the Gospel of Matthew that begins,

"For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome..."

Let us now change it a little:

"I came to church and there was no disabled parking;

"I wheeled inside, but found I had to sit in a passageway;

"I would have liked to become a reader, but there was no way I could get near the lectern or microphone;

"I cannot see, but the bulletin is not available in any format except print;

"I would like to have a chat after Mass, but you are too embarrassed to approach me because of my disability and I am physically incapable of approaching you".

What is Jesus saying about our performance? Things haven't changed much in 2000 years, have they?

John Simon, Penshurst, NSW

Dear Editor,

The parish described by Tom & Elizabeth Young (*Mix* July) could be almost any parish. After all, parishes are made up of humans.

But does their parish also have hard-working priests; a nun past retiring age who, along with other ministries, heads the RCIA programme each year; a group of elderly parishioners who keep the church looking inviting by cleaning, washing and polishing?

Our parish school has teachers who go the extra yard to make the children's Masses and sacramental ceremonies special occasions for both the children and their parents, many of whom have long given up the practice of attending Mass.

I think sometimes, like Jesus, when we become disillusioned, we need to go into the desert, alone, and await God's graciousness in giving us direction.

After all, parishes are made up of humans. ... Our parish school has teachers who go the extra yard to make the children's Masses and sacramental ceremonies special occasions for both the children and their parents.

I am constantly amazed that out of the morass of vanity and human pride, Christ continues to shine with amazing clarity.

Change happens, but only with time and patience.

Rita Lynch, Coalfalls, Qld

PS Love *The Mix* – something for everyone. "The Tradition" in last month's *Mix* gave me a lot of food for thought.

Essay – Obedience in the church

by Annette Cunliffe

The following is the text of a presentation given by Sr Annette Cunliffe, RSC, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity. Sr Annette was one of two speakers to address this topic at the Catalyst Dinner of April 7 this year. The other speaker was Michael Whelan SM and the text of his presentation will be published in a later issue of *The Mix*.

When I reflected on the title for this talk, I reverted to my origins as a science teacher and asked myself what the terms "obedience" and "the Church" really meant. Scientists often use terms in ways that differ slightly from other people's understanding. They then define relationships between the terms on the basis of their definitions. "Work" and "energy" are cases in point. Most non-scientists would challenge the scientific conclusion that work is not done nor energy expended in moving a load in a downward direction!

I also researched the conceptions about complex realities that underpin people's words in such areas as "science", "learning" and "teaching". This research highlighted for me the variations that exist in the deeper meanings beneath the words people use.

I will therefore use a simple structure for these few minutes, exploring first my conceptions of "obedience" in a religious context and "Church" and then of the relationship suggested in the phrase "Obedience in the Church". Of course other more basic conceptions are involved – particularly my conception of God. However, I will not even try to define that! My understanding will probably become apparent as I continue.

As a Religious I have freely vowed Obedience. This obedience is clearly vowed to God, though within the framework of my particular Congregation. Our Vow formula states, "I vow freely to you, my God, Chastity, Poverty and Obedience ..."

Recent writers note that the Religious vows of Poverty and celibate Chastity imply a lifestyle different from that of those – whether clergy or laity – who have not taken such Vows. However the Obedience to which religious are committed is essentially that to which all are called, differing only in being vowed.

My strong belief is that such a call is not confined to Christians, or even those who follow the Judeo-Christian tradition. I believe that all people of good will who are attentive to the God in whom they believe hear such a call.

The call to obedience to God was a strong theme of the Jewish faith, pre-dating Christianity by thousands of years. However, Jesus who "emptied himself ... and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Ph. 2:7,8) added a new dimension to this call. Such a response of obedience is obviously not without its risks!

But what is meant by obedience? Recent writers point out that the word is derived from the Latin verb "to listen". Early in the Old Testament Israel was called to "Hear" what God commanded (Deut. 5:1). Jesus clearly reinforced that need for an attentive response to God's commands. When one of the Scribes asked, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is 'Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mk 12:29-30) However, he added, "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Mk 12:31) The phrase "as yourself" implies the need for discernment, to which I will return.

Discernment requires us to judge the many messages we encounter daily to see which call us towards God and which lead us away. This judgement requires integrity and as far as possible, freedom from personal bias.

