



THE MIX



JOURNAL OF CATALYST FOR RENEWAL INCORPORATED

Circulation of 2000 in Australia and overseas

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 4

JUNE 2002

Anthony Fisher

The human face 2

Vince Casey

Institution is not a dirty word 3

Joseph Komonchak

The church: God's gift, our task 4

The bible

The hard sayings 6

The tradition

A necessary emptying 6

Our Say – The possibilities and limits of anger

Anger is like the sun: it is a wonderful and powerful gift, but you should not stay out in it too long. Anger mobilises the body to meet a challenge, it generates energy and strength. Anger is capable of moving us into action to achieve something – perhaps self-defense – that we would otherwise not achieve. Anger also alerts those around us that we have been moved and can signal to them, in very definite ways, that they need to respond in some manner. Anger is a sign that we are alive and care.

However, like the sun, anger can be destructive. Anger can blur our capacity to think clearly and therefore diminish our ability to choose wisely and act in ways that are useful to either ourselves or others.

We can get “stuck in anger”, constantly relating angrily to this or that particular person, event or thing. This chronic anger can seep into other facets of our lives and relationships and cause a loss of joy, depression, cynicism and even despair. The diminution of our freedom in such circumstances strikes at the very heart of our being human.

Any Catholic today who cares about the Church will know first-hand the experience of anger. In fact, many of us know first-hand the rage of impotence.

The rage of impotence is provoked in a human being when he or she is significantly frustrated. It may arise primarily because of immaturity or selfishness in the individual; it may also arise in a mature and generous individual who, for example, is effectively denied the power to participate in a system when he/she is willing and able and has the right to participate.

It is of the utmost importance that we recognise this possibility in the Church today. We cannot afford to deny the anger any more than we can afford to indulge it.

Perhaps a starting point for addressing this issue is a recognition of the fact that when I am angry – especially if I am very angry – I am probably incapable of good conversation. And if I am incapable of good conversation, then I am probably in need of help from someone who is not

caught in this same or similar anger, a person who is willing and able to help me work through that anger. This, of course, presupposes that I want to work through the anger, that I am mature and secure enough to let it go. (Some of us have a vested interest in holding on to the anger. There is no future in that.)

The most practical and, potentially at least, the most liberating question we can ask of ourselves at any moment is, “What is happening here?” More particularly, we can ask, “What is happening with and in *me* here?”. And listen!

We must make a good servant of anger; we must not allow it to dominate our struggle for renewal. When anger dominates us we are, in fact, dominated by the *source* of our anger – by the person, event or thing that frustrates and disturbs us. That will quite simply undermine our efforts at renewal. It will also prevent our promoting the one thing that matters in the end: life-giving relationships. □

THE HUMAN FACE

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

These are the current Members:

Maria Baden, Dominic Beirne,
Marie Biddle RSJ, Glenn Boyd, Jan Brady,
Kevin Burges, Aidan Carvill SM, Maria Contempree,
Birgit Cullen, Susanna Davis, Marea Donovan,
Geraldine Doogue, Paul Durkin, Peter Dwight,
Maria George, Denys Goggin, Margaret Goggin,
Catherine Hammond, Andrew Howie, Francois Kunc,
Owen Mason, fsc, Richard McLachlan,
Maryellen McLeay, Chris Needs, Michelle O'Brien, Rita
O'Connor, Margaret O'Hearn, Tim O'Hearn, Margaret
Rigotti, Roy Rigotti, John Robinson,
Louise Robinson, Ruth van Herk, Carmel Vanny,
Michael Whelan SM, Carole Wilson

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)

The Patrons are:

Mr Robert Fitzgerald AM
Mr Gerald Gleeson AC
Prof Francis J Moloney SDB, AM
Dr Richard J Mulhearn OAM
Bro Paul O'Keefe
Most Rev Geoffrey Robinson
Sr Deirdre Rofe IBVM

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 Friend's Application)

The Editorial Committee is:
Michael Whelan SM, Geraldine Doogue,
Catherine Hammond and consultants

Registered by Australia Post
Publication No: 255003/02125

Address all correspondence to:
PO Box 139, Gladesville, NSW 1675, Australia
Tel/Fax: +61 2 9816 4262

Web site: www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au



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.

Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated publishes *The
Mix* as one of its forums for conversation. All
reasonable expressions of opinion relevant to the
renewal of the Church are welcome. The Editor
reserves the right not to publish a submitted text.
Not all the opinions expressed in *The Mix* are those
of Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated.

All items submitted for publication in *The Mix*
should reach the Editor no later than the 12th
of the month previous to publication.

All original work in *The Mix*, unless otherwise
indicated, is the work of the Editor.

Printed by Serge Martich-Osterman
Printing and Publishing Pty Ltd, Annandale

My name is Anthony Fisher. I was born
at the Mater in Sydney in 1960, to
Colin and Gloria, first of their five. A
glutton for education, I went to Catholic
schools in Lakemba, Lane Cove, Ryde and
Riverview, then to Sydney University, YTU
Melbourne, and Oxford. Since joining the
Dominicans, I've lived in Canberra, Sydney
and England at times, but mostly at St
Dominic's in East Camberwell. My
community here in Melbourne now includes
eighteen men from 20 to 74 years of age, a
delightful menagerie of friars who are very
merciful to me.