In John's Gospel a similar message is set in the context of the Last Supper, with Jesus as exemplar: "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. ... This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn 15:10,12)

Essentially, then, I see religious obedience as

- attentive listening to God, who communicates in varied ways
- followed by discernment of the call of God within these many messages
- leading to our authentic response, which is always one of love.

God's voice, in our Catholic view, can be heard in Scripture, tradition and the authoritative teaching of the Church. We also believe in God's power to speak within our

own hearts in prayer, and through the beauty and power of God's created universe, including the human contributions of music, literature and art. Love given and received also proclaims God's call. Even the rawness of natural disasters and evil human actions call us to hear God's call in the resulting cry of the poor.

Discernment is needed to see in these multiple "voices" which are of God. Several traditions of discernment are part of our Catholic heritage. Essentially discernment requires us to judge the many messages we encounter daily to see which call us towards God and which lead us away. This judgement requires integrity and as far as possible, freedom from personal bias.

What will be our response if we listen attentively to God and discern the core of this call? The answer is simple in theory: love God and other people. This message pervades both the Old and the New Testaments, and is part of all authentic religious traditions.

During Lent the daily readings constantly return to this authentic response to God's word: Isaiah 58 tells of the complaint of those who ask, "Why should we fast if you never see it?" Isaiah's account gives God's reply: a description of the sort of fast that pleases: "to break unjust fetters and undo the thong of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the person you see to be naked..."

The well-known text in Matthew 25 describing the Last Judgement is another illustration of the same truth. The message seems clear: "Our only authentic response to God's love is LOVE and this love is real only if it is shown in loving action for others – especially those in real need. Ritual observance of rules alone is rejected in both examples. Ritual observance is *not* obedience.

Of course problems arise in our varied interpretations of *how* to love in action. We differ in what we see as priorities – some see help for the poor we find literally on our church steps and our streets as our primary call, others see the needs of those in the under-developed countries of the world as having a greater call on our loving action. Some do not accept a call to help those who have contributed to their own misfortune. Others cannot exclude such people from their love.

Again we are called to prayerful

discernment to recognise our own biases, and judge their legitimacy or otherwise. Is our exclusion of those in need on our doorsteps based on our being threatened by their presence? Do we exclude those at a distance simply because it is easier to forget them? Our perspective must strive to be based on our understanding of how God acts. That, I

believe, is the source of much of the friction within the Church. Our views of God differ enormously; therefore our discerned courses of action will be enormously varied.

My criteria for judging would be based on questions such as: What would be the perspective of the God "who makes rain fall on the just and unjust alike" or of Jesus who "did not come to call the just, but sinners to repentance"? Others would use the teaching that Jesus came "not to overturn the Law but to bring it to perfection" as their main yardstick.

What then of the Church? Many models have been developed to describe the Church. None can fully encapsulate its complex reality. The model that best describes how I see the Church is "pilgrim people of God". Pilgrims are usually a motley bunch – but they are generally going somewhere, and agree at least on the end point.

I resonate with the post-Vatican II concept that where there is salvation, there is the Church. Application of this concept would include some strange people and some troubling actions within the Church – and may exclude some who claim allegiance. I take the "Church" therefore to include all the People of God. *We* are the Church.

If the Church is the pilgrim people of God, I would contend that obedience in the Church calls each of us individually to listen for and to God's voice from the many and varied sources I mentioned earlier. Each is called individually to respond authentically in love, after genuine discernment. In a perfect world such individual obedience would lead us as a whole Church towards our ultimate goal.

However, the reality is that we are called as a Church to listen and discern *together* to God's call in circumstances that vary from place to place and that also vary with time. Then we are called to respond *as a Church* with love shown to every person and to creation itself.

One of our problems, as a Church, particularly in our modern context, is a lack of unity about the role of the Church. More people within the Church are now well educated in Scripture and Theology. Communication allows us access to so much more information. People who are educated and informed and who carry weighty responsibility in their careers are now closely

involved in Church at the local level. They therefore give more consideration to wider Church issues. With such an educated and informed membership, divergent views develop.

This variety of opinion also needs to be considered as part of God's call to the Church, not ignored, denied or judged as evil. Obedience requires this. Those who challenge or question the role of the Church need to be respected and heard.

The practical conflicts that occur between individual members of the Church and "The Church" as a body arise, I believe, from diversity of opinions about both means and ends. I fear some also arise from a misguided belief about how authority should be used. Most in the Church would agree with theoretical statements such as the claim that the Church is "God's instrument of salvation in the world", or "The presence of Christ in today's world". However, we argue strenuously about how to make these realities concrete.