They try to keep me occupied. I am
currently the Director of the John Paul II
Institute for Marriage and Family, where I
teach moral theology and bioethics. I'm
Episcopal Vicar for Healthcare in
Melbourne and Chaplain to the Victorian
Parliament. I'm also Deputy Provincial of
the Dominicans and Formator of our
students. So I'm never bored!

Who is God for me? God is, as a great
Dominican laywoman and doctor of the
Church, Catherine of Siena, taught me to
see, *pazzo d'amore* – disturbed, drunk,
insane with love for us, even before we
exist. Because all genuine love *must*
communicate itself creatively, this mad
divine love brought me and so many others
into being and sustains us in being every
moment of our lives. Having caught that
love, I am driven in turn actively to
communicate it and enact it. It is the very
source of my dignity and that of every
human being, from the newly-conceived to
the soon-to-be-dead, from the useful and
beautiful to those whose uses and beauty
are less obvious to us.

For Catherine, as for Dominic and
Thomas Aquinas before her and so many of
her Dominican brothers ever since, the
passionate pursuit and articulation of
Veritas, truth, was primary – for, as
Catherine so well explained, you cannot
love what you don't know. (We so easily
fall for mirages.) Yet as we fall in love with
God and his people, we discover far more
about him, them and ourselves: not only
can't we love what we don't know, but we
can't really know what we do not first love.

God has given me a very easy ride till
now – though we never know what is
around the corner! So I suppose I've found
him easy to love. Not that love of God
means always feeling good with him. Nor
that he reveals himself to me with any
special clarity. I know that there is always
the risk that I love the mirage. That's why I
NEED the Church: to conceive and nourish
and love and support and teach and
challenge me – every time I want to know
God better and every time I think I've got

God all worked out; every time I think I
love well enough, and every time I want to
love better.

As for the big issues and questions that
face the Church at the moment, I think the
great challenge is an evangelical one. Our
priests-to-parishioners ratio is holding up
only because the numbers of practising laity
are falling even faster than the numbers of
clergy and religious, and their average
is rising even faster. (Here I use the word
'practising' in both the narrow and broader
senses.) The crisis of vocations is not so
much to priesthood and religious life as it is
to prayer and worship beyond the sanctuary,
to married and family life, to a passionate
"living the truth in love" in the world.

That could not have been more obvious
than in the recent smug consensus of our
leaders about allowing the destruction of
'surplus' human embryos for medical
experimentation. Some said they couldn't
see why you'd worry about people the size
of a full stop. Others thought that if people
are going to die anyway, there's nothing
wrong with hurrying the process up a bit by
using them for spare parts. Others thought
that if the results are good enough, anything
goes. Still others thought that you just can't
have enough of the 'therapeutic', wherever
it comes from.

Well, there are lots of things to be said
about all this. But one really important
thing it says to me is that the preaching of
the Gospel of Life and Love has never been
more urgent, more precious, more of an
adventure.

If I'm right about some of this, the
principal challenge for the Church can't be
maintenance – whether of parishes or
schools or hospitals or bureaucracies. They
have their place. But our most pressing
need is to allure and persuade and inspire
the people of our day, to find ways which
turn them inside out and upside down and
around toward our mad, drunk God of truth
and love. A very Dominican way of
reading things, no doubt, but that's me.



Rev Professor Anthony Fisher, OP

Your Say - Institution is not a dirty word

Vince Casey

I am saddened by the disillusionment with the institutional church one often finds expressed in general conversation and in a publication like *The Mix*. I respect the experience of those who express these views and can certainly relate to feelings of disappointment about the church. But I also feel somewhat irritated by the extensive use of generalisations when referring to the failures of the 'institutional church'.

What is an 'institution'? Essentially it is people. People living and acting (or failing to act) in a certain way. As parish priest of a large parish, I am immersed every day (like so many other priests, religious and parish workers) in the workings of the 'institutional church'; however, my experience of this institution we call 'parish' is largely a source of life and hope.

Here at St Agatha's in Pennant Hills I am constantly energised and in awe of the goodness, prayerfulness and generosity of our parishioners who live their faith and mission in so many ways. This is translated into some 54 parish groups and numerous ministries, including those touching many marginalised groups. It is celebrated at five full Masses every Sunday, including a 'standing room only' young people's Mass. It is expressed by an extraordinary range of spiritualities, from outreaches to asylum seekers and Ugandan orphans to divine mercy celebrations and bereavement liturgies - all which find a home here. Most of all, it is expressed in the day-to-day expressions of love and faith in families and households of all kinds which are the bedrock of this parish community.

'Please, let's not make *institution* a dirty word, or we will unwittingly undermine the very people who are in there making a positive difference to the institution!'

Certainly, as a parish, we are far from perfect. We have our good days and bad days - no arguments there! But as a flesh-and-blood expression of 'institutional church', this parish community also offers powerful evidence of God's kingdom in our midst.

I feel it is important to present an alternative and more positive view because weeping generalisations about the failures of 'the institution' do nothing to support and encourage the efforts of the people here at St Agatha's and in so many other

parishes. On the contrary, it does them an injustice. Yes, institutions such as the parish system clearly have their problems. But, please, let's not make 'institution' a dirty word, or we will undermine the very people who are in there, 'boots and all', making a positive difference to the institution!

And where criticism is warranted, let the critics also put forward practical steps that will lead to real solutions. What are the life-giving experiences that have kept you involved in the Church? Who are the people that encourage you? What gifts do they offer? What kind of gatherings and outreaches have worked well? Is there a practical insight or pastoral idea that our parish (and other parishes) could learn from and apply to our own situation? We at St Agatha's would certainly be interested.

(Vince Casey is the parish priest of St Agatha's, Pennant Hills NSW (Diocese of Broken Bay).)

I am very happy that my Archbishop of Perth, Rev B J Hickey, is a reader of Catalyst for Renewal journal, *The Mix*.

I was present at that wonderful meeting [a few years back] re "The Statement of Conclusions". It was a wild, woolly and wet night, yet the Sydney Town Hall was overflowing with 4½ thousand people of all ages, eagerly waiting to hear from our Bishops about what had happened in Rome.

It was the people of God in action, for me. A layperson chaired the meeting, two Bishops, one priest, one religious and one layperson spoke. Very balanced.

We heard first-hand what happened at the Vatican, the pressure the Australian Bishops were under, their feelings, concerns, loyalty, and time frames.

They spoke freely and openly and, more importantly, from the heart, and the people present welcomed them with a standing ovation and thunderous applause.

Yes, hard questions were asked, but without anger and with respect and charity for the two Bishops. There were hecklers who chanted "Obey the Pope, obey the Pope". As they were sitting behind me, I asked them to at least listen to the speakers and questions before chanting.

I was surrounded by Catholic teachers, nurses and young people, trying to live their faith in their daily lives. They all were informed people of faith, who loved the Church and exercised responsibility for it in a formal and an informal way, yet felt unfairly judged by some Vatican bureaucrats and were confused where the official Church was going.

The final song "How Great Thou Art"

nearly took the roof off. People openly wept tears of joy. I felt really blessed having been there. It was a transforming moment in the life of the Australian church. The conversation had begun!

Afterwards, as I walked to a bus stop with an elderly parish priest, he commented, "Just like a family, we sit around the kitchen table, get things off our chest, hug and are reconciled".

I believe Jesus had a big smile on his face that night. We had created a faith community where Jesus was the centre and the unifying presence, not our egos, dogmas and rules.

Guido J Vogels - Perth

P.S. Let's keep that spirit alive next time we go to Mass or a Parish council, Y.C.W. or schoolboard meeting.

Referring to Margaret B Owen-O'Hearn's "Vat.II: What we've gained, what we've lost": I felt sorry for the writer after reading the article.

I agree that in some respects "the Church has returned to a fortress mentality ..." But much of our knowledge and understanding of Church-related happenings since Vat II comes from our own environment. I see many wonderful things that have come from Vat II.

Bishop J Fiorenza's intervention at the Oct 1st Synod spoke of *inter-religious dialogue*, as well as *subsidiarity*. There are some wonderful developments to have come as a result of *Nostra Aetate*: the interfaith movement and inter-religious dialogue; dialogue in theological discussion; dialogue re spiritual practices, i.e. prayer and meditation, liturgical celebration and other spiritual practices; dialogue with justice and peace development-type projects.

Let us come to see the Church as a matrix, a place where all can come, where inter-faith dialogue can flow. The Church - a bowl where all the noble aspects of humanity *mix*.

John Pettit, Alice Springs, N.T.

Thanks for the good news that *The Mix* is for us who work/live at the domestic church.

Rev Peter Brady, Moorooka, Qld.

I hope you can keep up the good work. I enjoy reading *The Mix* and get to SIP as often as possible.

Annette Milross, Gerroa, NSW

Essay – The church: God's gift, our task

by Joseph Komonchak

The following is about one quarter of an address Fr Komonchak gave in 1987 to The National Pastoral Planning Conference and the Parish and Diocesan Council Network in the USA. The full text can be obtained by sending a long, ssa envelope with 4 stamps to the Editor.

I have chosen a title which reflects some of the tensions which are now being experienced both in theology and in church practice. It makes a distinction between two dimensions of the church and also implies that they cannot be separated: The church is both God's gift and our task.

In the chief document produced by (the 1985 Synod), its final report, an attempt was made to assess the effect of Vatican II's teaching on the church. The synod's own summary report stressed two themes of the council's teaching on the church and quite neglected a third. The themes stressed are those of mystery and of communion; the one neglected is that of the people of God.