Anthony Gittins writes:

Each of us is challenged to examine our life carefully in light of our professed belief in an apparent paradox: on the one hand we want to claim that God calls us specifically as individuals and that the call invites us to new enterprises during the course of a life that is always changing; on the other hand we know we might be wrongly identifying our own lifestyle as a true response to God's grace. The danger of confusion or delusion is considerable. (Gittins, Anthony J., *Reading the Clouds: Mission Spirituality for New Times*, 19)

That aptly describes the challenge to discernment that we face as individuals within the Church. I believe also that decisions of those who hold authority should be subject to a similar examination.

Variety of opinion also needs to be considered as part of God's call to the Church, not ignored, denied or judged as evil. Obedience requires this. Those who challenge or question the role of the Church need to be respected and heard.

When individuals or groups within the Church seek to respond in a way they have discerned to be authentic, they face the possibility that those in positions of authority may not agree with this response. I believe that genuine obedience requires such people to examine their original decision in the light of the response of authority. However, obedience – responsive listening to God's call – may also ask them to challenge the

response of authority, providing this is done after honest discernment and in a spirit of dialogue.

Those in authority are often aware of other competing demands, or of circumstances unknown to others. However, I would expect that reasons for such disagreement should be shared, or that at least those affected should be made aware that competing demands exist.

Jesus taught that Christian authority is about service, not power. However, he also taught that we should respect the decisions of those with legitimate authority. I believe obedience requires those in authority (and I include myself in that category) to listen to God's call articulated by those who challenge their decisions and actions. Not an easy call to hear with love!

The search for an authentic solution in cases of disagreement depends on both parties hearing God's call, being free to discern, and being able to act in love on the basis of that discernment.

The many dimensions of God's call can be heard most clearly when information is shared fully, and when all seek and are open to new insights and information.

Those in authority are not, per se, any more or less subject to bias in their discernment. Obedience demands that we listen to other, divergent voices, and that they listen to us. Together we need to discern the presence and the call of God.

The freedom to act in love and to persevere in doing so depends both on human support and on God's grace. Such grace needs to be sought in prayer. Those who support and those who challenge us in our endeavours to respond authentically to God's call are mediators of God's grace to us.

In summary, then, I believe that obedience is present in the Church when individually and collectively we are engaged together in attentive listening to God, struggling to freely discern the call of God and to respond by practical loving action to the brother and sister whom we see. That is the test of obedience, of our genuine love for the God we cannot see.

OBEDIENCE

"Obedience in the widest sense is the total openness of the whole person to the meaning of all events in the life situation. This respectful reading of events is the safeguard and basis of human development. Because obedience is no longer instinctive and unavoidable, we can refuse to open ourselves fully to the meaning and reality of the natural and cultural events that influence our lives."

(Adrian van Kaam, *The Vowed Life*, Dimension Books, 1968, 25.)

Words for a Pilgrim People

There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

□□□

Believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion. (Gaudium et Spes, 20)

□□□

My God, I don't love you, and I don't even want to because I am bored with you. Perhaps I don't even believe in you. But look at me as you go by! Take shelter for a moment in my soul and set it in order with a breath, without seeming to, without saying anything to me. If you want me to believe in you bring some faith. If you want me to love you bring me some love. As for me I haven't any and there is nothing I can do about it. I can only give you what I've got, my weakness and my grief. And this tenderness that torments me and that you can surely see ... and this despair ... this maddening shame. My pain, nothing but my pain! That's all. And my hope. (Marie Noel, Notes For Myself, trans. H. Sutton, Cornell University Press, 1968)

□□□

Let me read with open eyes the book my days are writing -- and learn. (Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, Trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, 131)

□□□

I am what I am or I am nothing. My first elementary lesson of duty is that of resignation to the laws of nature, whatever they are; my first disobedience is to be impatient at what I am, and to indulge an ambitious aspiration after what I cannot be. (John Henry Newman, A Grammar of Assent, Image Books, 1955, 272f)

Sometimes we can gain a special insight in the Gospels by reflecting on the juxtaposition of certain passages. The Gospel of Mark gives us a good example of this in chapter 9. The Transfiguration has just occurred, followed by the healing of the epileptic demoniac where there is a strong call to have faith – “Everything is possible for one who has faith”. Then “they made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, ‘The Son of Man will be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again’ (9:30-32). This is followed immediately by a report on how they were “arguing which of them was the greatest” (9:34).