Mystery is promoted as an antidote to what is described as a one-sided sociological conception of the church; and it grounds the synod's appeal to the council's teaching on the universal call to holiness, which the synod felt had been neglected in favor of concern for structural reforms. Communion is the term stressed in order to provide the proper context for a discussion, on the one hand, of the distribution of power in the church and, on the other, of the relationship between unity and pluriformity in the church.

One council theme, the people of God, is nearly forgotten in order to stress two other conciliar themes, mystery and communion. The reasons appear to lie in assessments of what has taken place since the council, in a perceived overemphasis on sociological, institutional, bureaucratic dimensions of the church – on what we do and accomplish – to the neglect of the divine and sacramental dimensions – what God does and we can only receive. In short, there is an emphasis on the church as God's gift, while our part is either neglected or treated dismissively.

What has happened that the more balanced ecclesiology of the council has been dissolved? Why should the perception be that in order to stress the church as mystery we must neglect that it is the people of God? The answers, I offer to you, may be found on both a theoretical and practical level.

Before the Second Vatican Council, official and textbook ecclesiologies were

dominated by an approach to the church which concentrated on its institutional elements. As Yves Congar has described it, it sought to establish that the church is a perfect society whose members were unequal.

It was a *society*, the supernatural species of the genus of human associations. It was a *perfect* society, not in the moral sense, but juridically: independent, sovereign in its own sphere and self-sufficient. It was a perfect society whose members are *unequal*: for by divine will, some members lead, teach and sanctify, while the others are led, taught and sanctified. The social theory implied in this presentation can be criticized, but at least it did take seriously the reality of the church as a human community.

For the mystery whom we know as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is never more profound than in his gift of himself in the quite human life of Jesus of Nazareth and in the people of God whom we are called to serve and to be, that all too human community of faith in which mystery has chosen to continue to dwell and act.

There are historical reasons for the official and theological concentration on these aspects of the church, and indeed elements of the view must be part of any adequate theology of the church. But it was a terribly one-sided or reductionistic vision of the church, and a host of biblical, patristic, medieval and liturgical scholars in the decades before the council demonstrated how poorly it reflected the reality of the church as this has been both described in the Scriptures and tradition and realized historically in worship and daily life.

The tensions between the societal approach and more spiritual, liturgical and communal approaches marked the drama of the council's reflections on the church. In the end, these tensions were not entirely resolved at the council. The final texts were certainly far richer and deeper in their presentation of the church than the original drafts had been; and I would argue that the newer approaches do provide the interpretative key to the council documents. But at several key points the two approaches sim-

ply lie side by side in the conciliar texts, without having been integrated.

Many council statements are the results of compromise and conciliation, of a decision to leave to further theological discussion the resolution of differences the council had not either the time nor perhaps the ability to sort out.

This is why many people of quite different theological and practical orientations have been able to find justification for their opposed positions in the conciliar documents. (This is also why it is not possible to regard the conciliar texts as adequate for solving problems in the church today, since many at least of these problems are precisely the result of the council's decision not to supply definitive answers.)

We should not overlook a remarkable development in the church. We live in an age in which technical and bureaucratic organization is widely considered to be all-sufficient. One of the least observed ironies of the post-conciliar period has been that a council which placed communion and participation at the heart of its view of the church has been followed by an extraordinary increase in the number of bureaucratic offices and of the personnel occupying them.

How many of your offices were in existence 20 years ago? How much more complex is the organizational chart of diocesan or parochial offices today than the one in use, say, in 1960?

Most of these offices on all levels, of course, were established in order to assist the implementation of the council's view of the church, but any sociologist could tell you that there is considerable tension between bureaucracy, on the one hand, and communion and participation, on the other.

More than a few lay people have noted that their rights to participation in the church have not always been better respected by the addition to the traditional clerical hierarchy of a new and larger body of "professionals" and "experts". It is an occupational hazard of bureaucrats to believe that they know better than the people in the field how things should be done. And if they turn to management theories elaborated for business and government for ideas on how to plan for the church's future, it is not surprising to hear complaints that the church appears much more like a giant and impersonal organization than like a living community of brothers and sisters. A complaint, by the way, that by no means is aimed only at episcopal or papal targets! ...

We cannot be said to have achieved a high level of integration either in ecclesiology or in church practice. The synod's apparent belief that we must choose one or another of the images of the church and of the dimensions they are perceived to reflect seems to be more widely shared, as if we are placed before an either-or: Either we perceive the church as something we *make*, that is *ours*, or we perceive it as something we *receive* from God, that is *Christ's*.

I do not believe that it is possible for a Catholic view of the church to be built on such a choice. The council's own statement on the fundamental issue was far more balanced:

"The society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly church and the church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities, but as one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element" (LG, 8).

The first (thing we must recognize is) that we are in fact servants of mystery. The genesis of the church occurs when the mystery of God transforms the mystery of the human person, when the abyss of the free love of God speaks to the abyss of our sinful freedom and liberates it into love of God and of our brothers and sisters. Neither freedom is ours to produce, to control or to manipulate. It is well for us planners to know that we have a task unlike that of other planning group.