“They did not understand” (9:32) has to be one of the great understatements of literature! The disciples’ lack of understanding is highlighted by this story of vanity and petty competition. This story – so human – is all the more potent because it is told against the backdrop of the impending passion and death of the Master. How could they be so insensitive, so downright stupid? Because they are like you and me.

If the truth were told, we probably miss the point of the Incarnation more often than we actually get it. For example, so often we reduce the Gospel to a moral project and Jesus to a moral teacher; we reduce Church to an “organisational system”; we reduce Jesus’ death to just another thing that occurred during his time on earth. It is so tempting to evade the stark truth of the Cross and to argue unrealistically, like the disciples, about things that only find their true weight in the shadow of the Cross.

The juxtaposition of these two pieces in Mark’s Gospel helps us remember how prone we are to turn means into ends and relative things into absolute things. A clear and firm grasp of the big picture – what really matters in the end – can go a long way to helping us keep our feet on the ground. As a measure or test of those things we would argue for or about, we might do as Mark has done – stack them up alongside the Cross. □

As a measure of those things we would argue for or about - stack them up alongside the Cross.

The Tradition – A point of reference

Whenever we think of something we always do so with some other point of reference in mind, at least implicitly. That which is East is also West – depends on where you stand. Money has value only in reference to some standard, our lives also find meaning in the light of some standard or point of reference. In the authentic Christian tradition, the ultimate reference point and standard for all else is the action of God in Christ. Most particularly, it is the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. If Christians want to find meaning and purpose in life, or want to measure the ultimate value of anything, they will turn to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

There are many interconnected lines of thinking that are evoked by this practice. Consider two of them: Our dying and our loving. Karl Rahner writes with respect to the first: “Obviously death is something one should be able to deal with, something which man, reflecting upon himself, (in contrast to the animal) should be able to face straight-forwardly. But in fact this is accomplished only by Christianity”.

In fact, some people – maybe they have never heard of Jesus Christ – do face death courageously or without fear or even with desire. And many Christians are deeply distressed and confused in the face of death. That is not the point. The point is that nowhere in the history of the world do we find death being definitively dealt with in an event or person. That is precisely what God does in Jesus. Through Him, with Him and in Him, human beings can deal with death in a way that, without Him, they could not have dealt with it. Whether this affects us – or others – psychologically is another question altogether.

Simone Weil speaks to the second issue – the issue of loving – and represents the tradition well when she writes in her typically punchy fashion: “God’s love for us is not the reason for which we should love him. God’s love for us is the reason for us to love ourselves. How could we love ourselves without this motive?” □

The ultimate reference point and standard for all else is the action of God in Christ.

Bulletin Board

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Promoter – Terry O’Loughlin on (02) 9816 4262 or (02) 9816 5091.

mail: terry_catalyst@hotmail.com

[NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified].

° **Boorowa** – The Boorowa Hotel, October 12 “Where’s God in Suicide?” Faye Green & Neil Harrigan (Info: Margaret 6201 9802 or Christine 6385 3304).

° **Bowral** – The Grand Bar and Brasserie, October 26 “Unity in Diversity” Monica Attard & Harry Graves (Info: John 4878 5230).

° **Campbelltown** – The Catholic Club – resumes 2001 (Info: Sue Brinkman 4627 2953).

° **Canberra** – ‘The Australian Story’ - The Canberra Workers Club, Childers St, Canberra, October 25, Topic & Speakers tba (Info: Rita 6288 4715).

° **Chatswood** – ‘Sowing Seeds: Fostering Growth’ Orchard Tavern, Cnr. Victoria Ave & Orchard Rd, October 16 “Home: ‘Home sweet home’ – at what cost?” Terry Meagher & Pat McDermott (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Five Dock** – The Illinois Hotel, Cnr Parramatta Rd & Arlington St, September 27 “Faster, Higher, Stronger: Measuring Success” Speakers tba (Info: Noeline 9744 8141).

° **Jamberoo** – The Jamberoo Hotel, October 9 “Hope and Courage”, Brian Stoney sj & tba (Info Anne 4232 1062 or Gaye 4232 2735).

° **Glen Innes** – The Club Hotel, Grey St, (Info: Kerrie 6732 2023).

° **Kincumber** – ‘Proclaim Jubilee’, The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive, October 3 “Equality – more or less!” Steve Ella & Michael Kelly sj (Info: Robbie 4390 0370 or Clair 4344 6608).

° **Newcastle** – The Mary Ellen Hotel, Glebe Rd, Merewether, “The Seven Deadly Sins” September 18 ‘Pride’; October 16 ‘Lust’; November 20 ‘Wrath’ Speakers tba (Info: Lawrence 4967 6440).

° **Paddington** – ‘The Signs of the Times’, The Bellevue Hotel, September 6 “Celebrating our Identity” Anita Heiss & Josh Yeldham; October 4 “Conversation. What is it?” Geraldine Doogue & Tim O’Hearn (Info: Area 9387 3152 (H))

° **Penrith** – Golf Club, October 18 “What is the role of the Church in the new century?” Fr Paul Roberts & Freda Whitlam (Info: Dennis 4773 5521).

° **Rouse Hill** – The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd, October 3 “Contemporary Jesus” Anthony Crook & Maria Baden (Info: Tim or Margaret 9634 2927 (H)).

° **Waitara** – ‘Living the Gospel: What Sort of People Do We Want to Be’ -The Blue Gum Hotel on the Pacific Hwy, October 18 “Your life may be the only Gospel some people will ever read” Rev Bede Heather & Rev Peter Miller (Info: Kathryn 9983 0162)

° **Wollongong** – Mt Kembla Hotel, Mt Kembla, November 13, Topic & Speakers tba (Info: Tom 4228 5038).

Other States:

° **Ballarat** - (Info: Kevin 03 5332 1697).

° **Clayton (VIC)** – The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm: September 26 “Community – place of healing and wholeness” Margaret Nicholls & Dr Jacques Boulet (Info: Yvonne 9700 7340 or Joyce 9700 1250).

° **Collingwood (VIC)** – The Vine Hotel, Cnr Wellington & Derby Sts, 8pm-9.30pm. (Info: Maree 0412 136681).

° **Geelong** (Info: Denis 03 5275 4120).

° **Mordialloc (VIC)** – The Kingston Club Hotel, 7.30pm-9pm, October 25 “Women and Men in Partnership”, Dr Marie McDonald & Graeme Holmes (Info: Maria 9579 4255).

° **Spirituality Café, Rosanna**, (Info: Marian 9459 4403).

° **Devonport (TAS)** – Molly Malone’s Irish Pub, 7.30pm-9pm, Last Wednesday of each month (Info: Fr Richard Ross 6424 2783).

° **Fortitude Valley (QLD)** – Dooley’s, First Monday of month (Info: Lois 3260 7384).

° **Perth** – The Elephant and the Wheelbarrow, cnr Francis and Lake Sts, Northbridge, 7.30pm-9pm (Info: Michael 9448 2404).

° **AudioMIX?** The Mix is available on audio tape, thanks to the generosity of several volunteers. For further information contact Pauline on 02 9816 4262.

Other Matters and Events

° **Spirituality Courses Mary MacKillop Place**, North Sydney, “Women in our Salvation Story” October 25, 1.30-3pm, October 29, 11am-1pm; An Invitation – An Experience of Spiritual Direction; The Centre also offers a two-year Institute in Spiritual Direction- February 2001 – November 2002 (Info: Sr Jeanette Foxe on 89 ~~Reflexion~~ Morning October 21st, 9.30am – 12.30pm, Parish Hall, cnr Mary St & Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE PUB COMMUNITY WEBSITE

You can check the diary, read transcripts and stories, post or look at pictures, and share your thoughts and ideas: another forum for conversation!

Go to

<http://communities.ninemsn.com.au/SpiritualityinthePub>

° **Catalyst Dinner** Friday October 13, cnr Mary St and Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill, 7pm for 7.30pm. Topic: “A Conversation on Justice” Speakers: Terry O’Connell and Julia Ryan (Info: Pauline 9816 4262).

° **Appeal for Volunteers** to help organise Reflection Days. Please phone Carole Wilson 9869 1036 or Pauline McNaught 9816 4262.

CATALYST ANNUAL APPEAL FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We have launched our Second Annual Financial Appeal by writing to our Friends to help us in our mission of raising the level of good conversation in the Australian Catholic Church.