Second, all other elements in the church are secondary to this encounter in mystery. St Thomas Aquinas said that the essence of the new law of the Gospel is the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts. All other elements of the new covenant exist either to prepare or to articulate that primary and founding gift. That refers to *everything* else: the Scriptures themselves, the sacraments, the hierarchy, canon law, our bureaucratic offices – *everything* else is to be measured by its reference to the genesis of the church out of the word and love of God.

Third, because the genesis of the church is the genesis of a human community, it is proper and necessary to look for help from the human sciences of community. As theology is not the full science of the human, ecclesiology is not the full science of the church; and no serious study of the challenges facing the church or of the ways in which the church may be able to meet them can ignore the psychological, sociological, organizational, political or cultural sciences. The transcendent reality that is the church is transcendent precisely as a human community. It is a profoundly Catholic instinct that one need not, indeed one must not,

choose between a supernatural and a sociological view of the church. No reductionism, sociological or theological, will yield an adequate theory or practice of the church.

Fourth, on the other hand, to assist by planning or by pastoral councils in the genesis of the church is to be involved in a risky business. The cross of Jesus Christ stands as a constant reminder that we are dealing with a God whose ways we cannot predict or ever control and whose Spirit blows where she will. We have no choice but to do our best, but a certain humility about our comprehension of what best serves such a God or best prepares and articulates his ways is always called for.

Fifth, the church always comes to be locally. It does not occur on some abstract universal level or in diocesan or parochial planning offices. It occurs when, perhaps as a result of our efforts, the word of God is preached pertinently and effectively, when the liturgy is celebrated joyfully and attractively, when a genuine community of reconciliation appears in our broken world. The real action takes place outside our offices, where the drama of sin and grace is played out in the lives of people.

Sixth, what we are to think about and plan for in our work, therefore, is how to help the genesis of the church to occur in the particular times and places over which we have some responsibility. That should be our focus. And the kinds of questions we need to ask are:

- What are the specific questions of meaning, individual and social, that a proclamation of the word of God needs to address?
- What light do they throw on the Gospel and the Gospel on them?
- What are the temptations to resignation or despair to which the Christian message of hope must be addressed?
- What personal and social addictions do people need to be freed from?
- What are the recurrent sins that need forgiveness, the egoisms and group biases that love needs to overcome?
- What are the divisions among people that need to be healed?
- Who are the contemporary equivalents of the Jew and the Greek, the man and the woman, the freeman and the slave whom Paul said were all one in Christ?

And these are just particular ways of expressing the one great and basic question:

- What must we do in order for the world to see in and through our communities what God has already done in Christ and promises us in the Spirit?

Finally, it is not necessary to choose between being a reformer and a saint nor even, although this may be harder to believe, between being a saint and a bureau-

crat. St Teresa of Avila and St Charles Borromeo were both saints and very effective reformers, and their holiness was not at all irrelevant to their ability to look at the church and discern what needed to be reformed.

The holiness with which saints look at themselves and see sinners where we sinners see only saints would be a wonderful gift of discernment with which to ask in our local churches what is of God and what is not, what reflects and promotes the Gospel and what does not, what serves the freedom of the Holy Spirit and what constrains it. And if we ever achieve such discernment, we may also find that we need a courage only holiness can produce to be able to say what we have seen and to engage in the commitments it requires.

Such is what I am able to contribute on the theme of the church, God's gift and our task. We must not, we cannot choose between them. The reason, finally, is that it is not necessary to choose between the church as people of God and church as mystery of communion. As the council fathers were told when the chapter of *Lumen Gentium* titled "The People of God" was presented to them, this concept refers to the mystery of the church as it walks on its pilgrimage in the period between Ascension and Pentecost.

The engagement with history which this title connotes is the inner core of the mystery which the church celebrates and realizes. For the mystery whom we know as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is never more profound than in his gift of himself in the quite human life of Jesus of Nazareth and in the people of God whom we are called to serve and to be, that all too human community of faith in which mystery has chosen to continue to dwell and act. The mystery is not given to the world except through and in the accomplishments of the tasks of the people of God.



Fr Joseph Komonchak

Fr Komonchak will be the keynote speaker at the National Forum – "Vatican II: Unfinished Business", to be held at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, NSW, on July 12, 13 & 14, 2002. For further information call 02 9247 4651.

Words for a Pilgrim People

'Anyone who finds his life will lose it.' (Matthew 10:39)

□□

Once some brethren went out of the monastery to visit some hermits who lived in the desert. They came to one who received them with joy and seeing that they were tired, invited them to eat before the accustomed time and placed before them all the food he had available. But that night when they were all supposed to be sleeping, the hermit heard the cenobites talking among themselves and saying: "These hermits eat more than we do in the monastery". Now at dawn the guests set out to see another hermit, and as they were starting out their host said: "Greet him from me and give him this message: 'Be careful not to water the vegetables'". When they reached the other hermitage they delivered this message. And the second hermit understood what was meant by the words. So he made the visitors sit down and weave baskets, and sitting with them he worked without interruption. And in the evening when the time came for lighting the lamp, he added a few extra psalms to the usual number, after which he said to them: "We do not usually eat everyday out here, but because you have come along it is fitting to have a little supper today, for a change. Then he gave them some dried bread and salt and added: "Here's a special treat for you". Upon which he mixed them a little sauce of vinegar, salt and oil, and gave it to them. After supper they got up again and started in on the psalms and kept on praying almost until dawn, at which the hermit said: "Well, we can't finish all of our usual prayers, for you are tired from your journey. You had better take a little rest. And so when the first hour of the day came, they all wanted to leave this hermit, but he would not let them go. He kept saying: "Stay with me a while. I cannot let you go so soon, charity demands that I keep you for two or three days. But they, hearing this, waited until dark, and then under cover of night they made off. (Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, New Directions, 1960, 28)

There are a number of places in the Gospels where we find some very hard sayings. Chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel is such a place. There we hear Jesus instructing the Apostles, and he says things like: "No one who prefers mother or father to me is worthy of me. ... Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (10:37-39). Sayings like these are not incidental; far from it, they recur frequently enough to be regarded as expressing something at the heart of the Good News.

These sayings are hard, not simply because they ask something difficult of us – and they do – nor simply because they violate our expectations of hearing something more consoling from God's ambassador of Love – and they do that too. These sayings are hard because they expose facts of existence we would rather deny and remind us of the human journey we must all make, but will do almost anything to avoid. To be human is to be anxious. To be human is also to be a genius at self-deception. Combine these two in the face of the Living God and you must expect more than a little wriggling and squirming, denial and evasion. In the presence of God's infinite Love, given without reserve, our evasions and pretences and game playing and sheer capacity for missing the point appear utterly pathetic. To the extent that we have or have not invested ourselves in those illusions, we will find the hard sayings of Jesus more or less threatening or more or less liberating.

To be human is to be anxious. To be human is also to be a genius at self-deception.

It will take us all our lives to begin to understand, even in some slight way, the news that God loves us with an Infinite Love, that the purpose of our existence is to be in Love. In our lives, befogged as they tend to be with so much that is either illusory or simply does not matter, the Word of Love might sound like hate and the call to intimacy might seem like an obscenity and the embrace of mercy might feel like we are being crushed. Language is born of experience. We will only begin to comprehend the language of God when we know the experience of God. □

The Tradition – A necessary emptying

One of the recurring themes of all the great religious traditions is that of "cleansing" or "purgation" or "emptying". There is a universal recognition within those traditions that my origin and my destiny, in a profoundly paradoxical way, both lie beyond myself. Ego can bear the weight of human desire. We are made for more than ego could ever envisage, accomplish or sustain. Life is a going beyond by going in and through. The journey is accomplished – again paradoxically – by an emptying that is at once a movement "away from" and a "movement towards". Both movements are the work of grace and the work of my free cooperation.

One of the surest signs of human maturity is found in our ability to embrace life as an emptying process. The measure of my humanity at the end will not be found in how much I have acquired but how much I have relinquished. And this does not come about automatically or accidentally or even by wilful effort. It is the work of Love tenderly forming me, stripping me of all that obstructs Love and thus bringing me home to myself. And in that homeward journey I discover – progressively, slowly, painfully, enduring much that seems to be destructive and dark – that life is love, that being is loving, that my being is no more nor less than a partaking of the Eternal Being who is Love. Unless I am emptied of all that is unreal, illusory and in any way obstructive of that truth, I will not come to be the human being I am called to be.

One of the surest signs of human maturity is found in our ability to embrace life as an emptying process.

The great 14th century classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, gets to the heart of the matter: "How wonderfully is man's love transformed by the interior experience of this nothingness and this nowhere. He who patiently abides in this darkness will be comforted and feel again a confidence about his destiny, for gradually he will see his past sins healed by grace. The pain continues yet he knows it will end, for even now it grows less intense. Slowly he begins to realise that the suffering he endures is not hell at all, but his purgatory."

Bulletin Board

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Meetings

SIP Promoter – Terry O'Loughlin on (02) 16 4262 or (02) 9816 5091.

Email: terry_catalyst@hotmail.com
www.communities.ninemsn.com.au/SpiritualityinthePub

NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

° **Albury** – New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St June 12 “The Church has no place in Social Justice” Speakers tba (Info: Fr Glenn 6026 5333).

° **Alstonville** – (Info: Anne 6628 6428)

° **Bowral** - The Grand Bar and Brasserie June 26 “Spirituality and Gay People” Fr Claude Mostowik msc & John Engler (Info: Julian 4861 4649).

° **Campbelltown** – Campbelltown Catholic Club June 12 “If only I could win Lotto” Prof Jan McMillen & Rev Bill Crews (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

° **Canberra** – Whatever happened to Vatican II The Southern Cross Club Woden June 26 “Freedom of Conscience – how far is too far?” Patrick McArdle & John Warhurst (Info: Rita 6260 6737).

° **Five Dock** – Pathways to God The Illias Hotel, Cnr Parramatta Rd & Arlington St June 26 Clare Carroll & Michael Prest (Info: Noeline 9797 8862).