Thank you for your generous response last year which enabled us to employ our Projects/Development Manager.

When so many demands are made on your funds, can you help again?

Our goal of \$50,000 can be reached if: 2000 people give \$25 each; or 1000 people give \$50; or 250 people give \$200; or 62½ give \$800; or 50 people give \$1000; or

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Bishops have been asked to nominate candidates to serve on the proposed **Women’s Commission**, which is intended to be an effective focal point for ongoing dialogue with women, an expert rather than a representative body.

Do you know a good candidate to fill such an expert position?

Contact your local Bishop or Bishop Michael Putney on Tel 07 3224 3222 or Fax 07 3229 5526.

Recommended Reading

Thomas P Rausch, *Reconciling Faith and Reason: Apologists, Evangelists and Theologians in a Divided Church*, The Liturgical Press, 2000, 134 pages, index, footnotes, pb, \$39.50.

Thomas Rausch SJ has gained a well-deserved reputation in recent years as a fine theologian, a man very much in touch with what is happening in the Church and a thoroughly Catholic thinker with a great ability to see the good in different positions and maintain focus amidst this tension. Rausch here analyses the divisions within the Church, dealing with themes such as “the Catholic Left”, “the conservative Catholic sub-culture”, “why Catholics leave the Church”, “sexual morality”, “liturgical renewal” and the search for a “language that gives life”. While Rausch deals with some complex and subtle theological and pastoral issues, he also addresses some very concrete and practical issues. For example: Should the assembly stand or kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer? He notes that the US Bishops’ Conference, several years ago addressed this question and rejected the suggestion that the assembly should stand. He also notes that, at the Council of Nicaea in 325, the Council Fathers found it necessary to add a canon forbidding the novel practice of kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer. *Reconciling Faith and Reason* is a very readable and sensible book, one that will bring solid thinking to the conversation we must have concerning our beliefs. Highly recommended.

Arnold S Kohen, *From the Place of the Dead: Bishop Belo and the Struggle for East Timor*, A Lion Book, 1999, 398 pages, index, photographs, pb.

Arnold Kohen is an investigative journalist who has taken a close interest in East Timor since the Indonesian invasion of 1975. Before writing this biography of Bishop Belo, he travelled with the Bishop extensively for more than five years. Apart from many interviews with Bishop Belo, Kohen also interviewed many who know him, including some who do not count him as a friend. The result is a gripping story. This is not just a rehash of the tragic and brutal facts of East Timor over the past twenty-five years. There are plenty of sources for us to discover those facts. Kohen introduces the reader to a somewhat shy and gentle man, a reluctant hero. And through the story of this extraordinary man we are drawn into the human reality of a Church and people forced to endure injustices and savageries that are barely believable. Knowing that the rest of the world – including Australia – stood by and watched, makes it all the more poignant and morally challenging. This book should be read by every Australian. In particular, it should be read carefully by those of us who seek renewal within the Church. From the comforts of a largely middle class setting, we may easily get things out of perspective. *From the Place of the Dead* will not let you settle for easy answers or become too preoccupied about things that do not matter in the end.

Patricia Mullins, *Becoming Married: Towards a Theology of Marriage from a Woman’s Perspective*, St Pauls, 2000, 212 pages, endnotes, bibliography, pb, \$24.95

The author is a Catholic, married for forty-two years and mother of ten children. This book is based on her doctoral dissertation. While Mullins’ own experience is at the centre of the writing, she also draws on conversations with 279 other married women. The title – *Becoming Married* – suggests Patricia Mullins’ line of thought. She begins by asking “what, in fact, is marriage?” She indicates what most of the current literature on this subject indicates, that our understanding of marriage in the Christian tradition has not always been well-founded in credible readings of Scripture or even a reasonable understanding of human nature. She reminds us of some teachings which, at the beginning of the third millennium, appear as simply indefensible. Mullins goes on to develop a positive vision of sacramental marriage. One wonders how the Church’s teachings in moral theology in general and on marriage in particular might have varied if married people – especially women – had had a hand in their formulation over the centuries. This is a welcome contribution to an area of Christian life that desperately calls for a new and credible response from the Church. Not everyone will agree with Patricia Mullins’ views. But only the irresponsible will refuse to listen to her voice and similar voices. This is how a new vision can and must be born.

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