° **Jamberoo** – Vatican II The Jamberoo Hotel July 8 “Is the Spirit of Reconciliation moving in our Community?” Bishop Peter Ingham & members of Indigenous community & of other faiths (Info Anne 4232 1062 or Gabrielle 4232 2735).

° **Kincumber** – Rekindling the Light – The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive June 4 “Reconciling & Integrating Body, Mind & Spirit” Kim Hill & Maggie Sands; July 2 “Humanity is God’s Family” Lt-Col Donald Woodland & Janet Seath (Info: Robbie 4390 0370 or Clair 4344 6608).

° **Lismore** – Lismore Workers Club August 28 “Life Transitions” Tony Hempenstal (Info: Lynne 6625 1195).

° **Newcastle** – The Mary Ellen Hotel, Glebe Rd, Merewether (Info: Lawrence 4967 6440)

° **Northern Sydney** – Australia: An Open Hearted Country? Union Hotel, Cnr Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney June 17 “Education: The heart of education is education of the heart” Sr Margaret Beirne & Prof Peter Sheehan (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Paddington** – Unfinished Business for the People of God The Bellevue Hotel June 5 “Religious Life – does it matter any more?” Sr Maureen Flood & John Hill; July 3 “Leadership in the Church” Marea Donovan & Bishop John Heaps (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

° **Penrith** - Golf Club June 19 “Spirituality and Welfare” Brian Murnane & tba (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

° **Rouse Hill** - The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd June 4 “Does Marriage still matter to-day?” Julie McCrossin & Paula Kerr; September 3 “Youth Spirituality – The need for a Creed?” Louise O’Rance & Sean Finucane (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H)).

° **Rydalmere** – Responding to Change – The Family Inn Hotel, Cnr Park & Victoria Rds June 11 “Undaunted by the Unknown” Tom Rouse & “Women in the Church” Pauline Raynor (Info: Kerry 9630 2704).

° **Waitara** – Put Out Into Deep Water The Blue Gum Hotel on the Pacific Hwy June 19 Prof Malcolm Fisher & Brigid Tracey (Info: Kathryn 9402 7842).

VIC:

° **Ballarat North** – North Star Hotel, Lydiard St, Second Wednesday each month 12.30-2pm (Info: Kevin 5332 1697).

° **Clayton** – Vatican II: Vision & Reality 40 Years On - The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm July 2 “Reconciliation between traditions: Anglican & Roman Catholic” (Info: Yvonne 9700 7340 or Joyce 9700 1250).

° **Collingwood** – The Church of the Future – Where are we Going? – The Vine Hotel, Cnr Wellington & Derby Sts, 8pm-9.30pm June 6; July 3 (Info: April 9391 0787).

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

° **Heidelberg** – Tower Hotel, 838 Heidelberg Rd, Alphington, 8pm-9.30pm June 12 “Fundamentalism” Speakers tba (Info: Susie 9859 6184).

° **Mordialloc** – Vatican II – Unfinished Business – The Kingston Club, 7.30pm-9pm June 26 “Spirituality in Different Faiths” John Dupuche & Swami Shankarananda (Info: Maria 9579 4255).

Other States

° **Devonport (TAS)** - Molly Malone’s Irish Pub, 7.30pm-9pm (Info: Graham 6424 8286).

° **Fortitude Valley (QLD)** – Dooley’s in Patrick’s Bar First Monday of month – (Info: Madonna 3840 0524).

° **Macclesfield (SA)** – Three Brothers Arms, Venables Street June 4 “Spirituality Abroad: A question of strength” Bruce

Wyatt & Michael Spyker; July 9 “Diversity, Disadvantage & Soul Food” Margaret Lamb & Pat Rix (Info: Michael 8388 9265).

° **The Talking MIX** is now available on tape, thanks to the generosity of several volunteers. Annual subscription: \$40. For further information contact Pauline on 02 9816 4262.

Other Matters and Events

° **The Aquinas Academy** adult education centre, 141 Harrington St Sydney runs a series of programs, day and evening, with a special emphasis on spirituality. Aquinas also offers a Certificate in Religious Studies which is accredited with a number of dioceses for teachers within the Catholic Schools. Michael Whelan SM is the Director (Info: Patricia on 02 9247 4651).

° **Mount St Benedict Centre**, Pennant Hills, June 5, 12, 19, 26 & July 3 “Meeting Jesus in Matthew”; June 28–30 “A Contemplative Art Weekend” Veronica Griffith & Mary Conacher (Info: 9484 6208).

° **Catholic Adult Education Service Adelaide** – 40th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, CTC, Brooklyn Park, July 17 “The Church & the Council” Fr Joseph Komonchak (Info: Sr Liz Morris (08) 8210 8162).

° **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre** Douglas Park June 7–10 “Life’s Healing Journey”; June 14–16 Men’s Weekend; June 19–25 “Guided retreat – created by love – in love – for love”; June 28–30 “Prayer weekend - Praying with scenes from the life of Mary”; July 5–11 “Guided retreat – The Song of Songs”; July 12–20 “Directed retreat; July 26–28 “Mid Years Spirituality Retreat” (Info: Sr Joan 4630 9159).

“VATICAN II: UNFINISHED BUSINESS”

NATIONAL FORUM

St Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill,
Friday evening July 12
thru Sunday lunchtime July 13

ALL WELCOME!

RESERVATIONS ESSENTIAL

Come to all or part
Live in or commute

An opportunity to support each other as we reflect on the possibilities, challenges and questions facing the Catholic Church in Australia today.

Contact : 02 9247 4651

Recommended

John Quinn, "A Permanent Synod? Reflections on Collegiality", in *Origins*, April 18, 2002, 31:44. (Copies available – please send ssa long envelope with 4 stamps to the Editor.)

Megan McKenna, *Leave Her Alone*, Orbis Books, 2000, 247 pages, pb, footnotes, selected bibliography, \$27.50. (Available: Rainbow Books Agency - 03 9481 6611.)

Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit*, The Liturgical Press, 2000, 225 pages, pb, index, footnotes. (Available from amazon.com at \$29US.)

Archbishop John Quinn is former Archbishop of San Francisco and former Head of the United States Bishops' Conference. He came into international prominence in 1996 when he gave the Campion Hall Lecture at Oxford – an extremely thoughtful and thorough response to the Holy Father's request for assistance in understanding the ministry of Peter in this "new situation". That lecture was subsequently developed into a book, *Reform of the Papacy*. "A Permanent Synod?" is an address given by Quinn at a symposium on church governance at Boston College late last year. In this presentation Quinn argues that the Synod of Bishops as it now exists does not fulfil the intentions of the Second Vatican Council. "Adjectives used to describe the synods by those who have participated in them are *controlled, ineffective, failing to live up to the hopes of the bishops of Vatican II*", Quinn says. He cites, for example, the issue of subsidiarity. At the recent synod for Asia, the chairmen of the language groups were told by the synod secretariat that the word "subsidiarity" should not be used. This is a measured and thoughtful paper, honest without being confrontationist, a paper that should contribute well to the ongoing conversation we must have about church governance.

Amidst all the wonderful benefits – some of them stunning – of the Enlightenment, we must acknowledge a few losses – some of them awfully destructive. We have, particularly in the Western world, become very rationalistic and functionalistic. When we bring this mindset to the reading of sacred scripture, we cannot possibly gain access to the meaning of the text. One of the tragedies of contemporary Christianity is that it has laboured for too long under the impression that faith can be captured in rational propositions and reduced to behaviours that can be clearly and legally defined. One wonders whether we would have come to this sorry state if the stories of women had been more frequently told and women themselves had contributed more to articulating the faith. In this thoroughly reasonable presentation of different women from the bible, McKenna helps us to hear the revelation of God at work in the world afresh. She recalls the incident in which Mary anoints Jesus' feet and Judas rebukes her. Jesus says, "Leave her alone". From this story McKenna proceeds to reflect on a number of women from the Old and New Testaments. The style is easy to read, even as it weaves good scholarly insights into the text. This would be an excellent book for a home study program – especially for a men's group.

In his Foreword to this book, Archbishop Rembert Weakland says: "There is a freshness about Father Ghislain's writing that will impress the reader at once. He proceeds to not only present a profound analysis of each problem and its historical roots, but to outline innovative and creative solutions that correspond to the theology of the Church in the documents of Vatican Council II." Ghislain says of Vatican II: "(It) was intended to be a *deed* and not simply a *claim*, an event and not simply an admonition." As the title suggests, the author argues that we need "to imagine the Catholic Church today". He goes on: "In order to understand the crisis in the Catholic Church, we must also try to understand the broader crisis in society which many call 'the end of modernity' or 'the shipwreck of Western civilization'". This is a splendid book. It both demands and rewards careful reading. The evident scholarship that underpins the whole work never gets in the way of clarity of expression. The many footnotes are excellent additions to the main text. Every educated Catholic adult should read at least one serious theological text of the Church in his or her lifetime. Choose this one while you are still young enough to enjoy it and benefit from its practical insights and wisdom!

✂----- Detach and post today -----

YES! I WOULD LIKE TO BE A FRIEND OF CATALYST FOR RENEWAL AND RECEIVE THE MIX

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

MY FRIEND'S DONATION OF \$40 FOR ONE YEAR IS ENCLOSED

(Sadly this donation is not tax deductible)

(NB: IF YOU CANNOT AFFORD \$40 ANY DONATION IS ACCEPTABLE)

I am paying by Cheque MasterCard Visa Bankcard

I AM INCLUDING A FURTHER DONATION TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF CATALYST:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$500 Other

Friend's Donation:	\$
Other Donation:	\$
TOTAL:	\$

Name on card: Expiry date: / Signature:

PLEASE TELL ME HOW I CAN VOLUNTEER TO HELP CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

Post to: Catalyst for Renewal, PO Box 139, Gladesville, NSW 1675